Roles and Responsibilities In Education

As a parent, your involvement is essential not only for your child's success in school, but for the overall strength of the school community. What does that parent involvement look like, and what are the roles parents play in their child’s education?

Parent involvement is critical to the success of students and schools, but not everyone defines parent involvement in the same way. School principals, teachers and parent leaders see different parent roles as appropriate and important. Talking about expectations for parent involvement--and listening to what is being done at your children’s school--can help to prevent unintended conflicts or misunderstanding.

Experts place parent roles into four general categories that help illuminate the possibilities.

Supporters of Children's Achievement

First and foremost, parents need to support their children and their school achievement. As a parent, you should do all you can to see that your child arrives at school ready to learn and that schoolwork gets a high priority at home.

Research shows that when adults reinforce the importance of school, student effort and achievement improve. School principals and teachers experience great frustration when they deal with parents who ignore this basic responsibility but still want to tell them "how to run the school."

Decision Makers in School Community

Second, parents can help schools affirm their purpose and goals. A school exists as a public trust to serve the needs of its community.

Parents' hopes for their own children--and all the children in the community--are vital in determining a school district or school's focus and purpose.

In addition to informal conversations, you'll find several established formats for providing this input. Schools must include parents on school site based decision-making committees and other committees that evaluate options to improve the school. School districts periodically include parents on district-wide committees and task forces. District staff members often have difficulty in finding parents willing to make this commitment and see it through to the completion of assigned tasks.

Service on such committees can be frustrating and time-consuming, but well worth it if you want to understand more about how schools work and the challenges they face. These involvements are also often the best way to have an influence on how schools are run.

 Evaluators of School Performance

The third role of parents is as evaluators. Parents are the front line for judging the effectiveness of schools, because they see directly how well the system is serving their children. Feedback from parents--both positive and negative--can help responsible educators improve their work.

When you are unhappy about something that happens at the school or in the classroom, you should say so. Communicate with the teacher,
the principal, the school district superintendent and, if necessary, the school board. Putting your concerns into writing helps schools create a record. However, school officials will only take your opinions seriously if you have the courage to sign your name to them. Furthermore, parents do not have the right nor the opportunity to participate in the formal evaluation of individual employees or employment decisions.

However, it is important to tell school district leaders the good things you observe at your child's school. If you find a particularly effective school employee, teacher, or program, let school officials know. Educators value such approval from the public, and it helps identify you as a supporter of the schools. Most importantly, you're much more likely to find an open ear for complaints when you also take time to provide praise.

Supporters of the Schools

Perhaps the most visible role active parents play is as school supporters. Usually through school-based organizations, parents plan events, raise money, recruit and organize volunteers, and generally lend a helping hand both during and after school. Increasingly, parents are also providing linkages between the schools and community business partners.

At elementary schools, getting involved is often as simple as talking to your child's teacher or the school principal. At the middle and high school levels, you may need to start by finding out about the parent organizations, such as PTA and booster clubs. After you've gotten a sense of how things work you can better decide where your help is both needed and welcomed.

Rules of thumb for making a complaint:
→ Start with the person closest to the problem and work first to get a solution at that level.
→ Approach every communication with restraint and every person with respect.
→ Keep an open mind and make sure you get the facts.
→ Don't make idle accusations, particularly about matters that school districts must pursue aggressively (e.g., sexual harassment and child abuse).
→ Respect the privacy rights and confidentiality requirements schools must observe in relation to their employees and students.

Here are other ideas:
- Visit your child's classroom; a visit will give you an idea of what your child does at school and how he or she interacts with other children.
- Volunteer to help in the classroom as an assistant (listening to children read, for example, or serving as an aide during computer work).
- Support student events and performances by helping with them (such as sewing costumes or painting scenery for a school play) and by attending them.
- If your school has a Parents' Room/Lounge or Parent Center, drop in to meet other parents and teachers there, or to pick up information and materials.
- Participate in workshops that are offered, such as those on child development or concerns that parents have (or help plan such workshops).
- Take advantage of parent-teacher contracts (perhaps agreeing to read with your child for a certain amount of time each night).
- Ask your child's teacher if he or she has materials that you can use to help your child at home and to supplement homework.
- Be part of decision-making committees about school issues and problems, such as a Parent Advisory Committee.
Parents have certain key responsibilities that contribute to making the school an effective institution.

Education is most effective when it's a shared partnership between parents and teachers. Research has long demonstrated that what a child learns—or fails to learn—depends as much on responsible parent involvement as it does upon the skills of the teacher.

Get Them Ready to Learn

The parent's most basic responsibility is to make sure that children go to school ready to learn. This means limiting the amount of television watched, monitoring the completion of homework assignments, ensuring that children get enough sleep on school nights and providing a nutritious breakfast before school.

Get Informed

The more parents know about teachers’ and school’s expectations for student learning, the better they are able to help their child.

A first step is to meet your child’s teacher and principal early in the school year, and avail yourself of opportunities to ask questions about school policies and procedures. Often, there's a special orientation with the principal and the school's parent-teacher association/home-school club at the beginning of the school year for this purpose. You may also want to attend the monthly meetings during the year, as they cover a variety of topics, like new ways of teaching mathematics or ways to build better communication between children and parents.

Get Acquainted

An important event to attend is the "Back to School Night" in September or October, where teachers explain the curriculum, their expectations for student learning and behavior, and their policies regarding homework. This event is not the place to express individual concerns about your child; it's a time to get general information: How much homework can my child expect each night? What kind of tests will my child be given? What kinds of essays will he or she be expected to write?

Many elementary teachers also send home a periodic newsletter with information about homework assignments, current academic projects and planned field trips. Many schools are also developing Web sites devoted in part to improving school/home communication.

Individual parent-teacher conferences, usually held in the fall and spring, are appropriate times to get information about your child. At these conferences the teacher will discuss your child's academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as any other concerns he/she may have. You'll have an opportunity to ask questions about how you can best assist your child with school work, as well as any questions you may have about how your child is getting along socially at school.

Middle and high schools vary in their approaches to parent-teacher conferences. Some schedule them routinely, while some hold them only at a parent's request. Of course, if you have an urgent concern about your child you can at any time arrange to talk with your child's teacher or the school principal.
Roles and Responsibilities in Education

What Does the Principal Do?

The principal is the person ultimately accountable for everything that happens in a school. He/she is the school leader responsible for guiding good instruction, managing and evaluating teachers and staff, implementing school discipline policies, developing school budgets, fostering parent involvement, and making sure students make academic progress.

Instructional Leader

Perhaps, most importantly, the principal must be the instructional leader, concerned with what goes on in classrooms with teachers and students. Many experts believe that the principal's most important role is as an instructional leader. A strong instructional leader is familiar with the school curriculum and how teachers build on student knowledge and skills from one year to the next. He/she also understands that different children learn in different ways, therefore encourages teachers to develop a variety of teaching approaches. Most principals have many years of experience as classroom teachers before they move into school administration, so they are familiar with the terrain of teaching.

The principal is responsible for evaluating teachers, and suggesting ways in which teachers can address deficiencies and solidify strengths. Sometimes the principal has skilled teachers work with inexperienced teachers to help them develop their craft.

Parent Contact With Principals

Contact with the school principal depends, in part, on the kind and size of the school. Elementary schools are almost always smaller and less compartmentalized than middle schools and high schools. Hence, the principal may be available to discuss everything from a discipline issue to the implementation of a new school reading program.

Middle schools and high schools, on the other hand, are typically larger and more hierarchical institutions. While a parent can still arrange to see the principal, he/she may want to address a concern to a person closer to the situation. This may mean seeing a department chairperson regarding an instructional issue or an assistant principal regarding an infraction of school rules. Some schools provide a list of individuals to call for different needs and requests--ask your school if they have one.

What Does the School Secretary Do?

The school secretary takes care of administrative details, schedules appointments, handles school communication, is aware of what's going on at the school on a day-to-day basis, and is vital in communicating with parents and the community about what's happening at school.

The school secretary is the person to call about registration, school lunches, bus schedules, after-school programs, immunization requirements, and appointments to talk with the principal or your child's teacher.

An elementary school usually has just one school secretary, who may do everything from calling a parent about a sick child to posting notices for a school meeting. Middle schools and high schools may have several secretaries with different areas of responsibility. Try to be specific regarding the person you want to speak to or the concern you want to address.

Keep in mind that the school secretary is usually busiest at the start and end of each day, and at the start and end of each school year. Calling at less busy times will likely get you a more helpful response.
The Role of the PTA

The PTA is a parent advocacy organization affiliated with many schools in the country. If you picture the PTA as a few moms who meet now and then to plan bake sales, you may be in for a big surprise. The PTA, or Parent Teacher Association, is a huge and very influential nationwide organization with state and local affiliates through the entire country. The National PTA promotes parent involvement in school communities, and is a powerful lobbying organization, advocating issues on behalf of students and schools.

Schools that do not have PTA affiliations usually have "home and school clubs" or "booster clubs." These clubs serve many of the same functions as PTAs, but operate as independent organizations without state or national linkages. Collectively, these groups are sometimes referred to as PTOs (parent-teacher organizations).

The Role of the Local PTA

As the most dominant PTO, the local PTA sets a standard for these groups as a whole. The main role of the local PTA is to build strong working relationships between parents, teachers and schools, in support of students. This can include recruiting and coordinating volunteers, providing special recognition in awards ceremonies or through other activities, organizing parent education events, and much more. The PTA is sometimes perceived as a fundraising group, but according to the organization, this is not its primary responsibility. Nonetheless, in states where schools face tough budget restrictions, the parents in the local PTA may raise funds for everything from field trips to playground equipment, and from band uniforms to elementary music teachers.

Local school PTA meetings can serve as venues for discussions about a variety of educational issues. Teachers may talk to the parent community about a new reading program or student discipline issues. Experts from the community may talk about building better relationships with adolescents, or share important information about school reform initiatives. Parents may raise concerns about such things as homework or proposed changes in the school curriculum.

The PTA can also serve as a powerful mediating function, providing a neutral forum for resolving conflicts that sometimes occur in schools around controversial issues.

At the high school level, the PTA can become the PTSA ("S" for students), as adults encourage students to offer their perspectives and get involved in the decision-making process.

Other Organizations

In many schools, especially high schools, a host of organizations besides the PTA or PTO exist to support specific student activities. Booster clubs, for instance, support everything from sports teams and the school orchestra to foreign language clubs and student theatrical performances. Other committees are organized during the school year to plan and fund special events such as prom and graduation night.

Regardless of what your exact interests are, you can be certain that your participation will be welcomed in any school parent-teacher organization. Most schools have sign-up sheets located in the school lobby and send home information about organizational activities with the phone numbers of parent contacts.

Even if you don't have much time, attending your school's PTA meetings is an excellent way to stay on top of what's happening at the school and to connect with other parents.
Parent Services and School Choice
2009-10 SBDM Audit

Campus ____________________ Principal ______________________

SBDM
Check all that apply.

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MONTHLY SBDM MEETING
WEEK/DAY ___________________ TIME ______ LOCATION _________________

Are there months in which there are no meetings? ______ yes _____ no
If yes, what month(s)? ________________________________

SBDM CHAIRPERSON:
NAME: ____________________________ ADDRESS _______________________
PHONE: (day) _____________ (evening) ___________ ________________________

DOES SBDM MEET THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES?
• No more than 50% employees, 2/3’s of whom are elected? ____ yes ____ no
• At least 50% parents, community members, business representatives, and/or students,
  2/3’s of whom are elected by key groups and represent diversity of student population.
  ____ yes ____ no

SUBMITTED ON _________________ BY __________________________

Attn: Minnie Anderson, Parent Liaison Coordinator
Phone Number: 972-794-4547 FAX Number: 972-794-4542