

September 2020

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Using surveys to increase engagement

Do you want to know how parents feel about their child's school? Do you know what parents think their children need? Ask them.

Such a simple concept, yet many schools spend a lot of time talking at parents instead of with them. Schools send home flyers, newsletters and text messages, dispersing a lot of one-way information; not information that invites feedback.

True parent engagement, on the other hand, is interactive. It involves parents in shaping school culture and contributing positively to their child's learning experience.

One way to get that feedback is through one-on-one conversations and meetings. It can be difficult to reach the entire parent base this way, especially now with reduced school days and social distancing.

An easier way to reach the majority of parents is through an informal survey. There are many free and low-cost tools, such as Google Forms and SurveyMonkey. Whichever you choose, the goal is to ask questions that reveal parents' ideas and perceptions about their child's school and, specifically, what is working and not working for their child. For example, if a school is considering a new homework policy that will specify a certain number of minutes of homework per day for different grade levels, use a survey to ask what parents think about the idea. Then incorporate parent feedback into the design before launching it. This advance work will reduce the likelihood of cleaning up a flawed process afterward.

Surveys also can be useful in learning more about your families, so you can improve your programs to serve them better. For instance, you might ask how they prefer to receive communications from the school — by text, email, telephone or printed materials.

Parents are sometimes reluctant to speak out in public meetings or to pick up the phone and call a teacher or principal. A survey allows them to share opinions out of the spotlight, providing insights that otherwise might go unnoticed.

Keep your survey design simple and easy to complete. Multiple choice questions are good, but be sure to include a few open-ended questions for more detailed responses.

The most important benefit of parent surveys is the message that the school really does care about what parents think.

While surveys provide important, useful information, they bring some challenges. Participation rates are uncertain. It is sometimes difficult to get parents to take time to complete a survey, and some parents don't have access to a computer. Remember that surveys are just one tool, and other feedback should be considered when making important decisions.

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Maximize survey participation

Parent Surveys

A key to getting good participation in surveys is to make them relevant. Consider these tips:

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1. Tell parents what's in it for them.

Many schools have good luck offering incentives to those who complete a survey. Offer extra motivation, like a chance to win a school t-shirt or an iPad. Be clear about why parents should complete the survey and how the results will be used. When parents believe you want their feedback because you truly intend to listen to it and consider it, they are more apt to take time to give it.

2. Snag them in the subject line of your email.

In the subject line, don't just say, "Survey," but instead say, "Complete our school survey for a chance to win an iPad," or "Tell us your thoughts on homework." Offer a short one- or two-sentence introduction about why you're sending the survey and what it's about. List the number of questions, so parents can see that it won't take all evening to complete. Embed the survey link in the email, so it's easy for parents to click and find it.

3. Keep things anonymous

Parents are more likely to fill out a survey that allows them to remain anonymous. You can include an optional space for parents to provide a name, email, or phone number if they choose. Be sure to require this information if you have offered the chance to win a prize.

4. Thank them for participating

Follow up after the survey to thank parents for participating. Some online surveys enable you to do this automatically with a personalized message. The goal is to let parents know that you value their feedback and appreciate their involvement in their child's school.

5. Share the results

Once you have tabulated the results, share them with parents. Let them know how you plan to use the results and what next steps will be. They will be more likely to participate in future surveys if they see that you actually paid attention to the results of the first one.

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