A New Wave of Evidence


What Does the Research Show?

*A New Wave of Evidence: Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* is a synthesis of 51 research studies looking at the effects of parent and community involvement on student academic achievement. Several studies found that families of all income and education levels, and from all ethnic and cultural groups, are engaged in supporting their children’s learning at home. White, middle class families tend to be more involved at school. Supporting more involvement at school from all parents may be a strategy for addressing the achievement gap. Several of the studies found that teachers’ outreach to parents was related to strong and consistent gains in student performance. Effective outreach included meeting face-to-face, sending materials home, and keeping in touch about progress. Workshops for parents on helping their children at home were linked to higher reading and math scores.

Schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share three key practices which are:

1) They focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members.
2) They recognize, respect and address families’ needs as well as class and cultural differences.
3) They embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.

Several key findings which emerged are:

- Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children’s learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.
- The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective influence on children as they progress through our complex education system. The more families support their children’s learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.
- Parent 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 in developing specific knowledge and skills.
• Programs that successfully connect families invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent needs
• Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.

How Can Schools Put These Findings Into Action?

Schools can use these findings to engage families in improving student achievement by doing the following:
• Recognize that all parents—regardless of income, education, or cultural background—are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well
• Design programs that support families in guiding their children’s learning from preschool through high school
• Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families
• Link efforts to engage families, whether based at school or in the community, to student learning
• Build families’ social and political connections
• Focus efforts to engage families and community members on developing trusting and respectful relationships
• Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise. All parties should embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power
• Build strong connections between schools and community organizations
• Include families in all strategies to reduce the achievement gap among white, middle-class students and low income students and students of color.

Adapted from CA Parent Center   San Diego State University Research Foundation  http://parent.sdsu.edu