

## Parent Involvement: Keys to Success

*A podcast series from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center*

### Parent Involvement in Schools: Engaging Parents as Partners

Transcript

**Narrator:** According to the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Kentucky, "...parents must become equal partners in education. The people who work in our public schools should feel responsible not just to their colleagues and the district staff who supervise them, but to the parents whose children they teach. And parents should feel responsible for doing all they can do to support their children, reach out to other parents, and work with the schools to improve student achievement."

In this podcast, one of a series on parent involvement in the schools, we will consider information and strategies educators can use to assist parents in becoming strong partners with the school and community to support their children's learning. SEA staff, in their role as education leaders, can provide information to schools and districts regarding these strategies, as well as providing resources to parents to help them become active participants in their child's education.

Michael Armstrong of A.B. Combs Elementary in Raleigh, North Carolina, discusses the role parents play at his school.

**Michael:** "Parents are crucial in everything that we do. We have different staff development opportunities where everything that our teachers are trained in, whether it is a new math adoption or how to create a culture, our parents are trained in those same concepts. We have data notebooks where every single child has clear directions, examples, and objectives of what is expected of them for the year and that is given to our parents. We have parents who have helped create different documents in multiple languages that they can use at home on how to help their students. Also we have different outreach programs, we have an after school program called Combs' Achievers where one of our parents who is Spanish works with our ESL population training the different parents on ways to help their students at home."

**Narrator:** At Combs Elementary, parents have clear directions on how they can become actively involved. According to Karen Salinas, communications director for the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, "Teachers perceive that families don't want to be involved when, in fact, [parents] don't know how to be involved."

Let's listen as Carol Edelen, Parent Engagement Coordinator for the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, explains how she works to help parents become better informed.

**Carol:** "My role is to train parents to gain knowledge on educational issues. What I do with them is teach them about the curriculum, core content, Kentucky Standards-Based Education, reading data, and they learn skills on how to become partners in their child's school and the whole idea is to go back into their school after the six days of training and do projects that involve other parents to improve student achievement and have a lasting impact. The benefit to the district is to have knowledgeable parents being involved. Once you have parents that are knowledgeable about data, can read the data, it raises their involvement. It raises their partnership ability to be able to come in and leave emotion at home,

deal in facts and data. They begin to communicate with teachers on a different level, being able to see the whole gamut of what is happening at the schools and to be effective partners in doing something about it. For instance, closing the achievement gap, digging deep into the data to see what does this tell me, who is being left behind, what are the strengths here, what more can we do for this class, this child, this child that has a face not just a number.”

**Narrator:** While parents are the experts on their own children, they may not know what to ask at a parent-teacher conference or meeting when it comes to academics. Parents can benefit from practice and role-play as they learn how to ask important questions about learning and not just ask questions about their child’s behavior. The authors of *Beyond the Bake Sale* suggest questions that parents might ask the teacher, such as, “Is my child proficient in basic skills? What do the test scores mean? What are my child’s strengths and weaknesses? Could you explain your grading standards? Does my child need extra help in any area?” Educators can help provide this training for parents to help them ask better questions about their child’s education.

Sande Shepherd, a member of the Kentucky Commissioner's Parents Advisory Council (CPAC), offers some suggestions about parent training.

**Sande:** “Often as parents, we don’t get the same opportunities for high quality training that the teachers do. In school council training or parent involvement training, we often get high quality training but we come with a very different perspective so understanding things on the same level as a teacher would, has very little to do with intellectual capabilities, has more to do with understanding the background material, understanding basic education, what a child is supposed to learn and when, how we can help our child with study skills, or those kinds of things. If we as parents haven’t had those ourselves, and frequently parents haven’t had an extended education, it is very difficult to help a child study. It is very difficult to be involved in their education past a certain level because we don’t have that understanding ourselves.”

**Narrator:** Parent workshops are often used to help parents learn strategies for supporting their children. Amy Jones, a parent from North Carolina, tells about ways of engaging parents in academics at her child’s school.

**Amy:** “Parent education continues throughout the year—it’s not just a one time thing. Every quarter we have Celebrate Success for the students to show where they’ve progressed, how they have met their goals. Parents are invited and encouraged to come in and actually participate and see what’s going on in school. The way that we reach all parents is very important because we have a phone system that goes out to all parents. The message is sent by the principal and also in Spanish. So the Spanish community hears it in Spanish and the English community hears it in English. So that sometimes is a better way to reach them than actually a written letter that goes home even if it is in Spanish. Celebrate Success is important for the students because they showcase what they have learned and we learn more about more statistics and numbers and parents are very appreciative to know what is going on in school.”

**Narrator:** Parent education requires careful planning and implementation. Parent needs must be identified and schools must find resources to specifically address the identified needs. Schools may seek help internally or from outside agencies. Outside resources might include universities, businesses, social service agencies, or regional education centers. In addition to providing content for the sessions, schools

will need to accommodate parents in other ways, including possibly providing child care and transportation to make it easier for all parents to attend. Schools should also have parents to evaluate the sessions. These evaluations need not be lengthy, but should determine what was most and least useful as well as get suggestions for other kinds of workshop experiences that would be beneficial. This information will help schools plan future sessions.

When schools focus on parent needs, they often discover new ways to meet these needs and engage families in learning. Sherryl Loya, principal of Farmwell Station Middle School in Loudon County, Virginia, tells about an interesting way her school found to impact students and parents.

**Sherryl:** “We did go out and purchase a language program that we then placed in our computer lab and we invited the parents to come with their children and sit down and spend some time learning some vocabulary with their children so the rate of the oral language development has really increased not only in our student population but also in our parent population.”

**Narrator:** This school found a way to engage the families in ways that are linked to improving learning. Parent involvement that is linked to improving student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement.

Another way some schools connect with parents is by establishing a parent resource center in the school. The parent resource center can support parents as both learner and teacher. The center can provide parents with materials to help children learn, offer space for personal and small class meetings, and help link parents to school and community resources. A parent resource center also can give parents a place at the school where they can sit, read, and connect with other parents.

SEAs can assist their schools and districts in implementing the strategies mentioned in this podcast. For example, SEAs can provide guidelines and tips for starting a parent resource center, including ideas for how to secure funding and what types of resources to include. SEAs can also provide professional development to district and school leaders to help them learn what strategies and methods can be used to train parents. In addition, providing links to outside agencies that offer resources to schools on parent involvement and parent training might help schools and districts get started.

We hope you have found this podcast to be beneficial as you think about information and strategies to use with parents in helping them become more involved in their children’s learning. Join us for our next podcast, where we’ll discuss Cultivating Parent Leaders.

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