

## Parent/Student Relations

### Parent

In order for a school to operate effectively, parents need to take an active role with their students' education. This would include participating and becoming involved within the school. Many charter schools use a contract system with their parents. Not only does this ensure that the parents and school are acting as a communicating team, but the parent is also helping with the operation or maintenance of the school. All schools, but particularly charter schools, suffer the need of too many tasks, and not enough hands. From Fenton Avenue Charter School, in Lake View Terrace, California (as cited from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory), come suggested components for parent involvement contracts:

- Parent Participation: Parents agree to actively participate in parent/teacher conferences, parent involvement activities, and parent education opportunities. Volunteer at the school and attend orientation meetings.
- Homework/classwork: Parents agree to provide materials for student, assure homework is done in compliance with the homework policy, and attend school conferences.
- Reading: Parents of some charter schools agree to help students read for at least 30 minutes each night. (Practice of other subjects might ALSO be included.)
- Behavior: Parents agree to support schoolwide discipline policy, follow through with any behavior problems noted by the teacher, and visit the school as needed.
- Attendance: Parents agree to assure their children are appropriately dressed, arrive on time, attend school daily, notify school of change of address, and notify school of child's absence.
- Materials/school property: Parents agree to ensure that students do not destroy materials or bring destructive materials to school.
- Safety: Parents agree not to allow students to bring weapons of any kind to school.
- The contract should include a signature of the parent/guardian, the name of the student and the date.

The Center for School Change, (as cited from Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1999), compiled a list of possible parent/community involvement activities:

1. Share information with a class about a hobby, career, or country in which you have lived or visited.
2. Tutor small groups of students in reading, math, or other areas.
3. Help coach an athletic team.
4. Help publish a school or classroom newsletter.
5. Help sew or paint for a play or display.
6. Help with the school science fair.
7. Help plan or build the playground.
8. Help answer the school phone.
9. Help students with the planning and building of a garden or other beautification project.

10. Help coach for academic competitions such as Odyssey of the Mind.
11. Act as a community liaison for student community service projects.
12. Go with a class on a field trip.
13. Go on an extended (overnight) field trip.
14. Serve on a school committee.
15. Represent the school on a district committee.
16. Serve as an officer on your parent/teacher organization (PTA/PTO).
17. Help write a proposal that will bring new resources to the school.
18. Donate materials to the school.
19. Arrange for businesses to donate materials to the school.
20. Help with fundraising.
21. Write a letter to legislators about the school.
22. Go to a school board meeting to advocate for the school.
23. Help create a brochure or booklet about your school.

Obviously, always choosing the same people to help all the time will foster parent burnout, as well as create a sense of exclusiveness that may alienate other prospective parent volunteers. From the Charter Schools National Conference in Washington, D.C. (as cited from the Northwest Regional Laboratory, 1999), compiled the following ideas to help avoid parent burnout:

1. Train and develop others for positions of responsibility
2. Continually say “thank you”
3. Communicate clear and useful information
4. Avoid criticism of specifics and look at the whole picture
5. Be a solution rather than a problem
6. Have a sense of humor and use it daily
7. Understand and support family commitments outside of the school
8. Establish clear goals for the year and communicate them continually
9. Recruit new parents to take part in school activities

## **Students**

Appropriate student behavior is vital to the success of any school setting. Students need to be responsible and held accountable for their actions. Since discipline is such a sensitive issue, parents need to be made aware of policies pertaining to discipline. The school needs to communicate clear guidelines in the areas of dress code, behavior, and consequences. One of the most effective avenues to communicate this information, and to be certain the information is always readily available, is with the use of a student/parent handbook. This section of the *Guidebook* includes several Parent/Student handbooks from successful Colorado charter schools.

- The Massachusetts charter school handbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1997, as cited from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1999), created a suggested list of topics to include in a Parent/ Student booklet:
  - Introduction

- ❑ Mission Statement
  - Values, Educational approach
- ❑ Curriculum
- ❑ Enrollment
  - Procedures
  - Discrimination laws
  - Application deadlines
- ❑ Accountability
  - Annual report information
  - Mechanisms for measuring students' academic performance
  - Leadership, school structure, the leaders goals and strategies
  - Training for the leaders
- ❑ Facilities
  - Locating facility
  - Financing and regulations of a facility
  - Parental use of facility (e.g. gym)
  - Policies for health and safety issues
- ❑ Finances and budgeting-summary of financial plan and operating budget
- ❑ Appendices-include any materials needed

Also, the school may want to include in the parent/student manual, or in a separate manual:

- The academic calendar
- An explanation of the school's graduation standards and admission and transfer policies
- An explanation of the harassment policies and grievance procedures
- A code of student conduct
- An explanation of what happens when the code of conduct is violated, including suspension and expulsion procedures
- A brief overview of the school's concept and history
- Parent involvement expectations
- Reciprocal obligations of the school toward the parent and student
- Contact list explaining how parents can raise and resolve concerns regarding the school's operations and policies, as well as suggestions on how parents can take a constructive role in the school's operations and governance
- A description of the school's governing structure and how parents may become involved in it

***This section of the Guidebook includes samples of policies, forms, report cards, Parent/teacher organizations, and handbooks associated with parent and student involvement.***

## References

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