

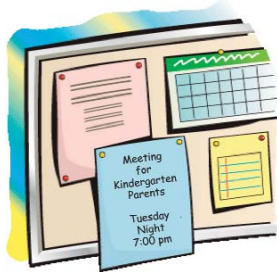
Boost the Attendance of Kindergarten Parents at School Events

Parents today are busy. In many cases, both parents work. They come home to fix dinner, monitor homework, do the laundry, read a story and—finally!—tuck the kids into bed. No wonder it's so difficult to get them to come to school for special events. But with careful planning that takes into account their special needs, you can increase attendance at functions for kindergarten parents.



Here's how:

- » **Make meetings shorter.** If parents know that an event will take only an hour, they may be more likely to attend. Start and end on time, every time.
- » **Make meetings fun.** No one can concentrate on a “chalk and talk” lecture after a busy day. Just as you plan for centers and hands-on activities to engage your students, plan events that get parents moving around and enjoying themselves.
- » **Promote connections.** Kindergarten parents are eager to meet other parents. Their children are becoming friends and they want to make new friends, too. Parents who feel comfortable talking with at least five other parents at the school are much more likely to participate.



- » **Give advance notice.** Their calendars are packed with activities, so make sure you communicate early and often. Announce the next event at your current meeting. Better yet, post the schedule for the year on your website, on take home folders, on your lunch menu, etc. Brainstorm other places where you can get the word out.
- » **Get their attention.** An invitation handmade by their child is always a hit.
- » **Involve their children.** Try pinning the final invitation to each child as you send them home on the day of an event.
- » **Meet them at the door.** It's hard to walk into a room filled with strangers. Having a teacher, a school administrator or another friendly member of the staff greet them can ease new parents into the group. Have name tags ready and then introduce the parents to others.
- » **Inform local media.** Establish ties with your local school reporter. Invite a TV crew in to film the event. Ask radio stations to air multiple messages.
- » **Use technology.** Invite parents through your website, automated phone calls, emails and text messages. Ask your district technology expert for additional ideas.
- » **Translate everything.** Students of parents who don't speak English are at risk of not attending school events. So it's especially important to translate invitations and handouts. Recruit bilingual parents to help.
- » **Focus on parents' needs.** Try using a survey to identify issues that are most important to parents. Then schedule events that appeal to them.

Host a 'dress rehearsal' for riding the bus

Riding the bus is one of the most exciting and potentially scary parts of starting kindergarten—a milestone recorded in many a family photo album. But according to the American School Bus Council, students aren't the only ones worried about this new adventure—parents are, too! Relieve their fears by offering parents information about bus safety, drivers and standards. To build confidence and promote safety, host a reassuring bus event before kindergarten starts. Include:



- **A tour.** At a summer gathering, allow kindergarten families to board a bus, try out the seats and even meet a driver. If the bus has seat belts, demonstrate how they work and let children practice using them.
- **A drive.** If possible, take students for a ride. Parents can come along or stay at the school for a “bus basics” presentation. Explain when and how parents will receive information about bus routes and pick-up/drop-off times.
- **Advice.** Teach bus safety in memorable ways. Many school districts use videos, books, pamphlets and even a presentation by a miniature talking bus to capture families' interest. Provide take-home materials, too. See page XX of this binder for a parent handout.
- **Reminders.** Parents appreciate tips on how to drive safely around buses. Address school parking lot safety as well. Suggest that parents begin school-year bedtime routines soon to prevent missing the bus.
- **Entertainment.** At a Columbia, South Carolina, event, for example, kindergartners got to board a bus, visit a museum, play games, hear live music, pick up information and walk through a mock cafeteria—all in one place, free of charge.
- **Specifics.** Describe how the school supports safe transportation, such as by using student patrols, crossing guards, carpool lanes, staff greeters and more. Answer the question, “What if my child misses the bus before or after school?”



Once the event is over, continue promoting bus safety throughout the year and beyond. One good way to do that is to celebrate National School Bus Safety Week—always held the third full week in October. It's an excellent time to review bus procedures and raise awareness about bus safety.

For more information, go to the National Association for Pupil Transportation website at www.napt.org/index.cfm. You'll find ideas for activities and information about their school bus safety poster contest.

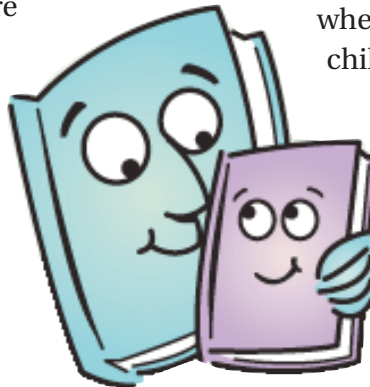
Keep reading together!

You've just taken a huge step in preparing your kindergartner for success in school. By attending your school's family literacy event, you have shown your child that you think school and reading are important. Don't let the momentum stop here. Keep your child excited about reading by making it a regular part of your family's daily routine.

Drop everything and read

Schedule a time for your family to "Drop Everything And Read." During DEAR time, have everyone sit down for a family read-aloud. Here's how it works:

- **Schedule DEAR in advance.** Once you pick a date, be sure to write it on your family calendar. This lets your child see that reading time is just as important as soccer practice.
- **Be prepared.** Plan a trip to the library before DEAR Day to make sure you have something to read.
- **Make it fun.** Pop a big bowl of popcorn and grab some pillows and blankets. Get cozy and enjoy reading together as a family.



Read in unusual places

Look for unusual places for your daily reading time with your child. You can:

- **Sit outside.** Read under a shady tree, in a sandbox or at a nearby park.
- **Toss a sheet over a clothesline** or table to create a reading hideaway.
- **Read to your child** during bath time. Be careful not to soak the book!
- **Listen to audio books** when you are driving the kids around.

Plan reading-related activities

Build enthusiasm about books by making reading a larger part of your child's life. Here's how:

- **Reenact favorite stories.** Choose a book your child loves and act it out as a family.
- **Let your child "read" to you.** Have your child turn the pages and tell you the story.
 - **Make audio books.** For times when you can't read with your child, record yourself reading favorite books. Include cues so your child knows when to turn the page.
 - **Write your own book.** Have your child dictate a story to you. Then write one or two sentences per page, leaving room for your child's illustrations. Punch holes in the pages and tie them together with yarn or ribbons.
- **Provide varied experiences.** A child who has seen and touched a sheep, for example, will be interested to learn the words *sheep*, *wool* and "baaa."
- **Allow late-night reading.** On weekends, occasionally allow your child to stay up past bedtime looking at books.