

Parent Coordinator Resource Guide & Toolkit

The JOINING PROCESS

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THE JOINING PROCESS: Developing Positive Relationships between Families and Schools

What you'll learn ...

As you complete this tool, you will learn about a framework for developing positive relationships between families and schools. This framework for thinking consists of three elements—Welcome, Honor, and Connect.

What you'll need...

A copy of the Moving to Action worksheet.

What you'll do...

1. Read the information about the Welcome, Honor, and Connect framework.
2. Complete the Moving to Action planning worksheet to transform an existing activity.
3. Implement your revised activity.



Three things that help build great relationships with parents

Dr. Karen Mapp is a faculty member in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is an expert in school, family and community partnerships and co-authored a synthesis of the research that has been done on the effects of parent involvement on student achievement. This synthesis, *A New Wave of Evidence*, was published in 2002 and offers the following conclusions. When parents and school staff work together to support learning, students:

- (1) Earn higher grades and test scores;
- (2) Enroll in higher level programs;
- (3) Are promoted more and earn more credits;
- (4) Adapt better to school and attend more regularly;
- (5) Have better social skills and behavior; and
- (6) Graduate and go on to higher education.

We are also learning that family and community engagement has a positive impact on school improvement and reform.

In 2006, Dr. Mapp co-authored a second book, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, that was designed for teachers and parents on the front lines in public schools, and administrators and policy makers at all levels. *Beyond the Bake Sale* helps readers answer questions like: What is a family-school partnership supposed to look like? How can schools and families build trust instead of blaming each other? How can involving parents help raise students' test scores? How can teachers relate to families who don't share their culture and values?

One important section of *Beyond the Bake Sale* discusses the "Joining Process." The Joining Process is Dr. Mapp's framework for developing positive relationships between schools and families. This framework consists of three elements — **Welcoming**, **Honoring**, and **Connecting**. The following is a description of each element.

Welcoming Families

To build successful relationships with families, start by welcoming them into the school family. If you want to become more welcoming to parents and families, you must first examine the different aspects of your current practice. By asking questions about the school's physical environment, its policies and practices, staff behaviors, and written materials, you can begin to assess the "current reality" of your school as a welcoming or as an unwelcoming place.

In a welcoming school, families feel at home, are comfortable, and feel a part of the school community. To feel "at home" suggests a familiarity, a functional yet relaxed environment, and the sense that a person "belongs." Begin

by asking how you can help parents to become familiar with the school and the staff who work in it. You must find ways to create places within the school where parents can feel comfortable and that they “belong.”

To be a part of a school community means that there is a common interest, common goals, common values, and expectations of each community member. People feel they belong to a community when they can positively contribute to the good of the organization in different ways. Finding ways for parents to positively contribute is the start of welcoming them into the school community.

Honoring Families

As you continue to develop positive relationships with all families, it’s important to consider how you honor families. In schools that honor families, the entire staff shares the belief that all families want their students to be successful in school, and recognize that family members are as concerned about student achievement as educators are. Schools that truly engage parents seek ways to ensure that they actively participate in their students’ education in ways that match their own backgrounds, interests and skills.

When you take the time to understand each family’s interests and priorities, it sends a powerful message to parents that educators honor what parents have to offer in support of their children’s achievement. Basing their involvement on each parent’s personal strengths and interests also helps to ensure a sense of efficacy on the part of the parents — a sense that they truly have something to contribute. This sense of self-worth on the part of parents can lead to continued parent involvement over time.

You can establish a school culture that honors parents by making a conscious and consistent effort to seek information from them. Information that increases your awareness of and sensitivity to each family’s individual culture and perspective on the role of the school will aid in the development of positive relationships. This can be accomplished through class and building-wide surveys, questionnaires, and suggestion boxes.

The most effective and meaningful way for you to get first-hand information from parents is by meeting with parents on a one-to-one basis. Scheduling face-to-face meetings is an excellent way for you to better understand families’ priorities, expectations and goals. This strategy also demonstrates to parents that you truly honor parents as trusted and respected partners in the pursuit of improved achievement for every child. Another way that you can honor parents is by offering them workshops in leadership, school improvement, or other topics suggested by parents. Helping to improve the skills of parents not only honors their contributions and increases their sense that they can contribute, but can ultimately develop an invaluable resource that will benefit the entire school.

Connecting Families to Learning

The final step in building positive relationships with parents is to connect families to the learning process. One way to accomplish this is to consciously link all parent involvement activities to learning. While parents have the right and responsibility to be involved in their children's education, the school has to open the door and invite parents to take an active role in learning.

This focus of “Welcoming, Honoring, and Connecting” was designed to assist educators in opening the doors of the classroom, office, and school to partner with parents in the education of their children. You must share with parents the research that makes it crystal clear that students do better in school when parents are actively engaged in their children's education. We want parents to see themselves in a partnering role with the school and we want them to see the results of their efforts. Parents will more likely choose to be involved if they:

- (1) Have the interest and perceive they have the time, skill and ability to help;*
- (2) Are given opportunities to learn how to help; and*
- (3) If they understand that they can make a difference in their child's success.*

Your charge and challenge are clear if you want our students to be the best they can be and do the best they can do. You need to embrace parents as partners by not only welcoming and honoring them but also by building a sense of “can do” within the parent community. You need to supply them with the skills and tools they need



to be a vital link to learning between the school and their children.

Putting it Together

Now it's time to translate the Welcome, Honor, Connect framework into action. Complete the Moving to Action worksheet so that you can transform your activities using the Welcome, Honor, and Connect framework.

Moving to Action: The Joining Process

Select an activity (parent meeting, workshop, training, outreach effort) that you did last year or have planned for this year.

ACTIVITY NAME: _____

DATE SCHEDULED: _____

Describe the original activity.

*How will you improve the activity to be more **Welcoming**?*

*How will you improve the activity to **Honor** what parents have to offer?*

*How will you improve the activity to **Connect** participants to the student learning process?*