

Effective Family and Community Engagement Strategies

Prepared for LEAD Connecticut

March 2014



In the following report, Hanover Research examines the link between parent and community engagement programs and student academic outcomes. The analysis also identifies the most useful frameworks for conceiving of engagement programs and best practices for their implementation. The report concludes with an examination of several school districts with exemplary family and community engagement programs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Family and community engagement in education is increasingly recognized as a vital contributor to student academic achievement. The following report traces the link between involvement and achievement and identifies several best practices to discern the most effective engagement interventions for improving student outcomes. The report comprises three sections:

- **Section One** examines the link between family engagement efforts and student achievement. It specifically seeks to identify the most pertinent involvement practices as they relate to academic outcomes.
- **Section Two** identifies several research-based frameworks for family and community engagement initiatives. It further presents key actionable best practices for developing and implementing involvement programs.
- **Section Three** presents case studies of school districts with particularly successful and innovative engagement strategies.

This examination of family and community involvement will acquaint LEAD Connecticut with the predominant discourses in this field.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Research has established a clear and convincing link between parental involvement and student academic achievement.** Studies show substantial consensus on the positive effects that parental involvement has on student achievement. Parental involvement can improve academic outcomes, whether this involvement is spontaneous or stimulated by school-based engagement programs. The forms of parental engagement shown to have the greatest impact on achievement are setting high expectations and shared reading.
- **Successful engagement programs foster a strong school-family bond.** In these programs, student learning is conceived of as a “team effort” between schools and families. What children learn in the classroom is supplemented and reinforced at home. This sense of connection engages parents and keeps them involved.
- **Effective engagement starts with logical organization and thorough teacher training.** Parent and community involvement efforts should not be conducted on an ad hoc basis. Systemic organization and implementation is needed for programs to have true and lasting effects. Similarly, teacher training is essential for the competent and committed delivery of parental involvement programs. Seattle Public Schools, for instance, provides comprehensive involvement training for its teachers and for parent volunteers.

- **Cultural diversity should inform the content of parental involvement programs.** Many forms of parental involvement are not applicable across all cultural groups. Supports that improve academic outcomes for one group may have little impact on the achievement of another. Therefore, it is important that districts, schools, and teachers tailor their expectations for and approaches to parental involvement to the cultures with which they work.
- **The success of engagement programs is premised on open and frank lines of communication between teachers and parents.** To effectively support their child's education, parents must be kept up to date on grades, attendance, and other pertinent information. Therefore, timely communication between teachers and parents is vital to family engagement initiatives. Several successful school districts, including Miami-Dade County Public Schools, accomplish this through an online portal which keeps parents informed of their child's progress.
- **Effective engagement programs link parental involvement to student learning.** Experts agree that the most effective forms of parental engagement are those that directly relate to student learning. This includes programs promoting shared reading, interactive homework, and learning support workshops. For instance, Creighton School District utilizes Academic Parent-Teacher Teams to equip parents with the skills necessary to support their children's learning in the home.
- **Schools should consider student age and developmental stage when planning parental engagement efforts.** The most important aspects of parental support change as children grow older. For instance, when they are young, children need parents to actively support their learning through at-home activities. As they get older, adolescents need this learning support less, and instead require parents to prepare them for independence. Successful programs take factors like these into account and modify content accordingly.
- **Engagement programs should also take parents' needs and desires into account.** Initiatives will only be successful if they appeal to parents and address issues that they feel are pertinent. Therefore, districts should consult families regarding what programming they would like to see offered.
- **Districts should build partnerships with community organizations that are linked to student learning.** These relationships can take many forms, from setting up tutoring programs for employees' children to providing internships for school students. Miami-Dade County Public Schools engages with community organizations to provide internships to juniors and seniors, in an effort to prepare students for college and the workplace.

SECTION I: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A large body of research has demonstrated that parental involvement in education is instrumental to students' academic achievement. A widely-cited 2005 Harvard Family Research Project meta-analysis offered strong evidence for the importance of parental involvement to academic achievement. The study examined voluntary acts of educational involvement, i.e., those which were taken of the parent's volition and not prompted by external interventions. It found that students with highly involved parents performed significantly better academically than their counterparts without parental support. Importantly, the analysis identified a hierarchy in the level of impact parental interventions had on academic outcomes, establishing that:¹

Student academic outcomes can be improved through formal, school-based parental engagement programs, as well as through voluntary parental involvement.

The facets of parental involvement that required a large investment of time, such as reading and communicating with one's child, and the more subtle aspects of parental involvement, such as parental style and expectations, had a greater impact on student educational outcomes than some of the more demonstrative aspects of parental involvement, such as having household rules, and parental attendance and participation at school functions.

The same researcher conducted a similar study several years later to determine the extent to which school-based family engagement programs affect student academic outcomes. In his meta-analysis, Jeynes found that school-based programs did, in fact, positively impact academic achievement. Specifically, programs that targeted shared reading, teacher-parent partnership, checking homework, and teacher-parent communication had "statistically significant, positive effects on student outcomes."² The strongest effects were correlated with shared reading programs.

Therefore, both voluntary and school-prompted parental involvement is credited with improving academic outcomes for students. In fact, Jeynes notes the benefits of coordinating the two, stating that "although both voluntary expressions of parental involvement and school-based family involvement programs may have some degree of

¹ Jeynes, W. "Parental Involvement and Student Achievement A Meta-Analysis." Harvard Family Research Project, December 2005. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/parental-involvement-and-student-achievement-a-meta-analysis>

² Jeynes, W. "A Meta-Analysis of the Efficacy of Different Types of Parental Involvement Programs for Urban Students." Harvard Family Research Project, February 7, 2013. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/a-meta-analysis-of-the-efficacy-of-different-types-of-parental-involvement-programs-for-urban-students>

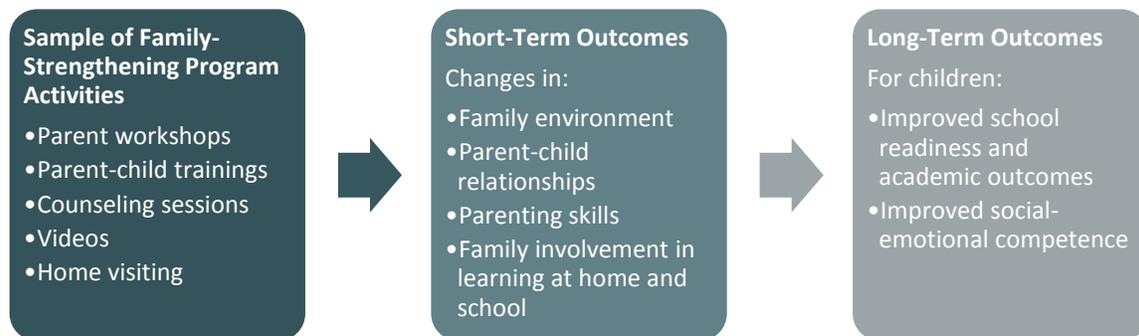
efficacy independent of one another, cooperation and coordination between the home and the school enhances the impact of both.”³

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions. A 2002 review of 51 studies concluded that there exists:⁴

...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 and for students at all ages. Although there is less research on the effects of community involvement, it also suggests benefits for schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behavior.

Outcomes of these interventions include higher grade point averages and standardized test scores, enrollment in more challenging academic programs, higher pass rates, better attendance, improved behavior, and better social skills.⁵ Figure 1.1 depicts the relationship between several parental engagement activities and short and long term outcomes.

Figure 1.1: Family Strengthening Program Outcomes



Source: Caspe and Lopez⁶

While research supports the role that parental engagement plays in student achievement, not all interventions are equally effective. Henderson and Mapp’s assessment of pertinent studies indicates that academic outcomes are most affected by home-supported learning, continuity of parental engagement throughout the education process, and learning-focused supports. In their words:⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Henderson, A. and K. Mapp. “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement.” National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, 2002. pp. 21, 24. <http://www.seidl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

⁵ Ibid., p. 24

⁶ Figure reproduced from: Caspe, M. and M. Lopez. “Lessons from Family-Strengthening Interventions: Learning From Evidence-Based Practice.” Harvard Family Research Project, October 2006. p. 4. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/lessons-from-family-strengthening-interventions-learning-from-evidence-based-practice>

⁷ Bullet points quoted from: Henderson and Mapp, Op. cit., pp. 25, 30, 38.

- Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.
- The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through our complex education system. 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.
- Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.

In his meta-analysis on the topic, Jeynes asserts that teachers and administrators must ascertain which aspects of parental involvement are most effective and then gear programming towards these factors.⁸ For parental engagement efforts to be truly effective, they must integrate the above findings into outreach and education efforts.

Finally, it is important to note that parental engagement initiatives are not a "magic bullet" designed as lone supports of academic achievement. In fact, most experts note that these efforts are most useful when they are part of a comprehensive student support strategy including elements of "instructional guidance, professional capacity of teachers, school learning climate, and parent, school, and community ties."⁹ In this vein:¹⁰

Research continues to demonstrate that there is no single solution for ensuring academic achievement. To be successful in school and in life, children must have access to multiple supports, including enriching early childhood experiences, effective schools, out-of-school time programs, and nurturing families.

⁸ Jeynes, W. "Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis." Op. cit.

⁹ Weiss, H., M Lopez, and D. Stark. "Breaking New Ground: Data Systems Transform Family Engagement in Education." Harvard Family Research Project, January 2011. p. 1.
<http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/breaking-new-ground-data-systems-transform-family-engagement-in-education2>

¹⁰ Weiss, H. et al. "Reframing Family Involvement in Education: Supporting Families to Support Educational Equity." Equity Matters: Research Review No. 5. A Research Initiative of the Campaign for Educational Equity Teachers College, Columbia University, December 2009. p. 16.
http://www.equitycampaign.org/i/a/document/12018_equitymattersvol5_web.pdf

SECTION II: STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

This section discusses effective practices for schools and districts seeking to improve parental involvement. It highlights important educational perspectives that inform effective parental engagement initiatives and discusses specific practices that are effective in improving the rate and quality of parental involvement across the educational spectrum. Notably, many of these practices are broadly applicable in a variety of contexts, so schools and districts can shape their implementation strategies according to specific needs.

DEFINING ENGAGEMENT

Joyce Epstein’s model of the six types of parental and community involvement provides a framework of parental involvement activities that schools can use to increase and improve parental involvement. These dimensions range widely in scope and area of influence, from parental involvement in homework to involvement in school policy decisions. The dimensions of involvement, and the activities that facilitate each, have broad applications across the spectrum of primary and secondary education, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. Schools that follow this framework take action to involve parents and community within each area in order to construct a comprehensive model of school-family-community partnerships.

Figure 2.1: Six Types of Parental/Community Involvement

- **Parenting** – Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families.
- **Communicating** – Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.
- **Volunteering** – Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times.
- **Learning at home** – Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
- **Decision making** – Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.
- **Collaborating with the community** – Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

Source: National Network of Partnership Schools¹¹

¹¹ Figure contents quoted from: “Six Types of Involvement: Keys to Successful Partnerships.” National Network of Partnership Schools. http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/nnps_model/school/sixtypes.htm

Other definitions of parental involvement, at home and at school, include:¹²

- Engaging in learning activities at home, including helping with reading skills and checking homework;
- Supervising children and monitoring how they spend their time out of school;
- Talking about school and what children are learning;
- Attending school events, going to parent-teacher conferences, meeting with teachers, and volunteering in the classroom or school.

The U.S. Department of Education defines parental involvement, more simply, as “regular two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.”¹³

RESEARCH-BASED GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Research suggests several guidelines for successful engagement initiatives. The literature indicates that a prerequisite of any engagement strategy must be the establishment of “a respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members.”¹⁴ Without this first step, parent and community participation and commitment to school-based programs will flounder. With this notion in mind, Henderson and Mapp outline three evidence-based requirements for involvement:¹⁵

- Programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs.
- Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.
- Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.

These qualities inform the recommendations that Henderson and Mapp propose for schools and districts seeking to strengthen parental involvement programs and practices. Figure 2.2, on the next page, highlights these recommendations, which provide conceptual guidance that schools and districts can adapt to their particular needs and contexts.

¹² Bullet points quoted from: Henderson and Mapp. Op. cit., p. 22.

¹³ “Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information And Resource Centers,” Office of Innovation and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 2007. p. 2.
<http://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/parents/parentinvolve/engagingparents.pdf>

¹⁴ Henderson and Mapp, Op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁵ Bullet points quoted from: Henderson and Mapp, Op. cit., pp. 43, 48, 51.

Figure 2.2: Research-Based Recommendations for Parental Involvement Practices

- **Recognize** that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background, are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well in school.
- **Create** programs that will support families to guide their children’s learning, from preschool through high school.
- **Work** with families to build their social and political connections.
- **Develop** the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members.
- **Link** family and community engagement efforts to student learning.
- **Focus** efforts to engage families and community members in developing trusting and respectful relationships.
- **Build** strong connections between schools and community organizations.

Source: Henderson and Mapp¹⁶

In terms of the implementation of parental involvement programs and strategies, Weiss et al. echo the need to build connections between schools, parents, and the larger community. They argue that, rather than implementing ad hoc and isolated initiatives, parental involvement efforts “should be systemic and sustained” efforts that “move beyond siloed school- or community-based programs” to approaches that “build family involvement pathways into the fabric of schools and communities.”¹⁷

Figure 2.3, on the next page, presents the U.S. Department of Education’s conceptual model for the cooperative relationship between educators and parents that most readily facilitates meaningful parental involvement. Based on “current parent involvement research” and “input from parent involvement practitioners,”¹⁸ the model notably incorporates many of the practices and strategies discussed in this report.

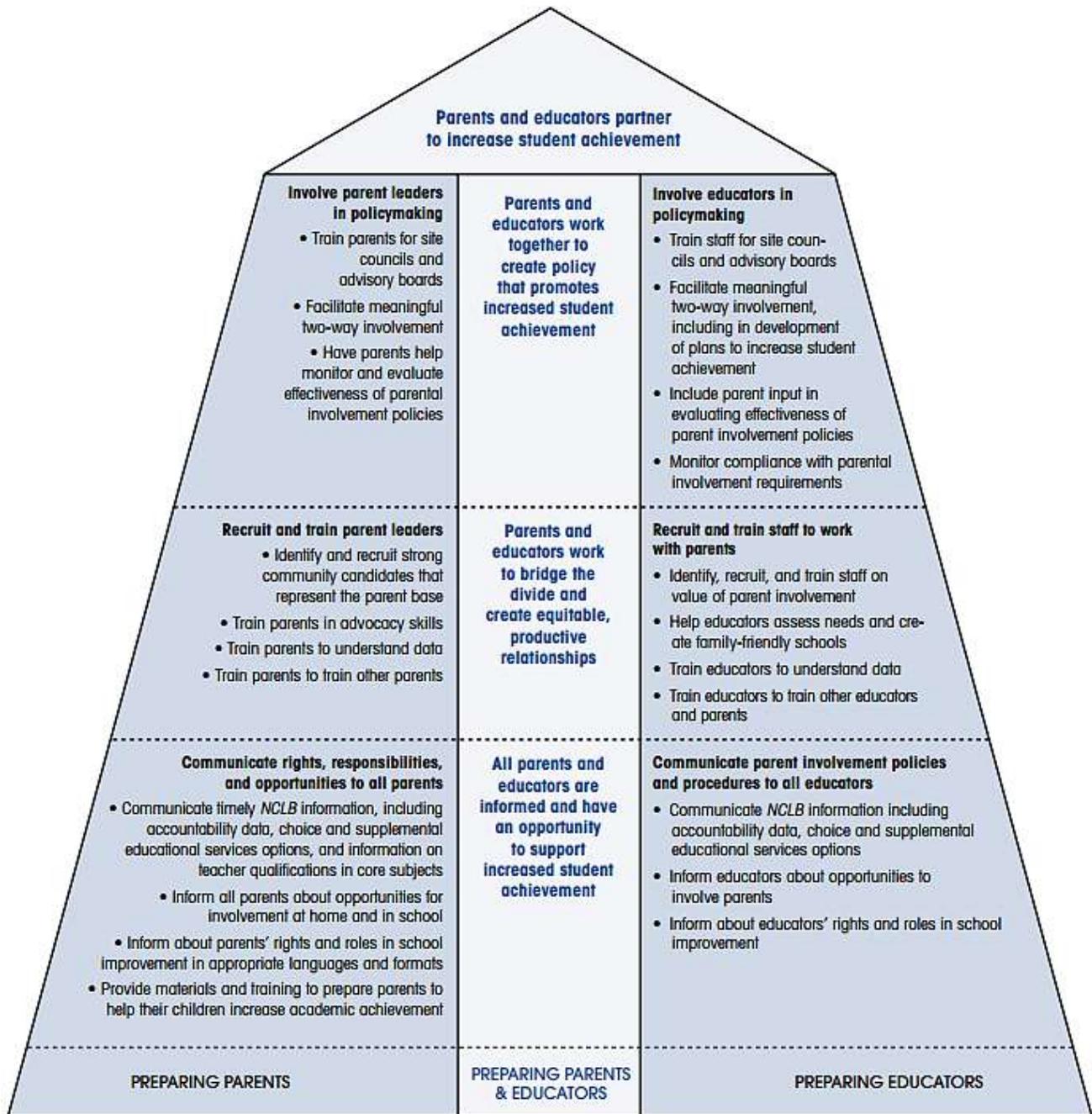
Figure 2.4 presents the National PTA’s standards for schools and districts working to increase and improve parental involvement. The National PTA’s standards provide examples of specific areas that schools and districts can target as part of a larger, systemic effort, as Weiss et al. recommend, as well as recommendations for practices that facilitate effective parental involvement initiatives.

¹⁶ Figure contents adapted from: Henderson and Mapp, Op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁷ Weiss et al., Op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁸ “Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information And Resource Centers,” Op. cit., p. 10.

Figure 2.3: U.S. Department of Education Model for Parent Involvement in Education



Source: U.S. Department of Education¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid.

Figure 2.4: National PTA Standards for Facilitating Parental Involvement

STANDARD	ACTION STEPS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS
Welcoming All Families into the School Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop family-friendly customer service guidelines to be used by school staff. ■ Set up a welcome center or help desk for parents/school visitors. ■ Plan meet-and-greet events to introduce families to school staff. ■ Provide staff training in race/class/cultural sensitivity and awareness. ■ Make time to address parents' questions and concerns.
Communicating Effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Track parent-teacher communication: how often do families hear from teachers? How often do they meet in person? What do they discuss? ■ Establish guidelines for regular communications between school and home, such as monthly calls from teachers, home visits, weekly newsletters, etc. ■ Collaborate with teachers and staff to develop a parent handbook. ■ Facilitate parental review of their children's work. ■ Establish and publicize parent visiting hours and guidelines for contacting teachers.
Supporting Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Give parents an active role in reviewing student work. ■ Provide parents with an overview of the curriculum, expected student learning outcomes, assessment methods, and expectations for parent participation. ■ Initiate a program of student-led parent-teacher conferences. ■ Establish a school policy that teachers regularly send home education materials (e.g. interactive homework) that facilitate parent-student collaboration.
Speaking Up for Every Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Frequently communicate policies and procedures for addressing parent concerns. ■ Establish and publicize a set of parent rights. ■ Provide handbooks that comprehensively explain all school policies. ■ Highlight successful changes in school practices that result from parent input. ■ Encourage and facilitate school and civic participation by parents.
Sharing Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Annually survey parents on current school policies and proposed policy changes. ■ Discuss school assessment results and plans for school improvement with parents. ■ Establish a parent team focused on school improvement. ■ Encourage parents to share concerns/ideas for school improvement.
Collaborating with Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sponsor a student community service day. ■ Request that local employers encourage their employees to attend parent-teacher conferences and other school activities for parents. ■ Encourage local businesses to run summer workshops for teachers to help them learn more about available community resources. ■ Host school breakfasts for civic leaders and local businesses.

Source: National PTA²⁰

²⁰ "PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: An Implementation Guide," National PTA. http://www.pta.org/files/National_Standards_Implementation_Guide_2009.pdf

ACTIONABLE BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Several key practices for implementing effective family and community engagement programs emerge from the literature, which are described in the following subsections. These practices include:

- Fostering strong school-family bonds
- Employing effective organization and teacher training
- Adjusting interventions to account for cultural diversity
- Communicating effectively with parents
- Linking parent engagement to learning
- Using age-specific techniques
- Addressing parents' needs
- Building relationships with community organizations

FOSTER STRONG SCHOOL-FAMILY BONDS

Experts agree that **the success of any family engagement program is premised on a bond of teamwork and trust between schools and the families they serve.** As educators and scholars become aware of the importance of out-of-class learning, they look to parents as partners in students' education. However, many districts face challenges conveying the importance of parental involvement and recruiting committed family partners in the quest for student achievement. Former Deputy Superintendent of Family and Community Engagement at Boston Public Schools, Dr. Karen Mapp, explains that "the relationship piece is key because, without the relationships, parents won't be compelled to attend even the best and most useful family engagement programs."²¹ Therefore, the onus is on teachers and administrators to forge bonds of trust, shared values, ongoing bidirectional communication, and mutual respect with parents.²² This engages families, fosters commitment, and makes parents feel more comfortable communicating with teachers about their child.

Garnering family buy-in to engagement and support programs requires recognition of mutual (i.e. school and parent) responsibility for students' success. In addition to trust between teachers and parents, both parties must also recognize the other's role in the learning process. Rudy Crew, former superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, espouses the importance of transforming "supply parents," those that are marginalized in the education system, to "demand parents," individuals who are active in their children's schools and demand quality education for them.²³ It is parents'

²¹ Mapp, K. "Why and How do You Link Family Engagement Practices to Learning?" The Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators/member-insights/why-and-how-do-you-link-family-engagement-practices-to-learning>

²² Weiss et al., *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

responsibility to support their children’s learning outside of school and demand that their children receive a quality education. Meanwhile, schools are responsible for providing excellent education to their students and training parents to be effective supports and advocates for their children.²⁴ Through encouraging shared responsibility, effective parental engagement programs ensure that:²⁵

Districts, schools, and families share a broad understanding of family involvement that honors and supports each partner’s role in supporting student learning— from the district’s most senior administrators to classroom teachers and bus drivers. These school districts move beyond the traditional notion of family engagement, which focuses on parents attending events at the school, to recognizing that sometimes schools cannot “see,” but can still support, one of the most important parts of family engagement: what happens at home.

EMPLOY EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION AND TEACHER TRAINING

The organization and administration of family engagement programs should be thoughtful and systemic. Ad hoc initiatives do not provide students the comprehensive and sustained support that they need for academic achievement. Similarly, poorly organized, piecemeal approaches to family involvement often fail to adequately engage and retain parent commitment. Successful programs, therefore, rely on district-level infrastructure to “develop, implement, and coordinate”²⁶ family engagement efforts. This framework allows districts to assess the efficacy of programs while facilitating communication between schools regarding best practices.

Effective parental involvement initiatives should be integrated across grade levels. Studies show that parental involvement is crucial to learners’ outcomes throughout the education process. Therefore, engagement efforts and supports should be integrated into the school system, allowing support to build on itself and continue throughout a child’s education. This requires school districts to prepare infrastructure for integrated family supports which allow children to move from one education level to another with continuous parental involvement. Therefore, engagement efforts:²⁷

[S]hould be designed to build family involvement as a continuous process that grows and evolves as children mature. Inherent in this perspective are a critical role for families across educational transitions, a commitment to engaging families early and often, efforts to support and reinforce involvement across learning contexts and the learning year, and efforts to build on and leverage earlier family involvement efforts.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵ Westmoreland, H. et al. “Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement.” Harvard Family Research Project, July 2009. p. 2. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement>

²⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷ Weiss et al., Op. cit., p. 29.

Training teachers in employing parental engagement techniques is vital to implementation. Much of the responsibility for implementing parental involvement initiatives lies with classroom teachers. Teachers must, therefore, know how to carry out parental involvement techniques and understand why they are important. This is specifically relevant to cross cultural communication techniques, which are essential to creating a lasting bond of trust and partnership between teachers and diverse families. Therefore, successful engagement programs invest in high quality teacher training and professional development: “As opposed to ‘drive-by trainings’ and cookie-cutter approaches,” these programs “adapt and build on events and models to implement an organizational, rather than individual, approach to professional development.”²⁸

CONSIDER DIVERSITY AND ADJUST INTERVENTIONS ACCORDINGLY

Successful engagement programs recognize that effective parental supports are culturally dependent and adjust their intervention strategies accordingly. A significant body of research has shown that the forms of parental involvement linked to student achievement vary by cultural background. For instance, one study found that African American kindergarteners’ math outcomes were improved by parent involvement with school activities; the same approach did not necessarily improve the math outcomes of white students, however, who were more likely to benefit from parental involvement at home and family appreciation of the value of education.²⁹

Disadvantaged students may gain even more benefit from an increase in parental involvement than middle-class students.

Similarly, cultures exhibit educational support in distinct ways, with some prioritizing participation in school activities and others demonstrating support through exempting students from obligations, such as getting a job, to free time for school work. Thus, “certain patterns of family involvement processes that result in positive outcomes for youth apply to some ethnic groups but not to others. Hence, it is important for educators to keep informed of the strategies that are relevant to the families with whom they work.”³⁰

Despite these differences, research has shown that families from all cultures are interested in supporting their children’s education. Indeed, as Henderson and Mapp note, it is important for educators to overcome any deficit perspective they may have and “recognize that all parents—regardless of income, education, or cultural background—are involved in

²⁸ Westmoreland et al., Op. cit., p. 3.

²⁹ Caspe, M. et al. “Family Involvement in Elementary School Children’s Education.” Harvard Family Research Project, Winter 2006/2007. p. 8. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/family-involvement-in-elementary-school-children-s-education>

³⁰ Kreider, H. et al. “Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students’ Education.” Harvard Family Research Project, Spring 2007. p. 8. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/family-involvement-in-middle-and-high-school-students-education>

their children’s learning and want their children to do well.”³¹ In fact, research suggests that disadvantaged students may benefit from increased parental involvement even more than middle-class students, underscoring the importance of this outreach to such families.³² Educators need to recognize the desire of diverse families to support their children’s education by engaging parents in respectful and culturally relevant ways.

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH PARENTS

Communication is vital for engaging parents as partners in student learning. To successfully support their child’s learning, parents must be kept abreast of their child’s academic progress and effective intervention techniques. Parents can only intervene if they know there is a problem, and can only provide effective support if they are equipped with the appropriate skills. Therefore “schools and out-of-school time programs [should] communicate with parents about children’s performance and share children’s successes and challenges over an array of settings in a timely fashion.”³³ This information allows parents to carry out targeted supports for their child. With access to such information, families can:³⁴

- *Support, monitor, and facilitate student progress* and achievement in a focused and concrete way that complements learning at school
- *Inform transition from one program or school to another* so that teachers can be cognizant of and build upon the child’s unique development and interests
- *Engage in ongoing conversations* with their child about planning for career and college
- *Map student skills and interests to available programs/resources in the community* such as afterschool programs and summer camps to further enrich learning and growth opportunities

In this vein, “family engagement is more likely to be sustained when it is outcome-oriented and tied to the instructional goals for a student, with specific benchmarks across the school year.”³⁵ When parents are alerted to their child’s academic progress and equipped with effective tools to address challenges, they can positively impact student learning.

LINK PARENT ENGAGEMENT TO LEARNING

Family engagement is most effective in improving student achievement when it is linked to learning outcomes. Research indicates discrepancies between parental involvement initiatives that are linked to learning (e.g. encouraging parents to read with their children or to set high academic expectations for their children) and those that are not (e.g. encouraging parents to run bake sales or attend school planning meetings). Evidence suggests that the former approach is directly tied to improved academic outcomes, while

³¹ Henderson and Mapp, Op cit., p. 8.

³² Weiss, et al., Op cit., p. 12.

³³ Caspe et al., Op. cit., p. 7.

³⁴ Bullet points quoted from: Weiss, H., M Lopez, and D. Stark. “Breaking New Ground: Data Systems Transform Family Engagement in Education.” Op. cit., p. 5.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

the latter has negligible effects.³⁶ Westmoreland et al. find that “family engagement has the most impact when it is directly linked to learning.”³⁷ Therefore, parental and community engagement programs are most successful in improving academic outcomes when they focus on student learning.

School engagement programs should therefore equip parents with the tools they need to be effective instruments of learning support. This support can take many forms, from interactive homework assignments designed to be completed by parents and children, to workshops highlighting the importance of setting high academic expectations for children. While schools and parents will work together to determine the specific topics to cover and delivery methods to employ, the unifying feature of these interventions should be their focus on student learning. In this way:³⁸

Rather than being a checklist of activities, family engagement becomes systemic and linked to specific educational goals. Rather than being an ‘add-on’ to what teachers already do, family engagement is integrated into teaching and learning by providing teachers with a partner who supports and monitors student learning. Rather than being activity-driven and dependent on time-limited funding, family engagement is more likely to be sustained when it is outcome-oriented and tied to the instructional goals for a student, with specific benchmarks across the school year.

UTILIZE AGE-SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

Evidence suggests that parental involvement strategies should vary according to the age and developmental stage of students. Studies show that, as children get older, parents become less important as teachers and more important in preparing their children for independence.³⁹ School engagement programs should reflect these changes. Figure 2.5 depicts the types of parental involvement which are critical to academic outcomes at each stage of development. Early childhood supports focus on the quality of bonds between parent, child, and teacher. Elementary school actions emphasize parental involvement in learning supports. Parents of middle and high school students should focus more on monitoring their child’s academic activities and preparing them for greater independence.

³⁶ Mapp, Op. cit.

³⁷ Westmoreland et al., Op. cit., p. 2.

³⁸ Weiss, Lopez, and Stark, Op. cit., p. 3.

³⁹ Weiss et al., Op. cit., p. 15.

Figure 2.5: Important Types of Parental Involvement, by Education Level

EDUCATION LEVEL	PARENTING	INVOLVEMENT AT SCHOOL	INVOLVEMENT AT HOME
Early Childhood	Parent-child relationship	Parent-teacher relationship	Child-centered activities
	Responsiveness	Presence in classroom	Literacy practices
Elementary School	Parent-child communication	Presence in classroom	Literacy practices
			Educational supplies
		Attendance at school events	Emphasis on academic and non-academic activities
Middle & High School	Authoritative parenting	Active in school community	Homework guidance
	Monitoring	Participation in family involvement programs	Support with time management and self-regulation
	Expectations		

Source: Peterson and Kreider⁴⁰

Parental involvement efforts at the elementary school level should reflect the important developmental changes and critical gains in math and reading skills that children experience during this time. Caspe et al. identify several critical support methods for parents of elementary school students. They classify interventions as oriented towards *parenting*, *home-school relationships*, or *responsibility for learning outcomes*.⁴¹ At this stage of development, parenting should focus on building a parent-child bond based on support, appropriate instruction, and respect. Parents' communication with teachers, volunteer efforts, and participation in school activities also play an important role in student achievement. At home, families should support children's literacy, help with homework, manage children's education, and set high expectations for children.⁴² Figure 2.6 depicts the relationship between these support methods and child outcomes.

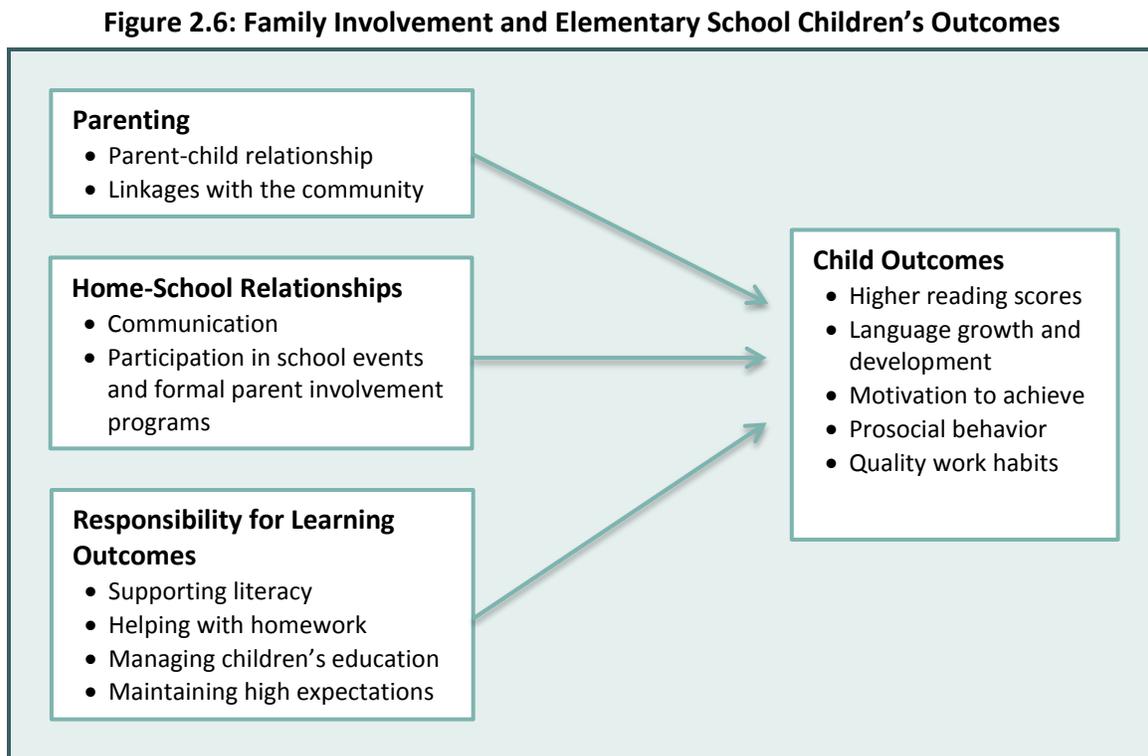
⁴⁰ Figure contents quoted from: Peterson, L. and H. Kreider. "Making the Case for Parent Involvement and Engagement." Harvard Family Research Project, May 11, 2005. p. 10 – 12.

http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/making_the_case_parent.pdf

⁴¹ Parenting refers to the values and practices used by parents to raise their children. Home-school relationships comprise connections between the home and school environments. Responsibility for learning is the facet of parenting which focuses on learning in the home environment.

Caspe, M. et al. "Family Involvement in Elementary School Children's Education." Op. cit., p. 1.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 2-4.

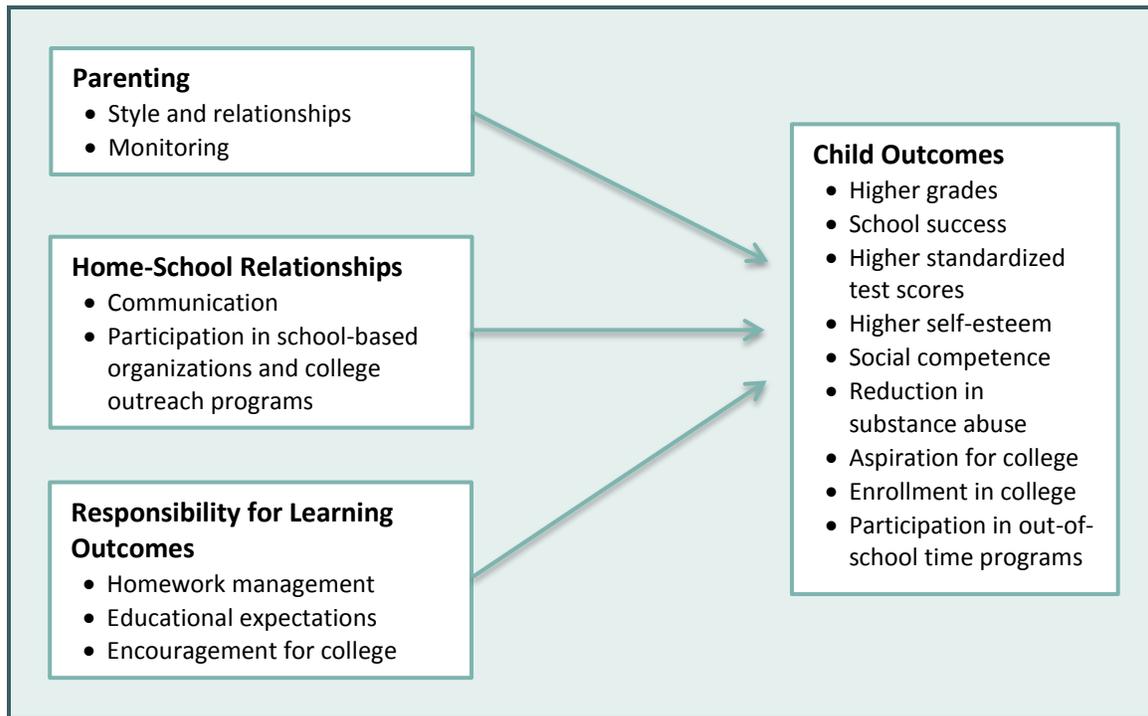


Source: Caspe et al.⁴³

Programs to enhance parental involvement at the middle and high school levels should recognize the increasing autonomy and cognitive abilities of students. Kreider et al. note that parenting approaches should emphasize forging strong bonds and open communication between parents and adolescents. Academic support shifts from teaching to monitoring homework. Parental involvement in school activities remains important; however, the focus should now be on engaging families in career and college readiness activities. Similarly, setting high expectations for children is crucial at this stage.⁴⁴ Figure 2.7 depicts the relationship between parental involvement techniques and middle and high school student outcomes.

⁴³ Figure reproduced from: Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁴ Kreider, H. et al. "Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students' Education." Op. cit. p. 2-5.

Figure 2.7: Family Involvement and Middle and High School Students' Outcomes

Source: Kreider et al⁴⁵

While certain parental involvement techniques do impact student outcomes, it is also important to note that race and socioeconomic status play a role in determining effective intervention strategies. Caspe et al. qualify their research findings, noting that “family involvement is not a ‘one size fits all’ model. Instead, family involvement practices and beliefs vary by culture as well as by economic status.”⁴⁶ These factors should be considered in conjunction with age and development level when schools create parent engagement programs.

CONSIDER AND ADDRESS PARENTS’ NEEDS

Experts note that successful parental engagement efforts take parents’ needs, both skill- and resource-related, into account. Effective engagement programs must consider parent demands and reflect their interests and desired knowledge. Dr. Mapp explains that districts and schools “have to offer programs that parents want. It is important to do some sort of survey or needs assessment of parents before planning begins. Don't make assumptions about what families need and want without asking them first.”⁴⁷ Programs that reflect parents’ interests are more likely to elicit participation.

Similarly, schools need to provide necessary supports for parental participation. External factors, such as job insecurity or lack of financial resources, may prevent some families from

⁴⁵ Figure reproduced from: Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁶ Caspe et al., Op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁷ Mapp, Op. cit.

participating in engagement programming. Successful initiatives recognize these constraints and take steps to address them. Schools may provide transportation to families without access to a car, for instance, or may provide onsite child care during programming.⁴⁸ With these factors in mind, educators are more likely to attract and retain commitment to engagement programs.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Community engagement efforts should emphasize partnership. There is significantly less evidence linking community engagement to academic outcomes, though districts may find these partnerships helpful in a number of ways. Generally, community partnerships should follow similar guidelines as parent partnerships. Namely, “parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement.”⁴⁹

These partnerships take diverse forms. Businesses may support parent engagement by allowing their employees to communicate with schools in the workplace. They may directly impact learning outcomes by providing tutoring services for employees’ children or partnering with schools to present information sessions and conferences.⁵⁰ Community organizations may support school disciplinary policies or sponsor in-school workshops. In these and many other capacities, school-community partnerships can supplement and enrich student learning.

⁴⁸ Henderson and Mapp, Op. cit., p. 46.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁰ Caspe et al., Op. cit., p. 7.

SECTION III: CASE STUDIES

This section describes family and community engagement policies implemented by Creighton School District in Phoenix, Arizona; Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Miami, Florida; and Seattle Public Schools in Seattle, Washington. Each of these districts was selected on the basis of national recognition and adherence to established best practices in family and community engagement.

CREIGHTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Creighton School District includes 10 elementary schools serving over 7,000 students. Of these students, 38 percent are English Language Learners (ELL) and 36 percent live below the poverty line.⁵¹ The district's family and community engagement program was identified by the Harvard Family Research Project as an example of innovation and success in the field, employing several best practices to impact student achievement.⁵² Parent engagement is encouraged through Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT), parent liaisons, and community classes.

At the district level, the director of community education is responsible for overseeing and implementing family engagement programs. Associated responsibilities include training administrators and parent liaisons in program implementation techniques. Each school in the district has a Title I coordinator who oversees the implementation of Academic Parent-Teacher Teams. Finally, teachers and parent liaisons are responsible for carrying out APTT meetings and communicating student progress to parents.⁵³

ACADEMIC PARENT-TEACHER TEAMS

Creighton Schools keeps parents updated on their child's academic progress and provides them with tools to support learning through Academic Parent-Teacher Teams. Teams consist of a teacher, an entire class of parents, and a parent liaison. The parent liaison is an individual hired by the district to promote family engagement. Liaisons sit in on team meetings, coach teachers, and assist in parent outreach efforts. Each team meets three times a year for 75 minutes each. During these meetings, teachers address all the parents at once. Each parent receives performance data for the whole class and for their child. Teachers review the data with the group of parents and then set 60-day academic goals for students based on their academic scores, breaking skill mastery up into manageable steps: "For example, if the standard is for 1st graders to learn 120 high-frequency words by the end of second quarter, children working ahead of the curve might have a goal of mastering all 120 by the end of November, whereas a child behind the curve might have a goal of

⁵¹ "Creighton Elementary District, AZ." National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp

⁵² Weiss, Lopez, and Stark, Op. cit., p. 8.

⁵³ Paredes, M. "Academic Parent-Teacher Teams: Reorganizing Parent Teacher Conferences Around Data." Harvard Family Research Project, October 2010. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/academic-parent-teacher-teams-reorganizing-parent-teacher-conferences-around-data>

75.”⁵⁴ Next, teachers demonstrate skills for parents to help their children achieve these goals and ask parents to practice these techniques with each other. Figure 3.1 lists several examples of home activities used to support skill-building. Thus, the APTTs keep parents abreast of their child’s performance, equip them with the tools to support learning, and facilitate networking and community support among parents.

Figure 3.1: Creighton School District First Grade Essential Skills Guide (Excerpt)

SKILLS	HOME ACTIVITIES
Reading	
Read grade level books	Use a grade level book from your child’s school or local library. Before your child begins reading, ask them to predict what they think the story will be about. Then ask them to read the story to you or a family member. Help them sound out the words they are unfamiliar with. At the end of the story, ask them questions about what they read (e.g. Who was your favorite character? Can you tell me about what you read? What was your favorite e part in the story and why? etc.) These questions can also be asked if you read them a story. Ask your child to practice reading at home on a daily basis.
Math	
Solve addition and subtraction problems	Use dice, beans, and other household objects to practice adding and subtracting. Your child can also use a number line or other strategies to help them solve the problems.

Source: Creighton School District⁵⁵

Parents and teachers also meet once a year for individual consultations. These meetings usually take place at the beginning of the year and provide teachers and parents the chance to review student performance and create individualized action plans to support learning. These meetings empower parents, who report that “APTT team meetings offer them a clear window into their child’s learning in the classroom, a clear and explicit articulation of what teachers expect them to do to support learning at home, and a timeline for completing the goals.”⁵⁶

Through the APTTs, teachers get to spend more time engaging with parents than they would using traditional parent-teacher conferences, helping them to solidify bonds. In the traditional model, parents and teachers typically meet twice a year for about 15 minutes. The time and frequency of interactions are limited because educators need to conduct meetings with each individual family. Through the use of group sessions, APTTs allow teachers to engage with parents more frequently and for longer of periods of time without taking additional time away from the teacher’s schedule. This facilitates communication, makes families more comfortable speaking with their child’s teacher, and provides more timely student progress updates to families.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Figure contents quoted from “2011 – 2012 Parent Learning Calendar.” Creighton School District. <http://www.creightonschools.org/documents/Community%20Ed/PLC%201stEng11-12.pdf>

⁵⁶ Weiss, Lopez, and Stark, Op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

PARENT LIAISONS

In addition to their role in APTTs, Creighton Schools' parent liaisons facilitate involvement through a variety of avenues. Parent liaisons foster the school-family bond, respond to family demand for educational and skill-building programming, and facilitate communication with parents. They do this by:⁵⁸

- Organizing regular educational workshops for parents,
- Raising parent awareness of academic standards and standardized testing,
- Arranging family intervention assistance, and
- Facilitating volunteering opportunities to parents and community members.

COMMUNITY CLASSES

Creighton's community classes provide parents with learning-linked skill building opportunities and also address barriers to parental involvement. The Parent-Child Kinder Readiness class is a free program conducted over several weeks. In the program, children are taught the cognitive, motor and social skills necessary for entry into kindergarten. Parents, on the other hand, are offered concrete tools to further learning at home. The class emphasizes parental involvement and builds parents' capacity to support learning at the early stages of education. It provides parents with learning-linked techniques to support their child's academic achievement at home.⁵⁹ Adult English classes are also offered to help support parental involvement by removing language barriers to engagement. Through this program, the district aims to acknowledge and address the needs of all of its parents.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Bullet points adapted from: "Parent Liaisons." Creighton School District.

http://www.creightonschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=180085&type=d&pREC_ID=375161

⁵⁹ "Kindergarten Readiness." Creighton School District.

http://www.creightonschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=180085&type=d&pREC_ID=375164

⁶⁰ "Community Classes." Creighton School District.

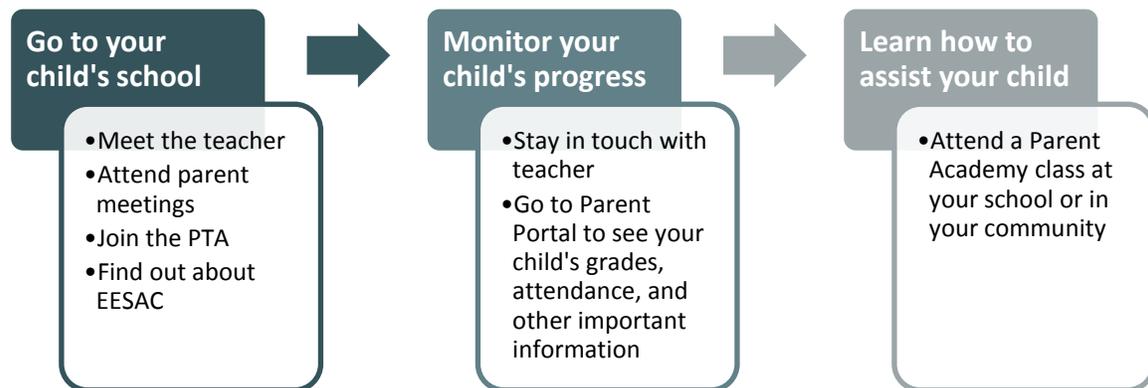
http://www.creightonschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=180085&type=d&pREC_ID=375160

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) serves over 349,000 students in 435 Pre K – 12 schools. Of its students, 17.2 percent are English Language Learners and 22 percent live below the poverty line.⁶¹ In 2012, M-DCPS won the Broad Prize, an honor awarded annually to the urban school district that “demonstrates the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color.”⁶² Family and community engagement was cited as one of the factors contributing to the district’s win.⁶³

In its 2009 – 2014 Strategic Plan, the district recommitted itself to student achievement and identified “Student, Parent, and Community Engagement” as one of the four pillars upon which this goal depends.⁶⁴ Figure 3.2 depicts M-DCPS’s “Parent Pathway,” which outlines the various modes of communication and support M-DCPS provides parents in an effort to boost involvement. The pathway includes the Parent Portal and the Parent Academy, two innovative approaches described in more detail below. The district also boasts a robust community engagement office.

Figure 3.2: Parent Pathway



Source: Miami-Dade County Public Schools⁶⁵

PARENT PORTAL

Miami-Dade County Public Schools seeks to maximize the flow of information between teachers and parents through its online Parent Portal. This tool is designed to promote communication and allow parents to closely monitor their child’s progress by posting

⁶¹ “Dade, FL.” National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp

⁶² “Overview.” The Broad Prize. <http://www.broadprize.org/about/overview.html>

⁶³ “The 2012 Broad Prize.” The Broad Prize. p. 4. <http://www.broadprize.org/asset/1801-tbp%202012%20fact%20sheet%20mdcps.pdf>

⁶⁴ “District Strategic Framework 2009 – 2014.” Miami-Dade County Public Schools. p. 13. <http://osp.dadeschools.net/0910plan.pdf>

⁶⁵ “Parent Pathway.” Miami-Dade County Public School Office of Parental Involvement. http://parents.dadeschools.net/pdfs/p_pathway.pdf

grades, attendance, and other records. In the 2009 – 2014 Strategic Plan Survey, parents voiced appreciation of the portal. In its review of the survey, the district noted that “many parents were excited about keeping a close watch on their child’s educational progress through the Parent Portal. Keeping the system up-to-date and user friendly is very beneficial to parent involvement in schools.”⁶⁶

The district plans to expand the impact of the Parent Portal by using it as a venue for learning-linked parent tutorials and other learning tools. Taking note of best practices which recommend coupling teacher-parent communication with actionable tools to support learning, M-DCPS aims to expand the impact of its online portal by including tutorials and other information designed to equip parents with learning support skills. In its statement of parental involvement policy, the district notes that:⁶⁷

In order to assist parents, resources should be made available for check-out at the school site or through the District web site or Parent Portal, such as: audio/visual, print, and web-based programs; “how-to” programs broadcast on education television and radio; pamphlets and books developed especially to aid the parent-as-teacher; copies of course schedules and homework assignments; lists of grade level and course objectives; testing guidelines; and schedules.

PARENT ACADEMY

M-DCPS further supports parents in their supplementary teaching role through The Parent Academy. The academy was originally conceived of by former Superintendent, Rudy Crew, in an effort to provide parents from all economic groups with the skills necessary to effectively advocate for and support their children’s learning. It acts as “a multifaceted and community-wide initiative helping parents learn about their roles, rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to support learning.”⁶⁸

The Parent Academy provides free classes focused on building parents’ understanding of the education system and effective parenting practices for student achievement.⁶⁹ In an effort to reach all parents, classes are offered in accessible locations such as churches and community centers. The Parent Academy also publishes a newsletter with updates and tips for supporting student learning. The most recent issue included several course descriptions, presented in Figure 3.3 on the next page. Many classes are also offered online. As of 2009, the most recent year for which data are available, over 85,000 parents had participated in Parent Academy classes.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ “District Strategic Framework,” Op. cit., p. 32.

⁶⁷ “The School Board of Miami-Dade County Bylaws & Policies.” Miami-Dade County Public Schools. p. 4.
http://parents.dadeschools.net/pdfs13/Brd_policy-2111_parental_involvement_072413.pdf

⁶⁸ Weiss et al., Op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁹ “About Us.” The Parent Academy. http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/about_us.asp

⁷⁰ Weiss et al., Op. cit., p. 30.

Figure 3.3: Sample of Parent Academy Course Offerings

COURSE	DESCRIPTION
Transitioning to the Common Core	Free online learning Common Core Curriculum informational modules in an effort to facilitate parents in assisting their children make the transition to the newly adopted state curriculum.
The Path to Learning English	English speakers increase their chances of obtaining employment and potentially earning higher wages. Individuals who have not mastered the English language will benefit from this event where they can get firsthand information on enrolling in courses that will increase their mastery of verbal and written communication skills.
The Path to Finding a Job	Individuals looking for a job or a career change are encouraged to attend this free event where potential employers will be making presentations and answering questions about their companies. Interested individuals will be able to make contacts with employers and receive information on broadening their educational skills that will make them marketable in the job market.

Source: Miami-Dade County Public Schools⁷¹

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Office of Community Engagement at M-DCPS seeks to promote student learning through partnerships with local organizations and businesses. The effort most relevant to student achievement is the Internship Program, which pairs students with community partners for “hands-on” experiences in the workplace. The district offers two distinct programs:

- **Honors and Executive Internship Program** – “Through a community-based internship, students are paired with community professionals to gain experience and first-hand knowledge in their intended collegiate field of study.”⁷²
- **Career Experience Opportunities** – “CEO serves as an opportunity to engage business and community leaders to expand learning through partnerships that connect to the students’ career pathways.”⁷³

Community engagement efforts also include a volunteer program, through which community members share their skills through mentoring or assisting school clubs.

⁷¹ Contents quoted from: “The Parent Advice.” The Parent Academy, September 2013.
http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/pdfs13/News_Sept13.pdf

⁷² “Honors and Executive Internship Program.” Office of Community Engagement.
http://community.dadeschools.net!/internship/HE_overview.asp

⁷³ “Career Experience Opportunities.” Office of Community Engagement.
http://community.dadeschools.net!/internship/CEO_overview.asp

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) has won awards from the National Network of Partnership Schools in three out of the past four years for successfully implementing best practices-based family and community engagement programs.⁷⁴ The district serves over 45,000 students, 9 percent of whom are English Language Learners and 13 percent of whom live below the poverty line.⁷⁵

SPS promotes parental and community involvement using Joyce Epstein’s six modes of involvement. These are manifest in the district’s various programs aimed at promoting student achievement by increasing engagement. Initiatives include Family Engagement Action Teams (FEAT), Family Connectors, and school-community partnerships. Figure 3.4 outlines the district’s overarching approach to family engagement.

Figure 3.4: District Infrastructure for School-Family Partnerships

STEP	ACTION
1	Each school will establish a Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) that includes family members, staff and community members who develop and monitor a school-wide, comprehensive plan that supports family engagement activities and strategies to strengthen the school and the achievement of ALL students.
2	Well trained Volunteer Family Connectors will be established in every school to serve as liaisons between families, the school, and the District to strengthen School Family Partnerships. Given the wide range of school sizes and programs within SPS, Family Connectors will need to fit into the school’s existing culture and school family partnerships structures (Family Engagement Action Teams, PTAs, PTSAs, Site Councils, PTOs, Family Support Workers, Building Leadership Teams, etc...). The Family Connector Program is not meant to replace existing programs or structures, but rather to enhance and formalize communication between families at a school and the District.
3	The District will create a paid Ombudsman position reporting directly to the Superintendent. The Ombudsman is a liaison who will serve as an independent and confidential resource, assisting families and the community in resolving problems, complaints, conflicts, and other school-related issues when normal procedures have failed.
4	Family friendly publications (both hard copy and online) will be developed containing information on best practices in School Family Partnerships and resource information for those facing barriers. Publications will be translated into the District’s eight major languages.
5	A logical, user-friendly SPS Web site will be updated to provide access to current programs and resources.

Source: Seattle Public Schools⁷⁶

⁷⁴ [1] “Partnership District Award Winners – 2013.” National Network of Partnership Schools. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/awards/2013/district/index.htm>

[2] “Partnership District Award Winners – 2012.” National Network of Partnership Schools. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/awards/2012/district/index.htm>

[3] “Partnership District Award Winners – 2010.” National Network of Partnership Schools. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/awards/2010/district/index.htm>

⁷⁵ “Seattle Public Schools, WA.” National Center for Education Statistics. http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/search/search_intro.asp

⁷⁶ Contents quoted directly from “Seattle Public Schools School Family Partnerships District Plan 2011 – 2012.” Seattle Public Schools. p. 4. <http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/groups/homepagefiles/cms/1583136/File/Departmental%20Content/fa>

In order to successfully implement engagement programs, the district calls for a cohesive, district-wide professional development plan. Employees and families work together to organize professional training which addresses “strategies for building culturally relevant school family partnerships in every school.”⁷⁷ This curriculum is delivered to school-level administrators and teachers and also extends to participants in the Family Connectors program.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTION TEAMS

Family Engagement Action Teams plan and implement school-specific programs aimed at building parents’ capacity to support learning. The teams exist at 41 of the district’s schools and are comprised of school staff, parents, and community members. Participants receive professional development from the district, which equips them with the skills needed to implement programming. Together, team members develop a plan, specific to the goals of individual schools, to increase family participation in and support of children’s learning. FEATs meet once a month to assess the progress of implementation and make adjustments to the plan, if necessary.⁷⁸

FAMILY CONNECTORS

Family Connectors act as liaisons between schools, families, and community members to support engagement initiatives. Parent volunteers attend a “Family Connectors University,” developed by Seattle University, to train volunteers to teach learning support techniques to other families in their schools. Training includes “sessions on ‘Understanding and Interpreting Student, School, and District Data,’ and ‘Preparing Families and Students for College and Careers.’” Other sessions cover topics on best practices in family engagement, how to facilitate a meeting, and developing conflict resolution skills.⁷⁹ Parent Connectors then return to their schools and deliver information sessions to fellow parents. In 2012, approximately 150 volunteers graduated from Family Connectors University and went on to volunteer their time in SPS.⁸⁰ This program delivers actionable, learning-linked information to parents and promotes commitment to, and participation in, the school community.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Seattle Public Schools also engages in partnerships with local organizations with the goal of enhancing student learning. The district’s 2013 – 2018 Strategic Plan states that SPS is “committed to the creation and implementation of effective school-community partnerships that enhance academic outcomes by providing high-quality services and

mily%20engagement/SFP%20Plan--2011-2012.pdf?sessionId=b3c6425d2160b31dfc8eb47536fc34cb

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁹ “Partnership District Award Winners – 2013.” National Network of Partnership Schools.
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/awards/2013/district/seattle.html>

⁸⁰ Davila, F. “Seattle Schools Win National Award for Family Engagement.” KPLU 88.5, September 11, 2013.
<http://www.kplu.org/post/seattle-schools-win-national-award-family-engagement>

instruction before, after and during the school day.”⁸¹ Community involvement takes one of three forms:⁸²

- **Category A** – Field Trips, assembly programs, guest speakers, and one-time teaching artists. These are usually single experiences for students and for schools.
- **Category B** – Tutoring, mentoring, enrichment and volunteer programs provided before, during, or after the school day.
- **Category C** – Multi-site, multi-partner, or multi-year commitment where there is a significant exchange of resources, time or funds.

Through these types of collaborations, students are exposed to the larger Seattle community and they engage in invaluable out-of-class learning.

⁸¹ “Seattle Public Schools Strategic Plan 2013 – 2018.” Seattle Public Schools. p. 21.
http://www.seattleschools.org/modules/groups/homepagefiles/cms/1583136/File/Departmental%20Content/communications/strategic%20plan/SPS_SP_Full_Plan_web_3-10-13.pdf?sessionid=a46fcd3e3fed73f9d36a5eb87c4c8d27

⁸² “Welcome to School and Community Partnerships.” Seattle Public Schools.
http://communitypartnerships.www.seattleschools.org/modules/groups/integrated_home.phtml?gid=3793520&sessionid=3cdb52136d59ac0d1c92d13c77604058

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