

Increasing the Number of Parents in Leadership and Decisionmaking Roles

Schools benefit when they include parents in the decisionmaking process. When parents provide their opinions and preferences regarding issues under consideration, they are more likely to buy-in to school policies and initiatives. When parents are aware of the complexities of running a school, they are often more supportive. Additionally, parents can help the school reach out to other parents, share ideas, and gather input because they have informal access through extra-curricular activities and neighborhood connections.

The issues and challenges to increasing the number of parents in leadership and decisionmaking roles are:

- **Key roles:** Offering parents key roles in the school decisionmaking process
- **Inclusive representation:** Assembling a representative group of all parents
- **Leadership training:** Offering parents training on how to serve effectively as leaders and parent representatives
- **Time constraints:** Developing strategies for overcoming parent and staff time constraints that interfere with arranging meetings
- **School data:** Making school data understandable and available to teachers and parents so that they can make informed decisions
- **Resistance issues:** Developing strategies for working through staff resistance to change, turf issues, and power struggles

The benefits of increasing the number of parents in leadership and decisionmaking roles are:

- **Parents are more supportive:** When parents are involved in leadership and decisionmaking roles, they become more supportive of the school's efforts and they have a better understanding of school issues and priorities.
- **Schools are more aware:** By involving parents in leadership and decisionmaking roles, schools are more aware of parents' perspectives.
- **Funding issues:** Involved parents are more supportive of school funding issues.

Strategies for Increasing the Number of Parents in Leadership and Decisionmaking Roles

- Award one parent a stipend:** Have that parent contact other parents, welcome new parents to the school, help resolve conflicts between the home and school, and actively seek parents' opinions and support.
- Make decisions after surveying comprehensive data:** Study data on student and family characteristics, academic achievement, and parents' opinions and willingness to support proposals for change.
- Offer leadership training:** Bring in a trainer or develop a leadership training workshop which is offered to both parents and staff.
- Do a parent check-in:** Before there is an urgent need to make decisions about vandalism, violence, and drug and alcohol issues, check in with parents. Discuss these problems before a crisis occurs. This offers parents an opportunity to play an active role in these very critical areas.
- Deal with conflict promptly:** Explore the issues with a neutral facilitator who will help set boundaries for the discussion and guide parties in developing common purposes, methods for working together, and timelines and check-in points to make sure that the resolution is achieved.
- At the end of meetings, do an "ABC" evaluation:**
 - What **action** will you take as a result of the meeting?
 - What was the **best** part of this meeting?
 - What **concerns** do you have?
- Recognize parents for their efforts:** Recognize all of the efforts made by parents who serve on school advisory committees and in other decisionmaking roles. This will not only give credit where credit is due; it will help other parents to know who is representing them.

*Supporting Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in Your School, by Deborah Davis
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