

Engaging Families in Student Learning

Center on Innovation & Improvement

The “curriculum of the home”—the bundle of attitudes, habits, knowledge, and skills that children acquire through their relationship with their family and that facilitates their school learning—is more predictive of academic learning than the family’s socioeconomic status (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Redding, 2000). In his meta-analysis, Jeynes (2002) found the nuances of parent-child communication regarding expectations to be a particularly powerful source of motivation for minority children and children living in poverty. These children especially benefit from visions of what is possible for them beyond the circumstances in which they find themselves at the time, and their parents contribute both to that vision and to the children’s confidence that they can reach out and attain it (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

Research shows that schools can improve their students’ learning by engaging parents in ways that directly relate to their children’s academic progress, maintaining a consistent message of what is expected of parents, and reaching parents directly, personally, and with a trusting approach (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Redding, 2000). These echo the conclusions of Swap (1993) that effective parent engagement must be comprehensive in nature, with the school consistently interfacing with parents at many points, in many venues, over the course of the schooling years. This is vital for all students at all grade levels, in all settings (urban to rural), and even more so for those with disabilities and English language learners. Epstein’s (1995) typology of family involvement in education has become the standard of the field and appears in various adaptations, including the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships from the national PTA (n.d.). A comprehensive family-school partnership (which Epstein defines as an ongoing relationship rather than a program or event) addresses all six types of family involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Action Principles

For States

1. Provide training opportunities for districts and schools on how to include parents in the improvement process and track evidence that strategies are being implemented.
2. Ensure that district and school improvement plans include specific plans for parent engagement and structured communication with parents and a way to evaluate the implementation of these planned strategies.
3. Provide sample documents and templates to assist schools in communicating with parents.

For Districts

1. Adopt formal district-level policies that address issues related to outreach to and engagement of families from diverse populations.
2. Assist schools in building capacity to engage all families in their children’s learning.

For Schools

1. Establish a site-based council (e.g., School Community Council) comprised of the principal, parent facilitator, social worker or counselor, and parents of current students (non-school employees) that meets regularly and includes family-school relationships as a major element of its work.
2. Expect and monitor sound homework practices and two-way communication with parents.
3. Give parents practical, jargon-free guidance on ways to maintain supportive verbal interaction with their children, establish a quiet place for study at home, encourage good reading and study habits, and model and support respectful and responsible behaviors.
4. Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate opportunities for parents to meet with one another to encourage the sharing of norms, standards, and parenting concerns and successes.

5. Provide teachers and staff with professional development and consistent policies to build their capacity to work with all families and to reinforce the school's clear expectations of parents. This includes promoting a strengths-based (rather than deficit-based) view of families.

References and Resources

- Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center. (2008). *Parent involvement: Keys to success* [podcasts and accompanying materials]. Retrieved from <http://www.arcc.edvantia.org/page/ParentInvolvementPodcasts/>
- Arias, M. B., & Morillo-Campbell, M. (2008, January). *Promoting ELL parental involvement: Challenges in contested times*. East Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice. Retrieved from http://www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Arias_ELL.pdf
- Center on Innovation & Improvement, www.families-schools.org
- Center on Innovation & Improvement. (n.d.). *Parent involvement analysis*. Lincoln, IL: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.adi.org/PIA/> [Web-based self assessment and planning tool for a school-based team with electronic reporting to the district and state].
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-712.
- Hanes, S., Kerins, T., Perlman, C., Redding, S., & Ross, S. (2009). *Evaluating the statewide system of support*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: SEDL.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2005). *The social context of parental involvement: A path to enhanced achievement*. Report to the Institute of Educational Sciences, U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/Peabody/family-school/Reports.html>
- Jeynes, W. H. (2002). A meta-analysis. The effects of parental involvement on minority children's academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(2), 202-219.
- Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- National High School Center. (2008). *Eight elements of high school improvement: A mapping framework*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://betterhighschools.org/pubs/documents/NHSCEightElements7-25-08.pdf>
- Parent Teacher Association. (n.d.). *National standards for family-school partnerships*. Retrieved from http://www.pta.org/national_standards.asp
- Patrikakou, E. N., Weissberg, R. P., Redding, S., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2005). *School-family partnerships for children's success*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Redding, S. (2006). *The mega system: Deciding. Learning. Connecting. A handbook for continuous improvement within a community of the school*. Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Redding, S. (2000). *Parents and learning*. Geneva, Switzerland: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/practices.htm>
- Swap, S. (1993). *Developing home-school partnerships: From concepts to practice*. New York, NY: Teachers' College Press.
- Walberg, H. J. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. Retrieved from <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Westmoreland, H., Lopez, M. E., & Rosenberg, H. (2009, November). *How to develop a logic model for districtwide family engagement strategies*. Cambridge: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/how-to-develop-a-logic-model-for-districtwide-family-engagement-strategies>