

Be the First Friend

Quick Start Guide



Introduction

Now is the time to think about the new students who will be joining your school community in the fall. It is important to warmly receive the new families and incorporate them into the life of your school community as quickly as possible. It is important to make sure that kids who begin attending your school have a positive experience! In most schools summer is the

time when you learn about the transitions in the lives of school families. Some of the families that have been attending your school may move to other communities or other schools. Some new families will come to join your school community.

Get prepared for the students who will be joining your school in the fall. If you do not already have some sort of “host the new family” program at your school, now is the time to start one. If you do have a program that that usually begins in the fall, change the time frame! Get the program running before you leave for the summer so new families can be “connected” before school starts.

Our “Be the First Friend” program is something each school can implement. There is one main component of the program: matching “new families” with “First Friend” families (veteran school families.) Of course, the more structure that can be added to this program, the more welcome the new families will feel and the more likely that the new families will STAY at your school, but even a simple program is better than none!

We are in the process of revising out complete guide to our First Friend program. That complete guide will be available for purchase by next fall, but in the meantime, we will share a few resources that are currently being tested for the guide. We would LOVE your feedback or great ideas that work well in your school!

On the next two pages you will find a basic introduction to creating a First Friend program. You will find an easy to follow guide for starting a program with a small committee. Print out a few copies of the attached *First Friend Quick Start Guide* or send the PDF by email on to a few potential members of your “First Friend” committee. You’ll be able to better welcome new families by next fall.

“Be the First Friend” Team Quick Start Guide

It seems that every school is looking to increase the number of students.
Creating a welcoming atmosphere is one way that people will WANT to stay!

Create a “First Friend” Program at your school

Recruit a First Friend Team

Think about 6 men and women who always seem to have a smile when you walk into a room full of people. Who makes eye contact with you and perhaps even breaks away from a group to make sure that you are personally greeted. Ask those folks if they would be willing to be part of a First Friend Team at your school. (Ask your Principal if you can include the school secretary on the team so that s/he can provide information about the new families as they commit to the team.

The Team’s First Task

Make sure that new families who will become a part of the school community next fall feel welcome and find a place to get involved as soon as they arrive.

- a. Recruit “First Friend” families - Recruit at least 5 families more than you think you will need to match so that you can match families based on kids ages and interests as much as possible.
 - i. Characteristics of First Friend families
 1. Friendly and positive
 2. Willing to “teach” their kids what it means to be a “first friend” to other kids
 3. Committed to making at least 4 phone calls to the family before Christmas
 4. Available to meet their new family at the “First Friend” event planned for the new families and the veteran families.
- b. Send a confirmation letter to all the “First Friend” families, include the following info:
 - i. Thanks for volunteering
 - ii. Alert them to the fact that some volunteers might not get matched (depending on how many new families and their interests)
 - iii. Explain the phone calls (Perhaps you can add list of Q and A they should make sure the New Family is aware of)

- iv. Reiterate the date for the First Friend Event and make sure they understand how important it is to attend. (If they are not able to attend or if their new family can't attend, encourage them to find an alternate time to meet together.
- c. Match new families with "First Friend" families as the "new families" commit to the school (Be sure to alert your school secretary of the program if s/he is not one of the Team members!)
 - i. The IDEAL match timeline: Recruit First Friend families BEFORE school ends for the summer to be able to match new families with First Friend families as new families are identified. (It is MUCH easier for kids and parents to BEGIN the first week of school if they already know and have met at least one person who will be at the school.)
 - ii. Optional match timeline: Recruit First Friend families immediately in the fall and match new families the first week of school.
- d. Plan the "First Friend Event" --perhaps a Welcome to our School ice cream social or burger fry for the new families and their "First Friends" --preferably before school starts in the fall.