

Barriers to Parent Partnership

Barriers to involvement exist for both schools and families. Some barriers are created by limited resources, while others originate from the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of families and school staff. (Liontos, 1992)

All children benefit when their parents are interested and involved in their school life. Parents want the best for their children but sometimes they find it difficult to participate in school life for a number of reasons. It is important schools ensure that all parents have opportunities to become involved in their child's learning and in school life in general. To do this it is advantageous to make a variety of opportunities open to parents

The following may present barriers to parent involvement:

Lack of confidence or Knowledge

Some parents may feel that education is best left to the school, they do not understand how valuable their involvement could be and don't believe their involvement will result in any meaningful change. They may have difficulties with reading and writing themselves. If daily activities for parents are mainly attended by women, men might be reluctant to attend as they may feel out of place

Time Issues

Many parents work full time or part-time, away from home or they may have shift work when most opportunities to attend school activities are offered. Some have to divide their time between schools that their other children attend.

Unpleasant memories of school

Many parents can be reluctant to engage with their child's school because they have had a negative experience of their own time at school; they may have feelings of inadequacy.

Family Circumstances are making it difficult

Lack of transportation and child care also keep families from participating (Caplan, 2000). They may have separated and have new partners, which makes it difficult for both sets of parents to attend events together.

Little or No Communication or Encouragement from the school to become Involved

Parents might hear infrequently from the school – they might receive the occasional newsletter but in terms of actually hearing information about their child, it may be limited to reports and one parent's evening a year and the annual play/concert, which is not a useful dialogue. Equally parents may be invited into the school but mainly to help in classrooms. This may not appeal to many or be a possibility for many others.

Language barrier

An increasing number of parents do not speak English as a first language so they are unable to understand communications from the school.

Finding School Communications Difficult to Understand

Even those parents who are fluent in English can have trouble understanding some communications from the school if it contains a lot of education jargon. It may be difficult to understand if reading is a problem for some.

Students have not informed or have banned their parents from Attending school functions

There may be something a student does not want their parents to know about such as behaviour difficulties, homework not completed etc.

Difficulties of involvement in the upper grades.

There is typically less parent involvement at the middle and senior high school levels, as adolescents strive for greater autonomy and separation from their parents. Families often live further from the school their child attends and are less able to spend time there (Caplan, 2000).

Parents may dread Parents' Evenings.

Often parents' evenings are held in the school hall and parents have to battle their way through crowds of others, to get to the next teacher on time. Some interviews can over-run and that puts a pressure on appointments with the other teachers who are working on a tight timetable. Many parents dislike the fact that other parents can hear what the teacher is saying about their child.

Not Fitting in

Some parents may be discouraged from joining Parent/Teacher Associations as they may appear to be 'closed or 'cliquey.' They may not feel that they have much to contribute and this will put a barrier to volunteering for this and other events.

Teachers' misperceptions of parents' abilities.

Some teachers believe parents can't help their children because they have limited educational backgrounds themselves.