

School and Family Partnerships

Child & Family Practice Brief

High levels of family involvement in schools contribute to positive outcomes for children of all ages. For instance, literacy performance improves when parents are more involved in their child's school experience.¹ Through home-based, school-based, and community-based involvement, parents can positively influence their child's academic self-worth, confidence in relationships with teachers, self-motivation, and ability to develop personal strategies for academic success.²

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) enacted sweeping revisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. IASA, reflecting modern research on the importance of parenting in education, mandated a family involvement policy for schools receiving Title I funds (federal contributions to elementary and secondary education) and the law provides federal funds for family involvement programs. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) added requirements for schools to develop parent involvement programs and to actively engage in communication with parents (NCLB, Section 1118). In 2006, the Ohio Core Curriculum Bill (S.B. 311/H.B. 565) required charter schools to follow the same rules as public schools in developing parental involvement policy. In addition, the bill mandates that the Ohio State Board of Education consult with child and family experts to create recommendations for districts and schools regarding family involvement policy.

Current Practice

Effective parental involvement policies must be carefully designed to match the needs of a specific community and school. Policies are most effective when schools "tailor practices to the needs of the students and their families."³ The goal is to involve all families, not just parents who are the easiest to reach and are already involved. Parental involvement policies must address the challenges and barriers to the involvement of all families to increase equity between students and their families.⁴ Some barriers to parental involvement may include work schedules, lack of child care, language, and cultural differences. Examples of best practice are cited below:

- **Welcome Packets** to families who enroll mid-year that include school and community information, calendars of events, and important addresses
- **Parents as Teachers'** home visit program prepares children at home to enter kindergarten.
- **Parents' Night Out** sessions to inform parents of relevant topics
- Parents organize **multicultural activities** and **survey parents for input in several languages**
- Recognizing student performance by **awarding the student and their parent for outstanding improvement**⁵



References: 1) Dearing, E., Kreider, H., Simpkins, S., & Weiss, H. (2004). Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy: Longitudinal associations between and within families. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/conference/index.html> 2) Weiss, H., Epstein, J., Henderson, A., Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Jeynes, W. (2004). Research and evaluation of family involvement in education: What lies ahead? Retrieved from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/conference/index.html> 3) Epstein, J.L. & Hollifield, J.H. (1996). Title I and school-family-community partnerships: Using research to realize the potential. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 1 (3), 263-278. 4) Sheldon, S.B. (2003). Linking school-family-community partnerships in urban elementary schools to student achievement on state tests. 5) National Network of Partnership Schools website, <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/Awards/index.htm>

Recommendations for Ohio's Schools: Policy to Practice

Create a Family Involvement Committee

- A district level committee with administrative support creates organization, sustainability, and consistency. Membership should include parents of various ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses, teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, community members, and students.

Provide training and resources in order to move from policy to practice

- Conduct workshops to address family involvement, best practice programs, and expectations for outcomes of involvement.

Assess family-school communication

- Get feedback on how accessible and effective communications are. Take into account local language, cultural barriers, and reading levels.



References: 6) Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Salinas, K., Simon, B., VanVoorhis, F., & Jansorn, N. (2002). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, Second Edition.

Keys to Meaningful Partnerships

Epstein's keys to partnerships between schools, families, and communities are widely regarded as the standard for effective programs.

☞ **Parenting**

Help families to develop better parenting skills and to create home conditions to support children as students. Schools should try to better understand families.

☞ **Communicating**

Improve communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about 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.⁶

Develop goals and an action plan each academic year

- Coordinate goals with school curriculum and educational events. Take advantage of the enthusiasm of families, community members, and schools to collectively improve specific areas of community concern. Solicit opinions from parents, administrators, and teachers about new ideas for involvement.

Use pledges

- Parent, student, and principal/superintendent pledges help identify the responsibilities and commitments of each member of the family-school partnership.

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