

PARENT INVOLVEMENT: What the Research Tells Us

Twenty years of scientific study show that parent and family involvement influences children's academic achievement. The research offers compelling reasons to focus on improving parent involvement in our schools. Parent involvement is a key factor in school improvement efforts. Collaboration with families and community members not only helps to identify the challenges our schools face but helps to develop and implement creative and satisfying solutions.

In *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp reviewed 51 studies and concluded that these studies found

"...a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds for students of all ages."

Here's what they report

- "Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to improved student achievement."
- "The more families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education."
- "Families from all cultural backgrounds, education and income levels can and often do have a positive influence on children's learning."

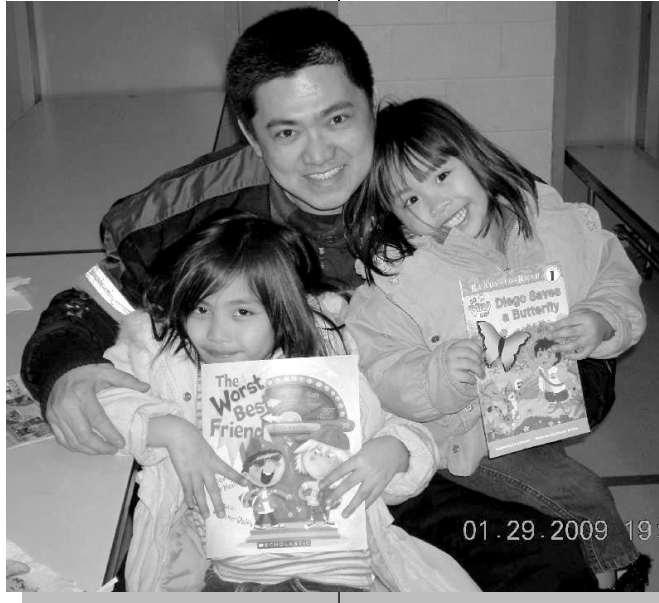
Henderson and Mapp also found that when parents are involved, children from all backgrounds tend to

- ✓ Earn higher grades and test scores
- ✓ Enroll in higher-level education programs
- ✓ Be promoted and earn credits
- ✓ Adapt well to school and attend regularly

- ✓ Have better social skills and behavior
- ✓ Graduate and go on to higher education.

In their book *Beyond the Bake Sale*, (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, Davis, 2007), the authors describe the benefits of collaboration and parent involvement.

- Partnership and student achievement are closely linked.
- Partnerships help build and sustain public support for schools.
- Families and the community can help schools overcome challenges they face.
- Teachers can benefit from parent and community partnerships.



The PTA report, *The Positive Relationship between Family Involvement and Student Success*, sites research done by Henderson and Mapp that points to four findings that schools can adopt.

1. The more parent involvement practices focus on student learning the more student learning improves.

Example: Provide family nights on reading, math or behavior programs.

2. Children whose parents speak up on their behalf are more confident at school.

Example: Families should have opportunities to learn about how the school operates.

3. All families can contribute to their child's success regardless of race, ethnicity, class or level of education.

Example: Families can talk to their children about the importance of school.

4. Partnerships with community members, businesses and organizations can improve learning opportunities.

Example: Establish a mentoring program between students and community members.

What Research Tells Us about the Reasons Parents Get Involved

Mainly three factors influence why parents get involved in their child's education and school. (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, Closson, 2005)

1. Belief by a parent that he or she should be involved and that his or her involvement will make a difference.
2. Parent's perceptions of invitations to get involved, such as a general invite from the school, welcoming environment, specific invitations from the child and teacher.
3. Life style variables, such as the parent believing that he or she has the knowledge and skills to help the child in school and the time and energy to do so.

The research and literature show that schools definitely influence parents' decisions about their involvement. With this knowledge, educators and administrators can develop quality parent involvement in their schools. You can create a welcoming and inclusive environment that engages all parents in their child's education, special education and in the school as a whole. And right from the beginning, you can include parents in school-wide improvement efforts, such as Response to Intervention (Rtl) and Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). In return, parents will feel more confident in their ability to support their child's learning at home in a way that benefits students and educators.

Importance of Strong Leadership

To achieve a real and effective parent-professional collaboration model requires strong leadership. When school leaders create conditions that foster collaborative relationships among school staff, families and community, the result can be a cohesive partnership among all school stakeholders. These partnerships can garner family, school and community resources to ensure that all students get the help they need to be successful.

Research identifies steps school administrators can take to support home, school, community partnerships

1. promote formal school and district level parent and community involvement policies
2. establish formal and informal communication processes to reach out to families and community groups in multiple ways
3. address cultural or linguistic barriers to involvement
4. create an environment that honors family and community member concerns and needs regarding student learning.

(SEDL, Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections with Schools: What Can School Leaders Do?, 2005)

Barriers to Parent Involvement

School staff should have opportunities to have their concerns and fears about parent involvement acknowledged and addressed. A question to ask educators: **What concerns you the most about changing the way parents participate in their child's education and in the school?**

Barriers that prevent families from taking an active role in their child's education and in the school should also be identified and addressed. A question to ask families: **What are the**

barriers that families experience? Here are some of the barriers the prevent parents from getting involved.

- not enough time
- lack of confidence in their ability to contribute
- lack of knowledge about how the school system works
- lack of child care and/or transportation
- not available during the school day
- don't feel welcome in the school.



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