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## **Building family-teacher partnerships**



We all want to be good parents to our children; but we all have a great deal of stress that comes from trying to balance the demands of our families and our jobs. This stress tends to pull us apart rather than bring us together, then add the pressure of technology — ours and our children's; and don't forget trying to cook healthy meals and eat together ... While I am not the expert on how to reduce that stress, I will tell you there continues to be a great need — and a great benefit for you to be involved in your children's education, starting with your child's childcare program. Learning begins at birth, and you are the strongest and longest teacher and model for learning for your child.

Recent studies show that when families are involved in their children's education in positive ways, the children achieve higher grades and test scores, have better attendance at school, complete more homework and demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior. On the flip side, reports also indicate that families who receive frequent and positive messages from teachers tend to become more involved in their children's education than do parents who do not receive this kind of communication. Here are some ideas on how to build positive partnerships.

As their children's first teachers, families can:

- Read together. Read with your children and let them see you and older children read. When adult family members read to their children or listen to them read on a regular basis, achievement improves. Take your children to the library to get a library card and help them find books to suit their interests and hobbies. Locally, Raising A Reader does a great job in the childcare programs providing books for the children to bring home every week.
  - Establish a family routine. Routines generally include time for completing homework, doing chores, eating meals together, and going to bed at an established time. These daily events are important to make life predictable for children and satisfying for all family members. Encourage your child's efforts and be available for questions while she is engaged in play and spend time discussing what she has learned.
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- Use television, and all screen time, wisely. Limit the amount of time children spend watching television, DVDs, on the web, or playing games; help them choose appropriate programs. When used carefully, some screen time can help increase interest in learning.
  - Keep in touch with the school. Stay aware of what your children are learning and how they are doing. Make a point of visiting the school and talking with the teachers through email, parent/teacher conferences or family nights; or schedule a phone call to discuss your child's progress.

- Offer praise and encouragement. Parents and families play an important role in influencing a child's confidence and motivation to become a successful learner. Introduce them to outside experiences that will enhance their self-confidence and broaden their interests.

In the effort to connect schools with families, educators can:

- Involve families in classroom activities. Parents can participate by preparing classroom materials, serving on a committee to select classroom equipment and materials, or sharing information about their careers or hobbies. The more involved parents are in what goes on in the classroom, the more likely they are to understand the teacher's goals and practices.
- Give parents a voice in decisions. Parents' viewpoints should be considered in making decisions about their children's schooling. Programs can open options for families to become involved individually and collectively in making decisions about goals and standards for their children.
- Communicate with families at the beginning of the school year or semester about school policies and services. Inform them about classroom goals and give a few examples of what the children will be learning. Point out the projects that involved their child and share information in a way that encourages respectful two-way communication. Family and school represent the primary environments in which young children grow and develop, and good schools value parental involvement. The foundation for good parent-teacher relationships is frequent and open communication, mutual respect and a clear understanding of what is best for each individual child. Isn't that what we all want, after all?

Kids First provides information and funding for early childhood programs and families in Pitkin County.

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