

19 Proven Tips for Getting Parents Involved at School

from the Edutopia & GreatSchools Communities

Introduction

Experts agree that parent involvement in their children's education is one of the biggest predictors of student success. This guide offers 19 ideas for increasing family engagement and strengthening the home-to-school connection.

These recommendations were contributed by the educators and parents of two great communities: Edutopia and GreatSchools. Join us at [Edutopia.org](https://www.edutopia.org) and [GreatSchools.org](https://www.GreatSchools.org).

Start Positive

Tip: Start the parent-teacher relationship right by sharing positive notes.

“Ask teachers to commit to choosing one student per day and sending a positive note home to parents with the back side of the note asking the parents to send a positive note back about their child. Even with a class of 30, that gives each child and family 6 notes or more during a school year. You would be amazed at what a little positivity will do to get parents engaged.”

—*Dr. Kimberley Palmiotto*

Open the Door

Tip: Teachers, open the door for parents.

“It's key that the teacher extend their hand and open that door first. Not all parents are comfortable making that first move. As a parent, you never know what the teacher's comfort level is with parent engagement. One year you have a teacher who prefers to keep parents outside the school walls, the following year you have one who promotes interaction with each project/lesson. Letting them know up front removes the unknown.”

—Gwen Pescatore, President Home & School Association

Start Early

Tip: At the start of the year, set expectations for parental involvement.

“At back-to-school night, as my kids' teachers discussed the upcoming academic year and what to expect for our kids, they also outlined specific ways we could volunteer to help. They had sign-up sheets available on-site, and offered opportunities for both working and at-home parents, so everyone could participate...As a parent, this approach made me feel welcome and like I had an opportunity to participate in my child's classroom in a helpful way.”

—Heather D.

Communicate Often

Tip: Communicate often about the need for and importance of parental involvement.

“My tip: be sure your school talks openly and often about the need for and importance of parent volunteers. Our school definitely does, and even has periodic ‘visitor & volunteer training days’ that communicate school expectations, rules, and procedures for everyone's benefit. The meetings are always very well attended, and we have a steady stream of parent helpers...I've come to rely on parent help and really miss it on the days no one comes in!”

—Kevin Jarrett, K-4 Technology Facilitator

Structure Helps in the Classroom

Tip: Be clear about what's needed and create a structure that supports those needs.

"Our kindergarten teacher makes a schedule for each parent to bring a snack, and sets the expectation that the classroom will work together to supply an assistant each day for two hours. It's a big class (27!) and she needs all the help she can get so the parents are motivated to help."

—Gretchen A.

Structure Helps in the School

Tip: Create school-wide, structured opportunities for parent involvement.

“Establish a SCHOOL-WIDE list of volunteer activities...If the list is too long, categorize items based on the time involvement required. Pay attention to the number of hours AND time of day required to complete an activity. Be sure to list items that can be done at home, maybe even with kids helping out. Then send out a checkbox list to ALL families allowing parents to select things they may be able to commit to doing. Or even better, have your students ask their families fill out the checklist on Back-to-School night.”

—John S. Thomas, First & Second Grade Teacher

Make Room for Everyone

Tip: Match parents and resources to needs.

"I always like it when a teacher is able to utilize the individual strengths each parent has. Some parents would rather make a Costco run than work with small groups of kids. Some parents can take a day off work every now and then to chaperone field trips but aren't able to commit to volunteering weekly in the classroom. At my daughter's school, there was a parent who wasn't a big volunteer most of the year, but she was able to get her employer to donate a year's supply of tissue and hand sanitizer. If I'm doing something that suits my schedule and that I already have the skill set for, pitching in is a pleasure."

—Heather P.

Find a Skill

Tip: Everyone has something to offer.

“Don't assume you don't have anything to offer if you can't make face-to-face meetings. I've never been to a PTA meeting, but I launched and coordinated the e-newsletter for years. My schedule didn't allow me to get to school during the day and my evenings were packed, but there was still something I could do!”

—*Laura Thomas, Director, Antioch Center for School Renewal*

Changes in Perspective

Tip: Pitching in can change the way you see the school.

"I always liked being field trip mom. I work from home, so it's easy to find time once or twice a semester. I see the classroom dynamic differently. Not always better, but differently. I do plenty of other volunteering, as well, but devoting an entire day to see how the class works is worth rearranging my schedule."

—Angel R.

Accommodations

Tip: Accommodate family needs.

“Make them welcome and valued. The following were done at older son's school: meetings after work hours, multilingual invitations, translators at meetings, and child activities for the kids.”

—Aj Jenny Normand Groome

Communication is Key

Tip: The first step of involvement is communication.

“Listen first, talk second.”

—*Kathi Guffey*

“Keep the parents informed of the children's progress: if they don't know what's going on with them, the parents can't help with the issues as they happen. That, in itself, will keep them involved!”

—*Elinda L.*

Be Specific

Tip: Create a list of specific items the classroom needs, along with prices and where to get them.

“One of my daughter's great teachers had a list taped outside the front door of the classroom with specific items she needs, the prices, and where to get them, like a classroom gift registry. Then, parents can donate specific items as needed. It works pretty well and when it doesn't, she sends out pleading notes to get parents to step up and fill in the gaps.”

—Leslie C.

Showcase Students

Tip: Showcase what students are learning and accomplishing.

“Parents (families) love seeing their child in action, learning, and sharing the product of their hard work...if your school/district permits it...use social media and technology to provide additional opportunities for participation. Share a picture of learning in action through a tweet, livestream project presentations for families to watch from afar or work, Skype a relative in to read a story. All these little things help make families feel like part of the learning experience.”

—Gwen Pescatore, President Home & School Association

Opportunities to Connect

Tip: Create opportunities to connect.

“Invite parents into the classroom to watch group presentations. Let them know it's during regularly scheduled classes only. Welcome them. Encourage students to start presentations by introducing themselves and thanking parents for coming in. Ask students to write thank-you notes within 2-3 days. Ask principals to come to presentations and say hello to parents too -- make sure parents are seen. Do it each semester. Short, succinct, successful.”

—Melissa Brockelbank

Workshops

Tip: Plan events and workshops that bring families into the school.

“Workshops are a great way to bring parents (literally) into the school community and provide them with valuable information. It’s hard to get parents out of the house after hours, so make sure you ask parents what they want to learn more about....Teachers and/or outside speakers can discuss any number of topics of interest to parents, including: family nutrition, child development, constructive and non-constructive ways for parents to help with kids’ homework, the importance of quality sleep for busy kids, etc.”

—Nate Nielsen, Support Representative for Memberhub.com

Home Visits

Tip: Connect with families during home visits.

“I just read an article on home visits and how valuable they are in connecting with parents and building relationships.”

—*Mellissa Connin*

Involve Families in Learning

Tip: Assign homework that requires family participation.

“Assign practical homework that requires conversation and action. Example: when doing procedural writing,...‘cook with mom, and write the steps, too’...; when learning about plants,...‘do a plant walk with someone from your family, write and sketch what you see.’ ‘Interview someone in your family about...,’ etc. In many cases, I believe it is the child's request that really gets the ball rolling.”

—*Yurij Halushka*

Offer Food

Tip: Sharing food encourages goodwill and is an important part of community building.

“We offer free food to get them in the door. That is a major need in our community.”

—*Matt Rogers Menefee*

Stay Connected

Tip: Stay connected to your students.

“Take time to build relationships with each family, and continue that relationship after their children have left your school. Parents appreciate it, and word of mouth spreads fast that you are a school that values engaged parents.”

—Luisa Palomo Hare

Additional Resources

More tips from Edutopia and GreatSchools:

- [Home-to-School Connections](#), a resource roundup from Edutopia, includes links to resources with suggestions for educators looking to expand parent and family involvement in school.
- Edutopia's resource roundup on [Parent Partnership](#) includes links to resources with ideas for parents and families seeking to strengthen their partnership with educators and schools.
- GreatSchools explains how (and why) you should play a key role in your child's school success in "[Partnering with your elementary school teacher.](#)"
- Have an older child? GreatSchools has you covered with "[Partnering with your older child's teacher,](#)" which includes tips for parents of middle and high school students.

About Us

[Edutopia](#) is dedicated to improving K-12 learning through innovative, evidence-based strategies that prepare students to thrive in their studies and adult lives.

[GreatSchools](#) is the nation's leading online source for school information, reaching more than half of U.S. families with school-age children.



Special thanks go to the educators and
parents who contributed to this guide.

For more tips and tactics, visit [Edutopia.org](https://www.edutopia.org) and [GreatSchools.org](https://www.GreatSchools.org).

