

Join a Parent Group

At most schools there is an organized group of parents who enrich the learning environment for students and assist the teachers and other school staff members. Parents' group volunteers may work in support roles at the school building, raise funds for school projects, and sponsor events that help families connect with one another. They usually hold regular meetings open to all parents.

The biggest parents' group in the country is the PTA, or Parent Teacher Association, a national nonprofit organization. The Washington State PTA has a state office and local branches at individual schools. Members pay dues, and part of the money goes to support the central organization, which provides lobbying for child-related legislation, an extensive website, training for members, and other benefits.

Not all school parent groups are part of the PTA, however. A group that exists in a single school and that is not a branch of a bigger organization is sometimes called a PTO, for Parent Teacher Organization. A group that accepts students as members may be called PTSA, for Parent Teacher Student Association.

The school office can usually provide information on parents' groups at your school.

What Is the School's Part?

Some school districts have adopted family involvement policies while others are more informal about interacting with families. Schools that receive federal Title I funds are required by law to have family involvement activities, and some receive special funds to help with those efforts. There is no Washington state law that says schools must involve families, but the most successful schools do.

HERE ARE SOME BASICS THAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT FROM YOUR SCHOOL:

- An atmosphere that is welcoming and encourages you to become a partner in your child's education.
- Respectful, friendly treatment from school staff.
- Timely, thoughtful responses to your concerns.
- Information about how to help students with homework and support learning at home.
- Partnerships with community organizations that help families.
- In diverse schools: information for families translated into languages in addition to English.

Office of the Education Ombudsman

1110 Capitol Way S, Suite 304

P.O. Box 40004

Olympia, WA 98504-0004

Toll free: 1-866-297-2597

Fax: (360) 586-0052

www.waparentslearn.org

Contact the Office of the Education Ombudsman if you'd like to receive this document in an alternative format to accommodate people with disabilities.

The Office of the Education Ombudsman provides information and referral services to students, families and communities regarding the public education system, promotes family and community involvement in education, and helps families and students resolve conflict with schools.



Participate in Your Child's Education

Office of the Education Ombudsman
**A Guide for Families
Getting Involved at School**



State of Washington
Office of the Governor

Your Child and Your School Need You

Children need both good teachers and strong family support to do as well as they can at school. National research consistently shows that when parents and schools work together as partners, students succeed. This holds true for families of all ethnicities, income levels, and education backgrounds, whether in rural or urban schools.

What Is Family Involvement in Education?

Family involvement means the active participation by families and legal guardians in their children's school lives. Family involvement must be done in partnership with teachers and other school staff. Every parent or family member has different skills, experiences and life circumstances, so we all have different ways to participate, support and enrich education for our children.

The most basic kind of family involvement is to make sure that each student attends school every day after getting enough sleep, eating a healthy breakfast and dressing appropriately. For parents who have the time and energy, volunteering at school or working with a parent group is a valuable contribution.

The Best Ways To Get Involved

The most important thing parents can do to help their children in school is to make academic success a family priority. There are many ways to show your student how deeply you believe in education. Mark the ideas below that you will fit into your family's routine.

MAKE HOME A LEARNING CENTER

- Read with your child every day, in English or your native language. Use books, billboards, food packages or whatever is around you. If you don't feel comfortable reading, discuss picture books or photos, or have your child read to you.
- Make a regular time and space for homework every day. Turn the TV off.
- Know what your child is studying. Learn new things yourself.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep each night and a good breakfast before school starts.
- Involve your family in community activities that expand on school learning.
- Let your child know you expect good work in school.

COMMUNICATE WITH SCHOOL

- Inform the school of your child's needs and any changes in family circumstances.
- Establish a communication system with your child's teacher and use it frequently.

- Check your child's homework, attendance and academic progress often.
- Respond to all messages from school.
- Attend school meetings, events, and parent-teacher conferences.

HELP THE SCHOOL

- Work with teachers to find educational materials, enrichment programs for students, and funding.
- If you can't volunteer at school during class time, ask the school for ways to help at home or on weekends.
- If you have time, help the teacher in the classroom.
- Recruit and train other families to form a volunteer group.
- Help set up and manage a classroom phone tree or e-mail list.

BECOME A LEADER

- Learn how the school system works and how to advocate for all children.
- Be part of decision-making committees at school.
- Organize a parent group in your school or be active in your school's parent organization.
- Take classes to develop your leadership skills.
- Be a public supporter of education. Get informed about state and local education laws.

HELP BRING THE COMMUNITY INTO THE SCHOOL

- Encourage your school to provide all families with information about community services and resources.
- If your school is diverse, find out which community organizations serve diverse cultural groups and help the school connect with them to provide services for families.
- Arrange educational and cultural experiences for your child. Share these opportunities with other families and your child's school.
- Help the school recruit and train community volunteers and mentors from diverse groups.
- Thank local merchants and business people who support education and schools.

Why Not Leave Education to the School?

The idea of family participation in U.S. schools began in the late 1800s. While families and schools working together seemed like a good idea for many reasons, people didn't realize that a side benefit would be strong gains in student learning. However, national research in the last 40 years has demonstrated that the more families participate in the education of their children, the better those students achieve in school.