Strengthening Family-School Partnerships Through Male Engagement

PTA and school leaders across the country frequently ask, "How can we get dads to be active in their child's education?"

Male caregivers *want* to be engaged, but are looking for unique, inclusive and specific opportunities to contribute! PTA and school leaders can support male caregivers by using the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships to advocate for and with them in a variety of ways.

Welcome All Families

Students without "dads" must be welcomed and included in any program or event.

- Using inclusive language like "male caregiver" or "men" encompasses not only fathers, but also grandfathers, brothers, uncles and other mentors supporting students in their educational journey. This way, no student feels left out.

Maintain consistent opportunities for men to engage throughout the school year.

- Emphasize that engagement is not totally time consuming! That means respecting bandwidth limits and allowing variances for work schedules.
- Go beyond "one-and-done" events (e.g., Donuts with Dad with no opportunities afterward). One-and-done events send the message that male caregivers are only welcome on one day per year.

Communicate Effectively

Communication must specifically invite and call out male caregivers.

- Remember that communication with a "primary caregiver" is not necessarily a mom or a maternal figure.

- Be intentional about surveying male caregivers so their feedback is incorporated when planning for future events and opportunities.

Busting the "Absent Father" Myth

Popular culture spreads the narrative that more fathers are abandoning their children.

The U.S. Census Bureau tells us that the opposite is true.

- 121 million men are fathers of children under 18.

- Only 20% (7 million) are absent from their children.

- 6% (2 million) are single fathers raising their children.

- 79.8% live with their children and 72.6% live with all of their children.

Support Student Success

Give male caregivers opportunities to contribute to the classroom and/or volunteer.

- Provide male caregivers with information about what and how students are learning and involve them in setting goals and supporting learning at home.

- Ensure male volunteers are not solely asked to help with manual labor tasks (e.g., event set up, clean-up days, etc.), and instead provide multiple specific ways for them to engage. And make sure to collect information for "additional caregivers" in all school and PTA forms and invitations so that you can directly communicate with and reach more male caregivers.

Speak Up for Every Child

Advocate for staff training on creating father-friendly schools by using best practices in male engagement and recognizing/breaking stereotypes of male engagement in schools.

- Reject misconceptions that male caregivers are "too busy," "not interested" or "absent."

- Shift mindsets from seeing dads in schools as "unusual" or "cute" to seeing them as a welcomed presence to the school community.

Share Power

Host listening sessions or empathy interviews with male caregivers to build relationships and understand the unique challenges and opportunities they face.

Recruit male caregivers to serve on your PTA board and committees so the community can see diverse perspectives being represented.

- Provide male caregivers the opportunity to make decisions that affect their children at school and in the community.

- Create a male engagement subcommittee that focuses on implementing best practices for male engagement.

Collaborate with Community

Partner with local organizations and businesses to assemble more male community leaders that can help get more men engaged in your efforts.

- If you're not sure where to start, visit The National Alliance for Father Friendly Schools to find ways to connect with male engagement programs in your area.

References

U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). The two extremes of fatherhood. November. Accessed July 22, 2024.

In Partnership with

The National Alliance for Father Friendly Schools