

Parent & Family Involvement

Tiers 1, 2 & 3

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Parenting practices may be as influential on school outcomes as cognitive functioning, behavioral excesses or deficits, and relationships with teachers and peers (Sheridan, Clarke, Marti, Burt, & Rohlk, 2005). Parental engagement is a key variable that has been found to predict academic achievement across ethnic groups, although encouraging parental involvement may differ depending on the target demographic or cultural group (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). Although appropriate parent involvement with school is important for all children, it is especially important for children and youth with behavioral needs. Interventions for students with behavioral issues should incorporate parental and family involvement rather than merely targeting individual child factors in isolation.

What is Parent Involvement or Engagement?

Parent involvement, also known as parent engagement, is defined as “parents and families working together to improve the development of children and adolescents” (Strait & Rivera, 2013, p. 5). Similarly, family-school collaboration encompasses “a cooperative process of planning that brings together school staff, parents, children, and community members to maximize resources for child achievement and development” (Skiba & Streusel, 2002, p. 1). It is a misnomer to conceptualize parent involvement as a dyadic relationship since this concept often includes relationships between, parents, their children, teachers, and other administrators. These core relationships also affect parents’ relationships with other, more distal school personnel and no single bond exists in a vacuum (McNeal, 1999). Parent involvement also encompasses notions of caregiver or guardian involvement if the student does not have an active relationship with his or her parent(s) (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Common characteristics indicative of parental involvement include (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005):

- **Communication components** (e.g., frequent contacts between parents and school, home-school notes),
- **Home-based components** (e.g., parent support and supervision during homework, parents having educational goals for their children),
- **School-based activities** (e.g., parental involvement in school clubs and events).

In recent years, education policy makers have urged for reform efforts surrounding parent involvement that focus on “systemic and integrated approaches to family engagement that

have an impact on student achievement and school performance” (Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2011, p. 2). In other words, systematic initiatives within and across schools that focus on parent involvement and tie it to curriculum, instructional, or behavioral goals are replacing random acts of family engagement that were disconnected from other school initiatives. In addition, encouraging parent involvement cannot be done without consideration of the parent or family cultural context and the circumstances of culture that may facilitate or hinder parental involvement (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) similarly conceptualized motivations for parental involvement in their child’s schooling that included an active role construction for involvement (i.e. parents believe they should be involved and have the self-efficacy to execute behaviors characteristic of involvement), perceptions of invitations for involvement from schools, teachers, and individual students, and elements of parents’ personal lives that encourage or discourage involvement with their child’s school. These investigators also acknowledged that many parents do not need supplemental initiatives to become involved and that over-involved parents can often hinder students’ responsibilities and progress.

Epstein created a comprehensive framework for methods in which schools can increase parental involvement (1992). This model includes parenting, learning at home, communicating, volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

- **Parenting.** The parenting element may include efforts such as developing a parent resource library or holding parent workshops.
- **Learning at home.** Another factor, learning at home, may encompass parents reading to their children or doing homework with their children.
- **Communication.** Parent-teacher conferences, home-school notes, and parent newsletters are all strategies that are characteristic of communication.
- **Volunteering.** Volunteering may involve aspects of assisting in classrooms, organizing a school activity, or participating in field trips.
- **Decision making.** Schools that engage in decision-making should encourage parent participation on district-level committees and Parent-Teacher Organizations.
- **Collaborating.** Finally, collaborating with businesses and community agency partners helps to provide families with information about relevant family services, recreational programs, and educational opportunities.



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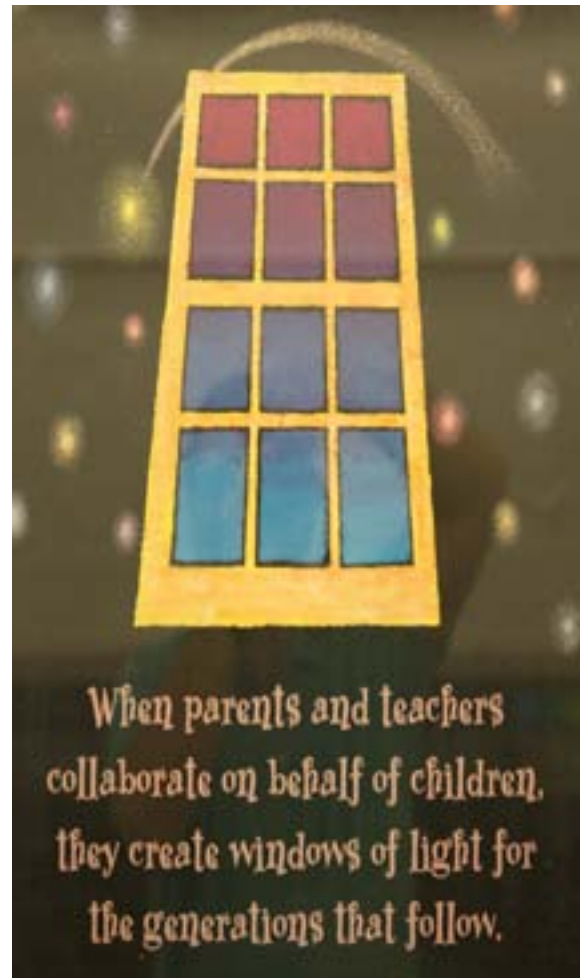
Key organizations that strive to disseminate these strategies include The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, National Network of Partnership Schools, and the Harvard Family Research Project (McKenna & Millen, 2013). A short description and link to each of these organizational resources is provided at the end of this brief.

What Do We Know About Parental Involvement?

Given recent federal attention and the allocation of funds designed to strengthen parent involvement programming and evaluation, there is a rich body of research on this topic. This brief does not attempt to exhaustively cover every research evaluation or description of parent involvement as a Psychinfo search using the terms “parent involvement” retrieved 1,769 scholarly publications. This brief aims to summarize existing research and highlight those studies which are most relevant to students with emotional and behavior disorders.

Effect on positive outcomes. Throughout the abundance of multidisciplinary research, it is clear that parent involvement and engagement, regardless of parental income or family composition, is a key protective factor in educational, social, and behavioral development and has the capacity to produce positive student outcomes (; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Jeynes, 2003; Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013; Sheridan et al., 2005). According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), high school students with involved parents are more likely to have better academic grades and test scores, pass classes and earn credits, attend school, adapt to school, exhibit prosocial skills, graduate high school, and enter college. Poor parenting practices, low levels of maternal education, parental substance abuse, parental instances of psychopathology, and dysfunctional family composition (e.g., divorce) have been linked to detrimental outcomes and school failure for students (McNeal, 1999; The Child Mental Health Foundations and Agency Network, n.d.).

Benefit by age of student. Parent involvement is most beneficial for kindergarten children



and predicts academic success in eighth-grade. “Knowing this schools can focus on involving parents early on to create the optimal benefit for their students” (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2012). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) emphasize that parent involvement in children’s school and social lives tends to decrease in the late middle and high school years, and as a result research has neglected the importance of involvement in high school. Carter and Healey (2012) further add that it is unfortunate that parent involvement in high school often translates to “working the concession stand or participating in fundraising activities” since students transitioning to high school often require support and consistency between home and school environments (p. 10). Jeynes (2012) found that staff-run parent involvement programs produced positive effects for elementary and secondary students alike; equal effect sizes demonstrated that parent involvement remains an important factor for secondary

students' academic achievement. Unfortunately, parents may reduce their amount of school involvement in middle and high school because they feel that their in-school support is not as necessary, or that schools are much less accessible past elementary school (Oxley, 2013.) Developmentally appropriate parental involvement is advocated during all stages of schooling, including middle school, and high school years and is a necessary component of decreasing instances of school dropout.

Value with minorities. A meta-analysis of 21 studies conducted by Jeynes (2003) reported that parental involvement was significant in improving academic outcomes for racial and ethnic minority students (i.e., African Americans, Latin Americans, Asian Americans), particularly in the areas of GPA, standardized testing, and teacher reports of academic improvement. Interestingly, parental involvement had the greatest effects for students from single parent families and African American students, highlighting that parental involvement may be particularly critical in promoting academic gains for these groups.

Given that parental involvement is cited as a critical variable in student success, school personnel should provide multiple opportuni-

ties for parent engagement. For example, home-school communication with particular expectations that are outlined for parent involvement and participation are helpful tools that eliminate ambiguity and promote responsibility for many parents. Henderson and Mapp (2002) state that:

"... engaging parents so they understand what their children are learning, giving parents a voice, providing information on how parents can help their children at home, helping parents help their children prepare for college" - these "build the family's understanding of the education system, aiding parents in identifying child strengths, and connecting families to social and community agencies" (p. 74).

Family fun nights, home visits, encouraging parents to volunteer at school, and structured parent-teacher conferences are examples of activities that may help facilitate parental involvement. Schools may choose to implement a variety of activities; however it is important to stress that schools partner with families to address parent concerns and make joint decisions as well (National Education Association, 2002).

Parents of students with disabilities. A recent comprehensive study of school-based, home-based, and special education involvement of parents conducted by Fishman and Nickerson (2014) reported that parents were

more involved in home and school-based efforts when their children specifically invited or encouraged them to take part in activities. Further, school-based involvement was predicted by parent perceptions of time, energy, and their education level (used as a proxy for socioeconomic status). In other words, parents reported higher rates of involvement when they perceived they had the time and energy to commit to



school-based activities. Specific teacher invitations were linked with parent involvement in the special education process and related activities. Although it may be difficult for schools to control for the time and energy that parents can devote to being involved with school, schools can emphasize or train teachers to reach out to parents, particularly those parents that need to play a role in assessment and planning for special education.

In addition, research has emerged that investigates how schools themselves can foster parent involvement, particularly for students with emotional/behavior disorders. A nationally representative study conducted by Duchnowski et al. (2012) found that when families whose elementary school child had an emotional/behavior disorder were offered a support service (e.g., family resource centers, family liaisons, or workshops on parenting) by their child's school were more involved with their child's education. Further, compared to families not receiving a support service, children that were receiving sup-

port services tended to have higher academic achievement levels and utilize more community resources. Still, only 17 percent of families indicated receiving a support service, highlighting the need for schools to reach out to parents to foster comfort and , develop future resource utilization in families.

Effect on dropout. In one of the few longitudinal studies regarding early indicators of school dropout, researchers from Johns Hopkins University, Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997) investigated the impact of family stressors (i.e., divorce, marriage, illness, death, moving, and transitioning to a new school), parents' attitudes and values, and parenting socialization practices in first grade as a predictor of later school dropout. The researchers reported that disruptive family stressors and out-of-home family placement between first and second grade were predictors of later dropout. Additionally, parents who had lower educational expectations for their children at the beginning their academic careers (i.e., first grade) were more likely to drop out of school than students of parents with higher educational attainment goals for their children. The results of this study speak to not only the strong relationship between parental involvement and practices on future high school dropout, but also the need for early intervention services for students encountering disruptions in family dynamics.

Similarly, Blondal and Adalbjarnardottir (2009) found that when Icelandic adolescents at age 14 reported that their parents demonstrated more authoritative parenting styles (i.e., accepting, yet providing supervision over activities), they were more likely to graduate secondary school by age 22 than adolescents from non-authoritative families. This finding still held constant regardless of gender, SES, temperament, and parental involvement. The researchers hypothesized that parenting style likely moderates the relationship between parental involvement and school dropout in that parental involvement decreased the likelihood of dropout for students in authoritative families only. These results further emphasize the importance of not only parental involvement in school, but also parenting practices that center on support, appropriate delivery of rewards and conse-



quences, boundaries, and acceptance.

Effect on social competence. Positive parenting practices also have the power to instill healthy social skills in children that may lead to better school outcomes. For example, in a longitudinal study conducted by Englund, Egeland, and Collins (2008) which followed a low-income sample from birth to age 23, the investigators attempted to predict high school dropout rates based on a multitude of risk and protective factors (e.g., academic achievement, behavioral problems, etc.). The study reported that students who were expected to graduate from high school had higher levels of parental involvement during the school age years, more supportive parent-child relationships in early adolescence, and higher levels of social competence with adults than the students who were expected to drop out. Therefore, this study demonstrates the importance of early instances of parental involvement as a protective factor in helping shape a child's path to graduation, and in building prosocial behaviors with adults. Parental involvement appears to buffer many of the detrimental schooling effects for children from low-income or impoverished families.

Teachers and Parents as Partners. Teachers and parents as partners (TPP), formerly known as Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) is a consultation service-delivery model that incorporates parents, caregivers, and the student's educators in collaboratively developing a plan to address behavioral and/or academic targets that are drawn from student, parent, and teacher needs. This model aims to increase the competencies of all involved by identifying common interests, utilizing strengths, and making decisions through data-based approaches. Students, parents, and teachers are guided through this process via four consultation meetings (i.e., needs identification, needs analysis, plan development, and plan evaluation) facilitated by a trained consultant (Sheridan et al., 2005). Primary objectives of the program include: addressing concerns across settings (rather than within one setting); improving home-school partnerships to benefit learning; increasing



communication between children, families, and school staff; fostering continuity and consistency across home and school change agents; and empower parents by capitalizing and building on already existing strengths (Sheridan et al., 2005).

There is an abundance of research emphasizing the effectiveness of CBC on academic and behavioral performance. In particular, a large-scale randomized control trial of the intervention found that CBC was helpful in addressing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional concerns with the home and the school contexts (Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001). More recently, CBC has proven successful in helping students display more adaptive behaviors and social skills, relative to students who did not participate in CBC. Importantly, teachers who participated in CBC reported more positive relationships with parents, as compared to teachers in a control condition, emphasizing the effectiveness of the model on not only student outcomes, but also adult relationships (Sheridan et al., 2012). Similarly, teachers that extended more frequent invitations for parent involvement within the CBC context moderated the effects of CBC on decreasing students' aggression and conduct problems (Coutts, Sheridan, Kwon, & Semke, 2012). Sheridan et al. (2013) also reported promising results for the model in rural contexts, particularly for students with challenging behaviors (e.g. externalizing problems) and increasing teachers' use of effective behavioral strategies. Therefore, this model has displayed

promising results for the last decade related to improving relationships and decreasing problem behavior. At the present time, this intervention may be especially relevant in early intervention contexts and has not proved as effective with high school students (Sheridan et al., 2001).

Limitations of parent involvement. Although parent involvement and the importance of family issues have always been recognized as key variables influencing students' decision to leave school, much of the research on the role of the family in school dropout is flawed and inconsistent. For example, much of the research has also been cross-sectional (i.e., only measuring the impact of parental involvement on outcomes over a short period rather than long-term) and focused on academic achievement rather than school dropout, *per se*. Academic achievement is the dominant outcome variable used in educational research, and measures of school dropout are often neglected or unable to be obtained (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). Research from McNeal (1999) echoes this finding in that parental involvement may be a salient factor in explaining behavioral but not cognitive outcomes. Moreover, parental involvement may improve outcomes for minority students, yet it also amplifies performance for students that are already advantaged (e.g. affluent students, white students, students from intact homes). Research has often neglected this finding of gap-widening. In addition, parents who put forth the same levels of involvement but have fewer resources may not demonstrate as large of gains in student achievement (McNeal, 1999). Given this notion, it is particularly crucial for schools to reach out to disadvantaged parents or apprehensive parents through consultation

with liaisons, community agencies, and by utilizing many of the suggestions below.

Additionally, most research often does not clearly separate the parent involvement variable from the larger sociological concept of socioeconomic status (SES), making it difficult to draw distinct conclusions about the role of parents. Research has consistently demonstrated that students from lower SES backgrounds dropout at higher rates than students from higher SES backgrounds, however the reasons for this may be multifaceted, such as access to better schools, parental values that place more emphasis on education (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009). One study that did control for extraneous variables, reported several variables (perceptions of invitations to be involved, self-efficacy, self-perceived time, and energy for involvement) were predictive of parent involvement at home and school after accounting for parent SES and levels of education (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Despite this positive finding, the same study still concluded that parent involvement decreases as child age increases. Thus, more specific, longitudinal research on the family dynamic and parental behaviors is warranted in order to develop corresponding interventions that elementary, middle, and high schools can tailor towards increasing parental involvement.

Facilitating Parent Involvement

Given the evidence that increasing parent involvement is a practical and efficient strategy for increasing student engagement, academic performance, and appropriate behaviors, it is important for schools to be knowledgeable



about ways in which they can facilitate better parent involvement:

- **Climate supportive of parent involvement.** Principals can play an important role in improving parent development by facilitating positive relationships between school and home. Teachers should not only be encouraged, but also expected to keep constant and positive communication with families providing them with opportunities to become more involved (Bouffard & Stephen, 2007).
- **Staff & parent development.** Professional development activities for staff on how to interact appropriately with parents, will set the stage for a school environment that is encouraging and welcoming for families (Bouffard & Stephen, 2007). Schools should use these workshops to help generate formal standards for parental involvement that are consistent among staff. Inviting parents to attend these workshops and offer input may also be of benefit (Casper et al., 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Strait & Rivera, 2013). If parents are unable to attend workshops due to busy schedules, create a schedule poll, provide incentives, offer transportation, record, and use alternate ways for parents to access the information (i.e., webinars, websites) (Strait & Rivera, 2013). Schools can also provide parent-training courses or workshops on how to manage their child's behavior, handle homework time, and access mental health and school-based services (Duchnowski et al., 2012).
- **Joint problem solving.** By identifying school weaknesses or low areas of achievement and collaborating with families about how parents can help them reinforce school standards and expectations at home. Parents can be surveyed in order to highlight their specific needs (Strait & Rivera, 2013). Providing families with handouts or resources that they can use at home is also critical in involving families in generalizing school expectations and values (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- **Preparing for transitions.** Schools can help families prepare for transitions to middle or high school by inviting staff from middle and high schools to speak with families regarding how they can prepare their children for the academic and behavioral expectations that they will encounter in future schools (Carter & Healey, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- **Increase communication.** Schools can significantly increase communication with parents. They can create a parent-teacher blogging website to increase parent and teacher communication, keep parents involved and knowledgeable about how their child is doing in the classroom, and to support homework completion. Research by Ozcinar and Ekizoglu (2012) indicates that a parent blogging system increases parent support and involvement in education. Teachers can communicate to parents daily (or regularly) by notes, phone, or email and provide supplemental exercises for parents to do with their child at home. Progress reports can be sent home more frequently than the typical quarterly report cards. Special efforts can be made to increase communication with the parents of struggling or at risk students.
- **Employ community partners.** Partnering with community resources may be more effective in encouraging families to become involved with school. Share school data with community agencies and any financial stakeholders (Strait & Rivera, 2013). This may be particularly important for families that feel marginalized or isolated from their child's school but have identified with a particular community group (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Partnering with dependable and reputable community members, such as faith-based organization leaders, business leaders, and civic organization officers, can help make information about student achievement more salient for parents and encourage discussions about students' strengths and weaknesses at home (Oxley, 2013).
- **Employ culturally sensitive strategies.** Always make sure to provide information on parent engagement that is culturally sensitive, especially since many cultures (e.g.,

Latin American cultures) value personal relationships. Providing translators, bilingual liaisons, and avoiding jargon during parent meetings or workshops is imperative (Hill & Torres, 2010; Strait & Rivera, 2013).

- **Professional preparation for educators.** Similarly, schools, particularly those that host practicum students or student teachers, may want to communicate with local colleges and universities to ensure that students in teacher education programs are being instructed in ways to engage families and have the opportunity to observe successful parent engagement efforts (Caspé et al., 2011).
- **Applied research.** Partnerships with local colleges and universities should also be encouraged to conduct research on parental involvement and return this data back to schools to evaluate and improve current parental involvement practices and professional development (Caspé et al., 2011).
- **Personal and specific invitations.** Invite parents to participate in school activities and events. Activities might include family fun nights, athletic events, field days, and field trips.

- **Utilize and support community resources.** Introduce parents to after school and summer learning opportunities in the community to ensure that parents are encouraged to utilize resources that are consistent with the school's mission and familiar to school staff and administration (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
- **Develop and sustain trust.** Since large school size is negatively associated with parent involvement at all levels, schools should try to develop the type of trust that teachers and parents more commonly have in small schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Interdisciplinary teaming can help larger middle and high school staff creates trusting relationships with parents (Oxley, 2013).

While collectively these strategies would have the potential to improve parent and family involvement for all students, it is also possible to employ these same strategies to attempt to improve the involvement of parents and families of students who are at risk, students who are having chronic or severe behavior or academic problems, or students who have high risk for dropping out of school. Special efforts can should be undertaken to engage and support the involvement of the parents of these students.



Conclusion

Parental involvement includes several factors related to parenting style/practices, communication, learning at home, volunteering, community collaboration, and parent decision-making using relevant data. Parental involvement has been shown to be an effective tool for increasing student engagement in the form of increased academic performance and adherence to behavior expectations. Research should extend to examining the effects of parent involvement for minority students and

highlighting the specific factors that compose “parent involvement” and their influence on outcomes. Specific strategies to promote parent involvement should incorporate professional development for teachers, parent input regarding family-based needs, and multicultural considerations.



See related Strategy Briefs on: Student Engagement, and Staff Student Relationships.

Resources on Parent & Family Involvement

AHarvard Family Research Project (HFRP)

<http://www.hfrp.org/>

Established in 1983, The Harvard Family Research Project has helped stakeholders develop and evaluate strategies to promote the success of children, adolescents, families, and their communities. The group works primarily within three areas that support children’s learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education. HFRP is strongly committed to evaluation, creating research publications, conducting original research, collaborating with schools, and building system-wide capacity for school, family, and community involvement.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

<http://www.ncpie.org/>

Founded in 1980, this organization advocates for the involvement of parents and families in their child’s education, and cultivate relationships between home, school, and community to enhance the education of all youth. Specifically, they provide resources and legislative support to foster parent involvement and serve as a representative for parent involvement at the national level.

The National Network of Partnership Schools

<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/>

Housed at Johns Hopkins University, this organization invites schools, districts, and states to collaborate in order to use research-based approaches to organize and sustain excellent programs of family and community involvement. These initiatives aim to increase student success in school through developing new processes, concepts, tools, and strategies to improve parent involvement policies and practices.

The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools:

http://cyfs.unl.edu/resources_working_papers.shtml

The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools (CYFS) strives to disseminate its research to the widest possible audience, thereby advancing the scientific knowledge base while informing practice, policy, and future scholarship through a series of working papers. Information on Conjoint Behavioral Consultation is available through this website.

Using Parent and Family Engagement as a Dropout Prevention Strategy:

<http://www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast/45-using-parent-and-family-engagement-dropout-prevention-strategy>

This webinar, presented by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, is entitled “Using Parent and Family Engagement as a Dropout Prevention Strategy” and provides suggestions for schools to improve family engagement that are based on research linking parent involvement with lower dropout rates.

Parent and Family Engagement-U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/parent-and-family-engagement>

U.S. Department of Education’s website regarding Parent and Family Engagement. The website provides links to a variety of topics, including early learning, military families, bullying, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

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