

# Ideas staff can use

## to promote parent involvement



## Inspire families to read with a 'Reading Road Race' program

Encouraging parents to read with children is one thing. Getting them to actually do it is another. That's just what Library Media Assistant **Jacque Kraxberger** accomplished at **William Knight Elementary School** in Canby, Oregon.

During the annual book fair, Kraxberger organized a Family Reading Night with a "Reading Road Race" theme. The event included:

- » **A reading "town"** in the gym, where families could listen to books in fun places, such as at a post office and inside a bus made by fifth graders.
- » **Staff participation.** About 80% of the school staff participated—total attendance was almost 500.

- » **Two sports cars** in the school cafeteria. The police also brought a squad car, stickers and safety information.
- » **A representative** from the public library, who spoke about library cards and library services available to families.
- » **Incentives to attend**, including a free pizza dinner. The night was strictly about reading, Kraxberger says—no games, prizes or costs to families, other than the availability of books at the book fair. And it was a huge success. What advice does Kraxberger share with other "Family Reading Night" planners? "You need to get a great support team," she says. "And start early."

**CONTACT:** Jacque Kraxberger, Media Assistant, William Knight Elementary School, 501 N Grant St, Canby OR 97013, 503-263-7100.

## Help your busy parents attend conferences

Even busy parents usually make conferences a priority. For the best parent turnout possible:

- » **Get the word out.** Show enthusiasm about the benefits of parent involvement. Remind parents in many ways—and in many languages—of when and why they will meet with teachers.
- » **Provide information.** The best conferences have prepared participants. Send home paperwork about classroom basics (goals, rules, etc.) and a worksheet to help parents plan for meetings.
- » **Encourage attendance.** Offer as much support as possible, such as transportation, translators, child-care, refreshments, reminder calls and flexible scheduling.
- » **Put parents at ease.** Provide adult-size chairs and supplies for taking notes to make families more comfortable.
- » **Share "talking" time.** Spend as much time listening to parents as you do giving information. Set specific goals together. After conferences, stay in touch about children's progress.
- » **Respect family efforts.** Many families face enormous obstacles. Make the most of every moment with them, knowing that you have a common goal—student success.

**SOURCE:** Linda Starr, "Meeting With the Parents—Making the Most of Parent-Teacher Conferences," Education World, [www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr291.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr291.shtml).

# questions and answers

**Q:** I don't overburden my students with homework, but I do assign work regularly. Each day, though, the excuses come in. "I left my homework at home." "I didn't have time to finish my math." How can I get families to make sure their kids do the homework and then get it to school?

**A:** One of the lessons students learn from doing homework is responsibility. You can help them learn that skill, just as you teach them math or reading.

First, set up a system that makes it easy for you to get your students organized. Many teachers use a two-pocket folder that stays in students' backpacks. The left side of the folder is for things that should be "left at home." The right side is for things that come "right back." At the end of each class, ask, "Do you have your folders? Do you have everything you need in the folders?" After about a month, they will be in the habit of checking their folders each day.

**As long as you are consistent, you can make any homework policy work.**

Then be sure to notify parents of your homework policy. Tell them why you assign homework. Explain your folder system to them and what role you expect them to take in checking the folders and monitoring homework.

Some teachers find that sending home a weekly or monthly calendar helps, too. Today's families are busy. Kids do sometimes spend the night with a divorced parent. If they know what's due in advance, it is easier for them to complete assignments on time.

Finally, decide on how you will handle late work and let students and parents know. As long as you are consistent, you can make any homework policy work.

—Kristen Amundson  
The Parent Institute

Complying with NCLB Section 1118: Part One of a Four-Part Series

## Meet requirements of NCLB Section 1118 with a school-parent compact

**A**lthough the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have gained the most public attention, the law also includes parent involvement requirements. Section 1118 (d) calls for schools and parents to "jointly develop" a school-parent compact.

Basically, the compact is a written agreement of shared responsibilities for improving student achievement. It outlines the specific steps that all parties—the school, the parent and the student—must take to reach that goal.

Here are some tips on developing your school-parent compact this year:

- » **Bring together** a group of parents, school staff and students to discuss the compact. If you have a school advisory council or a school improvement team, you might work through that group. Be sure your parent group reflects the makeup of your student body.
- » **Use Section 1118 (d) as a guide** in developing your compact. For a helpful checklist, go to [www.parent-institute.com/isu/resources/compact.pdf](http://www.parent-institute.com/isu/resources/compact.pdf).
- » **Choose two or three areas** of focus for the year. Use the compact to highlight areas where student achievement is not where you'd like it to be.



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- » **Ask each group** what they should do to achieve the goals. Then ask them what they think the other groups should do.
- » **Focus on issues** where parents can play a key role—homework, reading at home, communicating with the school.
- » **Keep the pledges** about the same length. Offer specific tips. Instead of "Read more with my child," say "I pledge to read with my child at least 20 minutes per day."
- » **Distribute the compacts.** Ask parents and students to sign them.
- » **Follow up.** Include articles on reaching the school-parent compact goals in your newsletter.

**SOURCE:** National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, "School-Parent Compact: Action Guide for Parent and Community Leaders," [www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/SchoolParent\\_Compact.pdf](http://www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/SchoolParent_Compact.pdf).

### Ideas staff can use Elementary Edition to promote parent involvement

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# program profile

## Consider creative ways to celebrate your school's special anniversaries

Every year, schools celebrate milestone anniversaries. To mark the occasion, they may create a time capsule, host a reunion for former students or serve cake. But when **Whittier Elementary School** in Downers Grove, Illinois, turned 80, the school wanted to celebrate in a different way.

“For 80 years, we have been the beneficiaries of a generous community,” says **Principal Linda Welch**. “For our 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, it just seemed like it was time to return some of that generosity.”

So as part of the celebration, she challenged students to perform 80 acts of kindness. The children took the challenge very seriously. Some shoveled snow for elderly neighbors. Some brought in canned goods for a local food pantry. Others collected books and distributed them to needy children.

While researching the history of their community, students learned about a long-forgotten program to bring spring into the city. In the

early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Chicago Tribune* urged residents of the suburbs to pick fresh lilacs from their bushes and share them with shut-ins



in the city of Chicago. After the children learned about that tradition, “they decided they wanted to revive it,” Welch says. So they made cards

decorated with lilacs and took them to senior citizens in a nearby home. Later, when the lilacs were in bloom, they returned with flowers.

The seniors—many of whom remembered the tradition—were thrilled. But the children were even happier as they “figured out how good it feels when you are kind to others.”

Welch has even been the recipient of one child’s act of kindness. One first grader “decided to share his lunch treats with the office staff,” she says. “Every day, he brings a single M&M or a cheese curl,” she says.

The rewards, Welch says, have been enormous. “It has brought us more benefits than I could have imagined.”

As children contributed more than 800 (!) acts of kindness, they thanked their community for 80 years of generosity—and developed into stronger, more caring citizens themselves.

**CONTACT:** Linda Welch, Principal, Whittier Elementary School, 536 Hill St., Downers Grove, IL 60615, 630-719-5865, lwelch@dg58.org

### Here's how to make it work for you:

If you want to challenge your students to give back to your community, here are some ideas to get you started:

- » **Set a specific goal.** The more specific your goal, the more likely it is to be achieved. Whittier linked their 80 acts of kindness to the school’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, but you could choose any number that will inspire your students.
- » **Get parents involved.** Because Whittier wanted to encourage students to organize their own kind actions, they publicized what they were doing. “We put information in our school newsletter. We invited our local TV station and newspaper to the kickoff of our campaign,” Welch says. It paid off—some children even asked friends to bring contributions for a children’s hospital instead of gifts to their birthday parties.
- » **Recognize every act of kindness publicly.** Students earned an apple on a large Giving Tree posted in the school for each act of kindness. To get more students to take action, “We put peer pressure to work,” Welch says. At the regular Kids’ Councils (school assemblies), Welch would ask students who had earned a Giving Tree apple to stand. “As younger children saw most of the older kids standing, they really wanted to get involved.”
- » **Share what students have done with parents and the community.** Everyone needs to know the great things your students are doing.

## quotable

"The more parent and community involvement activities focus on improving student learning, the more student learning improves."

—PTA, *National Standards for Family-School Partnerships*

## Engage pupils, parents in the fall election

There is no more important duty for a citizen than to vote. Yet the U.S. has the lowest rate of voter participation of any of the world's democracies.

This fall, give your students and their parents a chance to cast their ballots for president. The National Student/Parent Mock Election, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, will hold elections on October 30 in schools across the country.

To prepare, have your students:

- » **Research the political platform** of every candidate running for president.
- » **Give campaign speeches** and design their own campaign ads.
- » **Create posters** supporting their chosen candidates.
- » **Hold a "Get Out the Vote" parade** through the school.

Ask parents to:

- » **Read newspaper articles** about the election and watch the evening news with their child.
- » **Visit their child's classroom** to hear the mock election speeches.
- » **Vote with their child.** For some of your parents, this may be the first time they will ever cast a ballot.

For more ideas about ways to involve students and parents in this year's national election, check out the National Student/Parent Mock Election website at [www.nationalmockelection.org](http://www.nationalmockelection.org).

## Inform parents of the role they play in promoting attendance

The lazy days of summer may be over, but their effects are still being felt at school. It takes time for students to refresh academic skills and adjust to new routines, including waking up early. Use the letter below to remind parents of the importance of attendance—including prompt arrival in the morning.

**SOURCE:** "NCPIE Update, January 2008," National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, [www.ncpie.org/ncpie\\_update/ncpieupdatejan2008.doc](http://www.ncpie.org/ncpie_update/ncpieupdatejan2008.doc).

Dear Parents,

Now that school has started, I hope we can work as a team to promote your child's academic success. Research indicates that one of the most important things you can do is to get your child to school *on time every day*. Consider the following:

**Q: Why is attendance so important?**

**A:** When students arrive on time and avoid absences, they get the most out of school. They don't fall behind or have to catch up. Good attendance also allows me to maximize classroom time. Some absences are necessary, but when possible, schedule appointments and other commitments for non-school hours.

**Q: Does being absent or tardy frequently affect school success?**

**A:** New research shows that "chronic absence" (missing 10% or more days in a school year) is linked to low performance in school. It's also connected to dropping out and other problems.

**Q: How can I help my child get to school on time?**

**A:** Regular routines help keep kids on track. Establish:

- » **An evening routine:** Together, organize your child's lunch, backpack and clothing for the next day. Have a regular bedtime. Help your child set an alarm clock for morning.
- » **A morning routine:** Have a regular time for getting up. Allow time for eating breakfast, brushing teeth, morning chores and gathering school items. Don't rush.

Show that promptness is a family priority and compliment your child's success!

Sincerely,

Download this letter at [www.parent-institute.com/isu/resources/attendance-importance.pdf](http://www.parent-institute.com/isu/resources/attendance-importance.pdf).

## getting the facts

It's a fact: The sooner parents get involved in children's education, the better.

Research shows that parent involvement is most powerful when it begins early in a student's education. Promote simple ways for parents to get involved, such as reading to kids, reviewing homework and talking with their children about school every day.

**SOURCE:** "Getting Involved in Your Child's Education," National Education Association, [www.nea.org/parents/index.html](http://www.nea.org/parents/index.html).