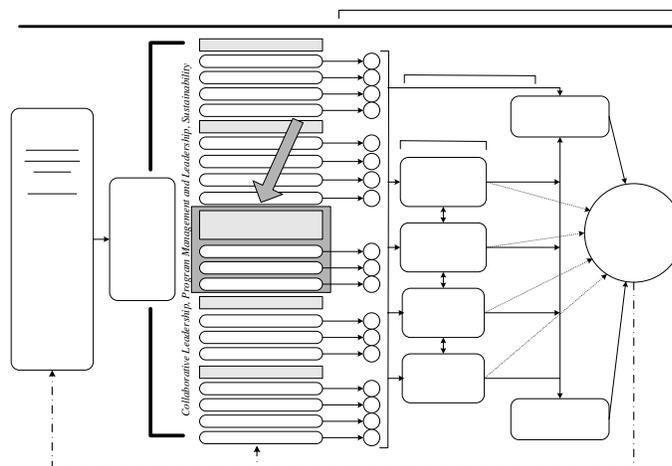


Family Engagement and Support

Introduction

A growing body of research suggests school practices are powerful influences on parent and family engagement and support (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This research also indicates that parents and families are among the most important influences and determinants of children's learning, healthy development and success in school. Furthermore, this research suggests that parents and families are interested in becoming involved, and they desire to know about their child's progress in school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995, Mapp, 2003). As such, family engagement and support is a critical core component within the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI).



Partnerships among families and schools are essential for two basic reasons. First, children spend the vast majority of their time throughout their lives outside of school, and families heavily influence this out of school time. Second, families are some of the most important determinants of children's attitudes, learning, behavior, healthy development and overall well being (Epstein, 2001). In short, it is important to get the conditions right for mutually beneficial relationships between schools and families.

The two primary aims for this chapter also are the primary aims for educators, parents and families, and schools. Educators, parents and entire families must share responsibility for students' learning, academic achievement and healthy development. They also must develop and sustain solid school-family partnerships.

In one perspective, when a child comes to school, their family comes with them. In a related perspective, educators also want the school practices and learning to go back home with students. A two-way relationship already exists in some form. The key is to make this two-way relationship stronger, mutually beneficial and permanent. Details in relation to family engagement and support follow.

What do we mean by family engagement and support?

Family engagement and support occur in schools (school-based) and in homes (home-based). For example, parents support schools as they volunteer in classrooms, serve in decision making/leadership roles, and attend parent-teacher conferences and other school events. Parents also provide home environments that are supportive of classroom instruction, encourage their children's learning at school, and communicate regularly with teachers about what happens with their child. "Parental engagement is a desire, an expression, and an attempt by parents to have an

impact on what actually transpires around their children in schools and on the kinds of human, social and material resources that are valued within schools” (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis & George, 2004, p. 11).

Family engagement and support also involves schools supporting families. For example, parents may engage in schools through their involvement in family support groups, parent education classes, GED and adult literacy programs, or ESL classes. They may develop vital skills and competencies as a result of expanded parent roles within schools. They also may receive support through linkages to emergency assistance and other vital services in school community.

In this chapter, the term “parents” refers to adult family members, including parents, step parents, grand parents, and other caring adults who parent children and youth. The term “family” refers to the students’ family system; all of the people with whom a student has close family relationships. Henceforth, instead of referring to both parents and families, we use the term “family” as a kind of shorthand.

“Engagement” refers to several types of parent and family involvement, including school-family partnerships. For example, parents are engaged by schools as supporters, advocates, co-teachers, communicators, decision makers and learners (Moles, 1993).

The concept of “support” implies a new role for educators and schools. When support is emphasized, a two-way relationship between schools and families develops. Specifically, educators and others at the school, especially social and health service providers, help meet the needs of families at the same time that they ask families to meet their children’s and the school’s needs. You will find more details in the social and health service chapter.

No doubt you have encountered other terms that describe what we are calling family engagement: parent involvement and parent empowerment are just two of the alternatives. Additionally, you may have encountered detailed inventories, which describe different kinds of parent and family initiatives (e.g., Epstein, 2001). In this chapter, we will simplify our language and refer to “family engagement” so as to maximize understanding and fully integrate all these strategies into one all encompassing concept.

Outcomes associated with family engagement

The outcomes children and youth experience from their families’ engagement extend from birth through grade 12 and beyond. What families *do* to support learning and healthy development matters for every kind of family.

In fact, what families actually do to become engaged in their children’s learning, school experiences and healthy development is a better predictor of school success than the family’s status (Ho Sui-Chu, 2004). More specifically, when families are engaged, the benefits persist, regardless of the family’s economic, racial, ethnic and educational background.

When exploring benefits, research has documented significant improvements in desirable outcomes and reductions in undesirable outcomes. Table 7.1 highlights key outcomes associated with family engagement.

Table 7.1: Key outcomes associated with family engagement

Improvements in:	Reductions in:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic achievement ▪ Completion of homework ▪ Participation in classroom learning activities ▪ Aspirations for postsecondary education ▪ Enrollment in challenging high school curriculum ▪ Successful transitions from special education classes to regular classes ▪ Successful transitions from one school to another ▪ Motivation for learning ▪ Social competence ▪ Positive student-teacher relationships ▪ Positive peer relationships, language, self-help, meaningful youth and adult connection/relationships, and strong peer and adult role models ▪ Family cohesion and adaptability ▪ Supportive home environments ▪ Parent-child interactions and communication ▪ Adult learning ▪ Parenting styles and family management practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In-grade retention ▪ Dropout rates ▪ Truancy ▪ Absenteeism ▪ Turnover or transience in the student population ▪ Discipline referrals ▪ Suspensions ▪ Placements in special education ▪ High-risk behavior ▪ Behavioral problems ▪ Family conflict ▪ Family instability

From: Adams & Christenson, 2000; Buckman, 1976; Comer & Fraser, 1998; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 2001; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000; Fischer, 2003; Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Keith & Keith, 1993; McNeal, 1999; McKay & Stone, 2000; Palenchar, Vondra, & Wilson, 2001; Quigley, 2000; Sanders, 1998; Shaver & Walls, 1998; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001; Shaver & Walls, 1998; Trusty, 1999.

Key design principles and strategies in family engagement and support

As researchers and evaluators have studied effective family engagement and support programs, they have identified and described the key components that account for their success. These key components comprise design principles and strategies. These design principles and strategies tell you what to look for and what to develop in your school community's parent and family initiatives. In other words, these design principles, or key components, are indicators of quality; and they account for success. Tables 7.2 and 7.3 highlight these key design principles and strategies.

Table 7.2: Check list of overarching design principles and/or strategies for successful programs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Program is designed to create intended results <input type="checkbox"/> The logic behind the program makes sense as the services link to outcomes <input type="checkbox"/> Program uses multiple strategies to accomplish its goals (comprehensive) <input type="checkbox"/> Program is evaluation-driven and continuously improved upon <input type="checkbox"/> Program is research-supported and theoretically-sound <input type="checkbox"/> A variety of teaching and learning strategies are used <input type="checkbox"/> There is sufficient dosage <input type="checkbox"/> The program is implemented the way it was originally designed <input type="checkbox"/> Staff are well-trained in the program design

Table 7.2: Check list of overarching design principles and/or strategies for successful programs

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Participants have a “say so” in how the program is structured and implemented |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Program is tailored to meet individual needs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Program is appropriately timed and located |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Program is implemented in culturally competent ways |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Program is family-centered and -supportive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategies foster self-determination and personal control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Participants are empowered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Participants’ strengths are built upon in the program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Positive relationships and bonding are created |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Program activities are enjoyable and meaningful to participants |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Staff are engaging |

Table 7.3: Key design principles and/or strategies for family engagement and support

Principle and strategy	What this looks like
Structural considerations	
Results-oriented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family engagement strategies are aligned with the school’s continuous improvement goals Family engagement strategies are adapted to reach targeted families and students Family engagement activities aim for more than “head counts;” genuine, lasting partnerships are prized Family engagement activities are connected to students’ learning, achievement and well-being
Whole family orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school’s programs and services are oriented toward the whole family, not just one child Educators view that the well-being of the parents and the support provided to the family is critical to the developmental progress of the child The school’s engagement strategies target fathers, grandparents and other caregivers, not just mothers Engagement strategies are not limited to educators and bound by school walls; community leaders, including other families, help develop family engagement Supports are provided across feeder patterns (i.e., elementary, middle and high school cone system) to integrate services for siblings and entire families Parents and educators help secure social and health services for families at risk
Family-centered and strength-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement strategies develop consensus among families, educators and students regarding shared aspirations and needs Engagement strategies are strength-based, solution-focused, and oriented toward helping families support their children and get involved in their schooling Families identify own needs and wants Families are joined “where they are at” Educators and other professionals think the best about parents and families without passing judgment <p>Professionals start “doing with” instead of “doing to” parents</p>

Table 7.3: Key design principles and/or strategies for family engagement and support

Principle and strategy	What this looks like
Quality and longevity (dosage)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability is a top priority; the commitment to family-school partnership is held over many years • Programs are of sufficient intensity and duration to create effects • Whole family engagement policy guides planning and implementation of programs and services • Programs are based in sound research and local context • Programs are implemented with fidelity • All family engagement and support programs are based in sound research
Timeliness	
Preventive and proactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators and service providers assess early warning signs; they do not wait for a problem or a crisis to occur to engage families • Programs are offered early on so problems are addressed before chronic • There is a broad focus on the prevention of problems involving the child, parent, family and school • Educators and service providers target families with young children because it addresses issues early in their development • Staff provide early referrals and linkages of families to supports in communities
Readiness and fit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and school strategies are designed to support the developmental demands created by physical, cognitive, emotional and social growth of the child • Educators recognize the developmental needs of families and work with others to support these needs in order to get families engaged • Family engagement strategies are tailored depending on needs and readiness of families (i.e., those in crisis may not respond) • There is a match between family engagement strategy and targeted parent or group of parents • Families help determine the strategies that work best with them
Implementation considerations	
Team approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators, service providers and other professionals view parents and families as genuine partners in planning and decision-making • Families, staff and administration work together to plan and implement programs and services • Families are empowered to have equal status with other team members • There is a focus on the links with the community for supporting education and families
Adequate leadership and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific school improvement structures allow parents a voice in key school decisions • Administrators assign importance to family engagement • Educators and parents share a commitment to family engagement and have a comprehensive plan • Priorities within the school community are made in relation to family engagement (i.e., a single point person is designated as the lead facilitator of family and parent work; space is allocated for families in schools, etc.) • The school provides leadership opportunities for families

Table 7.3: Key design principles and/or strategies for family engagement and support

Principle and strategy	What this looks like
Adequate leadership and support continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school commits resources (time, funding, space, personnel) to support family engagement • The school implements key facilitators for family engagement—for example, a parent-family coordinator, a parent-family resource center, a homework club, a child care center • Parents are recruited and supported to help recruit, engage and support other families
Parents as leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and families guide and structure programs according to their wants and needs • Parents lead or co-lead activities • Classes are offered to develop parent leadership • Family engagement activities double as opportunities for parents to learn and practice leadership skills that generalize to other settings
School expectation and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools assist families with monitoring their child's progress in school • Homework is reasonable and includes opportunities for students to talk about what they are learning with an adult at home
Parent and home supports for learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are viewed as their child's first and closest teachers • Educators share specific strategies with families for how to help a student at home • Educators assist families with monitoring their child's progress in school • Parents and family members supervise and communicate high expectations for their children • Parents and family members provide verbal support and encouragement • Parents and family members communicate a high value for education and the importance for getting a degree • Parents and family members talk with children about their school day • Parents and family members praise children for good academic performance • Parents and family members provide verbal support and encouragement to do homework • Parents and family members establish time schedules for homework completion • Parents and family members encourage children not to "give up" • Parents and family members provide space for children to do homework • Parents and family members model reading • Parents and family members provide direct help with homework • Parents and family members involve children in outside activities like clubs, sports and faith-based organizations
Underlying values	
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is the recognition of, appreciation of, and adaptability to, cultural values and beliefs, race and class • Engagement initiatives recognize and adapt to racially and culturally diverse families • Differences in view points and perspectives are seen as a

Table 7.3: Key design principles and/or strategies for family engagement and support

Principle and strategy	What this looks like
Diversity Continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengths Diversity of families is incorporated into the design of programs and services Language translators are provided as needed
Shared ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both educators and families are viewed as essential Educators and families develop shared goals Parents are equal partners Parents are “experts” in their child’s development and education Educators and families develop shared rules, norms and behavioral standards for students Parents are supported and rewarded for their recruitment, engagement and support of other parents and students
Value of family and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and families are viewed as the first and primary educators of their children Parents and families are valued as “experts” The cultural traditions and values of the family are appreciated
Relationships and affect	
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators, service providers, youth development leaders and families trust and respect each other Educators, service providers, youth development leaders and families enjoy regular opportunities for meaningful dialogue Communication between educators and families is not just crisis- and problem-centered; progress and achievements also are communicated routinely Families and teachers develop shared understanding of their roles and constraints Families and educators see each other as partners and friends
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular opportunities are provided for meaningful dialogue between parents and educators, parents and service providers, and parents and youth development leaders There are frequent opportunities for communication between the home and school There is ongoing communication between parents and schools that uses multiple methods Communication occurs regularly and not just when crises arise
Meaningful and engaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for family engagement are meaningful and purposeful—as parents and families perceive them Families are engaged and enjoy their experiences with the school
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and families are welcomed at schools and organizations Schools are seen as “family-friendly” places
Family support	
Assess and respond to basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental and family needs and perspectives are routinely assessed Programs link families to needed resources and supports to address basic needs as these factors often limit parents ability to be involved in school in traditional ways Families are supported through linkages to emergency assistance and other needed resources

Table 7.3: Key design principles and/or strategies for family engagement and support

Principle and strategy	What this looks like
Assess and respond to basic needs continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Places are provided (i.e., family resource centers) where families can go to receive services and information
Social support/mutual support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programs build informal mutual support networks where families give and receive support Social capital and sense of community are built by helping isolated parents become connected Programs seek out, understand, and respond to families' concerns, needs and priorities
Learning and skill development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family members and other adults are provided with additional learning opportunities Programs are designed to develop parenting skills and competencies, especially in young parents with no previous experience or training
Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent and family input and leadership guide services and programs Programs seek out a good fit between school, student and family needs and strengths Educators and others at the school actively seek out and respond to families' concerns, needs and priorities Educators take action when families express a need or a complaint Family input helps guide schools' services and programs Family engagement includes multiple strategies and methods, which are tailored to meet family needs and conditions Family engagement strategies are adapted to seek out a good fit between the school's needs and both student and family needs

From: Anderson-Butcher, 2006; Boone, 2002; Briar-Lawson, 2000; Christenson, 2003, 2004; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Mapp, 2003; Marzano, 2003; McWilliam, Tocci & Harbin, 1998; Rutherford, Anderson & Billig, 1995; Ward, Anderson-Butcher, & Kwiatkowski, 2006.

There is an important, exciting line of research on family-school relationships. Arguably, the four most important findings are:

- Parents and teachers usually want the same things and have the same goals for the children and youth under their care, but are often unaware of this important common ground;
- School-, family- and neighborhood-related barriers prevent them from developing shared awareness of this common ground;
- These barriers can be addressed effectively, enabling parents, families and teachers to work together effectively, benefiting students, each other, the school, and the surrounding neighborhood; and

- Intermediary people (e.g., parent-family coordinators; other parents) and organizations (e.g., the United Way, a local neighborhood organization) often play pivotal roles in removing these barriers, capitalizing on facilitators, and developing more common grounds between schools and families (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 2002; Lawson, 2003; Shirley, 1997).

When planning for these partnerships with families, it is important for your school improvement team of parents, community representatives and educators to have a comprehensive plan of practical yet innovative strategies. Educators, after-school staff or community partners should not attempt a “one-size-fits-all” approach, expecting all families to support learning in the same way. Rather, a match or “goodness of fit” of activities to the needs and assets of children and their families should be the priority (Christenson, 2004). In other words, there is no, single “best” strategy to use with every kind of family in every situation. Rather, it is most important to address the key design principles and strategies, while you choose strategies that fit the families in your school community.

Several frameworks also are available for guiding your planning and implementation of family engagement strategies. For instance, Ohio’s School Climate Guidelines offer one framework that is aligned with the research-based theoretical framework of Joyce Epstein, the National PTA and Marzano’s (2004) features of effective schools. You also might consider using the School, Family, Community Partnerships model developed by Epstein and colleagues (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis, 2002). Other models are designed specifically for high poverty school communities, especially those on the emergency list (e.g., Briar-Lawson, 2000; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997) or for specific family populations such as Latino (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 2002).

Other considerations in family engagement

The family engagement strategies provided in this chapter draw on this research and are designed to lead your school community in its implementation of quality, effective family engagement programs and practices. Here we also provide guidance related to school-based and community-based family engagement as well as present an overview of the role of the school in helping and supporting families.

School-based and community-based family engagement

To reiterate, all family engagement strategies are aimed at increasing parent and family involvement in children’s education. Your school community leaders must make important choices as you implement a two-part family engagement plan.

School-Based Family Engagement

Some models and strategies specifically aim to increase parent involvement and family engagement in and at schools. Most of these latter strategies are school-based because educators and others at the school (e.g., school social workers, psychologists and counselors) initiate and lead them.

Leaders of these school-based strategies typically focus on specific improvements needing to be made at the school in order to recruit, engage and retain a significant number of parents and families. For example, these leaders strive to develop a welcoming environment, help teachers communicate with parents in welcoming and inviting ways, and create parent- and adult-friendly facilities (a coffee lounge, a family resource center).

Community-Based Family Engagement

Other family engagement strategies are initiated in the surrounding community, and they are led by parents and families as well as community leaders and organizers. These community-based family engagement strategies often emphasize home visits, family-to-family networking and support systems, and neighborhood meetings.

Like school-based family engagement strategies, community-based strategies also focus on facilitators and barriers. In contrast to school-based strategies, community-based family engagement strategies also aim to develop *collective family engagement*. In other words, they aim to recruit, organize and mobilize groups of parents and families, at the same time encouraging them to do more of the same with other parents and families. Community-based strategies thus have the potential to benefit families, schools and entire neighborhoods. For example, they can increase parent and family engagement; strengthen and stabilize families (reducing the school's transiency or mobility rate); develop community-based after school programs and homework clubs; improve children's safety as they travel to and from schools; and help rally support for school levies (e.g., Shirley, 1997; Gold & Simon, 2003).

Blending the Two Strategies

Each school community is unique in some important ways. That said, each stands to benefit from an effective, appropriate mix of school-based and community-based family engagement strategies. Your challenge (and opportunity) lies in figuring out this local mix.

Just as educators and their partners must complete assessments to get the conditions right for student learning, so must parent and family leaders and educators complete parallel assessments to get the conditions right for family engagement. As the above discussion indicates, these assessments will start with school-based assessments with special attention to the existing and potential facilitators and the existing barriers. These assessments also must attend to family and neighborhood factors and conditions. Leaders in your school community can then use this information generated from their assessments to determine the ideal mix of school-based and community-based family engagement strategies. Often, two strategies emerge: (1) Creating important roles for families at school; and (2) Helping and supporting families in school communities.

Important roles for families at school

One of the most important barriers to family engagement can be transformed into a powerful facilitator. Here is the barrier: many parents perceive that they do not have meaningful, important roles to play at school. The facilitator derives from this barrier: provide meaningful, important roles for families to play at school as volunteers and as paid employees.

Your school community can develop at least three meaningful, important roles for families. Parents can serve as *co-teachers*, *co-leaders* and *co-workers*. These three roles are not mutually exclusive. All entail creating better relationships with families, connecting with parents in a variety of ways, and working to understand the needs and assets of all families. You can and should plan for all of them, including how one can lead to the other(s). Details and examples follow.

Co-teachers

Families, especially parents, are the first and most important educators of children. Many researchers of family engagement conclude that the support parents provide for their children's learning at home has a greater impact on overall achievement when compared to other forms of involvement and other school-related factors (Ho & Willms, 1996; Marzano, 2003). Parents essentially serve as *co-teachers*, communicating important messages to their children about the value of education. Table 7.4 presents examples of co-teaching roles for parents.

Table 7.4: Examples of co-teaching roles for parents

- Asking about their children's school day
- Encouraging learning and application at home
- Assisting children with homework
- Reading aloud to their children
- Providing educational experiences for their children at home
- Reinforcing the importance of school for success in life
- Valuing education
- Connecting the learning experiences at school with home life
- Monitoring school performance and behavior
- Communicating with teachers about school-related issues
- Modeling life-long learning behaviors
- Attending parent/teacher conferences
- Providing resources and supplies in support of school assignments

Co-leaders

Families and parents are sources of energy, leadership and decision making for the school community (Comer, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002). While the initial response of your school may be to make decisions from within the school or partnering agencies, this practice limits your strength and effectiveness. To strengthen schools and programs for children and youth, family members can serve as *co-leaders* within your school community, providing guidance, direction and program planning.

Federal guidelines for implementation of NCLB, section 1118, actually requires districts to include parents in the development and adoption of various school policies. Specifically, these provisions [Title I, Part A of the ESEA] stress shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement, including ...local development of parental involvement plans with sufficient flexibility to address local needs, and building parents' capacity for using effective practices to improve their own children's academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

In light of these definitions and requirements for school improvement, it only makes sense for schools to include families in the work of complying with federal guidelines and in meeting the school's continuous improvement goals. In addition, families offer school communities insight into best practices for their community and the needs and cultures of families being served. There is an added benefit for programs and families as parent leaders become ambassadors of the program, telling other families about the work of your school and partnering agencies. Parents in leadership roles become not only better advocates for their own children, but for all children (Henderson, Jacob, Kernan-Scholss & Raimondo, 2004).

In order to engage parents in leadership activities, you can take action by creating formal groups that include family representatives for guiding program planning and reaching out to other families. Large numbers of families also may provide guidance and feedback for programs by offering opinions in feedback groups, interviews and responding to surveys. Another viable and worthwhile means for parent leadership, often called "parent empowerment" involves informing parents about the local education system and the routes they may access for influencing their children's schools (Trumball, Rothstein-Fisch, Grenfield & Quiroz, 2001).

Parent Academies, Ohio Department of Education

In 1999, the Ohio Department of Education began the Parent Academy project with the creation of the Parent Academy for Reading. A team of parents, literacy specialists, community representatives and teachers came together to develop this two-hour workshop. Training events were held around the state to train parent-teacher teams to lead the workshop in their own communities. Many schools and school districts provide parent and teacher presenters with stipends for each Parent Academy they present. The workshop empowers parents by providing them with information about Ohio law regarding the 3rd grade reading achievement test, about reading diagnostic and achievement assessments, and about how their school district is working to provide high quality reading instruction and intervention for their children. Parents are encouraged to develop questions for their schools with the new information they receive. In addition, the parents work together to list their own strategies for helping their child become a better reader, and they share their strategies with each other. Parents are treated as the experts, understanding how to help their children with reading and other literacy skills at home.

In 2002, ODE brought together a team of parents and education professionals to develop a second workshop, the Parent Academy on Academic Content Standards. Once again, parents and teachers have been trained to work as a team to lead the workshop with parents and teachers in their communities. This time the content of the presentation focuses on Ohio's academic content standards and state-wide assessments. Parents and teachers who attend the workshop discuss the assessments and standards, and they receive tools they can use to monitor each child's progress in school. In addition, parents and teachers work together to brainstorm ways they can work together to help all children succeed.

Schools, churches, YMCAs and libraries have all hosted Parent Academies. They work hard to eliminate any obstacles that might keep parents from being able to attend. Child care and a meal are often provided. The workshops are held in accessible locations, and/or transportation is provided. Parents are invited to Parent Academies by personal invitations from other parents (the most powerful invitation), personal invitations from teachers, phone calls, flyers, newspaper articles, and posters.

If you would like to know more about Parent Academies go to, www.ode.state.oh.us/families/.

Co-workers

School communities also are presented with many opportunities to partner with parents as *co-workers*. Parents can serve in paid staff positions before, during and after-school. Table 7.5 presents examples of co-worker roles for parents.

Table 7.5: Example co-worker roles for parents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translators • Teacher's aides • Coaches • Club leaders • Home-visitors • Greeters • Home-work monitors • Workshop leaders • Parent mentors • Family-school liaisons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutors • Office assistants • PTA/PTO leaders • Lectures/Teacher on special topics • Library aides • Child mentors • Leadership and decision making • Advisors • School bond issue organizers • Others...
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In addition, parents can provide needed expertise to other parents through mentoring, leading parent support groups, teaching classes and sharing skills with other parents. Parents offer a link to the community and other families that outside professionals often do not have. Family Resource Centers in schools can be set up and staffed by parents. These same parents can conduct home-visits to other parents in the school.

Volunteering is a traditional school-based role for parents in schools, though this type of role is not feasible for many parents facing issues of poverty, difficult work schedules, lack of transportation, or family demands. Still, there are parents willing to take on volunteer positions in the school, in after-school programs or in community agencies. It is important for program leaders to provide training for volunteers in order to increase the volunteer's comfort and effectiveness with their job. Volunteers may do many of the jobs listed above, but are also possible advocates for children and education at school board and city council meetings. They also can be vocal constituents with legislators.

A family resource center in a Missouri middle school has a "chill out space" that contributes to the school's desire to be "a cool school." Teachers and parent classroom aides refer and bring kids who are having a bad time or bad day. Specially trained parents responsible for the chill out space calm and counsel the child. As needed, they contact the social worker and the children's parents and make home visits. This strategy unites social and health services with school improvement. It also prevents serious disruptions in classrooms and schools, while supporting the teacher and preventing the social workers' caseload from skyrocketing.

School communities helping and supporting families

When families fail to respond to communications and invitations from school communities they are often considered "hard to reach". It is the experience of many educators that the families of their lowest achieving students are often the hardest to reach. Because family engagement is essential to student achievement, healthy development and overall school success, it is essential that we adopt different strategies for engaging these "hard to reach" families (i.e., those who

might benefit the most from our support and connections to services). Our “hard-to-reach” families must become our “high priority” families.

Our “high-priority” families often experience many challenges that prevent them from being involved in the school and in the lives of their children. These barriers limit traditional parent involvement, and include factors such as socio-economic status, social isolation, cultural differences between parents and teachers, parents’ sense of efficacy within the school, parents’ educational experiences in school, parents’ time commitments and family responsibilities, and race and ethnicity if they are faced with racial discrimination (Alameda, 2003; Barton et. al., 2004; Briar-Lawson, 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998; Lynn & McKay, 2001; McNeal, 1999). Figure 7.1 describes these relationships.

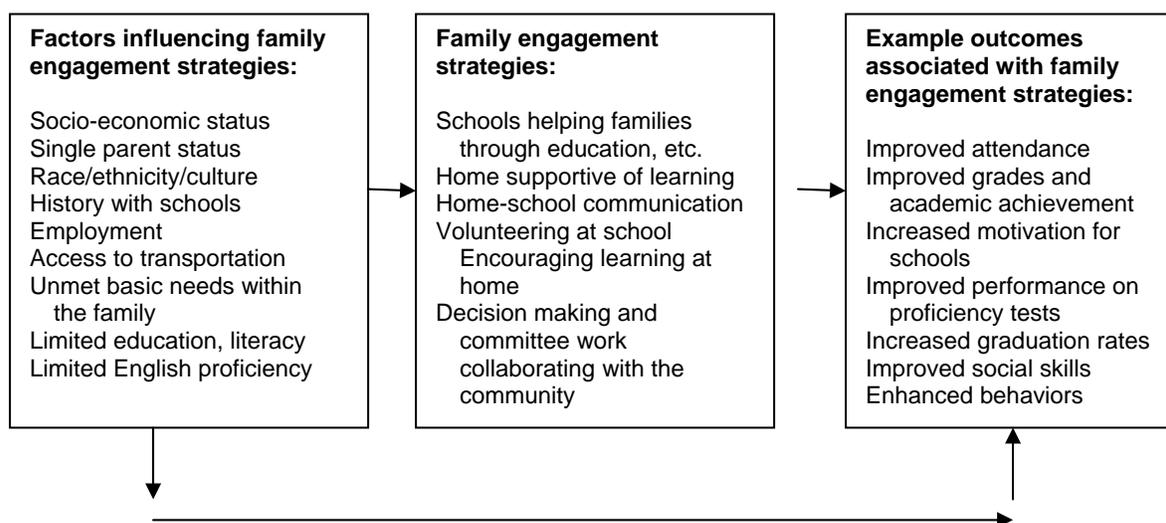


Figure 7.1: Adapted from: Ward, Kwiatkowski, and Anderson-Butcher (2006)

Given these underlying factors that predict traditional involvement, one of the most effective ways to support family engagement is by helping parents and families meet their basic needs. By addressing these barriers, schools can help increase parents’ time, flexibility, skills, motivation and energy to become involved in schools in traditional ways. Identifying ways for parents to be *co-learners* and *co-supporters* is an essential strategy when family engagement is examined from this perspective.

Co-learners

Providing for the learning needs of families is an important support school communities can offer to families. School communities across the country have served this purpose by providing families of the children in their schools with GED classes, English as a Second Language classes, job skills training, parenting classes, family literacy programs, and more. Deciding on which programs to offer should be guided by input from families regarding their education needs and those of their children. Programs for family literacy to consider are available through ODE and include: Reading First–Ohio, Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE), Head Start, Even Start, and Title programs through NCLB.

Some school communities have used the welfare-to-work programs that are being tested in every state to become key occupational ladders for parents who have been long-term welfare recipients. Schools and/or community agencies can receive supports from TANF to hire parents to serve in paraprofessional roles (such as parents using the school as a work site). In many cases, there will be special aid to help parents. Other school communities have used modest parent stipends and honorariums to recruit diverse families into teaching, health and social service careers. Parents receive monthly support for their leadership and learning. In addition, parents trained for these paraprofessional roles also bring a community perspective that helps to give more relevance to instructional, social and health strategies. For example, parents may be very effective in locating truant youth as they are often aware of hiding places. Parents and other youth often know about a youth who is homeless and who may be absent because of family stress. Much of this local, neighbor-to-neighbor information is often unavailable to professionals. Parents build bridges between other parents and children, but they also improve teachers' and health and social service providers' effectiveness. For instance, parents can do outreach to other parents to motivate them to come to the school for special meetings or conferences. They are able to approach families with whom professionals have enjoyed little success.

Furthermore, parents who have been trained can provide services to low risk and no-risk children. In this way, they respond to the needs of children and, at the same time, to the increasing caseloads of some social workers, psychologists and other student supportive service personnel.

Co-supporters

Families provide support to children and youth, to schools and to communities. At the same time, families need support structures, especially when the resources of the family are stressed. These support structures include extended family, supportive friends, strong neighborhoods, faith communities, dependable employment and effective schools. With family support structures in place, children are more likely to have the assets they need for positive youth development and learning.

Here, it also is important to emphasize that when families are supported, stabilized and strong, children and youth have the best chances of enjoying healthy development, and they are ready and able to learn and achieve at school. Furthermore, when families are supported, stable and strong, and when schools help them become and remain this way, families are less likely to move. In turn, when families move less, student mobility, also called turnover or transience, is reduced, and this is an important contribution to school improvement.

Clearly, most social interventions designed to strengthen families occur through programs or centers, involving staff, physical space and activities. At the same time, the best such programs and centers are more than a set of activities and curricula. They create opportunities for families to exercise leadership, and they serve as community-building anchors (Bruner, 2004).

School communities have the opportunity to help strengthen and support the families they serve, and by that same action strengthen the environments in which children are learning and growing. Family support offered by schools and their partnering community agencies may include cash assistance programs, parenting classes, divorce or grief support groups, immunization clinics, counseling and other mental health resources, child care co-ops, and others. Often, these services are streamlined and coordinated through parent -staffed and -led family resource centers.

Parent-Family Resource Centers facilitated by specially trained parent-family coordinators are two key facilitators for family engagement (e.g., Briar-Lawson, et al., 1998; Kalafat & Illback, 1998). Centers provide an adult-friendly place. Coordinators provide an adult-friendly atmosphere. Coordinators also serve as intermediaries and advocates for parents needing help with their efforts to communicate and work effectively with teachers, principals and service providers at the school.

As the parent-family center becomes more established, families take charge of it. Parents are trained and supported to serve as co-leaders, intermediaries, and recruiters and supporters of other parents. The center, its operations and the benefits provided to the school and to families are sustained in the process. Programs such as these strengthen and support families, who in turn provide more stable support for their children.

School communities also can plan for occasions for families to get to know each other, helping families to build more connections with the families in their community. Educators, parent leaders and community agency staff can talk with families about their level of connectedness to family and community, looking for ways to build on those connections. Developing opportunities for parent leadership in the school community, and partnering with parents as co-workers are additional ways that school communities can support parents as co-supporters of their family and community. Special attention should be given to isolated families (often considered “hard to reach”) for developing support structures with neighbors, other school families, school personnel and community agencies.

Addressing common barriers to family engagement

Research documents the following barriers to family engagement (Casper, Traub, & Little, 2002; Christenson, 2003; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Each is described briefly along with strategies for reducing the barrier.

Barrier: School perceptions about parents and their roles

First, families experience organizational barriers within the school that often deter their involvement. For a number of reasons, school personnel oftentimes do not engage in meaningful ways with parents. There is limited communication between the home and the school; and many times schools are seen as unfriendly places for parents and families. Table 7.6 presents common school perceptions about parents and their roles barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

**Table 7.6: School perceptions about parents and their roles -
Specific barriers and minimizing strategies**

Barrier: School perceptions about parents and their roles	Minimizing strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School personnel have limited knowledge about effective and meaningful practices for partnering with families • School personnel have low sense of efficacy for their own ability to partner with families • School personnel do not believe family engagement will make a difference in student outcomes, and blame families for low achievement • School personnel believe they are the professionals, and minimize the roles of parents and families in learning • School personnel discourage family involvement in the classroom and school • Policies and practices exist that exclude parents or some groups of parents (i.e. fathers, working parents, grandparents, etc.) • School climate is not family-friendly • School personnel have negative past experience with families • There is limited or unfriendly communication between school and home • School personnel do not communicate with families about course or assignment expectations • Communication between the school and the families is often driven by crises and problems • Families lack of understanding of new standards, course content or class expectations • Others... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development for school personnel on effective strategies for engaging families • Set aside work time for classroom teachers to spend contacting families • Include expectations for working with families in the job description/duties of each school personnel • Establish a family resource center • Welcome families into the building and honor parent efforts to help their children at home • Appoint a “coordinator” of family engagement – a point person for facilitating family engagement and support activities for the school community • Create a team for planning and implementing family engagement in your school community (include teachers, parents, community representatives and your principal) • Create and disseminate a family engagement policy with parent representatives • Use friendly language in communication between school and home • Communicate assignments and other course expectations to parents so they may monitor their children’s progress • Communicate with families early and frame contacts in positive language • Clearly communicate course expectations and rubrics for assignments in student language • Others...

Barrier: Limited views on family engagement

Most family engagement strategies developed by schools are only attractive to certain “types” of parents. Many parents do not have the skills, motivation and/or time to participate in their children’s schools and lives (Alameda, 2003; Briar-Lawson, Lawson, Rooney, Hansen, White et al., 1997). Traditional family engagement strategies that assume families have their basic needs met do not necessarily work for all parents and families. Table 7.7 presents common limited views on family engagement barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

**Table 7.7: Limited views on family engagement -
Specific barriers and minimizing strategies**

Barrier: Limited views on family engagement	Minimizing strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family engagement strategies primarily involve activities where parents are asked to help the schools • Expectations that all parents have the skills, time, energy and abilities to be involved in schools • Many family engagement opportunities are not meaningful • Strategies do not address various personal and family obstacles that limit family engagement (see below) • Others... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin asking what the schools can do for parents; as opposed to only thinking about what parents can do for schools • Keep track of the parents who you do, and do not reach – adapt strategies to engage “high priority families” • Find ways for families to be engaged in meaningful activities in the school community • Invite parents frequently to become involved in their child’s education and healthy development – give them a wide variety of specific requests from educators for parents to help for child, other children or for the school • Offer opportunities for families to serve as leaders within the school community • Provide families with requisite training so they may be successful at their leadership roles • Provide GED programs, adult literacy, technology classes, and other programs to support families’ learning • Develop parent support programs and neighbor-to-neighbor initiatives to build social capital • Others...

Barrier: Personal and family obstacles

Families experience many personal and family obstacles that keep them from participating in the youth’s learning. Specifically, some families may be struggling with not being able to meet their basic daily needs. When this occurs, families are unable to focus on other areas of their lives, including helping their children succeed in school. Table 7.8 presents common personal and family obstacles barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

**Table 7.8: Personal and family obstacles -
Specific barriers and minimizing strategies**

Barrier: Personal and family obstacles	Minimizing strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Parents do not have the time, energy or skills to engage in ways desired by the school • Families have many unmet needs that interfere with their ability to engage in the school • Availability of resources of time and money, family stability, accessibility (school or community agency distance from home) • Parents have limited educational levels and have limited knowledge and skills for helping child • Work schedules (#1 issue cited by fathers) • Divorce (strongly impacts a father’s access to children; lack of father’s support effects academic development for children as well as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess parent and family needs and provide services and supports in response • Assist families with accessing cash assistance, job training, employment and other vital services • Provide child care, food and transportation for events • Hold conferences, tutoring and other events at times and places that are easily accessible to families (consider family members who work long hours) • Give parents specific ideas for how they can help their child with the skills and knowledge they are expected to gain each school year • Demonstrate parenting skills or how to do

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> social and emotional development) • Unsafe neighborhoods (restrict family travel, especially in the evening) • Lack of transportation • Others... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning activities with a child • Consider the unique needs of fathers, grandparents and others caring for children when planning and scheduling events • Include both parents in all communications when children have non-custodial parents • Others...
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Barrier: Language, culture and past experiences

Language, culture and past experiences can sometimes hinder the way in which the school is able to communicate with the family and can pose additional risks for the student. Table 7.9 presents common language, culture, and past experience barriers and makes suggestions about how to address them.

Table 7.9: Language, culture and past experiences - Specific barriers and minimizing strategies

Barrier: Language, culture and past experiences	Minimizing strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language used at home is different than language used at school • Limited resources for translating communication to languages of families • Families do not view the role of the parent as important in helping with education • Families and parents do not view the teacher and school with respect • Parents have negative feelings or distrust of educators because of past experiences • There are cultural and intergenerational effects that impact the degree to which certain populations engage in schools (i.e., grandparents, Native American populations, etc.) • Parents have limited educational levels • Parents have feelings of inadequacy for helping child with school work (low sense of efficacy) • Others... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer ESL and adult literacy classes • Meet with families to hear about their dreams and aspirations for their children – talk about how their goals and the school goals for children can be achieved through partnership • Clearly communicate expectations to families and work together to come to agreement on a role for the parents that fits with their expectations, skills and resources • Translate all communications for parents into the primary language of the family • Have translators available for parent meetings, conferences and home-visits • View parents' distinct engagement strategies as their cultural style rather than their level of investment in education • Be sensitive to parent's prior negative experiences with school and community agencies • Let parents know specifically how they can positively effect their child's learning and health development • Treat the cultural capital of parents as valuable and try to build on it to create stronger connections between schools and communities • Recognize school-based expectations of parents as one set of cultural beliefs (among several) about the appropriate role of parents in education • Utilize the community-based forms of social capital in racial minority communities • Others...

Conclusion

Family engagement that improves the healthy development and education of children requires three key components:

- First, it requires firm commitments by educators, service providers and youth development leaders, especially the commitment to view families as genuine partners with expertise about what they and their children want and need.
- Second, it requires a comprehensive plan that has a dual focus: it pinpoints the contributions of family engagement to school improvement and also prioritizes the ways in which school improvement benefits and supports families. Furthermore, this kind of family engagement plan is most powerful when it includes key programs, services and strategies aimed at the “high priority” parents – especially parents whose children predictably are experiencing difficulties at school.
- Third, this kind of powerful family engagement also requires infrastructure supports. These supports start with a parent-family coordinator who assembles a team of representative parents. These supports also include family friendly facilities at school.

Hopefully, this chapter has convinced you that the work of family engagement is not just worthwhile; it is absolutely essential to school improvement, youth development and closing the achievement gap. Recruiting and mobilizing others is critical to your success. No one person, program or service can achieve the enormous potential of family engagement. Like health and social services, family engagement is a shared responsibility. Schools, families and community agencies have key roles to play.

School communities are in a unique position to build relationships with families, to support parents in their critical role as parents, to support families by providing and linking them to needed services, to develop parent leaders, to help families support learning at home, to give parents opportunities to learn, and to work together with families to provide the best school communities and community services for the children in your community. These important activities and contributions are merely examples of what you and others can initiate. Your leadership in promoting and implementing powerful family engagement strategies will improve outcomes for youth, schools, families and communities.

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