

Project Bright IDEA: Interest Development Early Abilities
A Jacob Javits Gifted Education Program Funded by the US Department of Education

Parental Involvement Component

Build Relationships between the School and Parents

Parents play a critical role as the first teachers to their children. Preparing young children for school starts at birth, and according to recent research, the first three years are thought to be the most important time for cognitive development in children. The first step for parents in becoming effective advocates for their children is to learn as much as possible about their child's abilities, gifts, interests, strengths and weaknesses.

Some parents of at-risk children may need more encouragement to be involved with the school because they may have had negative experiences as students. They may need specific strategies that they learn and use with their children to teach them at home. Kindergarten and first grade teachers can build good relationships with these parents through steps they take from the beginning of the school year.

Parents need to be advocates for their children by working with teachers to nurture and develop their children's potential. Teachers and parents must respect each other and work together as partners in the best interest of children. Parental involvement requires building relationships through a process that teachers develop and practice. The process recommended by the State Committee in priority order includes:

- 1) assessing and emphasizing the strengths of the child;
- 2) writing a letter to the parent outlining the strengths of the child and emphasizing something positive about the child;
- 3) listening to stories by parents about their children;
- 4) developing activities with parents for them do with children at home; and
- 5) celebrating successes with parents and the community.

Teachers may want to contract with parents to do certain things at home to help with weaknesses that are identified together. Parents must accept responsibility for working with their children at home. In addition to the teacher's portfolio, parents can develop a portfolio for work that children do at home that can help them discover and develop their children's interests. Parents can also become advocates for the teachers and the schools through legislative support and volunteering to work in the school.

Strategies for Teachers

Positive Contacts:

- Take a bus tour to the homes of the children. Tour the neighborhood to get a feel for the child's home environment.
- Send post cards to parents about an important event, activity, or positive statement about their children.
- Contact parent by phone, letter, or visit (when appropriate or possible).
- Write a grant to install a voice mail system that can keep parents be informed about their children's progress and to motivate the children to keep their parents involved.
- Avoid negative comments about a child until after the child's strengths have been assessed and a letter written to the parent. Build a respectful relationship with student and parent prior to identifying negative behaviors or academic weaknesses.

Interview Parents and develop a Process for Involvement:

- Interview parents early in the year.
- Let the parent tell the teacher stories about their child prior to a formal interview. It is important to let the parents express their views about their children in a way that reflects the true feelings and assessment of the parent's view of the child. This is an important factor to consider prior to doing a formal interview or survey.
- Develop a parent interview process that includes a survey, an interview checklist, a contract, and learning packages for the parent to help the child at home.

Celebrate with Parents:

- Build relationships with local businesses and foundations to support parental activities. Involve the community with efforts to get special resources such as a video camera and computers for the classroom and supplementary reading books, special computers, and other materials that children can take home with them.
- Hold a family night with a meal for parents, children, and teachers. Have a speaker that can motivate parents and children. Display children's writings, art work, and projects.
- Have Show & Tell program! Let the children teach the parents.
- Plan field trips for families, sponsored by business and foundations. Find ways for parents to go on field trips with their children. Take photographs and video.
- At the end of the year give each parent a video photo journal of the year's activities and achievements.
- Set up a family communication's network--computer, newsletter, or voice mail. Let the children publish a newsletter for their parents.
- Start a PAGE chapter. (Parents for the Advancement of Gifted and Talented.)

Portfolio Development by Parents:

- Provide a format to parents for developing a portfolio. Provide parents with information on how to gather items and organize them for a portfolio.
- Emphasize the importance of items that show a child's interests or unique gifts.
- Encourage parents to jot down things that they observe that sparks an interest in learning or frustrates the child.

- Ask parents to identify special topics or subjects that can hold a child's interest for long periods of time and to observe the best learning style(s) for the child.