

Tips for Planning a Successful Meeting

The purpose of most meetings is to share and exchange information. Some of the most important elements of ANY successful meeting are listed below. Also included are comments directly related to the *Moving Right Along: Engaging Parents for Student Success in the Middle Grades* presentation you can use at your middle school transition meeting with parents. For a successful meeting:

- **Determine a clear focus for your meeting.** Don't discuss things at the meeting that can be handled by a letter sent home to parents, a notice in your monthly newsletter or information included on your school website.

 *Remember the focus of this parent meeting. Don't use valuable time discussing next month's fundraiser. School staff are busy and so are parents. Everyone will appreciate a focused agenda.*

- **Announce the date, time and location** of the meeting well in advance, so everyone has ample time to plan. Use a variety of ways to inform everyone of your upcoming event.

 *Try to reach as many parents as possible—this affects all of them. Consider sending out "Save the Date" flyers. Reproducible invitations to send home to parents and a sample media release to inform the community are included in your kit in Section 3. Use them as is or as idea starters to help you get the word out about your upcoming meeting.*

- **Provide a personal touch.** Nothing beats a personal invitation to attend an event.

 *Have parent volunteers contact new and hard-to-reach families in the community. Parents will be more likely to participate if they feel welcome and if they know at least one other family who will be attending.*

- **Prepare the meeting agenda and objectives** well in advance. Have a written agenda available for presenters. In some cases you may want to provide the meeting participants with a meeting agenda, as well.

 *It helps to have a clear understanding of what the meeting agenda includes. For example:*

- Refreshments
- Welcome
- Introductions
- Presentation
- Discussion
- Distribution of handouts
- Evaluation

Program Profile: Promote parental support for student success

When students leave elementary school and move on to middle school, “they often don’t have quite as much support,” says Vickie Presley, principal of Campbell Middle School in Volusia County, Florida. “But at this age, parent involvement is more important than ever.”

Last year, the school joined a national program called “Be There.” The campaign encourages parents to spend time each day connecting with their kids. Presley likes the “Be There” approach because it’s realistic. “Today families are busy. They can’t always make it to school. But that doesn’t mean they can’t be part of their child’s education.”

The campaign teaches parents to find opportunities during the day to connect with their kids. “We encourage parents to talk about school in the car and to turn everyday experiences into opportunities to connect,” Presley says.

Campbell Middle School uses the “Be There” slogan on most home-school communication. The constant reminders are key to the success of the program. As with any campaign, the approach relies on regular repetition of a simple phrase. “Be There” is easy for parents to remember—and it’s easy for them to implement,” says Presley.

The program allows parents to use brochures, fliers and newsletter articles to reinforce the theme. There are even billboard designs to remind commuting parents of the slogan. The program is available to schools at no cost, except for the cost of printing.

Parent involvement and student achievement have risen since Campbell started using the “Be There” slogan. “I wouldn’t say that it’s responsible for all the increases,” Presley says, “but it certainly has been a valuable part of our efforts to involve more parents.”



Here's how to make it work for you:

- » **Make it memorable.** Choose a slogan that is catchy and easy to remember. Most people are exposed to more than 1,200 advertising messages each day—yours needs to cut through that clutter.
- » **Check the research.** One of the reasons teachers support a program like “Be There” is that it is based on sound research. Even when families can’t come to school, research shows they can have an impact by what they do and say at home.
- » **Ask parents.** Before launching the campaign, Campbell conducted focus groups with parents. They learned that parents were not clear about the role could play in their child’s education. They didn’t know what to do to help their children achieve.
- » **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** Both advertisers and teachers know that it takes frequent repetition to move any new information into the brain’s long-term memory.
- » **Believe it yourself.** “I think there is no more important message a parent can give a child than to say, ‘Whatever happens, I’m here for you,’” says Presley.

Moving Right Along

Sample: Welcome to Middle School Letter

Here is a sample welcome letter you can send to all parents of rising middle schoolers. You'll find a Microsoft Word® version of the letter on the CD included with this kit. You can adapt the letter to your needs. If possible, send personalized letters to parents.

Braddock Road Middle School

Dear (Parents),



Welcome to Middle School!

As we welcome you and your child to (School Name), it is our goal to make the transition to the middle grades a positive experience. This is an important time for your child's personal, social, physical and academic development. Many students—and parents—approach this day with both excitement and apprehension.

A good parent-school relationship is invaluable for your child's school success. Remember, you are your child's most important teacher. And you can continue to be involved by supporting your child's learning at home. Let's work together to encourage your child's curiosity, creativity and love of learning.

Throughout the year, we plan to maintain regular communication and to build a foundation of continued collaboration.

We look forward to getting to know you. Working together, we will guide your student toward school success and lifelong achievement!

Sincerely,