

Tips for Engaging Parents

- 1. Before you begin any new activity, program, change in schedule, action plan or rate increase consult numerous parents. Be sure when you solicit their input that you are giving everyone who wants to respond the opportunity by using multiple methods, times and approaches. Seek out the parents that will be the most affected by the change and those that have the reputation for dissent.**
- 2. Once you have input from your parents, listen to them! Don't just go through the motions of "illusion of inclusion" that many programs practice. Promote parent participation in the development and evaluation of the program. Challenge them to set, define and implement goals for action. Connect their participation to real change and active involvement.**
- 3. You need to encourage diversity. Your parents, like their students,¹ need help in tolerating differences. Create opportunities, activities and agendas that incorporate multiple views that still share core values. Recruit fathers, grandfathers, uncles and other male role models if your parent participation is mostly female.**
- 4. Offer parent support for meetings and activities beyond "Food". Vary the times you have the meeting, provide child-care, provide interpreters, and arrange car pools.**
- 5. Offer parent orientation classes, parenting skills, math nights, and computer instruction. Create opportunities to help parents become leaders by providing them with basic information on standards, budgets, evaluation, how government works, and college requirements.**
- 6. Get to know who your parents are. Use a "Parent Talent Survey" to find out their interests, hobbies, occupations, when they can help and what they can do best. Yard duty is the last place parents belong. Honor them as "experts!"**
- 7. Parents are the best recruiters of other parents. Parents are more likely to be involved if they already know someone who is active and can articulate the benefits of membership. They also can be a major force in finding donations and in-kind services from their family and friends. Many parents want to be involved if they see it as meaningful and non-threatening. Create opportunities for parents to meet one another and actually have time to interact.**
- 8. Avoid using professional "jargon" when working with parents such as "integrating k-12 curriculum with developmentally disadvantaged IEP's provides..." Always prepare all materials in multiple languages if needed.**