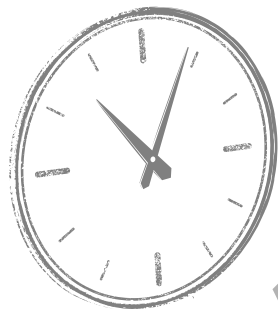


Ways Busy Families *Can* Help Children Succeed *in* School



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Introduction

Congratulations on your purchase of *Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed in School*. This toolkit provides the resources you need to make families your partners in their children's education. You can use the PowerPoint presentation, event planning guide, reproducible handouts, school newsletter articles and other tools in this kit to promote multiple forms of family engagement throughout the year, including:

- **Building a strong family-school partnership** by encouraging families to work with teachers and to support their children's learning outside of school.
- **Hosting meetings** and other events for families.
- **Sharing family engagement information and materials** on your school website, on social media, on your parent portal, via email and in print.

There's no doubt about it—children are most successful in school when their families are involved, both at home and at school. But most families today are extraordinarily busy and may believe they don't have time to get involved. They may not know how to help their children, or they may lack the confidence to do so. With the *Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed in School* Resource Kit, you'll be able to tell families how to make the most of the little spare time they have by using proven family engagement tips and techniques.

Read the information on the following pages first so you will know what your kit contains. After previewing the contents of this binder and logging in to the online portal, you can decide on the best way to use the materials provided.



Presenter's script

This presenter's script provides suggested wording if you wish to personally narrate the *Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed in School* PowerPoint presentation found in the online portal. (See page 4 for login instructions.)

You are, of course, free to modify the script to make the words your own, adding or deleting information as you choose.

You may make changes in the presentation as well. Please note, however, that under the resource kit license, you may use the modifications only for your own school presentation use.

The presentation is written to run for about 20 minutes, depending on the speed at which the narrative is delivered.



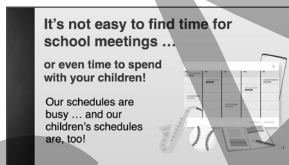
Slide 1
(Opening slide, no narration.)



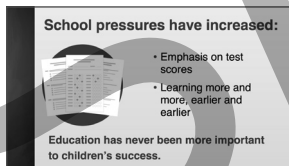
Slide 2
Thank you for being here today! I'm _____, and we're going to talk about ways busy families can help children succeed in school. **[+]** The first thing I want to say is, "Congratulations!"



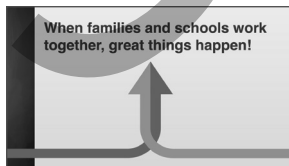
Slide 3
Just by being here today, you have already sent your child a valuable message— **[+]** that you think school is very important.



Slide 4
Families are busier than ever before. It's not easy to find time to participate in meetings and events at school, **[+]** or even to spend as much time as you want with your child. **[+]** And children are busy, too. Whether it's band, soccer, baseball, homework, studying or projects, many kids today have a lot to juggle.



Slide 5
The pressures at school have also increased, **[+]** with the emphasis on test scores, **[+]** and learning more and more, earlier and earlier. **[+]** Education has *never* been more important to children's success—now and in the future.



Slide 6
When families and schools are partners in children's education, children are more successful. And I know that's why you're here!



Make meetings useful for non-English speaking families

Communicating with non-English speaking families involves much more than translating school information into different languages. Real communication involves building a climate of mutual respect in which families and educators can have meaningful exchanges about students.

As you prepare for your meeting, keep your non-English speaking families in mind. To make them feel included:

- 1. Educate your staff.** Recruit a knowledgeable volunteer to inform your staff about customs of families in the diverse cultures of your school community that may affect how the families interact with teachers and others in your school.
- 2. Translate materials whenever possible** into all the languages of families at your school. This includes invitations, advertisements such as posters and press releases, and all handouts provided at the meeting.
- 3. Have students write invitations** to their families. A bilingual adult volunteer can help check that the information is correct on the invitations.
- 4. Recruit bilingual families** to invite non-English speaking families. A personal invitation often makes non-English speaking families feel welcome and more comfortable about attending a school event. Some schools use a team of bilingual family volunteers to serve as interpreters or mentors for non-English speaking families. They share information on school events, explain school policies and values, and in some cases, attend school events or conferences with the non-English speaking families.
- 5. Invite bilingual families to serve as greeters** at all the entrances to the room where you conduct the meeting. Post welcome signs in all the languages of your school population.
- 6. Recruit bilingual leaders for small group discussions.** Encourage them to allow all group members to participate.
- 7. Ask about the needs of your non-English speaking families.** During the discussion period following the presentation, have a bilingual volunteer record the comments of your non-English speaking families. Use these comments to plan future events to include these families.
- 8. Follow up with small group meetings** for your non-English speaking families. Consider starting a monthly discussion group.



Include an article in your school newsletter

To get families to attend your meeting, consider giving them a “preview” of the information they will learn during the presentation. Here’s a sample long article invitation to put right into your regular school newsletter, on your school website, on social media or on your parent portal. A customizable version of this newsletter article is available in the online portal.

What’s the Key to Your Child’s Success in School? YOU!

You make sure your child has pencils, paper and a backpack. But research shows the most important “school supply” is a dose of your involvement.

And here’s one great way to get involved! **Join us at (time) on (date) in (location) for a program on *Ways Busy Families Can Help Their Children Succeed in School*.** We’ll have a short video presentation, time for discussion and lots of helpful tips you can use at home to promote your child’s success in school!

We’ll have ideas like these and more:

- **Ask your child about school.** Listen carefully. Take an interest in every part of your child’s day (both inside the classroom and out).
- **Maintain a learning-friendly home.** Monitor how much time your child spends watching television and playing computer games. Make sure schoolwork comes first.
- **Read all notices sent home from the school.** Have a special folder where your child can put them. Be sure to sign and return forms on time. And review the school website for policies and other information.
- **Encourage reading.** Show your child that literacy isn’t something that’s “just for school.”
- **Keep in touch with your child’s teacher.** Let the teacher know when things are going well and when they’re not. Write a note, send an email or pick up the phone.
- **Come to school.** Every time you walk in the building, you help strengthen the message that “school is important.”

Help your child succeed in school: 12 tips for families

This handout is a list of tips discussed in the *Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed in School* presentation for you to keep and review.

- 1. Make sure your child comes to school on time each day.** Learning builds day by day, which means attendance is crucial.
- 2. Use time in the car to talk to your child.** Turn off the radio. Ask your child, “What would you like to talk about?” This is a perfect time to talk about school, friends or any problems your child may be having.
- 3. Exchange notes with your child.** Notes don’t have to be long— just a few words when you have a free moment. Tuck one into your child’s lunch or book bag. Ask your child to write back.
- 4. Schedule one-on-one time.** Make an actual appointment to spend quality time with your child at least once a week.
- 5. Encourage reading.** Experts agree that one of the best ways to help kids succeed in school is to encourage reading. Get the whole family involved. Be a reading role model for your child.
- 6. Aim for balance** when it comes to recreational screen time. Your child should have plenty of time for real-life activities (reading, hobbies, physical activity). Encourage positive ways to use technology, like connecting with relatives or watching educational programs.
- 7. Get to know your child’s teachers.** Share information. Know what the teachers expect. Join the family organization. Communicate regularly.
- 8. Provide support for homework.** Help your child choose a distraction-free place to study. Stock it with basic supplies like paper, pencils, a calculator and a dictionary. Stay nearby in case your child needs help, but avoid doing the work for your child. Make sure your child has time each day to complete assignments.
- 9. Stick to a regular bedtime** so your child is alert and ready to learn in school. Experts recommend 9 to 11 hours of sleep for children and 8 to 10 for teenagers. Help your child wind down by putting away screens at least one hour before bedtime.
- 10. Encourage positive behavior at home.** Stick to household routines, rules and consequences. This will make it easier for your child to follow classroom routines and show positive behavior at school.
- 11. Discuss tests with your child.** Start by talking about what your child did well. Together, try to understand incorrect answers—and brainstorm ways to improve next time.
- 12. Ask about what’s going on in school every day.** Ask your child specific questions. Talk about your day, too.

Questions and answers about family engagement



Children spend a significant amount of time outside the school setting—and usually they're around you! Make sure you're taking advantage of these waking, learning hours to become involved in your child's education.

Q: Why is family engagement so important? How does it affect my child?

A: Family engagement research, over the years, has shown that when families take an active role in their child's education, children experience many positive benefits. These benefits include:

- Higher grades and test scores.
- Better attendance.
- More positive attitudes and behavior.
- Higher graduation rates.
- Greater enrollment in postsecondary education.

Q: What if I don't have time in my busy schedule to get involved?

A: There are many ways to be involved that fit into even the busiest schedules. It helps to rethink what counts as family engagement. Sure, volunteering at your child's school is one way to be involved. But talking to your child about school counts, too, as does looking over papers your child brings home and communicating with teachers.

Q: Does my involvement have an impact on my child's school and our community?

A: Actually, yes! Research has shown that family engagement has a positive effect on schools and the community. Family engagement has been linked to improved teacher morale and higher student achievement. And successful students are more likely to grow up to become productive members of their communities.

Q: Why is family engagement so important to a child's education? Aren't teachers supposed to educate my child?

A: You have significant influence on your child's educational development. First of all, you are your child's first (and most long-lasting) teacher. You also have the best knowledge of your child's needs and talents. Finally, you have the most opportunities to be a model for your child. When you work with your child's school, these strengths will benefit your child.

Q: I'm not sure that I'm qualified to be involved in my child's education. I don't have a teaching degree. How can I help my child?

A: Regardless of your educational background (or income level or cultural background), you can be involved. All families can have a positive influence on their children's learning. The research evidence is now beyond dispute: When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. In fact, the



Section 6

Newsletter Articles

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Motivate families to help with math

Research shows that family attitudes have a lot to do with how well children do in math. Let families know that even if they don't understand what their children are learning, they can still help!

You can help your child with math

You want to help your child with math homework. But to tell the truth, you're not sure you understand it any better than your child does. Regardless of your math ability or confidence level, you have the power to help your child. Here are some things you can do:

- **Ask your child to teach you.** You'll gain a better understanding of the math your child is doing in school. And explaining it out loud will help your child learn.
- **Talk about math in a positive way.** Even if you struggled with math in school or believe you're not good at math, be positive when you talk to your child.
- **Point out ways you use math in everyday life.** Making spreadsheets or operating a cash register at work, creating a family budget and planning a daily schedule are just a few of the ways you might use math.
- **Make math fun with calendar challenges.** Ask a younger child to identify the numbers on a calendar. An older child can be challenged to add or multiply numbers on the calendar.
- **Encourage mastery.** Math builds on what has been learned. Make sure your child knows and retains math facts—not just for the test. There's no substitute for mastering the basics.
- **Focus on fundamentals.** Use flash cards to review math facts. On a day when your child has no math homework, go back and look at old tests. Don't focus on the grade. Some students who get good grades in math forget most of what they have learned when the test is over.
- **Use the textbook.** Math textbooks include a lot more than problems. They offer explanations of how to solve problems. They offer examples of how the math is used in real life. If your child is having trouble, look at the math book together. You may both find a way to solve the problem.



Show families what involvement looks like

The federal Title I legislation defines family engagement as “the participation of families in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.” But what does that mean in families’ everyday lives? It’s up to you to share with families what behaviors are considered effective involvement.

Family engagement at home

Families want to help their children at home—but may not be sure how to accomplish this beyond saying, “How was school today?” Let families know that they are having a positive impact on their child’s education at home when they:

- **Establish routines.** Families should monitor their child’s routine in terms of sleep, school and social habits—including study time and curfews.
- **Stay up to date.** Families should read information sent home from school so it’s easier to communicate about school issues. They should know school schedules and rules.
- **Help their child get organized.** Families should help their child develop a good organization system and talk about what will work best for their child. They can practice prioritizing and planning for tests and projects.
- **Monitor homework.** Families should never do homework for their child. But they should learn about teachers’ homework policies and make sure their child follows them.
- **Are supportive.** Families should create an environment conducive to learning by providing a quiet study area and showing enthusiasm about education. They should encourage their child to take classes needed to reach potential future goals.
- **Stay in touch.** Families should ask about the best ways to stay in contact with teachers, such as through email.
- **Read with their child.** Reading is a part of every school subject, so even 20 minutes of family reading time every day will pay off in terms of school success.

Family engagement at school

Families are likely familiar with the traditional idea of volunteering in the classroom. But it’s important that they realize they’re also getting involved when they:

- Attend parent-teacher conferences.
- Attend Back-to-School Night and other school events.
- Talk to their child’s teacher.



Ask families to fill out a volunteer checklist

A volunteer checklist serves two purposes: It informs families of the volunteer opportunities available at your school, and it gives school staff an idea of which families are most well-suited to which volunteer activities. A customizable version of this volunteer checklist that you can adapt to your needs is available in the online portal.

Volunteer Checklist

(Name of school) encourages family engagement. Please fill out the following survey to help us work together to determine the best ways your time and talents can help your child's school.

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Student's Name: _____

Where would you prefer to volunteer?

- At home
- At school
- Both

When are the best times for you to volunteer?

- Mornings
- Afternoons
- Evenings
- Weekends

What would you feel comfortable doing?

- Calling other families
- Helping in the office/library
- Attending field trips
- Helping plan events
- Working with students
- Clerical tasks (making copies, etc.)
- Other: _____

We know that our students and their families are a talented group! What talents can you share with us?

- Cooking
- Art
- Music
- Computer skills
- Sewing
- Trade skills (like carpentry, etc.)

Language(s) spoken: _____

Other: _____