

Creating Strong Relationships Between Schools and Student Families

To build strong relationships between parents and their children's schools, educators must support the learning that goes on at home. Educators themselves, the school community, and school boards have a responsibility to students and need to understand the communities in which they live. The following areas have been identified in order for the development of strong relationships between families and schools: Building Trust, Community Programming, and Creating a Deep Understanding.

Building Trust

First and foremost, it is necessary to work at gaining the trust of families and the community. This is especially the case for communities that have been damaged due to oppression and marginalization of peoples. Educators must work to undo damage that has occurred in order for families to heal and for lifelong learning to take place.

Due to some of the impacts of colonization in North America, gaining the trust of historically marginalized people is necessary in order to move forward in developing positive relationships. It is quite often in these communities that the distrust of schools exists because of negative experiences that families might have encountered either in our Canadian school system or in systems of education elsewhere. It is therefore crucial that families trust schools in order to foster relationships between the home and the school.

Community Programming

Another key aspect to developing relationships between families and educators is for educators to embrace communities through active participation and work within the community. Educators cannot enter a community and expect to dominate with activities and practices that are not relevant to the community. Educators must work side-by-side with the community to ensure families have a voice and that knowledge can be shared and culture and heritage validated.

It is important for the community and school to come together to create opportunities for shared learning. Programs that are designed to foster community input and support can help to facilitate meaningful learning for students and target the needs of specific communities. The needs of the community must be at the centre of any programming so that students see themselves in their learning and in turn become more engaged alongside their families.

Creating a Deep Understanding

To form meaningful relationships, it is important to build connections and come to mutual understandings. Having a deep understanding of students' lives is critical if educators aim to form genuine relationships. Through understanding the backgrounds of students and the perspectives of their families, it is easier to identify with them and have them be able to connect with their teachers. Without this building of relationships, students and their families can be objectified and quite often stereotypes can emerge.

In environments that foster learning as a partnership between the home and school there is the potential to create a rich pedagogy that is culturally-relevant and reflective of the community. Using community resources effectively is key to making

positive contributions to student learning. It is important for teachers to know and understand the people, cultures, and environments in which they teach. By using community resources in classrooms and learning culturally appropriate teaching methods, teachers can make a bigger difference. Teachers must be aware of the school culture in which they are working in order to be effective teachers. Schools and the systems in which teachers are trained should encourage and provide opportunities for educators to learn diverse teaching strategies.

Next Steps

By building meaningful relationships between families and educators, students become empowered and their motivation for learning increases. Student learning also increases when families are given a voice and asked to share their opinions. Therefore it is important for all educators to promote culturally relevant practices so that students can learn about themselves and the world around them. Educators must begin to increase their knowledge base so that learning can truly be a partnership between the homes of students and their schools.