Research Synthesis

Benefits of Parent Involvement

In a synthesis of 51 studies on the impact of parent involvement, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude that there is a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, income levels, or parents' level of education. To put it another way, when families are involved in their children's learning both at home and at school, their children do better in school. As a matter of fact, effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of educational reform. Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that students with involved parents were more likely to:

- Have higher grade point averages
- Have higher scores on standardized tests
- Be involved in more challenging school programs
- Complete homework on a more regular basis
- Have higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates
- Enroll in educational programs after high school

They also found that when parents are involved:

- Attendance is better
- Students are less likely to use alcohol, engage in violent behavior and other antisocial behaviors decrease
- Students have greater self-confidence, feel school is more important, and do better in school
- High school students are able to make better transitions, maintain high quality work, and develop realistic plans for their futures

Barriers to Parent Involvement

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<tr>
<th>Practical Barriers</th>
<th>Personal Barriers</th>
<th>Institutional Barriers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>Fears and frustrations</td>
<td>Negative attitudes/beliefs by staff</td>
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<td>Economic constraints</td>
<td>Anxious about child's performance</td>
<td>Unaware of how to involve parents</td>
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<td>Lack of transportation</td>
<td>Anxious about school expectations</td>
<td>Belief this is too time consuming</td>
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<td>Neighborhood safety</td>
<td>Reminders of past negative experiences</td>
<td>Teachers think parents are troublesome/lack necessary skills</td>
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<td>Lack of child care</td>
<td>Mistrust of the educational system</td>
<td>Equate parents' involvement with lack of interest</td>
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<td>Language/Communication barriers</td>
<td>Don't know how to become involved</td>
<td>Lack of school resources/time</td>
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<td>Lack of support from partner/spouse</td>
<td>No policies supporting parent involvement</td>
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<td>Limited education – unable to help child</td>
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<td>Limited finances</td>
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Source: Wandersman, Stone, Lindsay, Snell-Johns, Ford and Amaral (2002)
Given these barriers, perceived and real, the research also indicates that barriers are not insurmountable. Fostering continued parent involvement needs to be the responsibility of teachers and schools – as the research confirms that the extent to which schools encourage and facilitate participation is a greater predictor of involvement than family characteristics that include parents' level of education, parents' socioeconomic status, and marital status (Thorlidsen & Stein, 1998) and that parent involvement is higher when schools welcome parents and make it easy for them to be involved (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

Given the impact of parent involvement and the research on barriers, the following are suggestions from Henderson and Mapp (2002) on specific types of involvement and the benefits on children's academic success which provide a framework for strengthening parent/family involvement programs:

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<th>Findings</th>
<th>Suggestions/Activities</th>
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<td>The more parent and community activities focus on improving student learning, the more student learning improves.</td>
<td>Parent involvement programs should focus on:</td>
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<td>• Family nights on math or literacy – use scoring guides while making craft projects to let parents know how to use them</td>
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<td>• Family-teacher conferences that involve students</td>
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<td>• Family workshops on planning for college</td>
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<td>• Including information on standards and exhibitions of student work at open houses and back-to-school nights</td>
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<td>• Use the school newsletter to discuss test results and what students are doing to meet higher standards</td>
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<td>• Use the annual school and district Report Cards as a chance to have focused conversations with parents and community members about each school's strengths and weaknesses – and how everyone can work together to make improvements</td>
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<td>Children whose parents are advocates for them at school are more confident at schools and take on and achieve more. The more families advocate for their children and support their children's progress, the longer their children stay in school and the better their children do.</td>
<td>Families should:</td>
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<td>• Become knowledgeable about the operations of schools and the laws that govern those operations</td>
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<td>• Be confident about their ability to work with schools</td>
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<td>• Expect only the best from and for their children</td>
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<td>• Join the PTA/PTO</td>
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<td>All families can contribute to their children’s success. For involvement to happen, however, principals, teachers, and parents must believe that all parents can contribute to their children’s success in school.</td>
<td>Parents can promote their children’s academic success by:</td>
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<td>• Teaching their children the importance of education</td>
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<td>• Finding out what their children are expected to know and to be able to do and reinforcing lessons at home</td>
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<td>• Sending their children to school ready to learn every day</td>
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<td>Principal and teachers must support parent involvement by:</td>
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<td>• Making parent involvement a priority</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Recognizing and removing barriers to parent involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sharing decision-making power with parents and community members</td>
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<td>• Working to understand class and cultural differences</td>
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<td>Engaging community members, businesses, and organizations as partners in children’s education can improve the learning community in many ways.</td>
<td>Community partners may be able to:</td>
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<td>• Provide expanded learning opportunities</td>
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<td>• Build broad-based support for increased school funding</td>
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<td>• Provide quality after-school programs</td>
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When designing parent involvement programs, especially those that focus on linking to gains in children’s

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learning, it is a good idea to match practices to grade levels and to take children’s age and developmental needs into consideration.

1. Families with young children

☐ Home visits from trained parent educators with cultural backgrounds similar to their own or with knowledge of their culture

☐ Lending libraries that offer games and learning materials to build skills at home

☐ Discussion groups with other families about children’s learning

☐ Classes on how to stimulate their children’s mental, physical, and emotional development

2. Families of elementary and middle school students

☐ Interactive homework that involves parents with their children’s learning

☐ Workshops on topics that parents suggest, like building their children’s vocabulary, positive discipline strategies, and supporting children through crises

☐ Regular calls from teachers, not just when there are problems, about how their children are doing in class

☐ Learning packets in reading, science, and math, with training in how to use them

☐ Meetings with teachers to talk about their children’s progress and what they’re learning

3. Families of high school students

☐ Regular meetings with teachers and counselors to plan their children’s academic program

☐ Information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and post-secondary education options and how to plan for them

☐ Information about where to find academic support, such as help with homework, tutoring, after school programs, and special classes. Include subject areas covered and associated costs

☐ Explanations of courses students should take to be prepared for college or other post-secondary education

☐ Information about financing post-secondary education and applying for financial aid

Facilitating transitions for children. Children of all ages do better when they make a solid adjustment to school. By adjustment, we mean that students feel comfortable and respected, feel they belong at school, and feel supported by teachers. Here are some practices that research suggests help students adjust as they enter a new school:

☐ Offer families and students tours of the school and opportunities to visit and observe in the classrooms.

☐ Meet with students and families at the feeder schools or programs to introduce staff, explain the school’s programs, and answer questions.

☐ Make home visits the summer before school starts to begin building a relationship with each family.

☐ Work with families to prepare children for the next level and help them plan for postsecondary education

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Practical Ideas for Families and School Staff

Develop families' sense of confidence and power. Researchers call this "efficacy." Studies find that when parents have a sense of confidence and power, their children do better in school. For example, we want parents to feel they can help their children do well in school, and be happy and safe. We also want parents to feel that they can overcome negative influences on their children (such as violence and drugs), and have a positive impact on the school and neighborhood. Many practices that help empower families, such as those listed here, are required by the No Child Left Behind law.

- Engage families in planning how they would like to be involved at school.
- Consult a representative sample of parents and families, not just the PTA/PTO leadership, about school policies and proposed actions.
- Involve families in action research. Ask them to develop and conduct surveys of other families. Invite them to observe in the classroom, review books and materials, and visit other schools to gather ideas.
- Make it easy for parents to meet and discuss concerns with the principal, talk to teachers and guidance counselors, and examine their children's school records.
- Invite families to attend staff development sessions and faculty meetings.
- Facilitate families' connections with youth groups and programs for young people.
- Work with families to help them monitor their children's activities. Create a school directory, so they can contact other parents.
- Offer workshops on communicating with their children, about topics they suggest, such as talking with children about drugs, dating, problems with friends or family, and values.

Support families' efforts to improve the school and community. When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, their children tend to do better in school. Their parents are also better equipped to help them. When schools work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the school and advocates for public education.

- Give families information about how the education system (and local government) works. Make field trips to district offices and school board meetings.
- Keep voter registration forms and information about local government agencies in the school office or family center. Develop a student-run voter registration drive.
- Invite candidates for school board and other local offices to speak to families at the school.
- Open the school to community meetings.
- Go with families to press local officials about needed funding, programs or law enforcement.
- Work with families to develop action research skills to document problems in the neighborhood.
- Invite local banks and businesses to talk with families about their services, loan programs, and employment opportunities.

Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members. All
school staff, from the principal to the custodian, need opportunities to learn more about working more effectively with parents and community members. Design educational opportunities for all school staff that:

- Help staff recognize the advantages of school, family and community connections.
- Explore how trusting and respectful relationships with families and community members are achieved.
- Enhance school staff’s ability to work with diverse families.
- Enable staff to make connections with community resources.
- Explore the benefits of sharing power with families and community members.

Work with local after-school programs and supplemental service providers to link their content to what students are learning in class.

- Form a partnership between after-school program staff and teachers. Encourage them to share ideas and knowledge about the students, observe each other at work, and attend staff development sessions to update and build their teaching skills.
- Inform supplemental service providers about the school’s curriculum and learning programs (especially math and reading).
- Share textbooks and other learning materials with program staff.
- Give program staff information about students’ progress and academic needs.
National Standards for Family School Partnerships

Since its inception, the PTA has been instrumental in promoting parent involvement in schools. Working with Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University, the PTA has developed Standards for Parent/Family Involvement programs. The standards are available to all schools on the National PTA website, www.pta.org. The Standards shaped the definition of parent involvement under the last reauthorization of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, under Title IX as

"the participation of parents in regular, two way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities; including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and the carrying out of other activities such as those in Title I, Sec 1118."

In June of 2007, the PTA National Standards were updated to reflect recent research and improve parent and community involvement practices. The new standards shift the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to what parents, schools, and communities can do together to support student success. To reflect this change, the standards have been renamed the National Standards for Family School Partnerships. The standards are a comprehensive guideline that schools can use to determine how successfully they are implementing family school community partnerships. The new and updated PTA National Standards for Family School Partnerships standards are:

1. Welcoming all families into the school community
   Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

2. Communicating effectively
   Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.

3. Supporting Student Success
   Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

4. Speaking up for every Child
   Families are empowered to be advocates for their own children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

5. Sharing Power
   Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices and programs.

6. Collaborating with Community
   Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

The National Standards for Family School Partnerships provide a foundation from which to build strong parent involvement policies and partnerships for all Wisconsin schools.

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Bibliography


National PTA (2002). Building successful partnerships. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service


