

Parent Involvement: Keys to Success

A podcast series from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center

Parents Support Student Progress: Send Student Achievement Goals Over the Top

Transcript

Narrator: Hello and welcome to the first in a series of podcasts about parent involvement in the schools. This series of podcasts will address several topic areas including school and home climate, communication with and developing relationships with parents, and parents' growth as leaders and mentors.

What do you think of when you hear the words “parent involvement?” With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, we have seen a new emphasis on this important aspect of education. This legislation defines parent involvement as the “participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.”

Dr. Pedro Noguera, professor in the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University, a codirector of the Institute for the Study of Globalization and Education in Metropolitan Settings, and the director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, says this about parent involvement.

Pedro: “The most important form of parent involvement is what parents do at home, and what we really should be aiming for is, how do we get parents to understand what their role is—to reinforce the kinds of habits that we know are necessary and essential—for not just for achievement in school but for lifelong learning.”

Narrator: How can we help teachers, administrators, and parents understand the important role that parents play in students' success at school? How can we help them understand that parent involvement in school will impact long-term outcomes including higher earning power, increased job opportunities, and stronger families and communities?

Let's hear what Anne Henderson, author and consultant in the field of parent involvement, has to say about a school's parent involvement program.

Anne: “It is extremely important at the district level to set a standard that all schools are supposed to meet in terms of engaging families. I've been in many, many school districts, and I will go from one school that is a fortress school that is completely closed to parents; and right in the next neighborhood will be a wide open partnership school where people are in there and you can't tell who's a teacher and who's a parent because everybody's working together and all the adults are pulling for the kids. How can this be tolerated? Why would a district allow this to happen? Districts will say that it is up to the school to decide how it will involve families and I say, ‘No.’ We need to have an effective district policy that No Child Left Behind says you gotta have and it has to be developed with and approved by parents. That is in the law. That policy should set a standard, plus offer assistance and resources to schools to put that standard into practice. So, schools need to have a standard, they need to have help, and they need to have resources to help them do this.”

Narrator: Henderson makes her point—leadership at the district level is essential. School districts need to assume a major role in helping parents understand the need for their involvement in their children’s education and the impact that this involvement can have on their children’s achievement and beyond. SEAs, in their work with districts, can provide the leadership and resources necessary to help districts and schools meet the NCLB requirements with respect to parent involvement.

In the 2002 publication *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, the authors describe a framework of six major types of involvement that fall within a school-family-community partnership. These six types of involvement give us a focus of how parents can be involved in their children’s education at home and at school. The types of involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. In this series of podcasts, we will consider how each type of involvement is designed and implemented, and the results and outcomes of each.

Let’s also consider what the research says about parent involvement and student achievement. Laura Westberg, director of research at the National Center for Family Literacy, offers us this information.

Laura: “The majority of this research is reported in the publication, *A New Wave of Evidence*, by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp.

Let me first share the key findings on outcomes for students:

- Parent and community involvement with schools has shown a positive effect on student academic achievement.

In relation to this finding, other “finer-grained” results indicate...

- That this finding holds across families of all economic, racial, and educational backgrounds, and for students of all ages. Parents encourage their children, they talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework.
 - Studies have shown positive impacts on reading and mathematics as well as other school subjects.
 - Programs that engage families in supporting their children’s learning at home are linked to high student achievement.
 - Family involvement at home appears to have a protective factor on children as they progress through the educational system. That is, the more families provide support, the more children tend to do well in school and continue their education.
 - Involvement that is linked to student learning has greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement.
- Parent and community involvement has also impacted other achievement such as attendance, aspirations for postsecondary education, enrollment in challenging high school curriculum and successful transitions from special education to regular classes.”

Although the model, developed by Joyce Epstein, has well defined dimensions of involvement and is cohesive in the types of partnerships established. The focus remains on teacher and school initiated involvement rather than on parent initiated involvement.

Narrator: Let's hear what Anne Henderson has to say what the research says about parent involvement.

Anne: “In any body of research, what you usually find is that there some studies that point in one direction and other studies in others. So you're always having, we'll on one hand you have dah, dah, dah and on the other have dah, dah, dah. This body of research is unique because it all points in the same direction; that is, however they've defined parent involvement and in whatever setting they're looking at—whether it's a local school, a school district, a state; whether they're looking at the impact of demographics on particular schools or a specific school practices; doesn't matter—the impact is positive. That is overall, it shows that when parents are involved at home and at school—especially both, but can be either—kids do better in school. Plus, there's a collective effect; the schools get better. Isn't that interesting? It's always the case if parents are involved with their own children, at home and reinforcing what their children are learning in school in a way that's linked to what the kids are actually learning at school, kids will do better. I mean that's s natural. It is a reinforcement of what they are learning. But when about a third of the families are actively engaged in and around school, then you start to see the school as a whole improving.”

Narrator: As we close this introduction, Dr. Noguera gives us a challenge.

Pedro: “Are we ready for parental involvement? Are we ready for low-income parents to behave like middle-class parents? What would happen, what would happen if our low-income parents came in and started making demands and start asking tough questions about what the lesson is, about decisions being made, about the way the school looks? Would we be ready for that level of engagement? That level of scrutiny in our schools? I say that is a healthy kind of scrutiny because that is the kind that pushes and forces accountability, raises standards. That's why we need parents involved. We need parents involved to make our schools understand that they have got to serve our children well.”

Narrator: The research is compelling. We can make a difference for our states, our communities, our schools, and our students! Please join us for the rest of our podcast series as we explore parent involvement in schools.

Supporting Resources:

Epstein, J., Sanders, M., Simon, B., Salinas, K., Jansorn, N., & Van Voorhis, F. (2002). *School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Public Law 107-110. 107th Cong., 1st sess., 8 January 2002.

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This publication was developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, its contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.