



Involving Parents: Best Practices in the Middle and High Schools Teacher Version

What about Involving Parents at the Middle and High Schools?

A growing body of evidence recognizes that family and community connections with schools make a difference in middle and high school students' success. Following is a summary of that research based on the review by Henderson and Mapp and connected to key findings in their work.

The review recognized that a family's income level did not affect the family's level of involvement. Low-income families were as likely to be involved in their children's learning as higher-income families. Parents with high involvement rating tend to have students with higher grades and scores, no matter what was the level of family income or background.

At the middle school level, it is especially important for parents to do the following:

- Discuss school activities,
 - Monitor out-of-school activities,
 - Contact school staff, and
 - Volunteer and attend parent-teacher conferences and other school events.
- [Esther Ho Sui-chu and Douglas Willms (1996)]

At the high school level, it is especially important for parents to do the following:

- Guide their students toward postsecondary education,
 - Make sure they read and do their homework, and
 - Stress the value of education.
- (Catsambis, Fan, and Chen; Shumow and Lomax, Trusty)

Key Finding: Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.

- **TIPS – Teachers Involving Parents in School Work:** The more middle school students' parents were involved in the TIPS homework program in writing, the higher the students' completion of homework and the better their grades in language arts. Those students involved in the TIPS for Science earned significantly higher grades in science than the control group. (Van Voorhis)
- **Outreach to Parents by Teachers:** In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores in reading and math grew at a rate of 40



percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach. (Westat and Policy Studies Associates)

- **Weekly Homework Assignments Requiring Parent Involvement:** The grades of middle school students improved when at least one assignment weekly required parent involvement. (Epstein, Simon, and Salinas; Van Vorrhis)
- **Action Plans for Parent Involvement:** Well-designed practices to engage families result in increased student attendance and higher test scores. (Epstein, *et al*)
- **Communication with Parents:** When teachers communicate regularly with parents, standards-based reform practices have a positive effect on students' test scores. (Westat and Policy Associates)

Key Finding: The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through our complex education system. The more families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more the children tend to do well in school and continue their education.

- **Transition:** A combined effect of parent and school support has a tremendous impact on middle school grades, especially for African-American students. Three key influences identified are as follows: 1) parent involvement – talking to students about school, checking homework, attending events, and volunteering at school; 2) support from teachers – taking time to help students and being supportive rather than critical; and 3) belonging at school – feeling accepted, respected, and included at school. None of the three alone has an impact on student achievement, but when at least two are combined students achieve higher average grades. (Gutman and Midgley)
- **Parental Efficacy – Power to Produce an Effect:** Parents' sense of efficacy is high when they 1) can help their children do well in school, be happy, and be safe; 2) overcome negative influences and keep their children away from troublemakers, illegal drugs, or alcohol; and 3) have a positive impact such as improving quality of the school and making the neighborhood a better place. The higher the parents' sense of efficacy the more successful their students were at school. (Shumow and Lomax)
- **Communication between Student and Parent:** Students who feel their parents communicate with them and support their learning are more likely to continue studies past high school. (Trusty)



Key Finding: Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, all families can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children's learning.

- **Involvement at Home:** Parents' talking about school with their children and helping them plan their education programs are more highly related to higher grades and test scores than volunteering or attending school activities. (Ho Sui-Chu and Willms) Enhancing learning at home has the greatest effect on high school student achievement. Forms of involvement with more effect are parents' expression of high expectations, discussion of post-secondary opportunities, and assistance in preparing students for college. Parents' expectations for their students to do well and attend college had the strongest effect on grade 12 test scores in all subjects. (Catsambis)
- **Parents' Aspirations:** Parents' expectations for their students to do well in school, graduate, and go on to higher education are associated with higher grades, tests scores, and passing rates. (Fan and Chen) Catsambis's study indicates that parents' educational expectations and encouragement are "by far the most important type of family practice that affects all measures of senior achievement."
- **Racial Ethnic, Class, and Cultural Variations:** Asian, Hispanic, and African-American parents are as active in their middle and high school students' education as white parents, but in slightly different ways. The most effective strategies by all were encouraging completion of homework, reading at home, and supporting academic activities. (Catsambis, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, Keith and Keith)

Key Finding: Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.

- **Leisure Time:** The gap between high- and low-achieving students' time in weekly learning activities is about seven hours in high school. It was found that academic success (as measured by standardized test scores) is more likely when 1) students spend at least 15 hours per week doing high-quality learning activities with teachers; 2) students spend 8-15 hours a week fully engaged in out-of-school learning activities; 3) adults with high standards for achievement guide students' out-of-school activities; and 4) students know how to study, plan, and complete projects and have access to libraries and reference materials. (Clark)



Key Finding: Programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs.

- **Joining Process:** School communities must *welcome* parents into the school, *honor* their participation, and *connect* with them through a focus on the students and their learning. (Mapp)
- **Parent Involvement at the High School Level:** Involvement at home is positively and significantly influenced by school practices that assist parenting and facilitate interactions with teens on learning at home. Involvement at school is most strongly influenced by school practices that encourage volunteering and participation in school decision making. (Sanders, Epstein, and Connors-Tadros) Parent involvement increases with support from the school. When school staff members contact parents about opportunities, parents are more likely to attend planning workshops and talk to their teens about college and employment, volunteer as audience members at school activities, work more often with their teens on homework, and talk with their teens more often about school. (Simon)

Key Finding: Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.

- **Welcoming All Families:** Even though school staff members often think they welcome all families, researchers find that educators recognize only a narrow band of acceptable behaviors; teachers like parents who defer to them and accept their opinion about the students. Five “best practice” strategies to build collaborative relationships include the following: 1) build on cultural values of parents, 2) stress personal contact with parents, 3) foster communication with parents, 4) create a warm environment for parents, and 5) facilitate structural accommodations for parent involvement. (Scribner, Young, and Pedroza)
- **Cultural Brokers:** Use translators/trainers who are able to translate between the cultural and ethnic groups and the educators. They are effective in helping parents learn strategies for interacting with teachers and expanding their role. (Delgado-Gaitán)

Henderson and Mapp emphasize that all students, “but especially those in middle and high school, would benefit if schools support parents in helping children at home and in guiding their educational career. Studies that look at high-achieving students of all backgrounds found that their parents encourage them, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. The continuity that this constant support provides helps students through changes of school, program, and grade level.” (p 73)



Parents' involvement in school should be linked to improving learning, developing students' skills in specific subjects, and steering students to more challenging classes. The parent involvement programs should also develop close relationships between teachers and the families.

Sources:

- *A New Wave of Evidence – The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement – Annual Synthesis, 2002* by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp. Download of this article is available at <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam33.html>.
- *School, Family, and Community Partnerships – Your Handbook for Action, 2002* by Joyce L. Epstein, Mavis G. Sanders, Beth S. Simon, Karen Clark Salinas, Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn, and Frances L. Van Voorhis.

So What Does This Mean for Me as a Teacher?

There are several implications for our practice based on the summary of the research of Henderson and Mapp. They share the following recommendations:

1. Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background, are involved in their students' learning and want them to do well in school.
2. Get involved in programs that will support families to guide their students' learning.
3. Work with families to build their social and political connections.
4. Work directly with families and community members.
5. Link family and community engagement efforts to your students' learning.
6. Focus your efforts to engage families and community members in developing trusting and respectful relationships.
7. Embrace a philosophy of partnerships and be willing to share power with families. Make sure that parents, your colleagues, and community members understand that the responsibility for the students' educational development is a collaborative enterprise.
8. Build strong connections between your classroom and community organizations, especially those that support your standards and benchmarks.

Reflective questions:

- How do I support the involvement of parents in my classroom?
- What opportunities do/should I provide that will enable parent involvement to have a positive effect on my students' learning?
- How do I promote the students' consideration for post-secondary opportunities?



Now What Can I Do to Support Parent Involvement?

Some things you might consider as you seek to increase parent involvement in your classroom and your building:

- Explore ways to enhance what parents are already doing. Ask them about the ways they encourage their students at home and ways to share cultural traditions.
- Invite families to your classroom to share their education stories.
- Always ask about the families' expectations for their students' education.
- Share effective practices with parents about their involvement in middle schools (and be sure you are involved in them), which include interactive homework that involves parents with their students' learning; workshops on topics suggested by parents (e.g., building students' vocabulary, development of positive discipline strategies, supporting students through crisis); regular calls from teachers and leading with the positive information; learning packets in reading, science, and math as well as training on how to use them; and meetings with teachers to talk about progress.
- Offer to families with high school students regular meetings with you and counselors to plan their students' academic program; information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and postsecondary education options and how to plan for them; explanations of courses students should take to be prepared for college or other postsecondary education; and information about financing postsecondary education and applying for financial aid.
- Provide tours of your classroom and the school as well as opportunities to visit – especially at transition levels.
- Meet with students and families at the feeder schools, explaining your classes and answering any questions of parents and families.
- Make home visits before school starts – to build relationships with families.
- Work with families to prepare the students for the next level/class and help them plan for the future.
- Promote connections among families within your classes as well as with other teachers and school staff, and community groups.
- Translate all communications (including meetings) with families into their home languages and/or include an interpreter.
- Ask families about the best times for them to attend meetings with you or events connected with your classes. Ask what kinds of events/opportunities they like to attend. Ask what they think could make school better for them and for their students.
- Give families information about how your class works - especially families who are just entering the system.
- Connect new families to other families in your classes as well as to the community. Engage families in planning how they would like to be involved in your classes.



- Make it easy for parents to meet with you to discuss their student. Meet face to face and telephone routinely about the positives as well as concerns.
- Get involved in professional development on how to connect with families and community members. The professional development should also address the advantages of school, family, and community connections as well as how to work with diverse families.
- Get involved in school-wide programs to engage parents in working with their students (e.g., family literacy, TIPS – interactive homework, family math, family science).
- Share the curriculum with the parents; provide easy access to the textbooks and other learning materials so they are aware of what their students are learning. Be sure to incorporate information on standards and benchmarks.
- Honor every family's contribution and accomplishment, no matter how small.
- Work with community organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, faith-based organizations, businesses) to offer/support programs that encourage the learning in your classroom (e.g., reading, writing, and studying during evenings, weekends, and summer).
- Compare your students' achievement data with parent/family involvement.
- Talk about careers and post-secondary opportunities with your students and their families.
- Relate career opportunities and connections with all learning opportunities in your class.

Tools and Resources:

- **Adolescent Literacy**, a collection intended to help practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders gather and apply knowledge of necessary elements of curriculum and instruction for adolescents with the goal of helping all students achieve success.

<http://www.ncrel.org/litweb/adolescent/>

- **Breakthrough Collaborative**, a national non-profit that increases educational opportunity for high-potential, low-income middle school students and inspires outstanding college and high school students to pursue careers in education.

<http://www.breakthroughcollaborative.org>

- **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning**, resources on parent/family involvement, including essays and packets, books, and web site to promote curriculum in the home.

http://www.casel.org/about_sel/SELhome.php



- **College Financial Aid Tips**, a Public Broadcasting Site (PBS) where Kristin Davis of *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine gives parents, students, and educators tips on financial aid.
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/moneyshow/makeover/041301.html>
- **Constructing School Partnerships with Families and Community Groups**, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory's look at family involvement, including articles about its impact in the middle grades and at the secondary school level.
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa400.htm>
- **FinAid**, established in the fall of 1994 as a public service, this award-winning site has grown into the most comprehensive annotated collection of information about student financial aid on the web.
<http://www.finaid.org>
- **Financial Aid**, the United States Department of Education provides information for students, families, and educators to explore options for paying for education.
<http://www.ed.gov/finaid/landing.jhtml?src=ln>
- **Focus on High Schools**, this Iowa Department of Education web site provides information about high school in Iowa.
<http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/fohs/index.html>
- **Free Application for Federal Student Aid**, this site by the United States Department of Education provides parents and students the opportunity to complete a free application for federal student aid.
<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>
- **Future of High School Success: The Importance of Parent Involvement Programs**, Hickman's article focuses on the role that parent involvement programs play in the high school and how they can help to meet the changing needs of high school students and their families.
<http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/hsj/Hickman.asp>
- **Iowa Learning Online (ILO)**, designed to help local Iowa school districts expand learning opportunities for their high school students through courses delivered "at a distance" using technologies such as the Internet and interactive video classrooms connected to the Iowa Communications Network (ICN). Students enroll in Iowa Learning Online courses through their local school district.
<http://www.iowalearningonline.org/>



- **National High School Alliance**, a partnership of over forty organizations representing a diverse cross-section of perspectives and approaches, but sharing a common commitment to promoting the excellence, equity, and development of high school-age youth.

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

- **National Parent Teacher Association**, select “Student Achievement” to find many good ideas for parents and teachers in working with their students.

<http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/family.pdf>

- **Parent Academic Resources Incorporated (PARI)**, Temple University’s promotion of the growth of effective parent involvement in the middle school and high school years. The goal is to help parents build confidence in their ability to help with school and schoolwork.

<http://www.temple.edu/lss/cpie/cpieparentinvolve.htm>

- **Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in the Middle Grades**, Rutherford and Billig’s summary of lessons learned in a research project on the family and community involvement in the middle grades. This article can be downloaded at <http://www.eric.ed.gov>. (ERIC Digest - ED387273)

- **Pathways to College Network**, this College Readiness for All is a toolbox to help school and college outreach practitioners increase college preparation and access for all students. The toolbox is a systematic, research-based approach designed to help you increase the number of students preparing for postsecondary education. The toolbox contains strategies, tools, resources, and stories about successful schools and programs. The toolbox is the collective work of more than 30 national organizations in the *Pathways to College Network* dedicated to increasing college preparation, access, and success for all students.

<http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/collegereadiness/toolbox/index.htm>

- **School to Career**, a career development project for 7-12th grade students, educators and parents. Through video, Web, and interactive activities students are introduced to career professionals, projects and ideas that help them identify their interests and plan for their futures. Over 200 career professionals are profiled on the Web site through video, photos and text. Through discussion boards and interactive activities students gain a realistic portrait of a variety of career pathways.



<http://www.careers.iptv.org>

- **School to Career – Parents**, recognizing that students rank parents as having the most influence on their career choice, this site provides multiple resources to help parents help their students make career choices.
<http://www.careers.iptv.org/parents.cfm>
- **Strategic Reading Resource Center**, a collaboration of Iowa Public Television, the Des Moines Public Schools, and the Area Education Agencies (AEAs) to help secondary teachers integrate strategic reading instruction into their curriculum.
<http://www3.iptv.org/pd/strategicreading/default.cfm>
- **Supporting Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in Your School** (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory: 2000), a 44-page paper with research-based strategies as well as several data collection tools.
<http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/family.pdf>
- **Ten Steps to College with the Greenes**, a PBS web site that offers ten steps to assuring your students' admission to college. Access to worksheets and resources are also available.
http://www.pbs.org/tenstepstocollege/tensteps_1.html