



Product Research & Documentation

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

Principal Success Series

–and–

Parent and Family Engagement

Teacher Success Series

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Research has indicated that successful parent engagement not only improves student behavior and attendance, but also positively affects student achievement. Parent engagement is essential to the success of children in school. When parents form school partnerships and become actively engaged in the education of their children, the results favorably impact success in the classroom. Findings have indicated that the more the relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement. Thus, the Principal Success Series book *Parent, Family, and Community Engagement* and the Teacher Success Series book *Parent and Family Engagement* recognize that a strong connection between home and school can make a difference in how and if children succeed in school and in the classroom.

Both books equip school leaders and teachers with articles and tips on timely topics that will not only improve parent and school partnerships, but aid in the performance of students. When schools cultivate partnerships and engage families in their children's education, author Constantino (2008) stated, student achievement can increase. In addition, Constantino noted that schools must continuously nurture relationships with parents by providing them with the knowledge of how to help their children succeed in school. Constant attention in strengthening relationships lays the foundation for high-quality engagement.

Research has shown time after time that children's attitudes toward school, their achievement, attendance, motivation, self-concept, and behaviors are directly influenced by the attitudes of their parents towards learning and school. For at-risk students, the involvement of parent and family in learning has been identified as the

single most important determinant of success. When reviewing studies of school effectiveness, parental involvement practices represent a crucial factor that differentiates effective schools from less effective schools. Parent and family engagement initiatives appear to be strong indicators for student success in school. Parents can be involved in numerous ways, from volunteer activities to parent advisory councils, from attendance at conferences to discussions of student progress, and from attending training to learning how to better support learning at home.

Being accessible to parents is key to communicating to parents that the school has an open-door policy and values two-way communication. Parents can have a positive impact on the learning of students, and they are valuable resources when their input is sought and utilized. Actively involving schools, families, and community members in identifying issues, assessing the needs of the community, and developing solutions lead to more effective schools that can better meet the needs and expectations of the community.

The involvement of parents and families as members of a larger community can help to strengthen schools. Schools are important to communities, and the families within a community are important to the schools. This importance factor tells principals that they must continue their efforts to actively invite and engage parents, families, and community members in the education system. On the other hand, a teacher's ability to build positive relationships with parents also affects the success of students. Parent and teacher relationships should be built upon mutual respect, effective two-way communication, and an understanding of what is best for the child. Research has shown that when parents receive frequent and positive support from teachers, they are more involved in their children's education. To-

gether, principals, teachers, and parents should strive to create the best possible schools for our children. When parents are positively involved, students achieve higher grades and test scores, exhibit good attendance habits, complete homework assignments, and demonstrate positive behaviors and attitudes.

By using these books as resources to intentionally promote consistent, high-quality parent, family, and community engagement, teachers and administrators will see many benefits.

School leaders will:

- foster a school culture that embraces parent and family engagement.
- establish better parent programs and activities, increase classroom support, and improve interest and morale.
- earn respect from the parents and the community at large.
- improve the relationships and communication between and among parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.
- learn to appreciate and value diversity in cultures.
- become more respectful of parents' abilities and their time.
- increase respect for the school and for education.
- improve support for the school from the parents and community.

Teachers will:

- plan activities that engage parents and families in school.
- strengthen parent/family/school relationships.
- utilize tips for establishing positive connections with parents and families.

- engage parents in two-way communication.
- assist parents in developing strong parenting skills.
- guide parents in helping their children who need social- emotional, behavioral, or academic support.
- share ways for parents to support their children's learning at home.
- implement strategies that align with the district's and school's parent engagement policies.

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement was created to support administrators as they cultivate a school environment that continuously supports and impacts student achievement. The overall intent of this book is to enhance the leadership of administrators as they effectively plan and implement parent engagement activities, programs, and policies with sustained benefits for parents, children, educators, the school, and the community. *Parent and Family Engagement* was created to provide support to teachers as they cultivate positive relationships with parents by offering tips, strategies, and ideas for parent and family engagement.

Key research findings have supported the engagement of parents in schools, and thus established a rationale for developing both resources, one for school leaders and another for teachers. The following research represents a growing body of evidence that should help educators understand why engaging parents and families should be an essential goal each year.

Finding 1: A school committed to establishing trust is a school that initiates and implements programs, policies, and procedures that convey a strong intention of meeting the diverse needs of students and their families.



Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

- Trust-building opportunities take time, but must be a priority for the school to strengthen relationships and engage parents.
- Families must know that principals, teachers, and other staff make decisions based on the best interests of their children.
- The efforts made by school staff toward speaking in the language spoken by families is greatly appreciated (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001).

Finding 2: Parent involvement can make a difference in a child's education.

- The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) report *The New Wave of Evidence* noted that one common factor exists when determining which types of parent involvement are most effective. The finding showed that, no matter the program or the intervention, if the home support is connected to student learning, then there is a connection to higher student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- From a 2003 analysis of 25 public opinion surveys by Public Agenda, two-thirds of the teacher respondents expressed that students would perform better in school if their parents were more involved in the education of their children; 72% of parents surveyed believed that children of uninvolved parents sometimes “fall through the cracks” in schools (Johnson & Duffett, 2003, p. 25).
- Schools should invest in parent involvement. The role of the family is essential to academic success. Students can be affected more strongly when parents

are involved along with the school. If the school is involved but there is no parent involvement, the impact on achievement is not as strong. Schools must inform their parents of the potential of their influence. It is essential that schools invest in parent involvement (NCSU, 2012).

Finding 3: When parents support children at home, student achievement is positively impacted.

- Based on a review of parent involvement research, findings revealed that parent-child reading activities produce a significant improvement in children's language and reading skills from preschool through high school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).
- Another study showed a positive effect on student achievement when parents work with students on homework (Van Voorhis, 2003).

Finding 4: Parent training opportunities can positively impact the skills of Latino parents in the home and the success of their children in school.

- After participating in education training programs, parents reported favorable changes in their personal parenting styles and in their engagement with the school and their children (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).
- High-quality training that is successful in increasing parent knowledge and practices (e.g., academic standards, home-learning activities) is reported to be a strong predictor of success for Latino children. As a result, parents believed they could make a difference (Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2004).

- Perhaps parent education programs for students from all cultural backgrounds should be considered to enhance student achievement.

Finding 5: The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) addressed parent engagement.

- As reported by the National Association for Community and School Engagement (NACSE, 2015), the federal law ESSA has specified provisions regarding parents and schools. ESSA required all Title schools to build and strengthen parent and family engagement.
- Title I schools are required to give assistance to help parents understand the education system and how to help children achieve mastery of state standards; produce and supply materials and training to parents in order to support their children's learning; offer training to teachers, other staff, and school leaders in how to effectively engage parents in school; collaborate with other federal and state programs to help students achieve success; communicate with parents by providing materials that are easily understood and written or spoken in the language of the parents; and accommodate reasonable requests of parents.

Finding 6: The quality of the teacher and parent relationship appears to impact student performance.

- The interaction between teachers and parents can have a positive effect on the way in which students perform.
- It is important for teachers to focus on their roles in engaging parents. The role should be one that considers how to establish and maintain high-quality teacher and parent interaction (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

Finding 7: Two-way communication is crucial in developing effective partnerships with parents. Effective parent-teacher communication can lead to increased parent involvement.

- When parents participate in the learning their children are experiencing, the children are more likely to be successful in school. This is dependent on home-to-school and school-to-home communication.
- Teachers that engage in conversations *with* parents rather than only communicating information *to* parents send an important message. Utilizing parent input and participating in two-way communication demonstrate that teachers value parents and can develop, improve, and maintain ongoing, working relationships.
- Educators must see parent involvement as more than sending information home and counting the numbers attending school activities.
- Other points gleaned from this reading indicated that parents are not only interested in what is occurring in school, but that they also want to know how to support the learning at school and in the home.
- Children appear to be influenced by significant others in their lives. Observations of parents and teachers communicating and working together indicate favorable results on student achievement (Gelfer, 1991).

Finding 8: Developing school, family, and community partnerships can lead to improved school programs and school climate.

- Better school opportunities exist for students when shared partnerships are formed. Working partnerships among parents, families, teachers, students, and others in the community result in improved



school programs and learning environment. This shared connection leads students to succeed in school and later in life (Epstein, 1995).

- Community-based organizations have important roles in assisting schools as they seek to engage parents (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

Joyce Epstein (1995), Director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University, is a long-time advocate of parent and school partnerships. Through a synthesis of research conducted by the Center, Epstein stated that schools have a responsibility to improve education, but they cannot achieve this by working independently. To strengthen student learning and development, research noted that schools must join forces with families and communities.

Finding 9: Creating home-school-community partnerships around student learning can produce favorable effects on student achievement.

- Teachers must understand the goals that parents have for their children, how parents support their children, and how parents themselves would like to be involved. Likewise, parents must become familiar with the educational programs and what is required of students.
- Researchers indicate that neither parents nor teachers appear to have an understanding of the others' interests in children and schools (Epstein and Sanders, 2000). Effective parent involvement must be intentionally cultivated, resulting in partnerships that benefit the students' learning.

Finding 10: Research confirms that the involvement of parents and families in their children's education is critical to students' success in school.

- Based on the 2002 synthesis research report, *A New Wave of Evidence*, several findings were concluded. The overall conclusion was, "When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more." (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7).
- Henderson and Mapp (2002, p. 7) also reported that, "Many studies found that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to: earn higher grades and test scores; enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education."

Finding 11: Schools must prepare teachers (from early childhood through high school) how to strengthen the role of families in the education of their children.

- Positive relationships with parents and families are essential in developing and sustaining family engagement. Teachers must understand how to motivate families of different cultural backgrounds and develop seamless family engagement from early childhood throughout the high school years.
- Professional development is necessary to assist teachers at all levels in how to strengthen parent and family engagement, involving families in continuous support for student learning at all levels and communicating the impact of positive relationships with their children (Casper, 2016).

The findings from researchers in this extensive review on parent and family engagement concurred with others that a favorable and substantiated relationship exists between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. A key finding was that children of parents who are involved in home and in school settings show improved performance in school. This research validates the necessity of building and continuously strengthening parent and school partnerships throughout the schooling of children. These two books for engaging parents feature numerous ideas that support schools and educators as they strive to meet the demands of legislation that requires parent involvement, implement campus improvement plans, collaborate with parents, and make a positive difference in the education of children. Each book provides articles that address an array of topics that will help school leaders as they set the tone and develop an overall plan for cultivating an environment that invites communities, parents and families to join with the school to promote success in educating children. Teachers will be supported as they gain the knowledge and the skills to develop and impart appropriate strategies with parents for improving behavior, setting goals, improving attendance, thinking critically, living in crisis, meeting expectations in academics, and much more. The book for teachers guides them in how to communicate effectively in a variety of settings and provides opportunities that will reach and engage parents, maximizing parent involvement at school and in the home. Teachers' abilities to build positive relationships with parents affect the success of students as well as the success of the campus. Parent and teacher relationships are built upon mutual respect, effective two-way communication, and an understanding of what is best for students. Research shows that when parents receive frequent and positive support from teachers, they are more involved in their children's education.

As the research indicates, educators improve student learning by the ways they engage with parents. Taking the time to build trusting relationships with parents is paramount. When such relationships are established, then parents should be directly shown how they can support their children's academic progress. Schools must plan a variety of opportunities in order to help parents understand what is expected of them in relation to parenting skills and academic support. When parents form trusting relationships with schools, and are provided tools and equipped with knowledge, they can make a favorable impact on the success of students. Similar findings were found by Swap (1993). Swap noted that effective parent engagement should be comprehensive. School leaders and teachers must communicate and interact with parents in multiple ways over the course of time. Swap concluded that parent engagement is necessary for all students at all grade levels, especially English Language Learners and those with disabilities. Two-way communication is essential in showing parents that they are trusted and needed in the education of their children.

The United States Department of Education acknowledged that there are many factors that facilitate school learning. Of those factors, some are acquired through the relationships of children with their parents such as attitudes, habits, knowledge, and skills. Clark (1993) reported that parents of high-achievers were more involved with their children in home learning activities. These parents appeared to establish higher expectations for their children as compared to the parents of low-achievers. High-achieving children were reported to have spent more time on homework; however, the parents of low-achieving students helped their children more with homework tasks. Both books show the need for adults in the family working together for the mutual benefit of children. Training offered to parents and teachers who provide strategies for parents to use in the home are two immediate applications of this finding which is still indicative of what researchers say today.



As mentioned previously, Federal Title I legislation (ESSA) requires schools to include a parent engagement component. Parent participation shows parents taking a role in academic learning and other school activities. Schools, in compliance, should find ways for parents to have integral roles in assisting their children's learning. Schools should not ignore parental involvement provisions in state and federal laws. Findings revealed that students who build relationships with caring adults perform better in school and grow in self-confidence. Schools improve their learning environments with strong parental support inside as well as outside the classrooms.

Although it is essential for parents of all students to be involved in their children's education, some researchers have reported that at-risk students need parent involvement more than most other students. The Michigan Department of Education (2001) advocated for parental involvement as a firm predictor of student success in comparison to that of socio-economic status. Students who attend schools with a high level of community and parental involvement have a foundation readily prepared for success, yet those schools must continue to communicate with and promote parent engagement to reach higher levels of or sustain student success.

Due to parent involvement being an important component in school plans, schools have ongoing parent programs for the purpose of engaging families in supporting their children's learning in literacy and mathematics. Research from these programs yielded findings that show student achievement is positively impacted by the influence of parental home support. Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) advocated day and evening parent training on site. Their research supported the inclusion of literacy activities in the training due to the resulting student gains of children

whose parents were involved in at-home and at-school activities. Studies by Starkey and Klein (2000) found that parents were willing to support their children when provided math training and materials. Children whose parents provided support demonstrated an increase in skills and knowledge. Thus, the two parent engagement books offer ideas to educators for helping parents provide academic support at home and ideas to use with parents during conferences and trainings.

Studies by Miedel and Reynolds (1999) sought to determine whether parent involvement in early childhood programs affects children's achievement later in school. Evidence has shown that if parent involvement in the early years continues, it is likely to promote school success into the high school years. Sanders, Mavis, and Herting (2000) found that the positive effects of family, church, and teacher support on students' attitudes and behavior in school lead to higher achievement for both genders. One finding noted that, while African American girls spend more time with family and boys spend more time with friends, parent support is significant to the school success of both boys and girls. Thus, positive interaction with adults who are encouraging and supportive can result in positive benefits for females and males. Marcon (1999) conducted a study about parent involvement with preschoolers. Findings showed that increased parent involvement is related to the positive development and skill mastery in all content areas. In conclusion, these studies demonstrated that the more families encourage and participate in their children's education, the better their children tend to perform in school and are motivated to continue their education.

Wang, Oates, and Weishew (1997) reported findings from case scenarios from three urban

schools whose common goal was to improve student learning. This parent involvement research showed that shared partnerships between parents and schools are crucial. The education of children is a collaborative adventure, not an undertaking controlled completely by one entity. If children are to be successful in school, parents, school staff, and the community must all be stakeholders. Parents must be given a voice and provided with skills and knowledge so that they are armed with an understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and how to support their children's education.

Researchers have suggested that the high levels of achievement by minority students, as noted in a report provided by the National Education Goals Panel (Smrekar et al., 2001), is partially due to community contributions and the set expectations of parent involvement. A recommendation that surfaced from an earlier study by Moore (1998) encouraged schools to incorporate a range of strategies for active engagement of parents. The schools that had a greater impact on improved reading achievement indicated that they utilized the designated practices which appeared to yield higher levels of parent engagement. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) concluded that the more intensely parents are involved, the greater the impact on achievement.

Clark (2002) discovered that parents' and teachers' standards for their children accounted for a large variance in student achievement. This finding emphasizes the importance of informing adults how their guidance, instruction, and conversations may affect students. Adults need to be empowered to assist students in ways to support learning. Other research by Cotton & Wikelund (2001) showed that "parents generally want and need direction in order to participate with maximum effectiveness. Orientation or training takes many forms, from providing written documents" Therefore, schools should meet the needs of their parents by identifying multiple participation opportunities, providing a variety of resources,

and offering flexible training/conference scheduling for parent training. Studies have indicated that parents are similar to students in that they also have varying levels of readiness and limited free time. Programs for parents should be vertically aligned within school districts so that parent involvement programs extend over the schooling years and are not restricted to the early years. The purpose of parent involvement must be clearly communicated to parents with emphasis placed on the difference such support can have on the school performance if parent involvement begins upon school entry and continues throughout the education years.

In her book *Developing Home-School Partnerships: From Concepts to Practice*, Swap (1993) provided research studies detailing the effects of parental involvement at the preschool, elementary, and secondary school levels. Swap also included a comprehensive summary of the literature that noted the benefits of family involvement in schools. Benefits include increased student achievement, increased student self-esteem, reduced behavioral problems in school, and improved school attendance. Teachers must understand how to reach all parents if they are to involve all parents and reap these targeted benefits for children. When schools work with parents, together they can break the cycle of poverty in families. First, teachers must understand poverty and its impact on learning before they can help parents to positively impact their children. Strategies are identified in the teacher book to assist parents who may be experiencing the adverse effects of poverty.

All the aforementioned findings appear to be emphatic that a relationship exists between parental involvement and student academic achievement. From the research available on parent involvement and student success, it seems that there is no one factor that contributes to student success in the educational system. The data collected from this literature review has been reviewed by the Teacher Resources Product



Development Team and used to create *Parent, Family, and Community Engagement* for school leaders and *Parent and Family Engagement* for teachers. With regard to learning support in the home, school must focus on promising avenues of preparing students and families for success. Based on the findings, educators should recognize that schools can further increase student achievement through family engagement. The formation of active partnerships between parents, families, communities, and schools leads to improved achievement, regardless of the socioeconomic status or cultural background.

The Teacher Resources Product Development Team is comprised of educators, all of whom have served as teachers and principals with varied experiences. These educators have been actively involved with parents, including being parents themselves, leading parent conferences, facilitating parent training, designing parent newsletters, guiding Family Nights, soliciting parental input, and developing community partnerships. The numerous experiences of this team contributed positively to the creation of these resources. These educational resource books will assist school leaders and teachers as they guide parents in supporting learning. Based on the influence of parental engagement shared by the reported findings in this document, educators must include and purposefully seek resources that guide teachers and parents in the “how-to” component. Teachers and leaders need support in how to create and sustain powerful partnerships and how to effectively communicate in order to lead parents in excelling as active partners in their children’s education.

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