Highlights from NNSTOY SEL Fellowship Weekly Discussion

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That being said, I think we have a long way to go to include parents more. One thing from the article that I particularly liked was the idea of a parent resource center. We've had some feedback from parents that they don't feel welcome in the building. I think having a location for them to go and just help out with the school or get info on parenting (or anything) would be incredibly welcoming and useful. That's something I think I'd like to try in my school.

At the beginning of the school year, we have a back to school night in which we invite parents into the classrooms to meet the teacher and get acquainted to the building, staff, and policies. Our turn-out is usually around 50%. Also, in order to promote family/community involvement, each grade level has a designated day in which guests are invited into our school. 3rd grade has a Dad's/VIP breakfast. 4th grade has a Grandparent's/VIP day. 5th grade has a Veterans Day assembly and social hour. During these particular days, we have around 75% participation. However, our biggest draw is during the Spring Carnival/Book Fair/Art Show. This is held in the gymnasium and cafeteria. Student art work is on display, as are science projects, etc. In addition, books are available for purchase, and many games are set-up around the gymnasium thanks in part to our P.T.O. In addition, local businesses are on sight to promote their summer programs for students. This evening is such a wonderful one for our community and schools.

I agree with the four barriers that were identified. I feel as though each of them play a huge part in the lack of parent involvement/volunteers in the school system. And as a result, it is important that schools help alleviate these barriers by reaching out to the parents, making them feel worthy, welcome, and most importantly wanted. In addition, I too think intimidation is a barrier. However, not in the form of staff, but rather parents themselves did not have a good experience in school and still have this "bad taste" in their mouths. And as a result, they steer away from being in the school, or limiting their communication with the teacher in hopes of not reliving their own school days.

As a result, I feel as though this is where the parent resource center would be a great addition to our school! This would serve as a bridge to help connect both school and parents as a whole rather than two separate entities.

Wow! I'm overwhelmed by the wealth of information on this topic. Our school is very small, and -- with an enrollment of only about 70 students in grades 6-12 -- in some ways it is quite easy to keep in regular communication with family members. With some of these adults, faculty and staff have a fairly intimate relationship.

However, as is true everywhere, most of the adult family members of students at our school are preoccupied with the demands of their jobs. In the past few years, we have had a harder time recruiting adult volunteers and convincing family members to attend student-led conferences.

We do have an active social media outreach through Facebook and a digital newsletter that is sent twice a week.

Personally, I try regularly to inform family members about what is going on in my classroom. One problem I have encountered, though, is the reluctance — embarrassment, even -- of many adolescents to be featured in a classroom blog or newsletter. They tell me they see this as a violation of their privacy.

Also, I attempt to involve family members early if I see academic performance or attendance slipping. Often -- but not always -- the family member provides backup at home, resulting in renewed effort from the student.

One think I think is especially important is to try to avoid using the word "parent." At our school, we have a number of students living in foster families or family members other than birth parents, and I think it's important to the students to be as inclusive as possible.

Janelle Dickerson (New York)
Thank you for the rich discussion and all the additional strategies and resources that we can use to engage parents in the SEL process.

A few things have come up within our discussion that I would like to comment on...

Our discussion has made me think about culturally responsive parent engagement. Many schools have diverse populations. Depending on their culture and background, they may have varying values, beliefs and traditions from our own. We must keep those things in mind and remain respectful of it or that can also lead to families not feeling welcomed or respected by schools.

Most parents desire for their child(ren) to possess the SEL traits and skills that schools are trying to instill within students. Some parents do not have the knowledge of how to do so. Others may not have the time because they are working 2-3 jobs just to meet the needs of their families. It is important for us to judge these parents or villianize them but seek ways to support them and build a partnership where possible. I love the resources that seek to engage families through technology and social media. It 's a great option for parents who may not be able to physically be present within their child's school setting but would still like to be involved. It is also informal and low risk and can encourage those parents that may not feel welcomed or have a distrust for the educational system to become involved.

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Excellent resources this week, and critical discussion topic. I dare say there would not be quite the need for SEL in schools if it were [consistently and effectively] being taught at home. As the first article opened, "For a society to endure, it must socialize each generation of youth to embody the virtues and characteristics that are essential to that society's survival and prosperity." If children are coming to school void of these virtues and essential character traits, we must PARTNER with the parents/guardians to nurture the qualities...not just to improve academic performance, but to enable our society to endure. Wow. One additional point from the reading I would like to further emphasize is the partnership. The article seemed to make a contrast between parents as information receivers and parents as partners. As in traditional content education, it would not be effective for us to simply deliver SEL information to parents in a one-way method; we want students and parents alike to be engaged and empowered in the learning process.

One method I have found effective, from a parent perspective, has been the optional parenting classes offered at my children's school. They have offered sessions on Love and Logic, as well as Leader in Me. I learned a great deal, and I believe it is helpful for my own children to hear the same vocabulary and experience the same types of discipline at home and at school (logical consequences, being proactive, problem solving, etc.). Not all parents may be able to attend on-campus sessions, but weekly or monthly online sessions could easily be developed (probably already exist).

My kids' elementary school also had a parent night where families went all over campus to student-led games/activities based on the 7 Habits. The place was packed!

Sadly, I see less of this at the secondary level, but this need not be so. I wonder what tools/best-practices are already in place (some links below). It seems that a school-monitored online forum (perhaps a private FB group) could include parents and share character education ideas. Schools would not want this to turn into a complaint zone, but a safe place to interact with and involve parents.

Similar to others, my district has only a few opportunities for parental involvement at our middle school. We have an open house at the start of the school year and parent/teacher conferences in the fall and spring. In order to increase the level of parental involvement, food is often offered at these occasions. In addition, we have noticed an increase in parental involvement if events (such as conferences) are student led.

I find that our school is struggling with the effect that strong security is having on parent involvement. Clearly security is essential, but having to be buzzed in and IDs checked can be intimidating. Even getting parents to volunteer for field trips ends up being a decent amount of paperwork that can hinder parents from wanting to volunteer.

I love the simple strategies the Berkowitz & Bier article offers. I think that sometimes just reading about successful ideas can inspire a school to do the same. I loved the idea of having parents greet students in the morning alongside of the principal, as well as the Parent Resource Room. Such great ideas!

My school is an EL school, and along with that are some things that try to include parents (whether we're successful is a different story). One example is Celebration of Learning, which is similar to an open house. It's more than that, though, and is somewhat similar to the open school night example in the article. It takes place in all classrooms throughout the school. Students show what they've been learning and the parents come in to see. (You can read more here: https://eleducation.org/resources/celebrations-of-learning-why-this-practice-matters) So that's one way that my school tries to include parents.

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Unlike · 👍 3 people · March 30, 2017 at 9:55 AM

Janelle Dickerson (New York)

Hello Everyone,

This week our discussion will focus around one of our most important allies within education. Parents! Parental involvement not only affects the academic success of students but also has the greatest influence on character development of children.

Topic: How do we communicate with families about character education?

Resources:

Character Education: Parents as Partners

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept05/vol63/num01/Character-Education@-Parents-as-Partners.aspx

(If you have trouble accessing the article, please use the PDF version attached)

Social Emotional Learning: Strategies for Parents

https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-parent-resources

Maurice Elias: A View on Emotional Intelligence and the Family

https://www.edutopia.org/maurice-elias-emotional-intelligence-and-family

Please share:

Berkowitz & Bier discuss parents as information recipients, partners and clients.

- How do you or your school incorporate parents as recipients, partners and/or clients when engaging them in character education and/or SEL?

Berkowitz & Bier also discusses 4 barriers to parental involvement

- What solution(s) have you or your school tried or would like to try to overcome any of these barriers if they apply to your setting?

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Topic: Character Education
&
Parental Involvement