

# What the Research Tell Us: *Parent Involvement Matters*

From *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, National PTA

A comprehensive survey of the research is a series of publications developed by Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla: *The Evidence Grows* (1981); *The Evidence Continues to Grow* (1987); and *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement* (1995). In 2004, Henderson teamed up with Karen Mapp at the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools to produce *A New Wave of Evidence* on the impact of family involvement on student achievement. Citing more than 85 studies, these publications document the profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families, and schools, when family members become participants in their children's education and their lives. Below are some pertinent findings.

## Parent/Family Involvement and Student Success

- The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to (1) create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and (3) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.
- When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.
- The more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
- When parents are involved in their students' education, those students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.
- When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- Students whose parents are involved in their lives have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education.
- Different types of parent/family involvement produce different gains. To have long-lasting gains for students, parent involvement activities must be well-planned, inclusive, and comprehensive.
- Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher. They also hold higher opinions of those parents.
- In programs that are designed to involve parents in full partnerships, student achievement for disadvantaged children improves, [and] children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.
- Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
- Student behaviors, such as alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behavior decrease as parent involvement increases.
- Students are more likely to fall behind in academic performance if their parents do not participate in school events, develop a working relationship with their child's educators, or keep up with what is happening in their child's school.
- Junior and senior high school students, whose parents remain involved, make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved, on the other hand, are more likely to drop out of school.

## Parent/Family Involvement and School Quality

- Schools that work well with families have improved teacher morale and higher ratings of teachers by parents.
- Schools where parents are involved have more support from families and better reputations in the community.
- School programs that involve parents outperform identical programs without parent and family involvement.
- Schools where children are failing improve dramatically when parents are enabled to become effective partners in their child's education.
- The school's practices to inform and involve parents are stronger determinants of whether inner-city parents will be involved with their children's education than are parent education, family size, marital status, and even student grade level.

## Parent /Family Involvement and Program Design

- The more the relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement.
- For low-income families, programs offering home visits are more successful in involving parents than programs requiring parents to visit the school. However, when parents become involved at school, their children make even greater gains.
- When parents receive frequent and effective communication from the school or program, their involvement increases, their overall evaluation of educators improves, and their attitudes toward the program are more positive.
- Parents are much more likely to become involved when educators encourage and assist parents in helping their children with their schoolwork.
- Effective programs are lead by a team of administrators, educators, and parents, and have access to financial resources.
- When they are treated as partners and given relevant information by people with whom they are comfortable, parents put into practice the involvement strategies they already know are effective, but have been hesitant to contribute.
- One of the most significant challenges to conducting an effective program is the lack of instruction on parent and family involvement that educators and administrators receive in their professional training.
- Collaboration with families is an essential component of a reform strategy, but it is not a substitute for high-quality education programs or comprehensive school improvement.

Full report available at: [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

## What the Research Tells Us: *Benefits All Around*

Decades of research have shown that family involvement in children's education in school and at home boosts school grades and test scores, improves school attendance, fosters social skills, and increases graduation rates and postsecondary education attainment.

### After-School Programs

Research and evaluation findings, such as those compiled by the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP), are demonstrating that engaging families in out-of-school time programs provides benefits all around – for students, families, schools, and the programs.<sup>1</sup> Examples of benefits include:

- **Increased family involvement in children's education and school.** A review of program evaluations in the HFRP Evaluation Database found that family involvement in after-school programs was associated with greater involvement in school events and affairs, and increased family assistance with children's homework. Included in this analysis was the national 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center evaluation, which indicated the following statistically significant results:
  - At the middle schools, parents of program participants were more likely to volunteer at their child's school, attend open houses, and attend parent-teacher conferences.
  - At the elementary schools, a statistically significant higher percentage of parents with students in the after-school programs helped their child with homework at least three times a week, and asked their children about class work.
- **Improved relationships between parents and children.** Findings show that parents and children argue less and have more trust in one another. One extensive study of 78 after-school programs in Massachusetts also found that youth in after-school programs with significant levels of parent involvement had improved relations with adults overall. Another program found that participating students scored significantly higher than comparison students on measures of communication and involvement with family members and other adults, e.g. talking with parents, enjoying doing things with their family, and helping at home.
- **Improved implementation and outcomes for after-school programs.** Some program evaluations indicated that family engagement contributed to better program implementation and outcomes. For example, one evaluation of the Virtual Y programs in New York City found that communicating with families was associated with improved program outcomes.

When parents are fully engaged - from working with their children at home and being involved in the school to becoming advocates for strong public education in their community - research tells us that everyone can reap substantial benefits. *The Case for Parent Leadership*, of the Pritchard Committee for Academic Excellence, details the many benefits of family involvement in education. Some of those benefits are summarized here, and the report is available at: [www.ksaplus.com/ksa/framespla.html](http://www.ksaplus.com/ksa/framespla.html).

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<sup>1</sup> Details on these findings, with research citations, can be found in *Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School*, © 2006 Harvard Family Research Project, and Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet). Available for free at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/families](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/families)  
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## Students

According to *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (2002), a research review published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, there is a powerful link between parent involvement and positive student outcomes. Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Students whose parents are involved are also LESS likely to require special education, drop out of school, be arrested or require public assistance. The more that schools work with and encourage families to be involved, the more students like school and the longer they stay in school.

## Parents

When schools engage parents, parents develop more confidence in themselves and in the school. By engagement, we mean welcoming parents and family members into the school, helping them build relationships with teachers and other staff, informing them about the school's educational program and student progress, offering classes and workshops, giving them a voice in decisions that affect their children, and helping them connect to community resources.

Parents who become leaders are better able to support their children's learning. Taking a leadership role and achieving success help parents develop a greater sense of their own power to influence their children's future. Researchers call this efficacy, or the power to have an effect. Parent leaders can:

- gain management and executive skills that they can transfer to their jobs or home-based issues;
- make helpful contacts and build social networks;
- develop closer ties to their communities and neighbors; and
- learn how to influence decisions made in their schools and communities.

## Schools

The research is also clear about the benefits for schools when parents get involved. Teachers feel more support from parents and have higher morale. Parents rate teachers higher and are more likely to support the school through volunteering and other activities. In *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, the authors found a strong connection between trust levels and student achievement in Chicago. Schools with high trust among teachers, principal and parents were more likely to be in the top 25% of student performance, while low trust schools were more likely to be in the bottom 25%.

Another study of Chicago schools found that parent leadership had an impact on improved reading achievement. The study found that elementary schools with effective school councils, comprised of a parent majority, moved from 20% to 37% of students reading at the national average, compared to no significant increase for schools with ineffective councils. (Moore, 1998)

With parents as partners, schools are able to build social and political capital that leads to positive, sustainable change. Parent leaders can tap opportunities and resources not available to schools alone.