

## ***Learning Outside of School: Family Involvement in Special Education***

To support instruction, effective family and community involvement programs should be carefully designed to do the following:

- 1. Link with student achievement goals and school standards**
  - 2. Engage families in activities that focus directly on issues related to student learning**
  - 3. Use a variety of communication strategies to keep family members informed on what is happening in the classroom and what is needed to support student learning**
  - 4. Build a culture that is inclusive and supportive of family and community involvement.**
1. Engage parents in activities using role-playing about or demonstrations of how to work with children at home to reinforce classroom learning. This can be done during family-to-school events or home visits. When family members use a single well-understood strategy, it is much more effective than 10 scattered strategies.
  2. Share key tools, rubrics, grading criteria, or strategies to help family members learn how to determine if a child is successful in learning the content or complete a homework or study assignment. Staff can share these instruments at IEP meetings, open-house events, home visits, parent trainings during and outside of the school day, and newsletters. Special Education Coordinators should not assume that sending a document home for parents to read will result in automatic knowledge or understanding but rather should organize events to assist parents in learning how to use these instruments.
  3. Engage family members and students in math and reading games at family nights where they can learn from one another. Traditionally, schools held one open house a year. Take advantage of school events to offer activities specific to special education and learning skills. Today, schools commonly invite family and community members to events several times each semester. Using these events to coordinate a school-wide effort on an academic theme or content area is a great way to focus the time for maximum benefit. When the events are being held, be sure to include areas pertaining to students in special education. Teachers should thoughtfully connect the activities at these events to classroom instruction. Events can demonstrate different ways to instruct students.
  4. Create special learning kits to lend to students for home use. These kits can be made of inexpensive materials and housed and organized for “check out” by individual teachers or the school librarian. Upper grade level school organizations, family-school organizations, or community service organizations can assemble and maintain these kits as one of their projects. To maximize utility, these kits should contain clear directions for use and be tied to key learning topics for classroom content. Be sure that the learning kits include instruction for students in special education.
  5. Inform family members on standards in exhibits and other means. These efforts allow parents to see how their children’s schoolwork relates to state requirements. School staff can do the following:
    - Develop a visual display at open houses and back-to-school nights that informs parents about content standards and how teachers must address them in the classroom
    - Invite parent reactions to the standards during school gatherings
    - Post information on the school Web site

- Ensure that needs are addressed for students in special education for all to know.

Adapted from: Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Family in Supporting Classroom Instruction A Strategy Brief of the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools  
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