

How to Get Parents Engaged At Your School

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As a school administrator, you know how crucial parent engagement is. But getting there, of course, can be difficult.

While some parents are enthusiastic volunteers, how do you get those *other* parents on board? You know, the ones who are [too busy or distracted](#) to really dig in and get engaged with what's happening at school and in their child's academics?

It's a problem, and one you can't afford to ignore. The bottom line is that involved parents lead to better outcomes for students.

- [A 1998 study](#) by researchers Steven R. Hara and Daniel J. Burke concluded that implementing a structured parent involvement program in an inner-city Chicago elementary school had the direct result of improving student achievement in both reading and vocabulary.
- [Another study](#), published in 2010, concluded that "children with highly involved parents had enhanced social functioning and fewer behavior problems."
- Parental involvement was "positively associated with achievement" in a [2009 study](#) of middle schoolers.

There's no question that parent engagement should be a top priority at your school. But where to begin? Today, we'll take you through our top strategies for success.

1. Loop Parents In – Always

[Informed parents](#) are engaged parents – and, conversely, parents who receive inconsistent or incomplete information about what's happening at school are unlikely to feel like a true part of the community.

And, of course, in any kind of emergency situation or one involving a last-minute schedule change, parent communications are nothing short of vital. The time to [get your communications system up and running](#) is *now*, not in the [middle of a crisis](#).

If you need parent volunteers at your school, you've got [make it easy for them](#) to get the details of the volunteer opportunity: how to sign up to serve. If parents always know where to look to find the latest information on volunteer opportunities, then you've won half the battle right there.

You may be concerned about how much information is too much, and how many emails are too many. When do they begin to get lost in parents' inboxes? Here's our take on that:

You're always going to have that one parent who complains about the number of emails – it's just inevitable. But this also tends to be the same parent who complains about being out of the loop if you don't send the email!

So keep sending out the emails to keep folks informed, and try to stick to a consistent schedule so that parents know when to expect the information. Also, try to find out early on in the school year what parents

are interested in, and allow them to subscribe to the information that's most pertinent to them.

Remember: It is almost impossible to over communicate with parents about their specific children – especially busy, distracted parents!

Don't forget to use *all* of the communication channels available to you: phone calls, texts, bulletin boards, social media, [school website](#), U.S. mail, emails, webinars, school blog, posters, newsletters, etc. Sometimes parents will blow by (or blow off) one means of communication but be very reachable in another way. It's a fact that effective organizational communication involves spreading the communication over multiple mediums or channels.

Obviously, we think MemberHub is an excellent tool for optimizing your online school communications, but it's also important to think holistically about parent involvement and make it a true part of your school's philosophy.

2. Bring Parents In To Your School Community – Literally

Workshops are a great way to bring parents (literally) into the school community and provide them with valuable information. It's hard to get parents out of the house after hours, so make sure you ask parents what they want to learn more about. Ask them what topics would be interesting if the school were to start offering workshops. Teachers and/or outside speakers can discuss any number of topics of interest to parents, including:

- Family nutrition
- Time management
- Child development
- How to effectively communicate with children who have special needs
- Constructive – and non-constructive – ways for parents to help with kids' homework
- The importance of quality sleep for busy kids
- Ideas for active family recreation activities in your area
- Computer training
- Managing sibling rivalry
- ESL classes
- Parent orientation nights
- School library tours
- Anything else your school's parents might be interested in

Teachers and administrators are in the business of kids, so to speak, but many parents feel confused and clueless a lot of the time. So anything your school can do to become a go-to resource for them is both valued and appreciated. Plus, any time you can get parents together enhances school community.

3. Get Parents Talking With Each Other

Your primary concern is keeping [parents engaged with your school](#), but one great way of achieving this is facilitating communications among the parents themselves – this gives them a sense of community and highlights what they all have in common: Their relationship with (and love for) your school.

The key here is making sure parents are in the communication circles they want or need to be a part of. If

parents start getting too many messages that aren't pertinent to them, they will begin to ignore the communications. So make the effort to encourage parents to self-select the groups they most want to be involved with.

MemberHub discussion groups are great for this, and so are private Facebook pages. Parents almost universally love to see (and share amongst each other) lots of [photos of their children](#) and their classmates.

Also, don't forget that an easily accessible, fully updated school directory is vital – even parents who *want* to stay in touch with one another can't do so if they don't have each other's current contact information!

Making the directory available in a digital format, online, is crucial these days. Once again, MemberHub provides you with a great tool for your school directory – and our mobile app means that your whole school can easily stay connected, even on the go.

4. Don't Assume That Parents Know What You Need

Even parents who are eager to get more involved with the school can be hesitant if they don't know exactly *how* to help.

Do you need cookies for a classroom party? Chaperones for field trips? Talented artists who can help with the scenery for the school play? Parents who are willing to come in and talk about their professions? Someone to read to the class once a week?

Or maybe you need someone who can write grant applications. That's a hugely important job that a parent can do at night, on his or her own schedule! But maybe not the sort of thing that a parent would think to volunteer for. Always be thinking of ways to encourage and provide parents a way to volunteer for the school around their own schedule.

Absent some sort of clear guidance, even the most willing parents can quickly fall by the wayside – so be open about telling them exactly what you most need from them, and you're far more likely to get it.

5. Ask Parents What They Think – On A Regular Basis

Your school should have some way of [obtaining feedback from parents](#) on a scheduled, consistent basis – whether it's an emailed survey, a once-a-year form that goes out in the mail with a self-addressed stamped envelope, semi-annual “town meetings,” or whatever else works best for your school community.

There are several online survey tools available these days. Two popular options are SurveyMonkey.com and Wufoo.com.

However, one of the easiest and most commonly seen techniques to gather feedback through a simple survey is to use a Google Form. If you've got a Gmail email address you can get started with a Google Form quickly. Just “google” how to do it.

You can't always implement every change parents suggest but you do need to consider what they say and, even more importantly, sincerely thank them for their feedback. Clearly the most important aspect is that the school is listening to them and parents feel heard.

Knowing that your ideas are valued, and have been heard, is a key part of feeling [deeply involved](#) in any community (which is why your 8-year-old insists on speaking over everyone else at the dinner table!).

6. Establish a “Parents As Partners” Program

Many schools say they view parents as partners, but it takes just a bit more effort to actually make this happen. Here are some ideas:

- Make it a school policy to always greet parents warmly and to get back to them promptly when they call or email (sounds simple, but you'd be amazed at how often this falls through the cracks)
- Implement a "Parent of the Month" program and bulletin board
- Offer parents flexibility and requested accommodations whenever possible
- Establish a parent booster club to support school sports and activities
- Encourage parent involvement in after-school tutoring and mentoring programs
- Send out invitations for parents to come visit the school at a given time, either individually or in small groups

7. Make Sure You're Inclusive for *All* Families

Your school may largely consist of one "type" of family – whether that type is defined by economics, geography, religion, or some other factor – but it's important to walk the talk of making *all* families feel truly included at your school.

Be sensitive to this when you're planning school activities and celebrations, as well as when you're figuring out how best to stay in touch with parents.

It may make sense, for example, to have a bilingual teacher on staff who's willing to translate when necessary, or to send communications home in multiple languages.

At many schools, there are a significant number of parents for whom English is their second language. What would it take to make sure your communications are going out in both Spanish and English?

You should also make sure that your PTA/PTO membership accurately reflects the diverse population of your school (term limits for parents can help ensure a steady supply of new faces and new ideas).

8. Hit The Ground Running with New Families

There is no *bad* time to [start making more of an effort with parent engagement](#) at your school, but having a plan in place for warmly welcoming new families is an ideal way to start off on the right foot and encourage parent engagement from the outset.

Here are a few ideas to get you thinking:

- Host a new families event in late summer. Don't forget to [share your school's unique story](#)!
- Provide a welcome packet to new families (or to every family at the start of a new school year/grade level)
- Assign a "buddy" parent to new families who can answer questions and facilitate introductions to other folks within the school community
- Invite all families new to the school to a special PTA/PTO meeting
- Send a personal welcome letter – real, hard-copy snail mail! – to the new family, signed by the school principal and/or the teacher(s) the family will be working with

9. Don't Forget the Fun Stuff

There is, as you well know, a lot of important business that happens at our schools – education, professional growth, interpersonal development, and so on. Which is precisely why it's important to make time for fun, too.

Hold an annual family cookout at your school. Or a pie-throwing [fundraiser](#). Or an “international night” to showcase the diversity of cultures within your community. Rent out a dunk tank and start recruiting splash-worthy volunteers. You get the idea – let your imagination be your guide.

Spend some time brainstorming ideas for events that the parents at your school would really enjoy. What may be fun for parents at one school may not be fun for parents at another school.

If you can get parents and families together having fun, then they'll naturally want to be around each other more – and this will lead to more participation and overall engagement. They'll want to be seen as a part of the community and will be reluctant to miss out on fun school events in the future..

While you can have a secondary goal (say, fundraising), your main focus with these events should be [community fun and bonding](#), plain and simple.