

# A Successful Parent Involvement Program

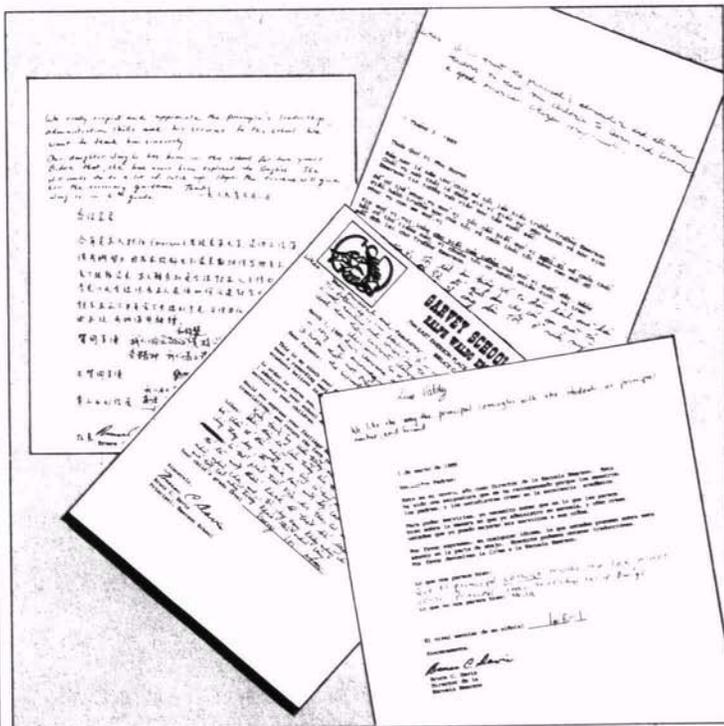
The staff at Emerson School in Rosemead, California, go the extra mile to communicate with their students' parents, but the results are so rewarding, they wouldn't have it any other way.

**T**ime crunches, gridlocks, Call Waiting, fax avalanches, and power lunches are taking their toll. At a time when parents have less time to be involved in their children's schooling, thousands of principals have new marching orders to increase parent involvement in the schools. The California State Board of Education, for example, has adopted a policy designed to ensure collaborative partnerships between family and school, and other states are expected to follow suit.

Cottage industries have sprung up like a crabgrass blitzkrieg to meet the needs of harried parents. You can hire a firm to deliver the hot dog buns you said you'd deliver to your daughter's scout camp cookout, write your Christmas cards, pick up your cleaning, and even schedule play periods for your children. The good old days of expecting parents to be involved because it's right and the "American Way" won't last much longer. New approaches are needed.

## The Keys to Parent Involvement

At Ralph Waldo Emerson Elementary School in Rosemead, California, we



**GARVEY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
RALPH WALDO EMERSON SCHOOL**  
7141 EAST EMERSON PLACE, ROSEMEAD, CALIFORNIA 91770  
BRUCE C. DAVIS, PRINCIPAL



March 1, 1989

Dear Parents:

This is my sixth year as the principal of Emerson School. It has been a rewarding assignment because Emerson teachers, parents and students believe in academic excellence.

In order to serve you, I need to know what you like about the way I administer your school and how you believe I can improve my service to your children.

Would you express your feelings below, in any language, we can get translations, and return the form to Emerson.

Like: *Me gusta como usted administra la escuela. Me gusta como usted trata a los padres y a los estudiantes. Me gusta como usted trata a los maestros.*

Dislikes:

Your child's grade level: *Jack Tony 1st grade*

Sincerely,  
*Bruce C. Davis*  
Bruce C. Davis  
Principal, Emerson School

*What we like the best is everything. He is an excellent Principal. He is always wonderful to our students, and always care about everything goes well. He always wants the best for our children. In my opinion he is an excellent principal. Thank you.*

1 de marzo de 1989

Estimados Padres:

Este es mi noveno año como Director de la Escuela Emerson. Esta ha sido una experiencia que me ha recompensado porque los maestros, los padres, y los estudiantes creen en la excelencia académica.

Para poder servirlos, yo necesito saber que es lo que les parece bien sobre la manera en que yo administro su escuela, y cómo creen ustedes que yo puedo mejorar mis servicios a sus hijos.

Por favor expresen, en cualquier idioma, lo que ustedes piensan sobre este asunto en la parte de abajo. Nosotros podemos obtener traducciones. Por favor devuelvan la forma a la Escuela Emerson.

Lo que nos parece bien:

Lo que no nos parece bien:

El nivel escolar de su hijo(a): Kindergarten

Sinceramente,  
*Bruce C. Davis*  
Bruce C. Davis  
Director de la Escuela Emerson

*Lo que nos parece bien es todo. Porque él es un excelente Director. Siempre está al pendiente de nuestros hijos y al principio porque todo marcha bien. Siempre porque lo mejor para su hijo. En mi opinión es un excelente Director. Gracias, mamá Rose*

**We send thank-you notes and letters of praise to parents and students constantly—but only when they are deserved.**

believe the keys to parent involvement are appropriate recognition and constant communication. We strengthen home-school relationships and expand parent involvement in a number of ways. For example, every week each teacher picks two students from his or her classroom to honor as "Student of the Week" (winner of a blue ribbon) and "Super Reader of the Week" (win-

ner of a red ribbon). The ribbons, donated by the PTA, are presented every Friday at morning assemblies. Forty-two ribbons a week, 1,470 ribbons a year. After nine years, that's a grand total of 13,230 students we've honored.

When selecting a recipient for an award, each teacher fills out a "reason slip" detailing why the student was chosen. Then, at night and on weekends, we call the parents in their native languages (our students represent 19 different languages or dialects) and tell them why their child received the award. During the conversations, we tell them how proud we are of their child and also how proud the teacher is of their child's effort. We chat about school matters and remind them to tell their child why we called. I do calls in English, my wife does some of the Spanish calls, and two home-school coordinators handle Vietnamese, Chinese, and the other Spanish calls. Other community members help us with other languages.

Those 13,230 calls make a telling difference. If your child has attended Emerson School for 7 years, the

chances are you have received at least 7 to 14 positive calls during that period. It's hard to resist a plea for involvement when the school has acknowledged your child. After all, if your child is doing so many things right, and the school can see it, then your parental skills have been validated. Isn't it true that we like to help people who recognize us?

**We send letters to parents in four languages and conduct our meetings in six languages, simultaneously.**

### No Detail Too Small

Another way we strengthen home-school relationships is by sending thank-you notes and letters of praise to parents and students constantly—but only when they are deserved. We mail thank-you notes to students because we remember, as former kids, how neat it was to receive mail. Parents receive letters praising them for their participation or support. We send letters to parents in four languages and conduct our meetings in six languages, simultaneously. We ask them what they think about our service to them, encouraging them to write back in their native languages. It's routine for 61 to 67 percent of the parents to respond to our letters. We translate their responses and report back to them, in their language, what we plan to do about their suggestions. Parents tell us we keep them well informed and that they feel no detail is too small to warrant our attention. We try.

**Parents tell us we keep them well informed and that they feel no detail is too small to warrant our attention.**

We also discover what our parents are good at and find a way for them to do that for the school. And when they contribute, we let the rest of the community know. If Mrs. Rios plants flowers in front of the school, we send a letter home with all of the students telling parents about Mrs. Rios' generosity.

Of our 650 students, 44 percent are limited-English-speaking, and 38 percent of our families are on welfare. Despite the odds, we have received the State Distinguished School award, and we think that's because the school and the community pull together. We're part of a cyclical process that feeds on and begets positive behavior.

So rather than just begging people to do for us, we build self-esteem and provide opportunities for people to have self-actualizing experiences. Will it always work? I hope so, but if the demand for parent involvement continues to grow, and parents are simply beside themselves with how to do it, I'll retire to start a parent involvement business. I'd be glad to stand in for you at school. I charge \$100 an hour. □

**Bruce C. Davis** is Principal, Ralph Waldo Emerson School, Garvey School District, 7544 E. Emerson Pl., Rosemead, CA 91770.

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