

Importance of Family Engagement



Parents and Families Are Powerful

Parents and families have a great deal of influence on the lives of their children, their families and their communities. Research shows that what parents do, say and believe affect those around them in powerful, lasting ways.

Families lead, kids succeed.

Families are powerful in promoting children's well-being

Decades of research demonstrate families are vital to their children's healthy development and play a central role in their well-being.¹

- From their child's birth and on, parents' behaviors, beliefs and attitudes affect their children's cognitive development and behavior.
- When it comes to children's outcomes, parents' behaviors have a greater influence than other factors, such as child care arrangements.
- Families make a difference in children's outcomes by being involved in their child's learning in various contexts (i.e., school, home, library and park).
- Family involvement remains essential, from birth through adolescence.

A growing number of studies are finding that helping children to develop good social and emotional skills early in life makes a big difference in their long-term health and well-being. Children's social and emotional functioning and behaviors begin to stabilize around the age of eight and can predict their behavior and mental health later in life.²

Families are powerful in advancing academic success

Two decades of research confirm that family engagement in children's learning promotes academic achievement, including reading achievement.³ A study of how families managed their children's time, found that the way children spend their time at home, not the family's income or education level, predicted their

¹ Bouffard, S., & Weiss, H. Building the Future of Family Involvement. *The Evaluation Exchange*, Spring 2008. <https://www.hfrp.org>

² Huesmann, L.R., & Guerra, N.G. (1997). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72 (2), 408-419.

³ Weiss, H.B., Caspe, M. & Lopez, M.E. (2006). Family involvement in early childhood education. Harvard Family Research Project. <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources>.

success in school. Families of high-achieving students reported they spent more time in home-learning activities than families of low-achievers.⁴

Parental expectations are a particularly important aspect of parental involvement. Parents' values about the benefits of education and their expectations for their children also are associated with children's motivation to learn as well as their academic achievement.⁵ The extent to which parents attend and volunteer at school functions has a consistent, positive effect on academic achievement. Youth benefit when parents, especially those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, are active on leadership committees. In Chicago, for example, when Latino parents' representation on local school councils rose, the number of Latino youth meeting academic standards increased substantially.⁶

Families are powerful in improving schools and communities

Parents, perhaps more than any other group, have a clear sense of how the school and the community connect — and how social change can benefit children, families, school and the community. Research supports the idea that relationships between the child's family members and the child's teacher can positively affect the child's life. Two-way communication, mutual accommodation and mutual trust are important elements when parents get involved with their child's school, whether it's volunteering in the classroom or exchanging information in parent-teacher conferences.

Children are likely to achieve both academic and nonacademic success when families, schools and communities support each other as partners.⁷ Schools with active parent-teacher groups have higher student achievement than schools that do not. When parents and community members organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, the results are noticeable: School districts make positive policy and practice changes that lead to upgraded school facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, new resources for programs to improve teaching and curriculum, and funding for after-school and family support programs. Schools with highly-rated parent partnership programs make greater gains on state tests than schools with lower-rated programs.⁸

⁴ Clark, R.M. (1993). Homework-Focused Parenting Practices That Positively Affect Student Achievement. A New Wave of Evidence

⁵ William, H. J. Parental Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. Harvard Family Research Project, *Family Involvement Research Digests*, December 2005. <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources>.

⁶ Caspe, M., Lopez M. E., Wolos, C. (2006/2007). Family Involvement in Elementary School Children's Education. Harvard Family Research Project. <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources>.

⁷ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1990). Rebuilding the next: A new commitment to the American family. <http://www.montana.edu/www4h/>

⁸ Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L. (2002). A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, Community Connections on School Achievement. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>