



Unravelling the Issues Related to the School-Family Relationship, One Step at a Time

Support tool for school staff members working in disadvantaged areas

Intervention in Disadvantaged Areas

EQUALITY | FAIRNESS | SOCIAL JUSTICE

“School is a space that intimidates parents from these [disadvantaged] areas. The goal of the school is to make it a friendly place and recognize what parents can do.”

Fasal Kanouté [Translation]

“It’s always the families whose children need it the most who get involved the least!”

Following the premise that all parents have the success and well-being of their children at heart, it is essential to seek to understand the root causes why a parent might seem less involved in their child’s education. Research is unanimous on the importance of parents’ role in their children’s educational success and perseverance.¹ It is therefore necessary to shift the school-family relationship from simply communicating information on school life to a real alliance between parents and school staff members.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS TOOL

This tool presents courses of action that the school can implement to better adapt to the various living conditions of families and establish with them a relationship of trust, mutual respect, acceptance and equality. It is intended for anyone working in the school system (administrator, professional or teacher) who wishes to increase their power to act on the paths of students from disadvantaged areas by focusing in particular on the school-family relationship.

SUGGESTED USE

Paint a picture of the various manifestations of school-family collaboration in your environment, noting those that are already well established and those that need to be improved or implemented. Of all these manifestations, retain only those that seem to be adapted to the reality and needs of your environment.



Perhaps the reason these parents seem less involved is . . .

	Already in place	To be improved	To be developed
. . . that they face difficulties that hinder their participation in their child’s school life.			
Learn about the living conditions of families by focusing on their experiences, their fields of interest and the environment in which they live.			
Draw up and update the list of local community organizations that can help families struggling with food, material or financial insecurity.			
Coordinate with community partners to establish agreements regarding the service offer to young people and their families.			
Create a climate conducive to communication by adopting an open, respectful attitude and by listening to others.			
Call on the support worker for strengthening the school-family relationship or another resource person who is mandated to support the relationship with families and guide school staff members.			
Give parents a voice and answer their questions, concerns and needs.			
Ensure that non-compliance with certain rules is not due to a lack of financial resources.			



Perhaps the reason these parents seem less involved is . . .

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. . . that they fear being judged negatively by school staff members.			
Give families the opportunity to share their concerns, realities and perceptions of the school. Attempt to better understand where the mistrust of some parents with regard to the school might come from.			
Encourage parents' sense of competence about the school by pointing out their child's successes and qualities. Follow up with parents, acknowledge the efforts made and highlight positive observations.			
Welcome parents without judgment while respecting their values and culture. Develop the intercultural skills of school staff members.			
Work to deconstruct the prejudices and false beliefs that school staff members may have with regard to deprivation. ²			
Speak out against and ban derogatory and snide remarks about family characteristics.			
Promote regular, frank, respectful, two-way communication with parents. Establish harmonious and open relations with them where everyone has their place and has the right to speak.			
Seek consensus in decision making. Use "we" when solutions are jointly formulated.			
Promote social justice (equal chances of success, fair and equitable distribution of resources, etc.) among school staff members. ³			
Recognize the skills of parents. They must feel respected and perceive that their role with their child is recognized and valued.			
Act on the sometimes divergent perceptions of school staff members regarding the expectations and objectives related to parental involvement.			
Establish a relationship of equality with parents by treating them as complementary partners at school. Avoid asymmetrical relationships.			
Work on the obstacles to collaboration with families (scale of the task, lack of time, fear that parents will pass judgment on educational decisions, etc.).			
Avoid comparisons with other children or families, which could spark feelings of inferiority in parents.			



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. . . that they do not understand the language or the level of language used.			
Use simple and accessible language, understandable to all.			
Show respect, flexibility and openness, and listen to the realities of others.			
Question the parents to ensure that you fully understand their situation.			
As much as possible, simplify the written communication addressed to parents so as to reach those with weak reading skills. ⁴			
Take into account cultural differences in the way you communicate.			
Look for community organizations in the area that offer support in the families' first language.			
Call on a support worker for school-immigrant family collaborations if necessary.			
Suggest that parents come to the meeting accompanied by a trusted person who is fluent in the language in which the meeting is being conducted.			
Check parents' understanding frequently and rephrase if necessary to make sure they understand.			
Make parents feel that their words are important by listening to them carefully.			
Ensure a common understanding of the conclusions of a meeting, put them in writing and send a copy to the parents.			



Perhaps the reason these parents seem less involved is . . .

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. . . that they are suspicious of the education system because of their difficult school experience.			
Cultivate a relationship with the child to gain their parents' trust.			
Take an interest in the school experience of the parents, and try to understand how this can influence the value they place on learning.			
Show respect, flexibility, empathy and openness, and listen to the realities of parents.			
Call on community organizations that could act as a bridge between school and family.			
Collaborate on various projects that reflect the interests of young people, families and their community.			
Work to make the school environment welcoming, caring and open.			
Continue to encourage parents to participate in meetings, despite repeated refusals.			
Begin and end meetings or communications on a positive note.			
Communicate regularly with parents to encourage them to get involved. Take the first steps, reach out to families.			
Encourage parents to participate in school life by offering enticing activities.			
Win parents' trust and share your belief that the situation can improve.			
Focus discussion on problem-solving; include parents in finding solutions.			
Personalize invitations to entice parents to attend.			
Choose a style of meeting that is not intimidating for parents, such as a round table.			
Make sure that there are not too many school staff members in relation to the parents, for example during individualized education plan meetings.			
Come to shared conclusions, put them in writing and give a copy to the parents.			
Offer parents the possibility of meeting them outside the school (community centre, office of an organization, etc.) if they do not feel comfortable at the school.			



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. . . that they do not know how the school works.			
Make important information as accessible as possible and distribute it in a variety of ways.			
Offer parents the opportunity to listen to training capsules on various topics of interest: academic support, organization, school life, roles and responsibilities, effective communication with educational staff, etc. ⁵			
Communicate to families the academic expectations for them and check with them whether they are able to meet these expectations.			
Provide families with information on school policies and regulations (code of conduct, food policy, etc.).			
Implement systems to identify the needs of families and plan actions accordingly.			
Ensure that parents are informed of the topics that will be covered during a meeting so that they can plan accordingly.			
Ensure that the expectations, rules and language specific to the school environment are well understood.			
Ensure that newcomers understand how the Québec school system works. ⁶			
Inform families about homework and lessons and simple ways to support their child.			

Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each education stakeholder and specify how they can help parents.			
Make sure invitations to meetings are clear enough that all parents understand the importance of attending.			

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To be improved
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Perhaps the reason these parents seem less involved is . . .

. . . that they are not aware of the importance of the role they have to play in their child's education.			
Make all education stakeholders aware of the importance of recognizing everyone's expertise and of the advantages of working with parents.			
Do modelling exercises with parents.			
Develop the capacity of teachers to involve parents, to encourage their participation in the life of the school.			
Establish common goals with the parents so that all stakeholders are working in the same direction for the child's success.			
Reassure parents about their ability to support their child in their educational path. Remind them that they are sometimes in the best position to suggest solutions.			
Remind parents that education is a team effort and that their commitment is essential, both for the school and for their child.			
Give a list of educational tools to parents, for example links to audio books or learning exercise sites (e.g. Alloprof ⁷).			
Include the child in the collaboration between the school and the family, since they are at the heart of this relationship.			
Value the role of parents by specifying that they are their child's first teachers and that their support is therefore essential.			
Consult with parents about practices that would increase their participation and involvement.			
Take the time to thank parents when they get involved and emphasize that their presence is very precious.			
Encourage parents to show a positive attitude toward learning when they are talking to their child.			
Encourage two-way communication. Be open to the knowledge and skills of parents in a true spirit of sharing and closeness.			
Set common goals centred on the success of the student, which inspire everyone to get involved.			
Reassure parents about their contribution to their child's school life by presenting them with useful ways to help their child.			
Establish among school staff members a clear and shared vision of parental commitment to the success of the child.			

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Perhaps the reason these parents seem less involved is . . .

. . . that the meeting arrangements proposed by the school do not allow them to attend.			
Offer a variety of meeting times, alternating days and times, to accommodate different people's schedules.			
Offer various means of communication: face-to-face, videoconference, telephone, text message, etc.			
Offer a drop-in daycare service for participants' children during collaborative activities.			
Plan the resources (human, financial and material) necessary for the meetings to run smoothly and for maximum participation.			
Find meeting places that are accessible and adapted to the number of participants.			
Take the time to call certain parents to invite them verbally to important meetings.			
Favour short and simple meetings.			
Facilitate travel (carpooling, bus tickets, etc.) for people without a car.			

Ask parents about the logistical constraints preventing them from attending meetings and offer them solutions.			
Offer various opportunities for involvement in terms of location and type of activity.			
Use surveys to learn more about ways parents would like to hold meetings.			

References

1. *Rapprocher les familles et l'école primaire*

<http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs52051#:~:text=La%20collaboration%20entre%20l'%C3%A9cole%20et%20les%20parents%20permet%20%C3%A0,entre%20autres%20avec%20la%20communaut%C3%A9>
<https://ecolemontrealaise.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix.pdf>

Rapprocher les familles et l'école secondaire

<http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs52313#:~:text=La%20collaboration%20des%20parents%20au,le%20personnel%20scolaire%20peut%20favoriser>

2. Testimonial of Mme Morin (video capsule and facilitation tool) and Pop-quiz on Prejudices and false beliefs [available in French only]

<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/intervention-milieu-defavorise/>

http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/education/jeunes/OutilAccompagnementCapsuleVideo.pdf

3. *Reflection Tool for Administrators and Social Justice Leadership Memory Aid* (French and English versions)

<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/intervention-milieu-defavorise/>

4. *Simplifying your Writing* (French and English versions)

<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/intervention-milieu-defavorise/>

5. Fédération des comités de parents du Québec

<https://www.fcpq.qc.ca/>

6. Information and facilitation tool on the Québec school system

<http://tcri.qc.ca/volets-tcri/jeunes/publications-volet-jeunes/179-outil-d-information-et-d-animation-sur-le-systeme-scolaire-quebecois>

7. Alloprof – Parents

<https://www.alloprof.qc.ca/en/parents>

To go further . . .

Effective or promising practices for school-family-community collaboration: a knowledge synthesis and possible courses of action (J. Larivée)

<https://frq.gouv.qc.ca/en/story-and-report/effective-or-promising-practices-for-school-family-community-collaboration-a-knowledge-synthesis-and-possible-courses-of-action/>

Rôle des parents et de la communauté dans la réussite éducative et la valorisation de l'éducation (Gouvernement du Québec)

http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/publications/Parents-communaute-reussite-valorisation.pdf

Crucial Conditions for Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships (R. Deslandes)

<https://www.ctreq.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Conditions-essentiels-anglais.pdf>