Independent School
Parent Partnerships:
New Ways to Partner for Success

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Objectives

1. Identify different challenging parenting styles and what makes them so challenging

2. Understand the underlying emotion, perception and/or drive behind that parenting style

3. Learn concrete strategies for effective conversations and ongoing partnership

4. Discuss “New Ways to Partner” for success
Challenging Parents...Every School Has Them

• “The school used to do it that way. Why did they change it?”
• “I’ve got it all figured out. I don’t need your support.”
• “Do you know how many of our family members have attended here?”
• “We don’t pay this much money for our son to get a B.”
• “My child is gifted.”
• “My child does not need to see a counselor/learning specialist.”
In an Ideal World...

All parents would:

~ Be open to feedback
~ Follow recommendations
~ Set healthy boundaries
~ React in an emotionally appropriate way
~ Be involved without being overly involved
~ Make decisions in the best interest of the student
An Independent School Parent...

- Is well educated
- Has high expectations
- May be accustomed to high levels of control
- May be anxious
- May be frightened about alternatives to private school education

(Thompson & Mazzola, 2012)
Challenging Parenting Styles

- Helicopter/Over-involved
- Under-involved/Inconsistent
- Know-it-all
- Denial/Resistant
- Entitled
- Bully
HELICOPTER/OVER-INVOLVED PARENT
HELICOPTER/OVER-INVOLVED PARENT

“I just happened to be at school and thought I would stop in to see how he/she is doing”

Behaviors:
- Super volunteer
- Enabler
- Texting with their child during the day
- Lingering after drop-off & arriving early for pick-up

Primary motivators:
- Anxiety that child cannot fend for themselves
- Struggle with separation/letting go
- Over-connected with child
- Strong desire for perfection in child or themselves
UNDER-INVOLVED/INCONSISTENT PARENT
UNDER-INVOLVED/INCONSISTENT PARENT

“I’ve been so busy that I haven’t had a chance to return your call.”

Behaviors:
- Does not show up for events
- Misses meetings for the child
- Doesn’t answer emails/calls
- Alcohol/drugs, mental illness

Primary motivators:
- Stressed or overwhelmed
- Lack of knowledge on how to participate
- Lack of confidence in parenting role
- Faith in your school in meeting their child’s needs
KNOW-IT-ALL PARENT
KNOW-IT-ALL PARENT

“I’ve got this all figured out. I don’t need your support.”

“I have three other children who have gone here. This is nothing new.”

“The school used to do it that way and it was much better. Why did they change it?”

Behaviors:
- Highly educated/self educated
- Acts as an historian
- Unwilling to listen to others thoughts/opinions

Primary motivators:
- Insecurity
- Fear of being wrong
- Perfectionism
- Competitive
DENIAL/RESISTANT PARENT
DENIAL/RESISTANT PARENT

Primary Motivators:
- Fear of change/unknown
- Competition with others
- Unrealistic about situation

Behaviors:
- Resists attending events
- Doesn’t return emails/calls
- Avoids following recommendations

“We don’t have any problems.”
“We’ve never seen this concern at home.”
“My child is gifted.”
“My child does not need to see a counselor.”
ENTITLED PARENT

I DIDN'T GET ACCEPTED INTO COLLEGE

SO MY PARENTS MADE A "SIZEABLE DONATION"
ENTITLED PARENT

“We pay this much and this is what we should get.”

“We don’t pay this much money for him to get a B!”

“Do you know how many from our family have attended here?”

Behaviors:
- Goes above a staff member to speak to their “boss”
- Makes negative comments towards others
- Uses one-sided communication
- Makes threats to staff

Primary Motivators:
- Insecure
- Afraid of confrontation
- Fear of being wrong
- Overly confident
BULLY PARENT
BULLY PARENT

Primary Motivators:
• Insecure/anxious
• Used to being in power positions
• Afraid of situation and possible outcome

Behaviors:
• Makes threatening remarks to staff/counselor
• Tries to manipulate situations
• Passive Aggressive

“I would hate to have to call the Head of School to let him/her know about this.”

“You were unprofessional!”
Our Model of Support

- Parent
- Teachers
- Learning Specialist
- Counselor
- Nurse
- Division Head
- Dean
- Head of School
Role of Administrators

- Handle the “squeakiest of all wheels”
- Manage adults (teachers and parents)
- Protect teachers from the most difficult parents
- Provide a safe place to brainstorm options
- Sit in on meetings to add additional support
- Follow up with formal letter stating meeting outcome
- Serve as “voice” of the school
MICDS PARENTS ASSOCIATION
PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

We the parent body of MICDS, in the best interest of our children, agree to the following:

- Work together as partners with faculty and administration of the School in the education of our children.
- Support and reinforce the Mission of our School.
- Communicate openly and respectfully with faculty, administration, staff, and other parents.
- Support our students and their decision making by:
  - following dress code guidelines
  - observing attendance policies
  - abiding by School regulations (and state laws) regarding minors and alcohol and drugs
  - upholding other School policies as outlined in Division Handbooks
  - involve ourselves in the life of the School.
Parents Also Receive...

• A further agreement with their re/enrollment contract:

  ▪ JK-12 MICDS PARENT SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP, 2013-14
How have we used this agreement to facilitate partnership?

- Hold parents accountable for interactions with faculty, staff, and administration
- Send to parents before a meeting: open lines of communication
- Provide courage to name inappropriate behavior as well as expected behavior
- In worst case scenario: Separate students from our community based on parent interactions
General Considerations for All Parent Interactions

- Don't talk to a parent (or email) when you are mad
  - Rule of thumb: Wait 12 - 24 hours before responding... or sleep on it
- Know when you need the support of a colleague
- Think about your attire...dress for success
- Consider location of the meeting and how it speaks to the intent/importance
Strategies for Communication

Before Meeting with a Parent

- Build up a “positive bank”
- Think through both the parent feelings and the developmental stage of the child
- Try to address issues before they become a crisis
Before Meeting with a Parent

• Talk to other teachers who work with the child
• Document observable behaviors and conversations with team members
• Document and analyze what has happened and what you think needs to happen next
• Consider the student and parent points of view
While Meeting with a Parent

- Start on a positive note
- State the purpose and goals of the meeting
- Allow parent to share their side first
- Figure out underlying feelings and perspective of parent
- Active or reflective listening - especially if parents are defensive
- Use silence
- Ask open ended questions
- Stay calm
While Meeting with a Parent

Actual phrases you might say:

- “I hear what you’re saying. You believe/think/feel...”
- “I’m sorry...”
- “Let’s keep our focus on what’s best for the student(s).”
- “How can we solve this together?”
While Meeting with a Parent

- Describe the problem in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms
- Be direct and assertive but show genuine care
- Remind them about resiliency of kids
- Agree on steps and actions that you and parents will take
- Document those steps and actions
- Include student when appropriate
At the End/After the Meeting

- Summarize process and goals
- Reinforce idea that we all want what is best for your child
- Thank parents for being open to working on the problem and as a team
- Follow-up with an email to all team members involved in summarizing plan
- Reflect (on your own or with colleagues)
References

- “How to Diffuse Difficult Conversations” by Kathy Pierce and Lynette Fields (NASSP Principal Leadership, December 2003) [http://www.nassp.org/portals/0/content/48919.pdf](http://www.nassp.org/portals/0/content/48919.pdf)
- *Making the Most of Difficult Conversations* by Michael Riera (NAIS, 2013)
- *Parents and Teachers Working Together* by Carol Davis and Alice Yang (Responsive Classroom, 2005)
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QUESTIONS???