

Customer Service Key to Creating Family-Friendly Schools

In today's competitive education environment, parents now have many choices available for their children. They've become school customers and are shopping for the school that best meets their specific needs. Parents' choices are often based as much on how they're welcomed by the school's environment and appearance as they are on test scores and curricula.

One bad experience can leave a parent with a negative impression of the school as a whole. A positive interaction, however, not only provides a good first impression, but can also lead to a good, long-term working relationship between the school and the home.

Schools can create family-friendly environments by addressing six basic needs of school customers:

- ❖ **Friendliness** – Customers need and appreciate polite and courteous treatment.
- ❖ **Understanding and empathy** – Customers need to believe that you will understand and appreciate their feelings.
- ❖ **Fairness** – Customers need to feel that they will be treated justly and impartially.
- ❖ **Control** – Customers need to feel they have an impact on the way things turn out.
- ❖ **Opinions and alternatives** – Customers need to feel that other avenues are available for them to get what they seek.
- ❖ **Information** – Customers need and want to be educated about your policies and procedures.

The South Carolina Department of Education has developed an initiative recognizing schools that are warm, inviting places where people are welcomed and made to feel part of the school family.

Some specific items used in the evaluation process that can serve as a good starting point for your school's customer service efforts include:

- ❖ Clearly marked visitor parking spaces near the front door
- ❖ Well-kept grounds that are free of debris and trash
- ❖ Plainly marked entrances, particularly the main entrance door
- ❖ Clean and appealing lobby/front entrance
- ❖ "Welcome to Our School" signs that clearly direct visitors to the main office
- ❖ Attractive, colorful displays of student achievement and school events
- ❖ Clean and tidy front office
- ❖ Reading material about the school available for visitors
- ❖ Welcoming and professionally dressed staff who greet visitors promptly and quickly ask to offer assistance
- ❖ Visitor badges available
- ❖ Telephones that are answered promptly (within three rings) and professionally
- ❖ The person answering the phone has basic, up-to-date information readily accessible, and
- ❖ Callers are promptly put through to the appropriate parties.