

Family Engagement

What is Family Engagement?

Parent involvement as defined by ESEA Title I is “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication to enhance student academic learning.” Parent involvement has been viewed as a wide array of activities occurring in the home and in collaboration with the school.¹ Family engagement is a more comprehensive and coherent strategy that focuses on the development of partnerships between school, families, and the community and away from the typical “random acts of parent involvement.”² Student achievement increases when families and schools are partners. When families are engaged in ways that are linked to improved learning, their children make greater gains.³

Parent and Family Engagement Research

Over 30 years of research supports the critical role of families in children’s learning. Key findings from *A New Wave of Evidence* include:

- Students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary settings.
- When families take an active interest in what they’re learning, students display a more positive attitude towards school and behave better both in and out of school.
- Children do best if parents can play a variety of roles in their learning: helping at home, volunteering at school, planning their children’s future, and taking part in key decisions about the school.
- Middle and high school students, whose families remain involved, have more successful transitions, maintain the quality of their schoolwork, develop more realistic plans for the future, and are less likely to drop out.

Henderson and Mapp’s work in *Beyond the Bake Sale* has identified four beliefs essential for engaging families.⁴

- All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- All parents have the capacity to support their children’s learning.
- Parents and school staff should be equal partners.
- The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

References:

¹Fege, A. (2011) *Handbook on Family and Community Engagement*

²Weiss, H. & Lopez, E. (2009) *Refining Family Engagement in Education* Harvard Family Research Project FINE Newsletter, Volume I, Issue 2

³Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. A (2002) *New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*

⁴Henderson, A., Mapp, K., Johnson, V, & Davies, D (2007) *Beyond the Bake Sale*