

Parent Involvement: Keys to Success

A podcast series from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center

The home climate—Where parents have the biggest impact on learning Transcript

Part One

Narrator: Before children ever enter a school building, they have done a lot of learning. They have developed many skills and know quite a lot, much thanks to their parents' teaching. Children begin school with expectations and an attitude about learning and school that can last a lifetime.

Educators at the state level may seem far removed from the parents in communities across your state, but you can still provide guidance to district and school leaders who, in turn, work with those parents. How do parents help their children prepare for success in school, and provide the support to sustain that success throughout their school years? This podcast talks about the importance of parents and what they can do at home to support their children's learning. It's the first of two podcasts on this topic.

This brings us to the main idea of this podcast—that parent involvement at home has a powerful impact on children's school success. If parents aren't coming into the school, it doesn't mean they aren't involved in important ways. This podcast from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center at Edvantia presents some support for why we know parents' involvement in their children's learning is important. The companion podcast provides some detailed steps educators can take to support parents in these endeavors.

In longitudinal studies conducted with Chicago's Child Parent Centers, parent involvement had positive long-term impact on both learning and behavior. Where parents are involved, at home or at school, students enter school better prepared for kindergarten. They are less likely to repeat grades or to be referred for special education classes, and they have higher rates of high school graduation. They also have fewer incidents of child maltreatment and fewer juvenile arrests. More information about this study, and other research referred to in this podcast, can be accessed from the podcast launch page.

Researchers at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships of Johns Hopkins University have developed an interactive homework process called TIPS: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork. The TIPS process has had measurable positive effects on student skills and grades. In one study, this project improved knowledge and skills for elementary and middle grade students by promoting the use of assignments in which students must demonstrate or discuss some school work with a family member. Using a weekly or biweekly schedule, the process keeps families aware of what their children are learning. Parents are not asked to teach subject matter but are encouraged to monitor, interact, and support their children and then follow-up by communicating with the teacher.

Improving the home learning climate can have an immediate positive impact on children's learning. Parents who are well-informed about what their children are learning at school can make sure children understand and complete their schoolwork. Parents don't have to know the content and teach it, but they can ask questions and guide learning when their children are struggling. They can communicate with teachers on behalf of their children to make sure everyone understands what is going on. Most

important, they can make sure their children are ready to learn when they arrive at school. We all do better when we are fed, rested, and free from stress. Even children who struggle with learning can, with their parents' help, believe that school is where they need to be and what they do there is important.

Parents can do several things to set the stage for learning at home: they can have and use many reading materials and writing tools, and they can provide a place that is quiet and comfortable for reading and writing. They can let children know that schoolwork, reading, and writing are important, and they can respect the work children and teachers are doing at school. Parents can also help by talking with children about school and what they are learning.

Matt Perkins, former principal at Cardinal Valley Elementary School in Lexington, Kentucky, has a staff that understands the importance of parents' support of children's learning at home. He and his staff worked with parents to help them better understand how they could support their children at home, even in a community where many parents were learning English themselves.

Matt: "Parents coming to your school for events is one thing. Parents taking home what you need for them to be doing to extend the learning for their children is something completely different. That involves parents. That makes them feel like they're a part of their children's education, and when that happens, people value and they own their own education. But it's all of our parents had issues with being able to support their students after school. We actually have targeted parents that we bring into our school—have family literacy nights where we teach our parents by modeling and demonstrating literacy strategies with their kids, doing book walks, doing character identification, estimating what is going to happen. We model all that with our parents and kids. And with that, we're doing what a lot of schools don't quite get to, which is saying look it's OK to teach our parents what we really want them to really do at night."

Narrator: You may already agree that parents are critical in promoting their children's success in school, but what can you do to help? Educators at all levels, from the state department to the classroom, can incorporate proven strategies to help parents establish a great home climate that promotes student success in school. To learn about some of these strategies, join us for the second in this pair of podcasts on the home climate.

Part Two

Narrator: Some parents say that schools are responsible for their children’s learning, but they may not realize what a powerful influence they have on their children’s success in school. Teachers, and even schools, may come and go, but parents have a consistent presence and far more personal attachment that make them influential “teachers” of their children. Forming a strong partnership with educators merges parents’ extensive knowledge about their children with the formal training and experience of teachers. Children benefit from this unified focus of support.

In the first part of this podcast, we presented some background on why we know parent involvement at home has a powerful impact on children’s school success. Now we’ll explore some practical strategies educators can use to empower parents to promote that success.

Urban sociologist Dr. Pedro Noguera, a professor at New York University, is one of America’s most important voices on education reform and diversity. In a regional forum sponsored by the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center and held at the offices of the National Center for Family Literacy, Dr. Noguera described important ways his own parents influenced his education at home.

Pedro: “At the same time my parents worked hard, they had 6 kids, so they were very rarely at the school. They came to parent teacher conferences, but they didn’t show up a whole lot and I was very happy about this because I wasn’t always the best behaved student. I really tried to avoid them calling home, especially when my father was there. But where they made their impact felt was not so much in school but at home, in terms of the value they placed on education for us. I point that out because in many schools, we have the tendency to think that if we don’t see the parents, they don’t care about their children, they don’t value education. If they valued education, they would be here, as if their jobs would say ‘oh you need to go to school today, have the day off, go on, go in there and help your son and daughter.’ I don’t know too many jobs, unless you are an executive or a professor like me, that you could do that. Most people don’t get that kind of luxury to take off work to spend a day at school, but we form judgments about them because they can’t.”

Narrator: Your state, district, or school may do many things to help parents establish a great home learning climate—here are few ideas, some of which may be new.

To check your status, put together a team of parents, educators, and school staff to assess your support for parents. Use these seven strategies as a checklist to identify areas needing attention.

1. Keep all parents well-informed, not just the parents who are able to come to the school. Parents face many demands and family responsibilities, but they care about their children and want them to succeed. Understanding the school culture can be difficult for some parents. Different communication strategies might be needed for different groups of parents. At both the state and local levels, print, electronic, and televised communications should be provided so parents of varying levels of literacy and languages can access and understand them.
2. Provide information on how to create a good learning environment for children at home. Make this appropriate to the age and grade of the students. SEA staff can connect parents to helpful information from other state and local agencies that support parents and families. Local

educators can offer guidance to help parents establish a designated time and space for children to do their homework. They can provide examples of ways to make learning fun and give suggestions for appropriate learning incentives.

3. Give parents examples of specific ways to support their children in learning. Don't ask parents to teach, but parents can help explain the meaning of terms, such as define, summarize, and describe. Explain the value of responding to children's questions and interests—encouraging them to dig deeper, encouraging them to understand the questions and look further for answers. Asking good questions can help in more ways than just finding the answers. Parents support development of problem-solving skills and independence by helping children discover their own answers. SEAs and districts can craft messages like these for teachers to share with parents.
4. Help parents identify the tools, materials, and kinds of interactions that create a language- and literacy-rich home. States can use their department Web site and print publications to provide information that helps parents understand the curriculum requirements their children face and where to go to get help for their children in different subjects. Schools can provide materials in the classroom that can be checked out for use at home, such as books, print, writing tools, resources, calculators, and computers. These can help children to explore as they complete homework.
5. Help parents motivate their children by establishing high standards for learning and identifying achievable goals. States develop challenging and rigorous academic standards while districts and schools can help parents understand how these standards support the school's goal for their children's learning. Show parents what high-quality work looks like, for their children's grade level, so they are able to set realistic high expectations and support their children's learning.
6. Encourage parents to be role models. SEAs and districts identify programs that illustrate strong role models for learning, from entertainers to local community members. Parents can show their children that they read, write, and learn new things everyday to accomplish necessary tasks at home and at work.
7. Share information about accessing community resources. SEAs and districts can identify rich state and local resources for alternative learning environments, such as libraries, museums, and after-school programs.

You can support parent involvement by providing sample documents and templates for schools to use in communicating with parents. SEAs can also assist with establishing guidelines for accomplishing specific tasks such as those described in this podcast, as well as providing professional development resources for districts and schools. More specific information and resources for following these suggestions can be found on the podcast launch page.

You can share this podcast with district and school personnel, as well as parents. It suggests ways for parents to provide a home learning climate that helps their children succeed at school. Some additional helpful tools are available online at the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center Web site, www.arcc.edvantia.org.

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