

# Instructor

## 10, 9, 8... Countdown to Open School Night

Is open school night fast approaching? Here are 44 tips, activity ideas, and last-minute reminders to guarantee a great back-to-school celebration.

At some schools, open house happens during the first week of school. If you're lucky enough to have planning time, make the most of it!

### Three or More Weeks Before the Event:

- Begin gathering examples of student writing, artwork, and in-class projects.
- Take photographs of daily classroom activities for a slide show, bulletin board, or to give to parents as mementos.
- Prepare home-school handouts, such as a class list, grade-level expectations, homework policies, and volunteer requests.

### Two Weeks Before:

- Ask students to participate. Invite suggestions about which class activities or achievements they would like to share.
- Have students make hand-made invitations. (See below for ideas.)

### One Week Before:

- Plan your opening remarks. Keep them short and upbeat. (Policies are best left to hand-outs.) Explain what you expect from your students and how parents can help.
- Have students create a welcome display.

### A Few Days Before:

- If you can, call parents personally and remind them about the event. Ask about any special needs (e.g., translation).

### The Night Before:

- Get a good night's sleep!

### Nine!

#### How to Make Parents Feel Welcome (Remember...They Get Nervous, Too!)

**Smile and Greet Them at the Door.** Let each parent know how happy you are that he or she could come.

**Have Children Introduce Their Parents.** Open house is a great occasion for learning about manners and rituals. A few days before the event, do a little play-acting. Have students practice making introductions: "Mrs. Plummer, I would like you to meet my Mom and Dad."

**Invite Parents' Input.** Give parents an information sheet to fill out that asks for information such as Three strengths my child has are...? and Three things I would like to see my child learn this year are...?

**Meet Parents' Real Needs.** A parent may have only a few minutes before an evening shift, or may have to attend with toddlers in tow. Make everyone-especially the rushed and the harried-feel appreciated.

**Let Parents Get To Know You.** Make a small display with your own family photos, favorite books, travel mementos, and so on.

**Send Thank-You Notes.** To simplify this task, have parents write their addresses on envelopes when they visit.

### Eight!

#### Three Things Every Parent Is Looking For (And What You Can Do)



**A Supportive Environment.** Parents want to know that your classroom is a positive and friendly place. Take time to share one special thing you've noticed about each child in the first weeks with his or her parents.

**A Sense of Your Expectations.** Share with parents the classroom rules that you and your students have created together. Give them a hand-out that clearly states what you want your students to learn in each subject area by the end of the year.

**Open Communication.** Let parents know that you consider them equal partners in their children's education. Tell them how you will keep in touch (e.g., newsletters, quarterly reports). Hand out cards with your contact information, and the best times to call.

## Seven!

### Fun Activities Parents and Kids Can Share

**Who's Who Display.** Have a volunteer take instant photos of each family group as they arrive. The student can label the picture with his or her name and parents' names and add it to an ongoing display, titled "We Are Family," "Together We Can," or "We're Working Together." Later, use the pictures to make a class directory or save them for student scrapbooks.

**Classroom Scavenger Hunt.** Introduce your classroom by having students lead parents on a classroom scavenger hunt. Make a list of 10 clues that point to important aspects of your classroom. Here are some examples: Can you find our #1 classroom rule?? What is the name of our classroom pet?? Can you find your child's book report/drawing/science project?? The children will love leading the way.

**Kid-Made Maps.** Alternatively, have students use their measurement skills to draw classroom maps on graph paper. Ask them to label classroom "hot spots" with foil stars. Place the maps on students' desks and encourage parents to visit each starred location.

**Memory Books.** When parents visit the classroom, it often brings back memories of their own school days. Encourage them to share these recollections by contributing to a collaborative book. Ask each parent to record on a page one thing that was different when he or she was in school. Then, have the student add a drawing.

**Math Manipulative Challenge.** Introduce parents to the manipulatives you use in your classroom with a quick, grade-appropriate activity that parents and children can do together such as building a block tower or geometrical shape, or creating a quilt square.



## Six!

### Fun Ways to Encourage Parents to Volunteer

**Basket of Apples.** Use a die-cut or a simple pattern to create apple shapes or another fun shape. Then write one classroom need or wish (e.g., paper towels, magazines, camera film) on each apple and invite parents to leaf through the basket and take an apple or two as a reminder to contribute!

**"Linking Up" Chain.** Provide colorful paper strips preprinted with the words "I can \_\_\_\_\_ for Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_'s class." Encourage parents to fill in what their contribution will be for the coming year. Parents can choose from a list of examples (e.g., chaperone a field trip, read a story, help with the Web site) and record it on a strip, and then staple the ends together to make a link on the chain. Label the chain display: "Success: One Link at a Time."

**Promise Book.** Have your students decorate a promise book for parents to sign. Head each page with an invitation to help with an activity (e.g., "Parents needed for zoo trip" or "Come help make pinatas.") Parents can record their names below an activity that interests them, while learning about upcoming events.

**Volunteer Calendar.** If you are looking for weekly volunteers, create a colorful, oversized calendar and invite parents to plan their volunteer time in advance by signing days on the calendar.

## Five!

### Easy Ways to Showcase Technology

**Five-Minute School Day Video.** A few days before the event, videotape your class for 30 seconds at a time throughout the day. Parents will love the super-fast insights into the daily activities of their children.

**Show Your Class/School Web Site.** Set up a Web site station on your classroom computer. Ask a tech-savvy student to guide parents through the important information and highlights.

**Show a PowerPoint Presentation.** Show off a presentation created by last year's class. Parents will get a sneak peek at upcoming units their children will study. Last year's students may even drop by to

watch!

**Send Them on a CyberHunt.** Set up a classroom computer with this month's Instructor CyberHunt and let parent and child teams meet the challenge together!

**Four!**

#### **Cool Invitations Kids Can Make**

**Photo Cut-out Cards.** Take a photograph of each student, or have students bring them in from home. To make the cards: Have each student fold a piece of paper, then draw and cut a star or other fun shape in the front of his or her card. The photo is then glued on the inside page so that it shows through. Write the wording of the invitation on the board for students to copy. "Come to open house. \_\_\_\_\_ can't wait to show you our school!"

**Milk-Carton Houses.** Have students make houses out of clean single-serving milk cartons by gluing paper on the sides and drawing doors and windows, etc. Then slip each invitation in the top of an "opened" house.

**Three!**

#### **Surprises That Parents Will Love**

**Info Fridge Magnet.** Print your name and contact information and important school numbers on a pre-made business cards and attach sticker magnets to the back of each card. (Cards and magnets are available in office supply stores.) Parents will really appreciate the invitation to keep in touch.

**Raffle Off the Principal.** Give each parent a raffle ticket and hold a school-wide drawing for the principal or a local celebrity to read a favorite story to your class. Invite parents to attend the reading, and have the principal or celebrity sign a copy of the book and give it to the parent who held the winning raffle ticket.

**Parents Are Good Cookies.** Wrap a few homemade or store-bought cookies in cellophane. Add a ribbon and a note that reads "Thanks for being a good cookie and coming to open house." Parents and kids will eat them up.

**Two!**

#### **Veteran Teachers Share Open House "Don'ts"**

**Don't Conference.** Make yourself available to parents, but do not discuss individual students' progress or grades. Respect their privacy and the time of the others who are there. Invite parents to schedule a phone call or meeting at another time.

**Don't Make it Too Formal.** Like you, parents have already put in a full day. Make it fun. Keep presentations brief, informative, and enjoyable. What's most important is for parents to get a chance to see the classroom and ask their own questions.

**Don't Assign Homework.** Both your students and their parents will appreciate the consideration. Try to plan a light day to follow open house for your own sanity!

**Don't Try to Do Too Much!** My first open house had an agenda at least two evenings long, and left me stressed and rushing. Relax and enjoy meeting everyone. Parents don't need to see every drawing their child made or learn every classroom rule.

**One!**

#### **Last-Minute Reminders**

**Save Some Energy.** Take a break, if at all possible, between the end of the school day and the start of your open house to rest and recharge.

**Smile.** Smiles mean a lot. When you smile, you let parents know you are happy and excited to see them.

**Encourage Parents to Read Aloud.** Give parents concrete examples of what they can do at home to help their child's education, such as reading aloud to their child and setting a regular homework time.

**Be Proud of All That You Do.** Enjoy an evening in the spotlight. Parents come to open house because they want to experience all the wonderful things their children are doing and learning in your class!

