

THE POWER OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT: EVIDENCE, IDEAS, AND TOOLS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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Introduction

Parent involvement has been a much discussed concept by parents, teachers, and policy-makers alike. The question arises though: is parent involvement more than just a “feels good” idea? The present paper (a) discusses research evidence that indicates the major role parent involvement and school-family partnerships play in improving children’s learning and behavior, and (b) offers ideas and tools to put this important idea into practice in order to help all children succeed.

Key Principles

Parent involvement: What is it?

Parent involvement is a crucial force in children’s development, learning, and success at school and in life. Decades of research in the area of family involvement have time and again supported the simple fact that children of involved parents have a much greater chance to develop into healthy, knowledgeable, responsible, and caring adults.

Parent involvement in education has many faces and assumes varying degrees (Vaden-Kierman & McManus, 2005) from the simple question asked at the dinner table: “How was school today?” to the daily checking and signing off on homework completion, to regular visits to the library, museums, cultural and art events, to participating in program evaluation and other decision making activities. Given this wide variety of parent involvement “definitions,” it is often challenging to compare information across studies, fields, and programs. One of the reasons a widely accepted definition is lacking is that family involvement is a complicated concept. Some factors that must be taken into consideration are child characteristics and development, beliefs and expectations of the family and school, the different roles parents, students, and teachers play, cultural perspectives and life demands, and policies that outline or mandate schools to forge relationships with families. All these contribute to what is known as school-family partnerships.

The need for a definition with a broad use has increased in recent years because of the emphasis current major educational policies and legislations have placed on parent involvement. For example, in *No Child Left Behind*, the centerpiece of current educational strategy, the term “parent involvement” appears more than 900 times! For the first time in major legislation, a parent involvement definition appears:

“parent involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring that (a) parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (b) parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; and (c)

parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child” [title IX section 9101(32)].

In order to create a comprehensive picture of some of the different aspects of parent involvement, this article will (a) review research evidence that indicates the positive impact parent involvement has on the academic, social, and emotional learning of children, (b) discuss the general factors affecting parent involvement as well as specific factors reported by parents and teachers, (c) present ideas and checklists schools and parents can use to build successful school-family partnerships, and (d) list resources with additional information on the theory and practice of school-family partnerships.

Parent involvement: Does it really work?

Parents, teachers, and policy makers agree that parent involvement is an essential ingredient to children’s learning. But what does research say about parent participation in a child’s learning and achievement? Does parent involvement increase children’s performance and behavior, or it is just one of the things that just sounds right?

Parent involvement and academic achievement

Research has indicated that there are positive academic outcomes stemming from parent involvement ranging from benefits in early childhood to adolescence and beyond (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). Researchers have used a variety of ways to measure academic achievement such as report card grades, grade point averages, standardized test scores, teacher ratings, other cognitive test scores, grade retention, and drop out rates. It has been shown that children whose parents are involved in early childhood or participate with their children in early childhood programs, such as Head Start, have higher cognitive and language skills than do children whose families are not involved or part of such programs. Also, children who participate in early childhood programs that had strong family collaboration are more likely to be better prepared for school. Most importantly, benefits continue to be evident even later, as these children have fewer grade retentions and are more likely to graduate from high school.

Parent involvement remains a strong predictor of academic achievement even for high school students. It is important to debunk the popular myth that parents’ influence over their children withers as they enter adolescence. Often, both parents and school personnel misinterpret the adolescents’ desire for autonomy as a developmental barrier to family involvement. However, studies have indicated that high school students believe they can do better at school if they know that their families are interested in their schoolwork and expect them to succeed, thus challenging the prevalent view that adolescents do not want their parents involved at all. Research has also shown that

there are long-lasting effects of parent involvement on the academic achievement of adolescents and young adults. Specifically, parents who hold high expectations for their teens, communicate their expectations clearly, and encourage their adolescents to work hard in order to attain them can make a difference in students' success. Students whose parents stayed well informed and held high expectations for them had higher grades, completed more academic credits, and were more likely to plan for college.

Parent involvement, social and emotional learning and the prevention of high-risk behaviors

In several studies researchers have acknowledged the value that social and emotional factors have on learning and academic achievement. More recently, these factors have been recognized for their own merits and for the important role they play in academic success (Zins et al., 2004). For example, children who participated in early childhood programs whose families were actively involved displayed much less delinquent behavior later in life than those who did not. Also, adolescents who are supported at home and at school display more positive attitudes about school, better attendance and behavior, and increased class preparation.

Also, social and emotional learning is shown to be fundamental to children's academic learning, social and emotional development, health, mental well-being, motivation to achieve, and citizenship. Social and emotional learning is the process of understanding how to recognize and manage your emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships with adults and peers, and handle challenging situations effectively (CASEL, 2003). Social and emotional types of learning have been shown to improve understanding of academic subject matter, increase motivation to learn and commitment to school, reduce anxiety, enhance attention, and improve study skills and time devoted to school work, as well as improve attendance and graduation rates.

These findings on social and emotional learning become even more important considering all the risks, including drug use and violence, facing schools, families, and students today. Preventing such risky behaviors involves many factors; one of them is the involvement of parents. It is imperative that, through their relationship with schools, parents become aware of their great positive influence and preventive power. Major prevention efforts such as the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, an historic initiative to educate and empower all youth to reject illegal drugs launched in 1998, underlines the important role parents play in prevention that works. The campaign's motto, Parents: The Anti-Drug, reflects the critical importance of parent involvement in children's and youths' healthy development (<http://theantidrug.com>).

The bottom line: Research evidence supports the view that parent involvement plays a major role in improving

children's learning and behavior. Children whose parents are involved in their learning do better at school, both academically and behaviorally.

Factors That Affect Parent Involvement

There are three broad types of parent involvement: involvement at home, involvement at school, and home-school communication. Communication is the key element that shapes parent involvement activities at home and at school and enhances school-family collaboration. Two-way communication between home and school helps build an on-going, productive, and trusting relationship between parents and educators, which increases parent participation in learning activities both at home and at school.

There are several factors that affect the frequency and way in which parents become involved in their child's education at home and at school and collaborate with schools. This section will first provide an overview of such factors, and give parent and teacher perspectives.

An Overview of Factors Influencing Parent Involvement

Child characteristics and development

Child characteristics can influence the magnitude and nature of parent involvement. Young children whose parents actively participated in early childhood programs not only display a head start in academic, social, and emotional learning, but also engage in less risky and delinquent behaviors later in life. As students enter adolescence, often both parents and school personnel misinterpret the adolescents' desire for autonomy as a developmental barrier to family involvement. High school students still want their families involved and believe that they can do better at school when they know that their families are interested in their schoolwork and expect them to succeed, thus challenging the prevalent view that adolescents do not want their parents involved at all.

Beliefs and expectations

Parent and teacher beliefs and expectations are crucial to shaping home-school relations. Beliefs about individuals and group characteristics drive our choices and behaviors, and are crucial in shaping relationships and partnerships. A positive, welcoming school climate, and consistent invitations to parents with ways to become involved in their children's education at home and school, positively predisposes parents about the school's efforts. Parents' positive perception highly influences their children's perception of school, which, in turn, positively contributes to students' academic, social, and emotional learning. Parent and teacher expectations regarding the academic, social, and emotional development of children have been shown to be among the best predictors of school success.

Parent, teacher, and student roles

Parents, teachers, and students play a critical role in establishing and maintaining school-family partnerships.

Roles are affected by, and also affect, beliefs and expectations about what the desirable outcomes from a home-school collaboration are, who is responsible for these outcomes, how important each member's contribution is, and in what ways each member can contribute. If parent roles are limited to chaperoning field trips and organizing bake sales, home-school relations remain on the surface level with no true partnership occurring. Parent roles must expand in other areas such as (a) decision making at school or the district; (b) collaborating with the community to offer additional resources and support to families and students; and (c) establishing new learning opportunities, such as interactive homework assignments and classroom presentations, to enhance involvement in both school and at home.

Older students can also play an important role in school-family partnerships. For example, involving older students in parent-teacher conferences and intervention planning creates continuity between home and school, and students get the strong and very important message of valuing education. Receiving a unified message and clear expectations from both parents and teachers is a strong motivation for students to succeed.

Cultural perspectives

In recent years with the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of families, the home and school environments may hold different and sometimes diverging beliefs about the appropriate degree and nature of parent involvement (Gaitan, 2004). Being aware of such factors and addressing them in appropriate ways makes home-school interactions more positive and productive for the benefit of all students in a multicultural society. By creating culturally aware school-family partnerships, school systems can reduce cultural discontinuities, create diverse learning opportunities, improve ethnic and racial perceptions and attitudes, and foster interethnic friendships. For example, providing parents with materials and activities that are adapted to accommodate the needs of families from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds will enhance parent involvement and contribute to the creation of a positive home-school climate. In this way, more learning opportunities will be created and students will be better prepared to acquire not only knowledge, but also attitudes and skills necessary to interact positively and productively with people in a pluralistic society.

Policies

For decades, federal, state, and local policies have impacted families and the roles they should play in public education. As discussed in previous sections, research evidence has affected major legislation which in turn has acknowledged the importance of school-family partnerships by mandating parent participation on various levels of policy design and implementation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the most important example of this effort. NCLB requires schools to develop specific ways to get parents involved not only in their child's education, but also in ways to improve the school (for details see

www.ed.gov). Still, current policies do not provide the specificity that practitioners need in order to better define and integrate school-family partnerships in their daily routines. As an important first step, organizations such as the Academic Development Institute have developed guides to help parents understand the different aspects of the law, as well as how they can help their child succeed (<http://www.adi.org/parentguide.html>).

Although policies mandate parent participation and the striking majority of parents and teachers agree that parent involvement is an important element in education, actual parent involvement is still low. Parents and teachers report different views on what is needed and may seek different things from a partnership between them (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). What contributes to this discrepancy between parent and teacher beliefs, and between beliefs and practice? The following sections discuss both the parent's perspective and the teacher's perspective on the issues.

The Parent Perspective

Parents identify three major barriers that prevent them from becoming involved: (a) time and life demands, (b) lack of knowledge of what is expected of them and in what specific ways they can help their children at home, and (c) various factors in the school environment.

Time and life demands. Time seems to be a major barrier impeding parents from participating in school activities or assisting their children with schoolwork at home. Parents often report lack of time or schedule conflicts as the two most important barriers of parent involvement and feel that, frequently, parent activities at school are at inconvenient times.

With the increase in single-parent households and the dramatic change in the work force, with mothers of school-aged children entering it in great numbers, time has become a valuable commodity for parents who struggle to make ends meet. It is important that schools recognize and adapt to this need by surveying parents about convenient times for activities, offering alternative means of communication, and most of all, understanding that it is not the parent's fault if he or she cannot participate due to employment, family responsibilities, or other time restrictions. For example, parents often report having difficulty attending parent-teacher conferences during the day due to inflexible work schedules. Whenever schools made adjustments to accommodate parents' time restrictions, parents were very responsive, offering greater cooperation and support for teachers and the school. In general, parents are appreciative of any parent involvement and outreach efforts schools make and give high marks to teachers who incorporate parent involvement in their regular educational activities.

Child care responsibilities also influence the parents' capacity to participate in their child's education. If it is hard for parents to attend the parent-teacher conference for one of their children, it is self-evident that the degree of difficulty increases tremendously for two or more. Many

families do not have child care resources or a live-in caregiver. This imposes a big obstacle for their participation in school activities. Alternative child care and after-school programs offered by community organizations can offer parents a helping hand so they can attend school events. Several schools provide some form of child care on days that parent participation is essential such as for parent-teacher conferences. In that way parents can have the opportunity to participate and actively contribute in their child's education.

Lack of Knowledge. An important ingredient to parent involvement is communication between parents and teachers. Most parents report that they would like to know what their children are learning at school and how they can be involved in their education. Parents feel that schools must inform them about their curricula as well as about ways to assist their children at home. Many parents believe that parent involvement in their children's school would increase if they had more information and understood better what their children were learning. Parents look to the school to suggest specific ways they can become involved and help their children learn. Even providing parents with general information can be sufficient to trigger noticeable change. For example, informing parents through a newsletter about parent participation, how powerful it is for their children's academic achievement, and how parents can be involved in their children's education can yield higher parent involvement rates.

The school environment. Based on recent census data, ethnic and cultural diversity is increasing in the United States, and the need for schools to prepare minority students for full participation in the American life and society has become even more pronounced. Children may experience adverse conditions in a variety of settings such as poverty and lack of resources in the family, school, or the community. In addition, parents of such children often have limited education themselves, and negative personal experiences with the educational system lead them to mistrust and often fear the school environment. Such perceptions pose a serious obstacle in parent involvement and may influence the children's attitudes and their school performance adversely. Another factor that complicates things even further is the fact that schools tend to communicate with parents primarily when there is a problem at school. This association between school and bad news only reinforces the parents' reluctance to get involved and fuels their defensiveness when dealing with the school system.

The development of positive, trusting attitudes toward the school is a slow process that requires constant attention, systematic and methodical structuring, frequent evaluation, and most importantly the school's and the parents' commitment to establish and maintain a constructive and trusting partnership.

The Teacher Perspective

Because teachers are the connecting link between families and the educational process, successful implementation of

parent involvement in schools depends to a great extent on teacher perceptions and practices on the issue of parent participation.

Teacher perceptions of parent involvement not only affect the teachers' participation in such programs, but can also play an instrumental role in influencing the teacher's relationship with the student. An overwhelming majority of teachers agree that parent involvement contributes to more successful students and a more positive school climate. However, only a third of teachers feel that it is their responsibility to involve families, and only half believe that they can change parent behaviors. This indicates that teachers often may not perceive themselves as effective agents of change and therefore, may not be actively involved in parent involvement efforts. Since they don't believe they can improve parent participation, teachers may not contribute broadly to this cause.

Training. The reluctance on the part of the teachers to actively involve parents may be partially due to insufficient training in developing the necessary skills. Robust teacher preparation for the schools of the 21st century should reflect the multitude of research findings pointing to the importance that parent involvement has in all stages of the educational process (Epstein, 2001; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). However, only a few teacher preparation colleges and universities have reported offering a course on family involvement or collaboration, and even then it may be offered as an elective. Several institutions report having some topic—usually parent-teacher conferences—relevant to parent involvement integrated into another course. Infused in some other course, or taught separately, pre-service teachers should have a comprehensive picture of the many benefits of broadly defined parent involvement, as well as be aware of key areas that can make them more effective when working with students and their families. Empowered teachers will empower parents to be involved and expect more from their children. Empowered parents can inspire their children to do better at school and in life. By preparing teachers and administrators to build collaborative partnerships, we have the potential to improve the learning opportunities for all students, so no one is left behind.

Parent demographics. As discussed earlier, there has been a rapid change in societal demographics in recent years. Teacher perceptions of parents and families seem to be partially influenced by demographic factors, such as the parents' education, SES, or marital status. For example, better educated parents receive higher teacher ratings on parental involvement. Also, teachers report that single parents may not be sufficiently involved in their child's education at home, despite indications that single parents were spending more time than married parents helping their children with homework. Another factor affecting teacher perceptions is grade level as teachers of younger children tend to give parents higher ratings, viewing them as more helpful than did teachers of older students.

Too much to do, so little time. Although increased parent involvement has major and obvious advantages, from the teachers' perspective, more contact with parents increases teachers' and other school personnel's responsibilities and raises various concerns about time availability and heavy work load. Teachers feel overburdened, with limited resources available to them, and view parent involvement efforts as being outside their expertise. Often, teachers do not know how to involve parents effectively or how to use them as a resource. By better preparing educators on ways through which (a) they can meaningfully collaborate with families, and (b) set goals and use time-efficient strategies to reach out to parents, we will tap into the underutilized force of parent involvement.

The bottom line: Parents and teachers have multiple responsibilities and pressing time demands. The pace of modern life is swift. But both must recognize that parent involvement and building school-family partnerships are integral to the process of learning and the success of schooling. Teachers are the glue that holds the school-family partnership together. With the appropriate support and time-cutting tools, teachers can put this great idea into practice. And by doing so, they will maximize school's benefits for all the children — and their families.

How to build a successful school-family partnership: Ideas and tools

Sometimes we take things for granted or we consider them self-evident when we should not. Many parents might be surprised to learn that research shows that they have such a strong influence on their children's and teenagers' education. Simply letting them know is an important first step. Given the realities discussed in the previous section, priority must be given to assisting teachers and parents in overcoming these barriers to establish effective partnerships. There are steps that schools can take to establish and maintain their relationship with parents, and there are things that parents can do to enhance this relationship. The following sections discuss what schools and families can do to build a productive partnership and further assist children to succeed in school and later in life.

What schools can do

It will help schools to use a comprehensive base when they develop their strategic planning for school-family partnerships. Fragmented or isolated efforts are not going to yield sustainable results, nor will they contribute to a system change. One framework schools can apply is the "seven-P's philosophy" of parent involvement when they develop their strategic planning on school-family relations:

Partnership as a priority: Schools with mission statements that highlight the importance of home-school relationships clearly communicate their commitment to including parents as collaborators in the education of children. But effective implementation of the mission statement requires the necessary resources, as well as

training to support the school personnel who put parent involvement into practice. Schools also should find ways to systematically recognize and reward positive school-family partnership efforts by both school personnel and parents.

Planned effort: Effective school-family partnerships are carefully planned and implemented. At the beginning of the school year, parents' needs, views, and patterns of school involvement must be assessed. Such an assessment accomplishes two goals: (a) it helps school personnel plan parent-outreach efforts more effectively, while at the same time (b) it conveys to parents the important message that their perspective is valued and will be used by the school. Planning is as essential for the success of teacher outreach to parents as it is for the implementation of the curriculum. And the same road-map principle applies to both: If you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you've arrived.

Proactive and persistent communication: Regular, continuous communication with parents throughout the school year about class rules, expectations, and goals involves them in the educational process in meaningful ways. Informing families about classroom routines (such as weekly quizzes) and providing them with specific ways they can help at home provides parents with structured opportunities to participate in their child's education. Home-school communications become even more effective if parents and teachers identify the best ways (e.g., phone calls, notes, or a home-school journal) and times they can be reached. This minimizes the frustration both parents and teachers have when they are not able to make contact with each other and, more importantly, makes sure that the message gets through. Using a variety of approaches and follow-up communications can increase the number of parents educators reach. And it maintains the flow of information that can lead to a child's improved academic and social performance.

Proactive and persistent communication becomes even more crucial when students are in adolescence, when school outreach to parents declines dramatically. Schools should continue to encourage parents to (a) keep open lines of communication with their teens by maintaining family time to discuss things and share common activities; (b) enforce consistent rules that help adolescents learn the relationship of independence and responsibility; and (c) show that education is important by encouraging homework and reading, knowing the student's teachers, and supporting post-secondary education planning. In addition to these general recommendations, it is important for schools to provide specific information and suggestions that are aligned with the broader curriculum framework and expand learning from the classroom to home and beyond. Since parent involvement continues to be such a positive and powerful source of influence for the achievement of adolescents and young adults, communicating to families ways which they can continue to be involved during the middle and high school years can maximize benefits for all students.

Positive: Research shows that teachers are more likely to communicate with parents when their children misbehave or face significant academic problems. However, it is extremely important to let families know when their child is performing successfully. In this way, communication from school is not automatically labeled as “bad news.” And the positive input can be an indication to parents that the teacher sees the whole child, not just his or her areas of weakness. This in turn provides a broader context to parents, who will then be in a better position to receive news of any concerns school personnel may need to share with them. Teachers who reach out to parents in a positive way early in the school year note that parents are thrilled to receive good news about their children, and that the good feeling built up through such positive reporting made them more responsive and willing to listen to teacher concerns and suggestions.

This positive style of communication establishes a constructive tone in home-school relationships and makes it easier for parents and teachers to work together for the child’s benefit. The dissemination of positive news fosters congenial interactions, not only between parents and teachers, but also between parents and children. Parents who receive good news from school have more opportunities to discuss the successful experiences with their children and be actively involved with them in positive ways. And positive communication is often a two-way street: Parents, by offering positive feedback to teachers, recognize and reinforce the teachers’ efforts.

Personalized: Providing school-wide newsletters and general classroom notes serves the important function of keeping parents in touch with school activities and events. But these general types of communication, though a necessary component, do not constitute a sufficient school-home communications program. What draws parents’ attention is specific information about their own child. Teachers who provide parents with specific, concrete examples of their child’s strengths and weaknesses achieve higher levels of collaboration, maximizing the benefits for the child.

Personalized communication can involve a variety of techniques, such as keeping a home-school journal in which parents and teachers inform each other about the child’s achievements and their concerns, jotting quick personalized notes, and having students decorate the notes to draw parents’ attention. Ready-to-use materials can cut down on preparation time and help the teacher personalize communications in an efficient way. Systematically planning for parent-teacher conferences or “report-card pickup” days also enhances opportunities for parents and teachers to share specific information about the child.

Practical suggestions: Effective school-family-partnerships extend the learning environment from the classroom to the home and beyond. Teachers can ease this process by offering parents practical and specific suggestions on how they can further assist with their child’s education. This will show the parents, who have a desire to help their children, varied and structured strategies.

Simple suggestions, such as counting the plates and forks while setting the dinner table or the steps going up the stairs, can help parents reinforce what their child has learned at school. In this way, knowledge is generalized to various environments, and, through its multiple use, the child can be more confident about his or her schoolwork.

Program monitoring: School-family-partnership activities can be improved when they are systematically evaluated. Throughout the school year, as part of their planning, teachers need to examine the effectiveness of the strategies and materials they use, ask for parent feedback, and calibrate their practices accordingly. In this way, activities can be fine-tuned continuously and will have greater potential for yielding positive results. An end-of-the-year evaluation also will provide closure for the year’s efforts—and valuable insights for next year’s planning.

School/Teacher Checklist on Communication

The following checklist can help schools and teachers initiate constructive and consistent communication with families and enhance student performance.

- ✓ Send home words of praise and encouragement. Remember, parents need a pat on the back too!
- ✓ Jot a quick note on letters home, or have students decorate them to draw parent attention.
- ✓ Keep parents informed of school and class rules, expectations, and activities.
 - Send home a welcome letter to parents before the beginning of the school year to help get their children ready for the new year (e.g., list major goals for the year, materials needed for class, contact information).
 - Remind parents to read the school handbook and ask questions if they need further information or assistance.
 - Start a weekly or biweekly class newsletter.
- ✓ Encourage parents to respond to your notes by leaving space for comments or by including quick questions as a guide.
- ✓ Give parents a chance to express their goals for their child’s education.
- ✓ Use simple, familiar language, and include “attention grabbers” (e.g., upbeat graphics, bold headings, boxes around special items, etc).
- ✓ Keep parents regularly informed about their child’s progress.
 - Try to contact parent(s) at least once each quarter—sharing positive news with them will enhance their involvement.
 - Send home a weekly work folder containing completed homework assignments, in-class work, and any tests or quizzes.
 - Recognize academic and behavioral achievement by sending achievement certificates home and encouraging parents to display them.
- ✓ Always communicate respect for and appreciation of parents and families.

- Try to greet parents as they drop off or pick up their child at school.
- ✓ Be sensitive to cultural differences.
 - Encourage parents to attend special events such as school open house days, back to school events, or class orientation nights.

School/Teacher Checklist on Homework

In order for students to succeed in the classroom, they must develop a structure that supports homework completion. Parents and teachers can collaborate in this process by enforcing good homework habits at home and at school. When parents and teachers work together, children can develop healthy homework habits that last a life time!

- ✓ Establish a homework routine, and communicate it clearly to students and parents.
- ✓ Inform parents about your expectations for homework and how homework will be scored and contribute to student grades.
- ✓ Let parents know when and how to contact you if there are questions or concerns about homework.
- ✓ Provide parents with information about available homework resources (e.g., homework hotlines).
- ✓ Ask parents for their feedback on homework assignments. You can use questions or check list points such as:
 - How long did it take your child to complete this assignment?
 - My child completed this assignment on his/her own.
 - My child completed this assignment with some help.
 - My child needs more work on this skill/topic.
 - I need more information to help my child with this type of assignment.
- ✓ Always provide prompt, specific feedback by returning graded homework papers as quickly as possible, offering practical suggestions for improvement, and praising students for effort and achievements.

What families can do

There are several things families can do to increase their involvement at home and school. Communication and homework are two major ingredients to student success and connecting links between schools and families. The following checklists offer suggestions to parents to become better informed and more involved in their children's learning and education.

Communication. Good communication between home and school is important to keep parents in touch with the child's educational needs and success. The following checklist can help parents improve their communication with the school and better assist their children with homework:

Parent Checklist on Communication

Get basic information you need at the beginning of the school year.

- ✓ Go to the school/classroom open house or orientation night.
- ✓ Have the teacher's contact information (e.g., phone number or e-mail), and know the convenient times to get in touch with him/her.
- ✓ Read the school handbook so that you are aware of the school/classroom rules.

Let the teacher know that you want to be informed regularly about your child's schoolwork and behavior.

- ✓ Give the teacher your contact information and convenient times to get in touch with you.
- ✓ Tell the teacher that you would like to hear about both your child's strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Read and respond, if needed, to all notices, newsletters, etc.
- ✓ Ask about class rules, routines, and what students will be learning.
- ✓ Talk to the teacher as soon as you have a question or concern about your child.

Let the teacher know that you would like to be actively involved in your child's education.

- ✓ Go to parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings. If you can't make it, work with the teacher to make alternative plans.
- ✓ Ask the teacher about specific ways in which you can be involved in schoolwork at home.
- ✓ Ask the teacher when you can visit the classroom.
- ✓ Volunteer to help the teacher in the class or with special events.
- ✓ Mark your calendar with special school activities and events so that your child is prepared for both of you to attend together.
- ✓ Work with the teacher to clarify your child's academic and behavioral goals for the year.
- ✓ Share information of major life changes that are taking place at home (e.g., death in the family, birth of a sibling, divorce, etc.) and may affect your child's academics or behavior.
- ✓ Share information about your child's accomplishments at home or in extracurricular activities.
- ✓ Act like a partner with the teacher for your child's education and learning.
- ✓ Tell the teacher that you would like to work together to solve problems.
- ✓ Let your child know that you support the teacher's classroom rules and work goals.
- ✓ Contact the teacher to let him/her know about things at school that your child likes.
- ✓ Communicate with the teacher when you have questions, concerns, or suggestions to improve your child's learning.

- ✓ Ask for suggestions about activities you can do with your child to build on what he/she is learning at school.
- ✓ Show respect for the teacher and the school.
- ✓ Thank the teacher for his/her efforts—remember, teachers need a pat on the back too!

More tips to enhance parent-teacher communication include:

- ✓ Write a note on your child’s homework and let the teacher know if the work was easy or difficult for your child.
- ✓ Make an appointment so that you have time to talk with the teacher instead of showing up without prior arrangements at a time when the teacher may have other responsibilities to fulfill.
- ✓ Talk about your concerns in a positive, problem-solving way—avoid blaming or criticizing the teacher especially in front of your child.
- ✓ Let your child know about the discussions you have had with his/her teacher. Children should see that open communication between home and school is a good sign of teamwork.
- ✓ Show the teacher your appreciation, especially when he/she does something special for your child.

Homework. Homework is another area of the educational process where parents can play an instrumental role. See Table 1 for a “getting started” guide that can help parents start building healthy homework habits.

Parent Guide Building Healthy Homework Habits	
Getting Started Checklist:	
	Use an assignment notebook.
	Set daily time for homework.
	Have your child sit at a clean, well-lit table.
	Have the necessary supplies in place.
	Quiet! No television.
	Check that homework is complete.
	Put assignments in bookbag.
	PRAISE child for his/her effort.
	Talk with teacher as needed.

Table 1: Getting started on building healthy homework habits

Also...

- ✓ Let your child know that homework is important.
- ✓ Agree with your child upon a set workspace and time for homework.
- ✓ Ask to see homework, and talk to your child about what he/she learned each day.
- ✓ Check to make sure your child has finished all assignments.
- ✓ Know what to do or whom to contact if your child does not understand an assignment .

- ✓ Be careful of the line between helping your child and doing the work for your child.
- ✓ Talk to the teacher about a problem your child is experiencing with homework.
- ✓ Praise your child for good effort.

In addition, you can...

- ✓ Ask the teacher how much time your child should be studying each night.
- ✓ Have your child write down assignments in a special “assignment notebook.”
- ✓ Read to or with your child every day.
- ✓ Set a good example by doing your “homework” (e.g., paying bills, making a grocery list, reading, etc.) at the same time your child does homework.

Conclusion

School-family partnerships take time and effort to establish and maintained. There are concrete steps that schools can take in order to reach out to parents in a positive and ongoing way. But that is not enough. Since school-family partnerships are a two-way street, parents must build on the school’s efforts, or initiate their own, and collaborate with teachers in a productive way for the success of all children.

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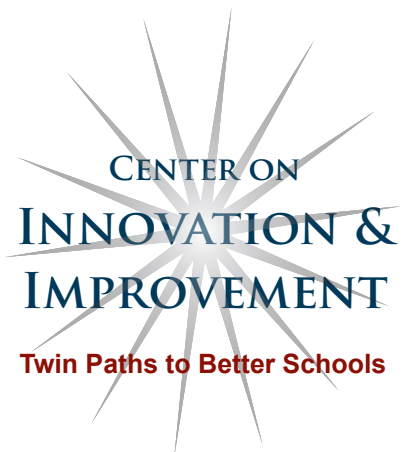
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Resources

Internet Resources

- Academic Development Institute
<http://www.adi.org>
- Edutopia
<http://www.edutopia.org/php/keyword.php?id=225>
- Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html>
- National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
<http://www.ncpie.org/Resources/>
- National Education Association
<http://www.nea.org/parents/index.html>
- National Network of Partnership Schools
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/>
- National Parent Teacher Association
<http://www.pta.org/>
- North Central Educational Regional Laboratory
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/paocont.htm>
- North West Regional Educational Laboratory
<http://www.nwrel.org/comm/topics/parent.html>
- U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml>



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