

This document is designed to help you take the first steps in creating a community of parents who will stand ready to support your physical education program with time, talent, and advocacy action. Like most first steps, we encourage you to start small but think big.

### **Why work toward parent engagement?**

Businesses use the term “Return on Investment” to measure the financial rewards of investing initial resources. Consider your initial investment toward parent involvement as a “Return on Invite.” We could never list all the benefits you will eventually see as you build your parent engagement program, but the return on your initial investment will dramatically enhance the hard work you currently do to change young lives, impact your community, and build the best P.E. program on the planet! When you open your gym doors to parents, and they see their children thrive and learn, they will quickly and graciously open their doors to you.

*Just a few immediate benefits include:*

- ✔ The joy on a student’s face when they see their parent in the gym. Pictures are worth a thousand words; smiles are priceless.
- ✔ The pride in a parent’s smile when they see their student succeed and enjoy physical activity.
- ✔ The immediate power and impact of parents seeing quality physical education in action.

*These long-term benefits are equally important:*

- ✔ An available network of extra hands and eyes to help you when you need it most.
- ✔ Extended opportunities to call upon parents when you need assistance with bulletin boards, event set-up, making equipment, equipment room work days, financial donations, etc.
- ✔ An army of passionate advocates when you face policy, staffing, and scheduling challenges.

### **When should I invite parents into my physical education classroom?**

*If you have already started to engage parents in your program:*

- ✔ As often as you feel comfortable. The more parents who see you shine, the more quickly the long-term benefits become a reality. You dictate the pace and the presence.

*If you’re just starting with parent engagement:*

- ✔ Face it: we don’t always teach every class as well as we have planned. Chances are, you’re your own worst critic. That said, we always want folks—especially parents—to see us at our best, so select a unit and class period in which you’ll be most comfortable.

### START SMALL > THINK BIG

#### Advice for beginners:

- ✔ Give yourself 2 or 3 weeks before inviting parents into your gym. This will allow you to establish class rules and procedures. Parents will be impressed with your ability to herd cats, manage the masses, and organize your students. Word of caution: you will do such a great job that parents will invite you home to help them organize and manage their own children! We wish we were kidding....
- ✔ Choose 1 or 2 classes full of students who you know will behave appropriately and help you succeed (bribe them ahead of time....no, we're kidding. Well, maybe...).
- ✔ Choose instructional topics/lessons that directly involve kids in small groups (i.e., gymnastic centers, fitness stations, activity grids, etc.). Parents can be more engaged in helping the kids and not necessarily focused on all the intricate details and nuances of your instruction (not that they would get it anyway, but they will have their hands full with 4-5 kids at their station).
- ✔ Try, and then try again. If the lesson wasn't as you planned, bear in mind that it's better than any they have ever experienced, and definitely better than they might remember.
- ✔ Document the experience. Take and post a picture of each parent with their child. Have parents sign a bulletin board. Provide sticky notes for parents and ask them to write a quick note to post on the wall. Documentation showing that you have had parents in the gym not only helps build momentum, but also helps to show how fantastic you are when it comes time for your teacher evaluation.

#### How do I get started?

- ✔ Look at the big picture. Great things are a series of small things you are willing to bring together. Ask yourself: Why is this important to you? What would you like to eventually accomplish? What is the big return? Now start taking the little steps to get there.
- ✔ Create an environment that is welcoming and helps parents engage with their children. It helps to have your bulletin boards up and looking pretty and your gym organized and tidy (as much as we can keep a gym tidy, that is). First impressions are important.
- ✔ Provide a sign-up form and place it where parents drop kids off (maybe outside their homeroom, a bulletin board near the gym, etc). Or use free service like [Sign-up Genius](#).
- ✔ Parents will need a place to put their belongings (purses, phones, etc.). Post a gentle reminder that you'd prefer they put their phones away for the duration of their visit so that they can be present and enjoy the time with their children. However, at an appropriate time in the lesson, invite parents take a picture with their phone and post to social media using the hashtag #ParentsLovePE.
- ✔ Create specific instructions for helping parents become actively engaged in your class. Provide them with a handout that empowers them to be a "Professional Parent." In other words, they already have the knowledge and ability to keep their own child safe. Encourage them to step in if something doesn't feel safe, be an extra set of eyes to help supervise, work one-on-one with a student that might be struggling with a skill, or be a tagger in a tag game.