

Authentic Family Engagement

NO MAGIC BULLET



RELATIONSHIPS – FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Many schools struggle with finding ways to effectively and meaningfully engage with families. While there is no “magic bullet” that will solve this challenge, there are examples of effective strategies across the education spectrum. GEAR UP has brought Patty Fleming on board to help schools develop family engagement strategies. Patty is a retired school administrator who spent 6 years as principal in the Glendale School District. Since retiring she has spent a lot of her time focusing on family engagement and she is eager to share her insights with you and guide your schools through a process to develop an effective plan. Here’s what Patty has to say about finding ways to effectively engage with families.

Nestled in the heart of the “R” of Relationship, is the intriguing strategy of *Family Engagement*. While agreement about the value of parental involvement with student success runs high, the definition of **authentic** engagement, as well as the measuring of it, remains elusive. And the most chilling thing about inviting RELATIONSHIP with parents of our students, is that relationships take TIME that we do not have.

How do we know that what we are doing and measuring hits the mark in fulfilling the purpose of the strategy of *Family Engagement*? I believe that the heart of the matter lies in a parent embracing the fact that they are irreplaceable in helping to focus and define a successful future in the life of their child. No institution or professional staff member can take their place, no matter how skilled or intelligent they are. Parents have personal insights and avenues of speaking into the hopes and dreams of their child that belong to no one else. Our job is to help them open the door of that relationship and the honor and responsibility involved in fulfilling that role. Getting some parents to that point of confident understanding is the most powerful part of this strategy. It is not simple or able to be delivered by an assembly line method; the difficult and beautiful thing about all of this is that no family is just like any other.

HELP IS ON THE WAY

Perhaps you may be hunting for a strategy designed to pull insights from home regarding your students’ Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSA’s), so that you can use that parental information to help guide the college and career ready process. If so, there are some exciting possibilities to explore in this area of engaging parents to be a valuable resource in the lives of their children.

Some foundational tools in this design, are simple and reader-friendly parent reports that use common themes like “*Purpose – Passion – Pride*” and “*Focus – Follow Through – Faithfulness*”, to assess specific

attitudes, interests and employability skills. The reports appeal to a parent's desire to share all that is good in their child, while becoming aware of areas that need strengthening.

An *Insights From Home* strategy includes an abundance of incentives, motivators, charts, stickers, leadership development, celebrations and FUN. Best of all, the data is authentic and the time required for management is minimal – the students and parents are doing most of the work! Sound good? It's even better than it sounds to see kids and parents on the same page!

As your “guide on the side” I will work with you to develop an actionable plan to help you achieve your family engagement goals. Here are a few steps we can learn to take that will increase our ability to assist parents in speaking in to the lives of their children, even as they learn and grow themselves.

1. Identify obstacles - communication, transportation, language barriers, cultural perspectives, lack of resources, time limitations, intimidation by topics and school settings, lack of personal experience in college and career readiness
2. Initiate creative avenues of interaction between students, parents and staff
3. Develop activities that inspire and promote families to work together within both context and content rich environments
4. Work toward a culminating activity that will be challenging and celebratory
5. Develop a system of capturing authentic data that is a true reflection of progress toward specific goals that also reveals where improvement is needed.

As our students move through each grade level, it is our reward to see them increasing in confidence and hope for their future goals and plans. It is our job to give them the tools that will equip them to hit the mark, and to stand strong when obstacles would tempt them to give up or take the easy way out. That strength in a student is built as school staff increases its avenues to support and equip parents to be the best that they can be in the life of their child.

Let's explore some of those avenues together this year!

Contact Patty to schedule a consultation: pattylfleming@gmail.com.