

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: KEY TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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In the wake of school accountability reports and the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), school personnel and communities are motivated to explore strategies that further promote student achievement and ensure that “no child is left behind” in getting a good education. Over 30 years of research shows that one of the most effective ways to increase student achievement is for parents to be actively involved in the education of their children. A 2002 National Education Service study indicates the following:¹

- When parents are involved students tend to achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background or parents’ educational level.
- When parents are involved in students’ education, those students generally have high grades and test scores, better attendance, and more consistently complete homework.
- Students whose parents are involved in their lives have higher education rates and greater enrollment rates in postsecondary education.

Given this research, it is advisable for all schools to promote and support parental and family involvement and invest in activities and strategies that foster parent and school collaboration. There is, however, some resistance and hesitation associated with allocating resources to promote parental involvement in schools. Both school personnel and parents struggle with the “how tos” of getting more parents involved. School personnel may say, “*We would like to have more parents involved but don’t have the time to send out notices on everything we do. We ask parents to be more active, but it’s always the same parents that sign-up to help.*” Parents also may struggle with increasing their school involvement. Their issues often involve, “*My work schedule doesn’t allow me to attend meetings during the day. What can I do to help with my child’s homework - I don’t even understand it!?!*”

According to Family Support America there are common barriers associated with increasing involvement of parents and families in schools and community programs.² The four common barriers are:

- 1) **Attitudes** – Staff do not feel comfortable talking about issues in front of families. Families don’t trust staff. Staff think families are too overwhelmed to participate. Staff aren’t willing to accept families as equal partners. Families think they have nothing to contribute. Staff think that families will violate client confidentiality.

¹ The 2002 National Education Service study is highlighted in “Strengthening Parent Involvement: A Toolkit,” a publication by the Colorado Department of Education available online @ www.cde.state.co.us/cdeunified/download/pi_toolkit.pdf.

² Family Support America is a national, non-profit organization based in Chicago, Illinois, that promotes parent and family engagement. Additional information is available online @ www.familysupportamerica.org.

- 2) **Logistics** – Schools and programs can't pay for child care. Transportation is unavailable for families to get to meetings. Meetings are held only during working hours – or at times inconvenient for parents. Families aren't reimbursed for the time they take off of work to attend meetings.
- 3) **System barriers** – No systems are in place for paying parent leaders for their time and contributions. Staff time can only be paid during regular working hours. Lack of resources available for supporting parent and family involvement.
- 4) **Lack of skills** – Families have never participated in (school-type) meetings/committees. Families are unaware of applicable procedures and policies. Staff aren't ready to work with families in new ways. Lack of information about the role of families and staff.

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) recognizes that support is needed to address challenges and barriers associated with increasing parental involvement. Many steps have been taken to offer local schools and districts information and materials to expand parent and family engagement. School districts are encouraged to think of parental involvement in broader terms, not only limited to parents volunteering in the classroom or working on fundraising projects. There are models that can help schools reshape how they look at parent and family engagement such as, *Epstein's Framework of Parent Involvement*. This model is utilized by CDE Prevention Initiatives, Positive Behavior Support schools, and adopted by The National PTA. It is based on *six types of parent involvement* identified by Joyce Epstein from the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University.³

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement includes:

1. **Parenting** – parenting skills are promoted and supported.
2. **Communication** – communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
3. **Volunteering** – parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
4. **Learning at Home** – help parents understand the educational process and their role in supporting student achievement. Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
5. **School Decision-Making and Advocacy** – parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families. Title I, II, IV stipulate that parents should have a role regarding programmatic decisions that are made. The intent is to give parents voice in decisions that affect their children's education.
6. **Collaboration with the Community** – community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

In addition to materials, CDE is also providing technical assistance and training. In November 2003, The Colorado Department of Education/Prevention Initiatives contracted with The National Center for School Engagement at The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children to provide local elementary, middle, and high schools with technical assistance designed to promote parent and school collaboration and increase family involvement in the education of children. Technical assistance is available to Colorado schools participating in Positive

³ Additional information on Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement is available online @ <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm>. More detailed information is also provided at the end of this article.

Behavior Support and those receiving funds through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, and/or Expelled and At-Risk Student Services. For more information on this assistance contact Judy Martinez, 303-837-8466 ext 105, judym@what-works.org.

Additional information on parental involvement can be accessed from the following website:

American Federation of Teachers/The Parent Page - www.aft.org/parentpage/index.html

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University - www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm

CDE Colorado Department of Education/Strengthening Parent Involvement: A Toolkit - www.cde.state.co.us/cdeunified/download/pi_toolkit.pdf.

Council for Civic Parent Leadership (Parent Leadership Database) - www.parentleadership.org/

Family Support America – www.familysupportamerica.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children - www.naeyc.org/

National Association of Child Advocates - www.childadvocacy.org/

National Association of Parents in Education - www.napehq.org/

National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) - www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/

National Center for Family Literacy - www.familit.org/

National Center for Parent Involvement in Education - www.ncpie.org/

National Network of Partnership Schools - www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/index.htm

National Parent Information Network – www.npin.org/

National PTA - www.pta.org

No Child Left Behind legislation - www.nclb.gov

Parent Leadership Institute - www.parentleaders.org/

Parent Leadership Associates - www.plassociates.org/twelve.html

Partnerships for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE) - www.pfie.ed.gov

Positive Behavioral Supports - www.pbis.org/english/ or <http://www.pbis.org/spanish/>

The Asian American Parent Association (AAPA) - <http://aapa.net/>

The Black Alliance for Education Options (BAEO) - www.baeo.org

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) - www.nclr.org/

The Parent Institute: 10 Things Any School Can Do to Build Parent Involvement - www.parentinstitute.com/educator/resources/10things/10things.php?

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement

(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, and Redefinitions)

Type 1 - Parenting

Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Sample Practices

- Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.
- Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.
- Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy.)
- Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.
- Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school. Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

Challenges

- Provide information to *all* families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.
- Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.
- Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.

Redefinitions

- *"Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read any where, any time, in varied forms.*

TYPE 2 - COMMUNICATING

Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.

Sample Practices

- Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.
- Language translators to assist families as needed.
- Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.
- Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences on improving grades.
- Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.
- Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.
- Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.

Challenges

- Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and non-print communications.
- Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.
- Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, ... on).
- Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.

Redefinitions

- *"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.*

<p>TYPE 3 - VOLUNTEERING</p> <p>Recruit and organize parent help and support.</p>
<p><i>Sample Practices</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents. • Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families. • Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers. • Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information. • Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.
<p><i>Challenges</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit volunteers widely so that <i>all</i> families know that their time and talents are welcome. • Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate. • Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive.
<p><i>Redefinitions</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time -- not just during the school day and at the school building.</i>
<p>TYPE 4 - LEARNING AT HOME</p> <p>Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.</p>
<p><i>Sample Practices</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade. • Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home. • Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments. • Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class. • Calendars with activities for parents and students at home. • Family math, science, and reading activities at school. • Summer learning packets or activities. • Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.
<p><i>Challenges</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives <i>students</i> responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork. • Coordinate family linked homework activities, if students have several teachers. • Involve families and their children in all-important curriculum-related decisions.
<p><i>Redefinitions</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.</i> • <i>"Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing -- not "teaching" school subjects.</i>

<p>TYPE 5 - DECISION MAKING</p> <p>Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.</p>
<p><i>Sample Practices</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation. • Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements. • District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement. • Information on school or local elections for school representatives. • Networks to link all families with parent representatives.
<p><i>Challenges</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school. • Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents. • Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.
<p><i>Redefinitions</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.</i> • <i>Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.</i>
<p>TYPE 6 - COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY</p> <p>Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.</p>
<p><i>Sample Practices</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services • Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students. • Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses. • Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others). • Participation of alumni in school programs for students.
<p><i>Challenges</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities. • Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships. • Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services. • Match community contributions with school goals, integrate child and family services with education.
<p><i>Redefinitions</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development.</i> • <i>"Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but also by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools.</i> • <i>"Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.</i>

