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Take advantage of technology to create two-way, family-friendly communication

Communication was the focus at a recent team leaders meeting that I attended as part of a professional development program. At the beginning of the day, we asked these educators to reflect on the types of messages, frequency of communication, and methods of communication. We should not have been amazed to find that most of these folks said e-mail was their primary communication tool.

Internet, web mail, e-mail seem ubiquitous these days. Our cell phones have access to the Internet, e-mail, and instant messaging. Internet technology continues to grow as a powerful communication tool for educators as well. This powerful communication tool should be tapped as a family involvement strategy.

Most work in this area reminds us that effective family involvement communication will be two-way discussions, not one-way announcements. In other words, educators need to establish ways to communicate with parents about important classroom issues but also provide opportunities for parents to ask questions or request assistance. We need to establish a communication loop between parents and families.

The central office can play an important role in helping schools develop the knowledge and skills needed to create this powerful communication system between schools and families. Central office staff need to **support school staff's use of technology to increase family involvement** (Roy and Hord, 2003, p. 161).

Most districts and schools have web sites, but not all the web sites are family-friendly. The best web sites contain information that has been found to be effective in forging strong family

connections. Central office staff need to **assist schools in posting web sites where families can see school news, special notices, tips on parenting, and reading lists**. Numerous sources suggest parenting tips that could be provided by school web sites and even a Parental Involvement Toolbox (www.projectappleseed.org).

In addition, central office can **assist schools in setting up e-mail or voice-mail systems to communicate with families**. This technology helps establish the two-way communication that builds school-family relationships. **Ensuring that teachers have easy access to phones to contact parents** is also important.

Many districts cannot assume that all families will have computers; therefore, central office staff may need to **work with external organizations to provide families with access to technology and the Internet to support family involvement**. My community recently opened a recreation center that included a huge technology center. Many libraries, YMCAs,

and churches are providing Internet access. Central office can help provide information about these centers to families who might otherwise not have access to technology.

The benefits are enormous. According to a review of research, students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, be promoted, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and graduate (National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, 2002, p. 7).

Family Involvement:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately.

Read more about NSDC's standards at www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm.

REFERENCES

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. (2002).

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