

## Parent Involvement: Keys to Success

*A podcast series from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center*

### Engaging Parents in Children's Learning: Ways to Involve Parents

Transcript

**Narrator:** Do you remember parents being involved in your school as a child? Did parents organize class parties or chaperone field trips? Maybe parents came into the classroom to share a craft project or shelve books in the library.

Research indicates that we need to get parents involved in their children's learning. This is the eighth in a series of podcasts about parent involvement intended for education leaders. In prior podcasts, we spoke about the school and home climate, as well as communication and relationships with parents. In this podcast, the focus is on engaging parents in their children's learning for the purpose of improving student achievement.

Despite not working with parents directly, educators at the state level can still provide guidance to district and school leaders who work closely with parents. Listen to this podcast about engaging parents and follow suggestions to help schools implement these strategies. Helpful tools are available online at the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center's Web site, [www.arcc.edvantia.org](http://www.arcc.edvantia.org), where other podcasts can also be accessed.

Is it enough to get parents to come to school for a back-to-school night or to come to a conference at the end of the first grading period? Will it be helpful if they accompany the class on a field trip? Let's hear what Anne Henderson, noted author and consultant in the field of parent involvement, has to say about this.

**Anne:** "Some of the findings on the research I think give schools some very clear guidance about what to do to engage parents more in ways that will influence achievement. One thing, I know this sounds obvious, is to link the parent involvement programs to improving student learning. If you think about all the different things that happen at schools, activities and events, to involve parents—there is the sports program, of course, and the back-to-school nights, open houses, fun fairs, raffles, whatever, all the kinds of winter festivals and so on that schools put on and that parents come to, but how are they linked to showing parents what kids are actually learning in class. What are the standards say that a third-grade math should look like to be proficient? And really help parents talk to their kids about what they are learning and how they are using their minds to learn."

**Narrator:** It seems then, that while it is good to get the parents active in the school through events and activities, it is even more important to find ways to link those programs to student learning. In the book *Beyond the Bake Sale*, the authors state that, "the more a program is expressly designed to improve student achievement, the more impact it will have. All the programs at your school should help families get a clear idea of what their children are learning and doing in class, promote high standards for student work, gain skills to help their children at home, understand what good teaching looks like, and discuss how to improve student progress."

This doesn't mean that schools should stop having open houses and bake sales. It does mean, though, that schools should find a way to connect the event to student learning, to give it a focus on achievement. For example, a PTA meeting can be used as a forum to showcase some student work. Maybe the third graders could give a demonstration of the oral math drills they have been doing to build their math skills; or the fifth graders could display their science projects and be available to explain what they have learned.

Classroom visits are another great way for parents to experience what is happening during their child's school day and to give them a clear picture of what the students are learning. Classrooms have changed since the parents were in school; so having them in class for several hours will give them a chance to see how the day goes. While they're there, they may think of a way they could support their child's learning at home, or see a way they could become involved in class to help teach a concept. The visit will also help a parent get a better idea of how their child interacts with peers in a classroom setting.

Listen as Anne Henderson talks about a classroom visit.

**Anne:** “Finally, this is an important point. Think about how you can help parents recognize good teaching; the way we teach things is different now. Parents might come into a project-based classroom and think it looks really chaotic, and think how can anybody learn; these kids are doing this and these are doing that, they are all talking, but the kids are learning. If it is explained to them, you can do demonstrations of different learning projects at evening or weekend events. You can have opportunities for parents to come in certain days set up for classroom observations—whatever it takes to help parents really recognize that kids doing hands-on activities is a great way to learn science or math. Then they can start doing those kinds of things at home and they can talk to their kids about what they are doing in school and really understand what their kids are saying.”

**Narrator:** Taking this a step further, Sam Shipp, principal at Harper Park Middle School in Loudon County, Virginia, tells about a specific program developed at his school to involve dads in student learning.

**Sam 7:16-8:43:** “At Harper Park, parents are involved in a number of ways with regard to student learning, but one of the things I would like to share with you is a program we call DASH (Dads At School Helping). This is a program we started this year in which we try to have father figures, dads, or male guardians come in. They work, they spend the day with us. In our main office and throughout the building, we have been accustomed to having a lot of moms come in and they volunteer, but we've not only found that having male figures come in, they not only get to eat lunch with their child, but instructionally we've assigned them to resource periods in the building. Every student in our school, in all of our schools, have a resource time where they are able to go and they work with their team of teachers for either enrichment or remediation time. These fathers and dads can go in and they can also help kids. For example, we had two dads that were engineers that came in, and there was a physical science class that was doing a mousetrap project. The engineers were able to go down and work directly with the kids and apply hands-on knowledge that they use every day in their profession with how to do this mousetrap. The kids got a lot from that. They are very visible; they have special t-shirts that they wear that are bright red that say “DASH-Dad's at school helping at Harper Park.” On the back it says, “Way cooler than my kids think I am.”

**Narrator:** Like Harper Park, many schools are exploring innovative ways to include parents in learning activities at school. Ellen Cooper, instructor at The O'Donnell Elementary School, reports that Technology Goes Home @ School, a program in the Boston Public Schools, has become a gateway to greater parent involvement at her school. The school uses computer classes to engage parents in their children's learning. Program goals include helping children improve their academic performance while encouraging parents and children to work together toward a common goal. Another goal is the enhancement of the relationship between parents and teachers. An added bonus is that school personnel have found that the parents who are involved in the Technology Goes Home @ Schools project often become engaged in other school activities. You can read more about this project at the City of Boston Web site. The link is provided on the podcast launch page.

Several strategies were presented in this podcast on involving parents in the school environment. We learned that the most helpful way to impact student achievement is to actually link the involvement of the parents to the children's learning. We heard about ways to add this connection to existing school events, as well as heard examples of how several schools have established new programs to involve parents. We were also challenged to open classrooms for parent visits so they can see what's changed about schools and to encourage parents to use what they see in class to support their children's learning at home.

State departments of education can assist schools in implementing these strategies. For example, SEAs can share research linking parent involvement with student achievement, so schools and districts can make research-based decisions about strategies and programs that they will implement. SEAs can also expose schools to positive examples of parent activities that are being used successfully throughout the state, in order to give schools ideas that they can use in their own situations. SEAs, in their leadership role, can provide these valuable resources to schools and districts.

We hope these ideas will be helpful as you think about how the parent-school relationship can be strengthened. We know that, together, parents and educators make a great team for student learning!

Join us for the next podcast in this series on parent involvement in schools, where we look at helping parents understand data.

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