

Youth CareerConnect Parent and Family Engagement Tip Sheet and Resource List

One key to your program's success is to build strong relationships with parents. A well-designed set of materials outlining the role parents play is an effective way to accomplish this goal. Successful programs are developed with input from parents and include clearly defined expectations. Providing parents with materials when students first enter your program, connecting with parents during the program, and celebrating their contributions will help engage parents and strengthen your program.

Information to include in Parent Materials:

- An explanation of the program requirements, as well as the requirements for student and parent involvement.
- A list of parent responsibilities for supporting student learning and program success, and a request for parents to commit to them.
- Ways parents can stay informed and communicate with the school, including reminders to promptly read notices and to respond as appropriate.
- Expectations and opportunities for volunteering at YCC program events and activities..

*Provide encouragement and rewards for success.
For example, provide a meaningful recognition for parents who volunteer or attend 90% of meetings.*

Parent Engagement Communications Plan

Communication is the foundation for all other forms of parent involvement. Effective communication strategies involve:

- **Initiation:** Initiate contact as soon as you know which students will be program participants for the school year. An introductory phone call or letter should help parents understand the program and know what to expect. Follow-up with an email that includes parent resources and contact information for program staff.
- **Timeliness:** Contact parents as soon as possible after identifying a problem or opportunity, so timely action can be taken. Responding promptly to calls and e-mails from parents demonstrates your commitment to involving parents and encourages them to be responsive to your requests.

- **Consistency and frequency:** Parents want frequent, ongoing feedback about how their students are performing academically. Be sure parents know how to use school district websites to access program and academic information and comments from teachers. Since positive messages are more well-received than negative ones, try to have a positive focus, even when communicating a challenge, so parents look forward to reading your communications.
- **Follow-through:** Lead by example and do what you say you will do. Parents are watching and will be more likely to follow through if they see you doing it first.

Other elements of an effective communication plan include:

- Implementing a communication system that is responsive to parent needs and preferences, such as mail, phone, texting, e-mail, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Remind.com, school district web pages), or face-to face meetings (at home or work sites), and robocalls.
- Making contact with parents and families prior to the beginning of the school year and throughout the summer.
- Establishing a system for delivering YCC newsletters highlighting program performance, upcoming events, student and parent success, and ways parents can get involved and participate.
- Developing a regular schedule (e.g., monthly, quarterly, annually) for ensuring parent contact information is up to date. Create a standard procedure for verifying contact information anytime a parent is contacted.
- Using personal contact to follow up on letters and other information that are mailed or sent home with students, to ensure the information was received and understood.
- Providing additional services based on the needs of your community.
 - Provide assistance for parents who need help accessing and reading school newsletters, web pages, blogs, and the monthly calendar of events.
 - Offer materials in other languages for parents who are not native English speakers, based on the needs in your community.

Parent Engagement Meetings

Parent engagement meetings are effective ways to share YCC program policies, address issues of concern, and get to know the parents of program participants. These meetings may also provide parents with access to school district personnel and an opportunity to provide education and training information for parents.

Tips for Planning a Parent Engagement Meeting:

- Talk to teachers, counselors, and support staff to gather information about parents and families before you plan your meetings.
- Ask parents to play a key role in developing meeting agendas and invite them to serve as speakers or co-facilitators.
- Schedule meetings at varying hours to accommodate the range of parent schedules.
- Provide easy access to the meeting with a central location, transportation options, and free parking.
- Offer free on-site child care during meetings by recruiting older students in the program to provide the child care and earn community service hours.
- Post the meeting on your website or Facebook and encourage parents to connect and carpool.
- Provide invitations and meeting materials in multiple languages and have bilingual staff or interpreters available as needed.
- Send reminders often and in different formats.
- Allow time for open discussion or questions and answers.
- Use an evaluation form or suggestions box so parents can provide feedback anonymously.

Possible Parent Engagement Meeting Content:

- School and programmatic updates
 - YCC program updates.
 - The school district's academic agenda.
 - Information about PTA meetings and how parents can participate.
 - Volunteer opportunities within the YCC program.
- Student-focused topics
 - Strategies parents can use to support student success, socially and academically.
 - Resources available through the program and the community for academic success, student support, and youth employment.
- Parent-focused topics
 - Preparing for parent-teacher meetings.
 - How to help with homework.
 - Strategies for overcoming language barriers and available resources.
 - Continuing and adult education opportunities.

- Employment and employability resources.
 - Human service and health management resources.
 - Volunteer opportunities within the community.
- Planning for awards ceremonies and special events

Special Events—Celebrate Success!

In addition to the regular meetings, special events can increase and sustain family engagement. Events can be planned to bring people together as a community, celebrate success, recognize program partners, and reward parents for exceptional participation and leadership. Along with parents, family members, and staff, invite YCC program partners to these events, as well as school and school district staff, whenever possible. Examples include:

- Spring and fall picnics
 - Have staff on hand for informal interaction, and welcome all family members; this is a chance for the entire community to become better acquainted. If you are not able to provide food, you can ask families to bring a dish to share or ask for donations from partners.
- College night
 - Set up a conversation with higher education admissions staff and financial aid advisors.
 - Celebrate students who have been accepted into post-secondary institutions, and bring back former students with successful college careers to provide advice and perspectives.
- Movie nights
 - Show a movie on a weekend evening, with all family members welcome.
- Host a family STEM night
 - Create an event with hands-on learning activities related to the YCC classes that students are taking. Remember to include activities from each of the career pathways that are available.
 - Include activities for adults and younger children so everyone can be involved.

The stronger and more effective the relationships between parents and program staff, the more likely parents will be to attend meetings and become actively engaged in the program.

- Celebrations of diversity and talent
 - Showcase different cultures through displays, demonstrations, dress, and performances.
 - Host student talent shows, which are usually extremely popular and draw parents who may not be attending meetings.
- Community service day
 - Organize YCC program families to volunteer on a designated project.
 - Award students community service hours, if they are required to earn these for graduation.

Conclusion: The Value of Engaging Parents

When parents are involved in their children's education, the educational and social benefits are lasting and significant. YCC programs can boost their own success, and the success of students, families, and communities, by educating, involving, and supporting parents. Each program and student body will have its own set of specific strengths, needs, and issues. The greater the involvement from parents, the more specifically the YCC program can tailor itself for success, and the more robust the program can become.

Parent Engagement Resources

1. **Afterschool Alliance. "Afterschool: A Key to Successful Parent Engagement."**
This issue brief explores afterschool and parent engagement, arts enrichment, school improvement, and digital learning.
http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_57_Parent_Engagement.cfm
2. **Big Future by The College Board. "Get Started for Parents."**
The Big Future college planning site, helps parents prepare for postsecondary education.
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/get-started/for-parents>
3. **Brockton Public Schools. "Parent Engagement Program."**
Brockton Public Schools (Brockton, MA) has put in place guidelines to engage parents and created a Parent Involvement Program.
<http://www.brocktonpublicschools.com/page.cfm?p=1319>
4. **Child Trends. "Parental Involvement in Schools."**
The Child Trends DataBank examines and monitors more than 100 indicators that focus on risks and positive developments for children. This report analyzes data on the impact of parental involvement.
<http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-involvement-in-schools>
5. **"Expanding Knowledge of Parental Involvement in Children's Secondary Education: Connections With High School Seniors' Academic Success."**
A 2001 article by Sophia Catsambis from the journal *Social Psychology of Education*.
<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1014478001512>
6. **Georgia Department of Education. "Parent Engagement Program."**
The Parent Engagement Program believes that parents, schools, families, and communities working together can create meaningful partnerships that ultimately lead to significant gains across the board in student achievement.
<https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Pages/Parent-Engagement-Program.aspx>
7. **Green Dot Public Schools. "Building Parent Engagement Programs Annual Report."**
The mission of Green Dot is to transform public education by engaging parents in their children's education in a continuous, substantive way.
<https://rtt.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=4335>
8. **Harvard Family Research Project. "Parent University Network."**
Information about the national network of school-based and community-based parent universities.
<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/projects/parent-universities-completed-project>

9. *Harvard Family Research Project. "Harvard University Family Involvement Network of Educators Newsletter."*

The March 10, 2016, issue contains the article "Why Thinking of Family Engagement as Continuous Across Time Matters," as well as interactive online decision-making tools for families contemplating postsecondary education.

- <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/why-thinking-of-family-engagement-as-continuous-across-time-matters>
- <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/professional-development/making-a-decision-about-college-interactive-case-family-engagement-in-the-transition-to-college>

10. *Mass Mentoring Partnership. "Parent and Family Engagement in Mentoring: Staff Training Handbook."*

This 2014 publication, produced by a Massachusetts mentoring network, compiles research findings about family engagement and presents evidence-based approaches.

<http://ircmentorcollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Parent-Engagement-Handbook-MMP-Web.pdf>

11. *MENTOR. "Parents as Partners."*

MENTOR, the National Mentoring Partnership, facilitated the free 2014 Collaborative Mentoring Webinar Series, which includes "Parents as Partners: Research and Strategies for Engaging Parents in Youth Mentoring Programs."

http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/may_2014.pdf

12. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth).*

NCWD/Youth is the source for information about employment and youth with disabilities. Experts in disability, education, employment, and workforce development strive to ensure you will be provided with the highest quality, most relevant information available.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/a-z>

13. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability. "Families and College and Career Readiness: What Schools Can Do to Engage Families in the Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) Process."*

This InfoBrief assists educators using individualized college and career planning tools in their work with families. It discusses families' perceptions of whether and how they were engaged in schools' implementation of Individualized Learning Plans, and suggests actions schools can take to improve family engagement in the ILP process, for youth with or without disabilities.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/families-and-college-and-career-readiness>

14. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Helping Youth Build Work Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families.”

This InfoBrief addresses the need for work skills and offers strategies parents and families can use to help youth develop skills that lead to success on the job. It also includes information on incorporating work skill development into school documents, such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Summary of Performance.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/information-brief-34>

15. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Helping Youth Develop Soft Skills for Job Success.” (Podcast)

This podcast series provides ideas for activities families can do at home and include in their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) to ensure he or she develops skills needed for job success by the end of high school.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/podcast/helping-youth-develop-soft-skills-for-job-success>

16. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Helping Youth Develop Soft Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families.”

This InfoBrief discusses the importance of soft skills and offers strategies parents and families can use to help their child develop these skills.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/information-brief-28>

17. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Navigating Tunnels and Cliffs: Empowering Families and Caregivers to Assist Youth with Mental Health Needs in Preparing for Work.”

For many families and caregivers of youth with mental health needs, career preparation and exploration are not top priorities. This resource provides information needed to prepare for a career, including promising practices from the field and an action plan for success.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/short-cut/navigating-tunnels-and-cliffs>

18. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Supporting Families of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education.”

This brief highlights findings from a national online dialogue on the topic conducted in early 2015. It provides ideas for supporting families in the common areas of need identified in that dialogue and promotes family engagement as a strategy for student retention and academic achievement.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/Supporting-Families>

19. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Tapping into the Power of Families: How Families of Youth With Disabilities Can Assist in Job Search and Retention.”

This InfoBrief explores the important role families and other caring adults play in career planning, job search and job retention for youth with disabilities.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/infobrief/tapping-into-the-power-of-families>

20. *National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability*. “Understanding the New Vision for Career Development: The Role of Family.”

This Info Brief introduces families, including families of youth with disabilities, to a new way of looking at career development for youth. This brief discusses the three phases of career development, highlights Individualized Learning Plans as a tool for facilitating the career development process, and offers strategies on how families can be involved.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/understanding-the-new-vision-for-career-development-the-role-of-family>

21. *National PTA*. “Overcoming Obstacles to Parent Involvement.”

Tips and tools to make parents feel more comfortable visiting the school.

<http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1101>

22. *Naviance College and Career Readiness Platform*.

A comprehensive K-12 college and career readiness platform.

<http://www.naviance.com/college-and-career-readiness-platform>

23. *Ohio Department of Education*. “Sample Best Practices for Parent Involvement in Schools.”

Best practices, based on the State Board of Education’s Parent and Family Involvement Policy, the National PTA’s National Standards for Family-School Partnerships and Joyce L. Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of (Parent) Involvement.

<http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Getting-Parents-Involved/Sample-Best-Practices-for-Parent-Involvement-in-Schools>

24. *Project Appleseed*. “Benefits & Barriers to Family Involvement in Education.”

Project Appleseed seeks to engage public school families by mobilizing volunteers, building responsibility and promoting accountability — both at school and at home and discusses the increase of: academic achievement rising in tandem with parental involvement.

<http://www.projectappleseed.org/#!barriers/c1tzy>

25. *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory*. “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement.”

This publication examines parent and community connections with schools and their impact on student achievement.

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/introduction.pdf>

26. *U.S. Department of Education*. “Family and Community Engagement (FACE).”

A forum for sharing FACE tools and resources with States, school districts, parents, and communities in an effort to encourage partnerships between families and schools.

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/partnership.html>

27. U.S. Department of Education. "I Have a Question...What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask and Do to Help Children Thrive at School."

This tool provides parents/caregivers with questions to ask and issues to consider when approaching teachers, principals and counselors about their child's development.

<http://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf>

28. U.S. Department of Education College Affordability and Transparency Center. "Information for Families About College Costs."

College affordability information for families.

<http://collegecost.ed.gov/>

29. U.S. Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid. "Resources for Parents."

Resources to help families understand the student aid process.

<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/resources/parents>

30. Youth.gov. "Positive Youth Development."

This federal website provides interactive tools and other resources to help youth-serving organizations plan, implement, and participate in effective programs for youth.

<http://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>