

7 Habits Successful Charter Schools use to Engage Parents

As practiced by

Bob Bourgault, Executive Director, Almond Acres Charter Academy



Parents and community members don't volunteer at Almond Acres Charter Academy. However, that isn't to say they're not involved. In fact, community engagement is thriving at the school. Rather than *volunteering*, parents *participate* in school activities. It's a subtle but important distinction at the core of the school's community-based philosophy.

“Nobody volunteers to be a parent,” says Robert Bourgault, executive director at Almond Acres Charter Academy and father of seven. “When we make the choice to be parents, we’re choosing to be active in our children’s development and education.”

This sense of commitment and cooperation is engendered in all of Almond Acres' programs, creating a truly vibrant school and parent community. For Bourgault and his team, building good habits and organizational health is essential to students' academic success and personal well-being. Almond Acres relies on seven habitual behaviors to build a highly engaged parent community.

HABIT 1

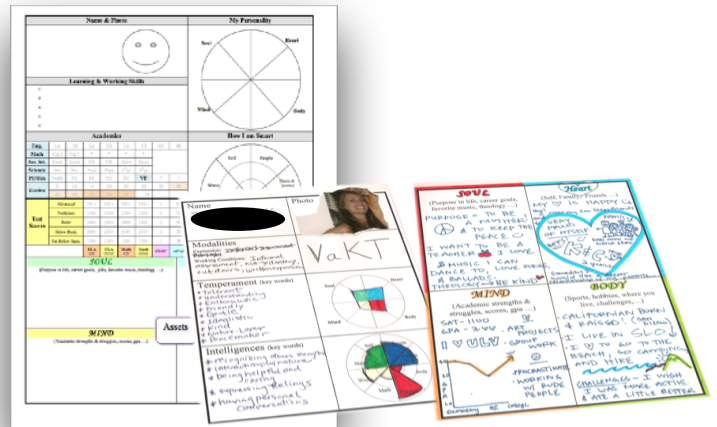
Honor Uniqueness

"Acknowledging the uniqueness and respecting the dignity of every individual improves the art of teaching and living," Bourgault says. "This includes heart, body, mind and soul. We care deeply about our students as people and when parents realize that, they become engaged."

All Almond Acres students and parents create learning profiles, which helps school leaders develop unique relationships with each family. This strategy engages parents because they trust that school leaders are devoted to support their children. Parent meetings at the beginning of each school year also help Bourgault and his team interact with families and build rapport.



Example: Create a parent and student learning profile



HABIT 2

Practice Organizational Health

"Almond Acres develops organizational habits of the heart and mind to create engagement and honor uniqueness", says Bourgault.

"Without trust, inevitable conflicts that arise become detrimental to the learning community." The Almond Acres staff conducts key performance indicator (KPI) meetings each morning to ensure everyone is on the same page and driving toward mutual goals. Each day has its own theme, and the school observes a habit of the week.



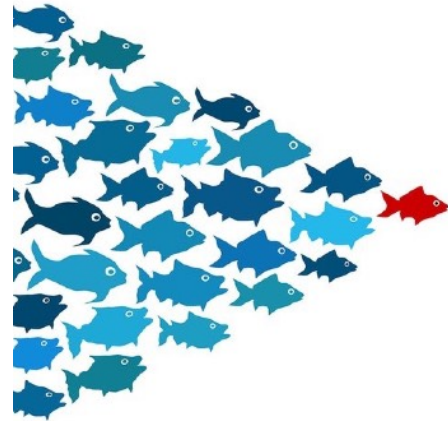
Just as importantly, students gather together every morning for a *Shared Start*. During Shared Start, school leaders honor and recognize students who have practiced habit of the week. The group shares stories about the weekly habit, why it's important and how they live it out each day. These routines and processes contribute to organizational health that builds an education community, centered on trust.



HABIT 3

Inspire Leadership

Good leadership builds trust with families and creates advocates at home and in the community. *“Effective leaders help people show themselves their own way and develop their own leadership skills”,* Bourgault says. *“The goal is to empower parents through strategic and visionary communication.”*



Through consistent messages that share learning, success stories and ideas, Almond Acres brings parents into the fold. The school uses the communication platform ParentSquare to communicate directly with parents at every level - school, classrooms and committees.

Example: Create strategic and visionary communication with parents

P.S. Mr. B's Weekly Message Feb 17th

Our new habit of the week is **Commitment**. I'd like to challenge our thoughts about being committed parents and educators.

♥ 29 people appreciate this post

Melanie McWilliam says: Thank you for sharing your heart and wisdom.

HABIT 4

Empower Teacher-Parent Partnership

Teachers are the experts. Almond Acres empowers teachers to share their knowledge and expertise with parents to keep students' learning alive at home. Almond Acres teachers again use ParentSquare to distribute regular messages sharing classroom lessons, techniques and photos. The program enables bi-directional communication, which is critical in developing trust and cooperation.

In one recent example, Bourgault observed a teacher record video of a kindergartner reading. She then sent the video, via ParentSquare's mobile platform, to the student's parents. "As a dad, that was really heartwarming to see," Bourgault says. "I can imagine how excited the student's parents were to receive that video."



Example: Send regular messages to parents sharing classroom lessons, techniques, photos



HABIT 5

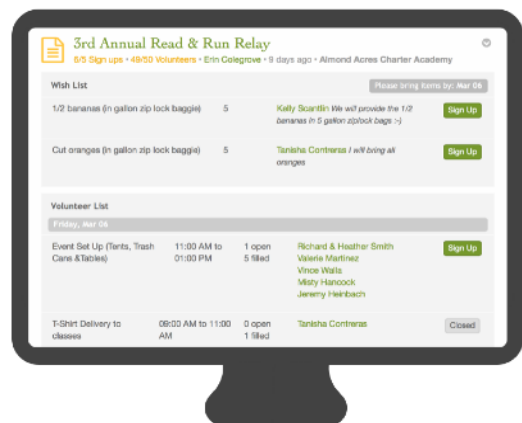
Activate Participation

When parents participate at school, it shows devotion and sends a message to the students that school is important. Bourgault recommends using feedback mechanisms and online sign-up to get parents involved.

“Activate by asking,” Bourgault preaches, because parents are far more likely to participate if school leaders indicate that there’s a need and opportunities available. Online communication platforms like ParentSquare make it easier for teachers and school leaders to send requests directly to parents.



Example: Get parents involved with feedback mechanisms & online sign-up



HABIT 6

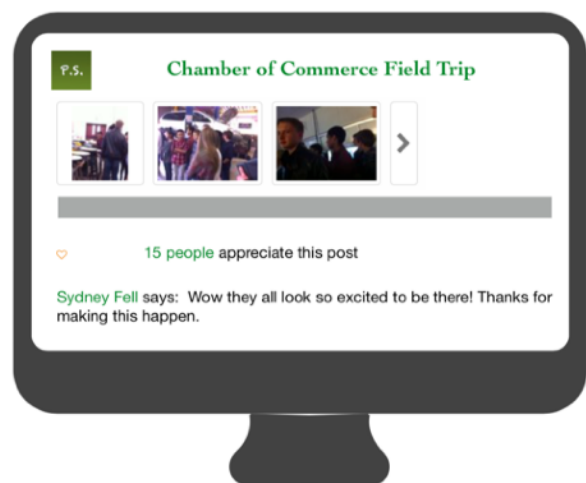
Community Outreach

Administrators can share their schools' philosophy and experiences with their communities as a way to build advocacy. *"How does a school shake hands with the community? Through parents,"* Bourgault says.

Almond Acres engages parents with activities they're passionate about. Oftentimes, parents visit classrooms to share information about their professions or hobbies. Teachers can also arrange field trips into the community, visiting local organizations and businesses.



Example: Engage parents in things they are passionate about-up.



HABIT 7

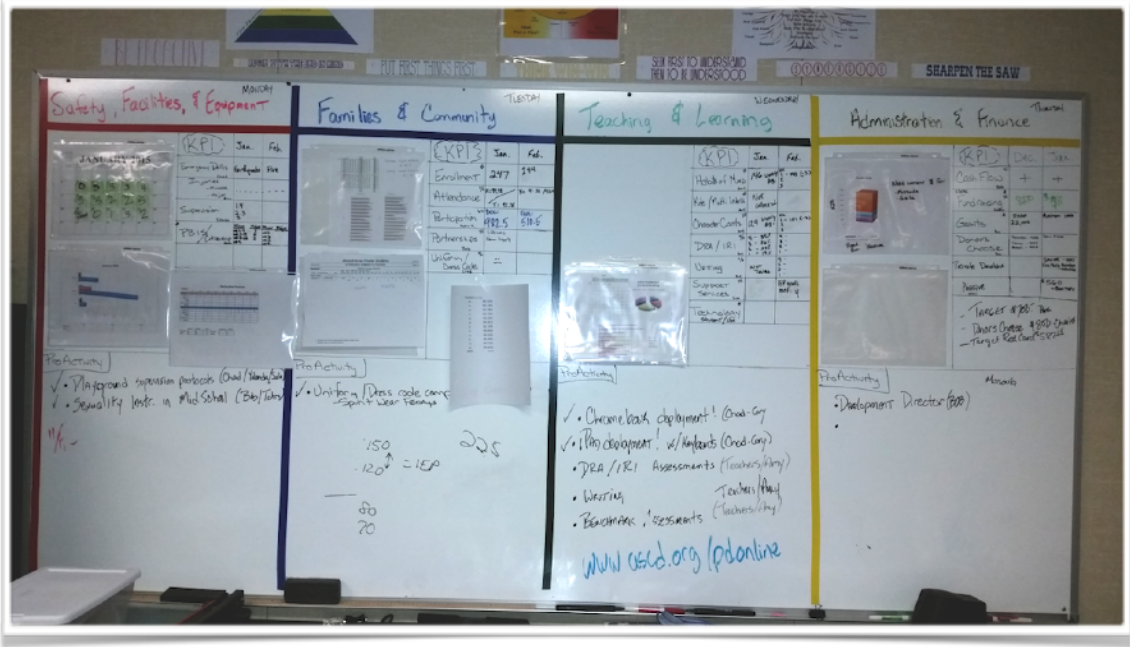
Track and Measure

Bourgault recommends that school leaders track and measure student and parent engagement, then take well-informed steps toward improvement. Adopting school-wide KPI goals is a great way to hold each other accountable in a productive way. Accountability is paramount for commitment.

Almond Acres created a KPI wall with four quadrants in its office:

1. Safety, facilities and equipment
2. Families and community
3. Teaching and learning
4. Administration and finance
5. KPI wall.

Example: Adopt school-wide Key Performance Indicators



Putting It All Into Action

There are no shortcuts to building a highly engaged parent community. As Bourgault observes, it takes dedication from everyone involved: parents, teachers, administrators and students. *“If we think about students metaphorically as trees, for example, we know they need good soil in order to thrive,”*

Bourgault says. *“It’s our job as school leaders to nurture their growth through the development of good habits.”*



About ParentSquare

ParentSquare is for educators who are looking to build a positive and supportive culture with parents. ParentSquare simplifies the engagement of parents with interaction opportunities and a diverse set of communication styles and languages, ensuring every parent can participate and support the educational process. Powerful metrics on parent engagement help school administrators take well-informed steps to improving parental involvement. Learn more at www.parentsquare.com.