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Partnerships with Parents in Catholic Schools

Parental involvement is a concept that Catholic schools across the country have promoted for many years. It is no surprise that the importance of engaging parents in the spiritual and academic education of their children has been an integral part of the Catholic school culture and is considered one of the unique strengths of Catholic education. Recently, the tremendous impact of partnership between parents and schools has been thoroughly studied and the research is overwhelmingly clear. Involving parents in the educational process builds school community and has a tremendous influence not only on academic achievement, but also on creating positive attitudes and fostering the long-term success of students.

In a recent study (Riggins-Newby 2004), *“research shows that when families are involved in education, students’ grades are higher, their attendance is better, and they become motivated learners.”*

Undoubtedly, enhancing efforts to develop strong family/ school partnerships within our Catholic school communities reinforces our commitment to parents as we assist them in the Christian formation and education of their children, recognizing that we are all part of God’s family and that the children entrusted to our care are created in God’s image. Catholic schools are an ideal setting in which to facilitate genuine partnership with families.

As Catholic schools prepare students for the world of tomorrow, it is vital to include the role of parent/school partnerships as a part of the planning and assessment process. The goal within this proactive process is to determine where we have been in the past and where we are at present in order to determine where we want to be in the future. Projectappleseed.org (Dec. 2003) offers the following eight items for consideration when evaluating the role of parent/school partnership in school communities:



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1. Which partnerships are currently working well at each grade level?
2. Which partnership practices should be improved on or added in each grade?
3. How do you want your school's family involvement to look three years from now?
4. Which present practices should change and which should stay the same?
5. Which families are you reaching and which are harder to connect with? What can be done to better communicate with the latter?
6. What costs are associated with any improvements you want?
7. How will you evaluate the results of your efforts?
8. What opportunities will be arranged to share information on successful practices with teachers, parents, and students in order to strengthen their own efforts?

In every Catholic school these questions can be discussed thoroughly with school boards, parent groups, teachers, students, pastors, and community members when exploring the role of parent/school partnerships. Ideally, a collaborative effort where all parties feel respected and valued will facilitate meaningful communication, heighten awareness, and ultimately create positive parent/school partnerships that promote student learning.

"If all of the members of the church are to follow Christ's way of love, it is essential that we continue speaking with, listening to, working with, and learning from each other. We are all one family in Christ."
(Follow the Way of Love)

Resources and Suggested Reading

Bill Macdonald, Ed/D.(March/April 2004 The Value of Parental and Family Involvement in School. *Today's School*.

Garden and Wall. (2003) *Catholic from the Inside Out*. New York.

Laurie Beth Jones. (1995) *Jesus CEO*. Hyperion. New York

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