

# Ideas staff can use

## to promote parent involvement



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## Give parents tips for helping their children with homework

Parents aren't expected to teach students during homework time, but they should create a supportive environment. To help parents:

- » **Communicate about homework** from the beginning. Review homework policies at back-to-school night and parent conferences, and through phone calls and notes (that require parent signatures). Explain when and how parents can contact the school with homework concerns.
- » **Use newsletters**, your website and other means to inform parents about how they can help with homework. For example, your monthly newsletter might share ways to solve a common

homework problem, such as how to help when a child can't do a math problem—and the parent doesn't know how either.

- » **Send home a list** of "study questions" they can ask their child. For example, "What homework do you have today?" "Do you understand the assignment?" "What steps will help you finish your long-term project?"
- » **Share ways to monitor** their children's TV and computer time. Publicize that excessive school-night viewing is linked to lower performance in school.
- » **Tell them helping is not doing** homework. If they do, they send the message that they think their children aren't capable of learning.

## Go high tech with parent involvement

Today, many parents check email more often than voicemail, and may never see or read papers sent home. Using technology is a great way to supplement traditional communication methods and reach parents quickly. Some technologies to consider include:

- » **Automated information delivery** systems. These send messages by email, telephone and text about cancellations, exams, attendance and many other issues. They should require limited work on the part of school staff.
- » **Customer service tracking** programs. Electronic tracking can keep track of compliments, concerns and suggestions. This information may lead to school improvement and parent satisfaction.
- » **Email, websites and blogs.** Use technology to give parents a way to "talk back" about issues that are of concern to them—at a time of day that is convenient for them. No matter what technologies you use, remember to:
  - » **Give a response time.** Some parents expect an immediate reply when they send an email to a teacher. Tell them how soon they can expect to hear from the school.
  - » **Address privacy** and Internet safety issues.
  - » **Accommodate the needs** of your non-English speaking families.

**SOURCE:** "Helping Your Students With Homework: A Guide for Teachers," U.S. Department of Education, [www.ed.gov/pubs/HelpingStudents/17comm.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/HelpingStudents/17comm.html).

# questions and answers

**Q:** I think our school may have a gang problem. Students in my classes seem to dress in specific colors. I have noticed that even some of my middle school students are getting tattoos. There's more violence in the halls. How can we get parents to help us with this situation?

**A:** Schools have a real interest in keeping kids out of gangs. Students who are involved with gang activity are more likely to have academic trouble in school. They are likely to be discipline problems as well, often doing things that lead them to be suspended or expelled.

So find out if your suspicions are true. Talk with a few students in an informal setting. Ask, "Do we have a gang problem in our school?" They will probably be relieved to tell you what they know.

To get parents involved:

- » **Invite a group** of concerned parents and students to create a gang intervention program for your school. Ask them to write an action plan to address the gang problem. Don't let people be in denial—the longer you wait to address the problem, the worse it will get. Have them consider working with your local police department or bringing a G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education And Training) program to your school. This research-based program helps students develop the life skills they need to resist gangs. Learn more at [www.great-online.org](http://www.great-online.org).
- » **Distribute** *Dealing With the Tough Issues: Gangs*, a QuickTip published by The Parent Institute. It provides tips to help parents recognize and cope with gang activity. For information on this resource, go to [www.parent-institute.com/educator/products/quicktips/tough.php#gangs](http://www.parent-institute.com/educator/products/quicktips/tough.php#gangs).

—Kristen Amundson  
The Parent Institute

Families in Crisis: Part One of a Four-Part Series

## Provide resources, counseling for homeless students & their families

**T**hree weeks into the school year, Jackie enters your class for the first time. The counselor doesn't have her record from her last school. When you ask Jackie where she lives, she shrugs. Later, you learn she's living with her mom's sister—and this is the fourth school she has attended in the last 18 months.

Sadly, the numbers of families like this are growing each year. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, 1.35 million U.S. children are homeless on any given night. Families are now the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.

These students often face special challenges: They are more likely to repeat a grade. They are more likely to need special education services. They are more likely to come to school hungry.

To help children from homeless families be successful during the coming year:

- » **Focus on the student**, not the homelessness. Students become homeless due to circumstances they can't control.
- » **Make school a safe haven**. Many homeless students want to come to school early and leave late because school is the only place they feel truly safe. Allowing a student to use your classroom as a study hall could really help.



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- » **Talk to parents**, if possible. Help the parents and the students focus on specific, achievable goals.
- » **Find ways** to meet non-educational needs. Work with your community to provide a list of resources. These may include organizations that can help with housing, medical treatment, transportation, food, clothing and other needs.
- » **Be discreet**. Respect the privacy of your homeless students and their parents.

**SOURCE:** Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and Monica Miller Marsh, editors, *Other Kinds of Families: Embracing Diversity in Schools*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4838-1 (Teachers College Press, 1-800-575-6566, [www.tcpress.com](http://www.tcpress.com)).

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

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# program profile

## A community business partner can provide support for student learning

School-business partnerships can bring many benefits to schools including volunteers, mentors and much-needed resources.

But at **Falls Church High School** in Fairfax County, Virginia, an innovative school-business partnership is giving students a chance to learn the coffee business—from the “grounds” up.

In 2007, the school began a partnership with the **Annandale Chamber of Commerce**. The Chamber then connected the school with Beanetics Coffee Roasters.

When Assistant Principal **Michael Brooks** first talked with co-owner David Starr, “We knew we wanted to create a real partnership. We weren’t just looking for someone to give us money. We wanted to create a mutually beneficial relationship, one that would last a long time.”

Thus was born Jaguar Joe coffee (the name comes from the school’s mascot). Over the past two years, students have created and sold their own blend of coffee (a mix of Sumatran, Guatemalan and Brazilian beans). They’re not challenging

Starbucks® yet, but the profits from this successful business venture are meeting some needs that otherwise would be beyond the budget.

It’s the learning experiences that Brooks says are the most valuable part of the relationship. “The

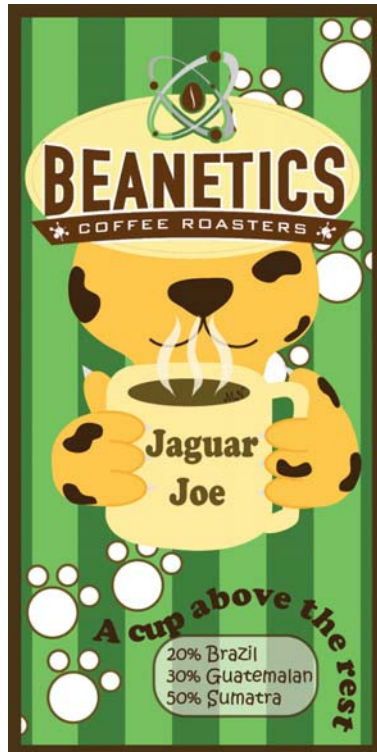
students can truly take something they have learned in the classroom and apply it to a real-world situation,” he says.

Students in culinary arts classes spent hours tasting coffee to create their unique flavor blend. Marketing students designed and executed the marketing plan. Computer graphics students designed the logo.

Photography students helped create the website. Business students manage the business. “Students tell me they will use the skills they have learned for the rest of their lives.”

For Falls Church High School, the partnership has brought many benefits. The Jaguar Joe project created exciting and authentic learning experiences for students. It has forged a stronger connection with a local business. It has raised funds for much-needed technology.

But Brooks says there is one benefit no one expected when they began their collaboration. “Everyone just really likes the coffee!”



Logo Courtesy of Michael Brooks

**CONTACT:** Michael Brooks, Assistant Principal, Falls Church High School, 7521 Jaguar Trail, Falls Church, VA 22042, 703-207-4000, Michael.brooks@fcps.edu.

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

- » **Think about the long term.** “People tend to think of the tangible benefits of a school-business partnership,” says Jay Garant in the Fairfax County Office of Business and Industry Relations. “But the longest-lasting benefits are those borne out of relationships and trust.” So focus on building a long-term relationship.
- » **Have clear goals.** Both the school and the business should have a clear expectation of what the partnership will achieve.
- » **Remember that businesses can gain as much as they give.** Business leaders want strong schools in their community. Their employees may be parents of students at your school. Making a business partnership a two-way street is one way to ensure its longevity.
- » **Sign a formal agreement.** That way, both parties will have a clear idea of expectations and responsibilities.
- » **Communicate regularly.** Solve little problems before they become big problems.
- » **Find ways to thank your business partner.** Invite business partners to sit in front-row seats at the choral concert or the spring musical.
- » **Build on your successes.** For next year, Falls Church is exploring the idea of opening an in-school café where Jaguar Joe and pastries will be sold. It would give students even more opportunities to manage a business. The school is also exploring the idea of opening a coffee kiosk in the offices of another of its business partners.

## quotable

"Programs designed with strong parent involvement produce students who perform better than otherwise identical programs that do not involve parents as thoroughly, or that do not involve them at all."

—Anne T. Henderson

## Connect your parent compact to learning

Section 1118 of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires schools to develop parent compacts linked to learning. Here's how:

- » **Create a group** of staff, parents and students to review your school's test data. Identify two or three areas for improvement during the coming year.
- » **Spell out responsibilities.** If you are trying to raise math scores, identify what students and parents can do to achieve that goal.
- » **Check the research.** Focus on compact promises that provide the greatest impact on learning.
- » **Include specific information** so parents and students know what's expected. You want parents to agree, "Even if I can't do the math homework, I can make sure my teen does homework every day."
- » **Be specific.** Have students agree: "I will read out of school at least 20 minutes daily."
- » **Include others.** Share drafts of the compact widely before distributing it.
- » **Keep bringing it up.** Introduce the compact in the fall. Remind parents and students of their responsibilities throughout the school year.

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

## Give parents reasons to prevent student absence & tardiness

Summer may be over, but the process of changing summer habits—such as staying up late and sleeping in—is just beginning. Now is the time to remind parents of the importance of attendance, including prompt arrival in the morning. Help families understand their influence on truancy, and review school policies regarding absence and tardiness.

**SOURCE:** Jennifer Railsback, "Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies From Research and Practice," Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, [www.nwrel.org/request/2004june/Attendance.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/request/2004june/Attendance.pdf).

Dear Parents,

The transition from summer to fall is a challenging one, particularly when it comes to arriving at school on time and prepared. Attendance affects student success, so by encouraging it, you make a real difference in your teen's life. Review the following questions and answers about absence and tardiness.

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

**A:** When students arrive promptly and avoid absences, they lessen worries about falling behind or having to catch up. In short, missing too much school hurts learning. Some absences are necessary, but when possible, schedule appointments and other commitments for non-school hours.

**Q: What about being tardy?**

**A:** Students who are frequently tardy may find it difficult to settle down and focus once they arrive in class. And their late arrival may distract other students. Check to see what consequences your child's teachers have for students who are tardy.

**Q: Does absenteeism affect anything other than grades?**

**A:** Absenteeism is connected to many serious problems. Low attendance can lead to dropping out, and research links chronic, unexcused absences to substance abuse, crime and incarceration.

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

**A:** Your support is critical. Make school a priority, and reflect this in family routines. At night, for example, your teen might choose an outfit, put school supplies by the door, set an alarm clock, and get to bed on time. Lunches can also be prepared at night and refrigerated. Provide a nutritious breakfast for everyone—even if it's "on the go"—and show pride in your teen's success!

Sincerely,

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

## getting the facts

It's a fact: Family involvement is a key to dropout prevention.

Family involvement is key to dropout prevention. Research shows that when parents stay involved during high school, their children are more likely to graduate and continue their education. Also, these children tend to have more realistic goals for the future.

**SOURCE:** Deborah Leuchovius, "Parent Brief," National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, [www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=3135](http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=3135).