

# *School Parent Center*



*A tool to open school doors for increased parental involvement.*

A parent center can make a big difference for parental involvement in your school. A center can help parents feel more comfortable in visiting the school. The more comfortable parents become, the more active they will be in the school and in their children's education. A Parent Center, which is "parent-friendly", can be priceless in helping them feel supported in helping their children. Studies have shown that when parents are involved in education, students do better academically and socially.

**\*How can you create a parent center that is both "parent-friendly" and valuable for parents?** Creating an Action Team may help schools develop a

good center (see *Action Team Process page 5*). Here are a few more ideas and tools to start you on your way. These suggestions have been effective in allowing many other schools to open the doors for greater parent participation.

**\*Where should the parent center be located?** The center's space should be easily accessible and visible. Near the main entrance to the school, next to the principal's office, or near the play area are all locations where schools might effectively allocate space for their centers.

**What should the space look like?** The space needs to be user friendly. Adult sized tables, good lighting, and plenty of comfortable chairs should be in the room. Telephone access, paper supplies, access to copy machines and other materials are also needed for approved activities. The room should highlight education and learning by displaying books, lesson bags and kits. Decorations could include posters of character building, encouragement, teamwork, and achievement. These posters can help make statements regarding the school's academic intent. Posters should model the diversity of the parents and students.

**When should the center be open for parents to come?** Center hours should be posted in an area where there will be a lot of parent traffic. The parent

leadership group or the coordinator of the center should set the hours with input from other parents. The most utilized times may be before classes begin in the mornings, during the lunch hour, before school lets out, during parent meetings or during other school activities.

**\*Should someone always be present in the Parent Center?** A parent coordinator or volunteer would be a valuable asset during the hours of operation. This person can be a guide for parents regarding what resources are available and how to use the resources appropriately, and how to operate different equipment. Some parent centers even offer parents computer literacy classes.

**\*What can parents/staff to do help the center be effective?** School personnel and parents can create a list of goals and specific tasks for the school year. These goals and tasks should have timelines so all the goals for year can be attained.

Individuals should be assigned to work on goals and tasks. The coordinator needs to monitor ongoing progress toward goals.

Parents can offer many skills and bring fresh ideas. Therefore their involvement in the parent center is

critical to help parents and schools set tasks and goals. The following activities are examples of ideas that have been utilized to increase parent involvement.

### **Activities for Parents**

#### **⇒ Band Moms and Dads**

Parents can provide supervision of students, assist with materials and can help raise funds for these organizations.

#### **⇒ School Communications**

Parents can help the school write and mail out information concerning school progress, plans and activities.

#### **⇒ Concession Stands**

Parents can help with working the concession stand to support the school.

#### **⇒ Library Assistance**

Parents can help work on projects, re-shelve books, and helping with reading clubs.

#### **⇒ Garden Club**

Parents can reinforce student learning of fruits and vegetables, and also teach them responsibility and teamwork by planning and tending a garden.

#### **⇒ PTA**

Parents can play a vital role through a large and active PTA. Parents will be

involved in decision making and resource provisions for the school.

**\*What items should be available in the parent center?** Start by assessing what would be most useful to parents in your school. General parent education and child development resources are wonderful tools to have available. In addition, materials on what parents can do to help improve their child's academic achievement are also valuable. A center can be filled with resources that are school and community focused.

The parent coordinator should have information on the center to give to parents. This information can be available at ballgames, musical performances, PTA meetings, and open houses.

The following items can be helpful to parents:

- ⇒ **Community Partners:** churches, stores and local businesses adopt schools and offer both financial and volunteer support.
- ⇒ **Parenting and Educational Books**
- ⇒ **Educational Videos**
- ⇒ **Parenting Magazines**
- ⇒ **Parenting handouts addressing specific child behaviors**
- ⇒ **Homework Hints**
- ⇒ **Study Guides**
- ⇒ **Tutoring calendar:** lists available opportunities for students to

receive additional help with homework.

- ⇒ **Adult Education Information:** Parents may want to continue their own education.
- ⇒ **Computers with Internet Access**
- ⇒ **Academic Standards:** specific information on what students are expected to learn in a specific grade.
- ⇒ **Volunteer sign in sheet**

**\*How can we make the center more effective?**

Develop a survey card (*see Sample Survey page 6*) to assess how the center is currently operating. These cards should include space for parents to indicate what is going well, what needs to be changed, and what can be added. Parents can be helpful in identifying and addressing barriers for involvement.

Cards can be given to parents at parent-teacher conferences or school activities. They can also be placed next to a suggestion box in the parent center, or mailed. The card should indicate where it should be returned.

Keep a large calendar in plain view that lists upcoming events. Information can include, open house, back to school events, holidays, school board meetings, testing dates, and field trips.

Parent centers can open doors for parents to be involved in their child's academic achievement. Use your tools.

Center for Effective Parenting  
Little Rock Center (501)364-7580  
NW Arkansas Center (501)479-751-6166  
[www.parenting-ed.org](http://www.parenting-ed.org)

**\*Highlighted Parent Centers:** Please take a virtual tour.

**Fort Smith School District**

811 N. T. Street  
Fort Smith, AR 72904  
(479) 784-8182 ext. 15

**Lake Hamilton School District**

309 Wolf Street  
Pearcy, AR 71914  
(501) 760-5443

**Little Rock School District**

Harris Elementary  
4424 Jacksonville Highway  
North Little Rock, AR 72117  
501-954-4633

**Springdale School District**

800 E. Emma  
Springdale, AR 72764  
(479) 750-8706

**Van Buren School District**

300 North 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Van Buren, AR 72956  
(479) 471-3141



## **Action Team Process**

### **1. Create an Action Team**

Parents, educators, and others that represent the community will be involved in setting and reaching goals to which all are committed.

### **2. Examine Current Practice**

Review what is currently done for parent and family involvement. Survey the staff and parents to get a clear understanding of the current practices in parent-school involvement.

### **3. Develop a Plan of Improvement**

Based on the survey results, identify priority issues and steps. Pay close attention to developing a well-balanced plan using each of the six standards.

### **4. Secure Support**

For success, keep everyone aware of the plan and their involvement for the success of the program (those responsible for implementing, those who will be affected, and those outside the school/program who have influence over the outcome).

### **5. Provide Professional Development for School/Program Staff**

Effective training is essential. The best trainings are those that provide staff and parents with several opportunities to interact with the issues, work together, and monitor and evaluate the process.

### **6. Evaluate and Revise the Plan**

Parent and family involvement is not a one time goal. It will need continuous improvement and commitment to long-term success.

*Action Plan*

Area of Focus:

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Goal:

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Activity:

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What will be done?

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Why this activity?

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Who will do this?

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When?

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Materials/Resources Needed:

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Evidence of Success:

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## Sample Survey

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A message to all parents of \_\_\_\_\_ school, from the Parent Center Action Team. In an effort to help all families feel a sense of ownership in and belonging to \_\_\_\_\_ School, we are creating a Parent Center in the school. The center will be a place where parents, grandparents and other family members can feel welcome to come any time of the day, to meet with other parents, teachers; to volunteer for school projects; participate in school and community events and programs.

**Your answers are very important!** This survey will help us find out how parents think a Parent Center should be used.

Please fill out this survey and ask your child to return it to his or her teacher by \_\_\_\_\_.

**A. What issues would you like the Parent Center to address? (*Check as many as you wish*)**

- 1. Communicating with your child's teacher(s)
- 2. Helping your child learn at home
- 3. Reading tips for parents
- 4. Math tips for parents
- 5. Homework
- 6. Study skills
- 7. Parenting classes
- 8. Improving communication skills
- 9. Discipline at home and school
- 10. Child Development, ages and stages
- 11. Social skills for children
- 12. Television watching
- 13. Internet guidelines
- 14. Family nutrition
- 15. Child abuse and neglect
- 16. Alcohol and drug abuse prevention
- 17. Role of parents in school-decision making
- 18. The school curriculum
- 19. The benchmark test

- 20. Arkansas Frameworks/curriculum
- 21. Community issues (i.e. hunger, poverty, housing)
- 22. Exploring cultures
- 23. English as a second language
- 24. Introduction Spanish
- 25. Adult literacy classes
- 26. GED classes (earn a high school diploma)
- 27. Other suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. When could you be able to use the parent center?**

- 1. Weekdays during the school day
- 2. Weekday evenings
- 3. Weekends

**Inventory of Volunteer Interests**

Volunteer for one or more of the tasks below by checking the space. Then return this to your child's teacher.

**C. I am interested in volunteering in the classroom, I would like to:**

- 1. Tutor a student
- 2. Work with individual students
- 3. Work with a small group of student's
- 4. Listen to students read
- 5. Translate for students or teachers  
Language \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Help with teacher's work
- 7. Prepare materials
- 8. Attend field trips
- 9. Help students with dramatic performances, special events
- 10. Help in class with art projects
- 11. Do paired reading
- 12. Be a Watchdog Dad
- 13. Be a Safe gate Mom
- 14. Work with a specific grade level \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. Be a guest speaker to:
  - share career experiences
  - share my travels

- share my culture
- share a talent, skill or craft
- 16. Help teachers with class activities such as learning center time

**D. I am interested in volunteering in other areas. I would like to:**

- 1. Help with building maintenance
- 2. Carpentry
- 3. Gardening or yard work
- 4. Work in school library or book fairs
- 5. Photograph school events
- 6. Video record school events
- 7. Type of do clerical work
- 8. Prepare newsletters
- 9. Prepare web sites for teachers
- 10. Prepare posters, displays, bulletin boards
- 11. Do copying and laminating
- 12. I am interested in working with children on computers and supervising children while they surf the internet
- 13. Teaching a computer class
- 14. Teaching a class for parents

**E. I am interested in helping at home. I would like to:**

- 1. Recruit parents and businesses to participate in special reading programs for children
- 2. Call parents to organize a phone tree for special projects
- 3. Enter data on a computer
- 4. Gather resource materials
- 5. Sew
- 6. Provide snacks
- 7. Correct papers
- 8. Cut out projects
- 9. Stuff envelopes
- 10. Distribute brochures door to door
- 11. I am interested in improving our school by working with other parents on projects