

Research Teachers



SEPTEMBER 2010

"This article is one of a series intended to help ETFO members become more aware of current research findings directly relevant to teaching in elementary schools."

1 PARENT ENGAGEMENT

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A wealth of research concludes that students are more likely to be successful when their parents are engaged in their education. When parents are truly engaged, children:

- attend school more regularly;
- are better behaved;
- have better academic outcomes;
- have a greater sense of how to be successful in school; and
- are more likely to graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

In light of this evidence, meaningful relationships that enhance parents' opportunities to make important contributions to student learning are vital to the work of teachers.

Recently, researchers have analyzed these findings to determine what parents do that makes this difference in students' education. It seems it is **not** particular parent actions, such as attending school functions, establishing household rules, or checking student homework, that make the difference. Instead, it is more **subtle aspects** of parent engagement that prove to be the most important - such as creating an atmosphere in the home in which education is valued, and in which high expectations and levels of support are established. When parent engagement is **linked to teaching and learning** it contributes to enhanced student results. The benefits are greater when the parent is not expected to act as another teacher. These findings have important implications for teachers in how they build relationships with parents.

Three critical implications for teachers emerge.

1. **Adopt a definition of parent engagement** that embodies the role parents play in their children's learning both in **and** out of school. Move away from promoting tasks for parents to perform such as reading with their children, helping with homework, or volunteering in the classroom.

Encourage parents to be engaged in their children's learning on their own terms and in ways that fit their place in their children's lives - playing games, cooking together, enrolling their children in language, cultural, or extra-curricular activities, or family outings.

2. **Pay attention to the knowledge parents and families hold**, the ways they instill a sense of educational standards and support, promote learning, engage with their children in varied experiences, and so on. Learn from parents and families about their lives out of school. For example:
 - invite parents to lead a school staff orientation or community walk in which they introduce the school community to the staff as residents in that community;
 - re-conceptualize “Meet the Teacher” night as a “Meet the Parents/Families” night;
 - plan the first curricular unit of the school year around “family stories”; and
 - use the first 15 minutes of every staff meeting for every staff member to make relationship-building calls with parents.

3. **Use the knowledge gained from parents and families to engage with parents**, at home and at school, in ways that contribute to school improvement and student learning and benefit children, parents, families, and educators. Create opportunities for parents to contribute in meaningful ways to decision-making, For example:
 - hold a meeting to co-determine with parents the homework policy and practices for the class – the amount, type, expectations, roles everyone will play – based on the context of their lives;
 - work with parents to analyze together student achievement results and jointly establish school priorities and growth plans.

With parent engagement, what both parents and teachers know and desire is central to teaching and learning.

Further Reading

- Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L., Johnson, V.R. & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York: The New Press.
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- Hill, N.E., Tyson, D.F. & Bromell, L. (2009). Developmentally appropriate strategies across ethnicity and socioeconomic status. In N.E. Hill & R.K. Chao (Eds.), *Families, schools and the adolescent: Connecting research, policy, and practice* (pp. 53-72). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Jeynes, W.H. (2010, March). The salience of the subtle aspects of parental involvement and encouraging that involvement: Implications for school-based programs. *Teachers College Record*, 112 (3), pp. 747-774.
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- Pushor, D. (2010). Are school doing enough to learn about families? In M. Miller Marsh & T. Turner-Vorbeck (Eds), *(Mis)understanding families: Learning from real families in our schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 4-16.