



National Standards for **Family-School Partnerships**



What parents, schools, and communities
can do together to support student success

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A New Way of Leading

Building family-school partnerships for student success

In the 2002 research review *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp conclude that there is a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. To put it another way, when families are involved in their children's learning both at home and at school, their children do better in school. The report also points to specific types of involvement as being especially beneficial to children's academic success.



Finding 1: Involvement programs that link to learning improve student achievement.

It's simple: The more parent and community involvement activities focus on improving student learning, the more student learning improves. Learning-focused involvement activities may include

- * Family nights on math or literacy.
- * Family-teacher conferences that involve students.
- * Family workshops on planning for college.

Finding 2: Speaking up for children protects and promotes their success.

Children whose parents are advocates for them at school are more confident at school and take on and achieve more. The more families advocate for their children and support their children's progress, the longer their children stay in school and the better their children do. Families should

- * Become knowledgeable about the operations of schools and the laws that govern those operations.
- * Be confident about their ability to work with schools.
- * Expect only the best from their children and for their children.
- * Join PTA.



Finding 3: All families can contribute to their children's success.

Family involvement improves student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. For involvement to happen, however, principals, teachers, and parents themselves must believe that all parents can contribute to their children's success in school. Parents can promote their children's academic success by



* Teaching their children the importance of education.

* Finding out what their children are expected to know and to be able to do and reinforcing lessons at home.

* Sending their children to school ready to learn every day.

Principals and teachers must support parent involvement by

- * Making parent involvement a priority.
- * Recognizing and removing barriers to parent involvement.
- * Sharing decision-making power with parents and community members.
- * Working to understand class and cultural differences.

Finding 4: Community organizing gets results.

Engaging community members, businesses, and organizations as partners in children's education can improve the learning community in many ways. For example, community partners may be able to

- * Provide expanded learning opportunities.
- * Build broad-based support for increased school funding.
- * Provide quality after-school programs.



The findings presented by Henderson and Mapp provide a framework for strengthening parent/family involvement programs. PTA, working with leading experts on parent involvement and school-community partnerships, has updated its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs to reflect recent research and improve parent and community involvement practices. The updated National Standards shift the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to what parents, schools, and communities can do together to support student success. To reflect this change, the standards have been renamed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the school community—Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Standard 2: Communicating effectively—Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.

Standard 3: Supporting student success—Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child—Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

Standard 5: Sharing power—Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

Standard 6: Collaborating with community—Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

For more information about the National Standards and PTA programs that promote family-school partnerships, visit www.pta.org.

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

Over 30 years' research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and their quality indicators are research-based and grounded in both sound philosophy and practical experience. The purpose for the standards is threefold:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation;
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs ;
- To provide guidelines for schools that wish to improve their programs .

The program standards are guidelines for leaders of institutions with programs serving parents and families. Therefore, the intended audience includes principals, administrators, educators, and parents who are in positions to influence and improve parent involvement programs. When the standards are used as guidelines, they can direct leaders as they move from discussion to action in developing dynamic programs to improve student achievement through parent involvement. As with any effective long-term reform, the overall integration and implementation of standards should be based on local needs and circumstances.

The National Standards are:

Standard I: Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Standard II: Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Standard III: Student Learning—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Standard IV: Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Standard VI: Collaborating with Community—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

A model for all to follow—If imitation is the best form of flattery, then perhaps the greatest compliment given to National PTA so far came in May 2000. National PTA participated in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration panel of experts to review the parent/community involvement components of 12 of the most popular school reform models being used throughout the country. All of the models were reviewed against National PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

For more information and complete descriptions of each National Standard, please visit National PTA's website at <http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp>.

*Old Version of the Standards
1997*

Parent Engagement on Rise as Priority for Schools, Districts

Push for formal role, rather than add-on

By Karla Scoon Reid

Family-engagement practitioners and researchers say educators are adopting systemic and sustained efforts to integrate parents into the fabric of their schools—a welcome shift for advocates who have complained of lip service but scant support for programs they say can have a big impact on student achievement. [Back to Story](#)

In the past seven years, large and mid-sized school districts such as Denver and Nashville have created positions and departments specifically geared toward parent involvement, with a concurrent growth in related organizations, increased attendance at conferences, and a heightened interest from some philanthropic groups to fund parent-engagement efforts.

Meanwhile, states are including family-engagement in their teacher-evaluation systems or making it a requirement in other programs.

In Massachusetts, for example, **family and community engagement is one of four standards within its teacher-evaluation rubric**, which has led to the development of some parent-engagement professional development programs. **California crafted a "family engagement framework"** to help districts meet requirements in the state's new school funding law to include families in the school budget decision-making process.

And at the federal level, the **U.S. Department of Education released a family- and community-engagement model in 2014** to encourage school districts and states to adopt parent-engagement efforts linked directly to student learning.

"Instead of constantly knocking on the door, I feel like the door is open, and we're invited to the table," said D'Lisa Crain, of the **Family-School Partnership Department** administrator for the Washoe County district in Reno, Nev. "Now, I feel like family engagement is a natural part of the discussion."

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Tools for Parents

School districts that have family and community-engagement offices are able to develop a comprehensive district-wide approach to provide parents tools, training, and support to help their children academically. These districts also are able to provide family-engagement professional development for staff and teachers to expand their parent-engagement efforts even further.

Heather B. Weiss, the founder and director of the **Harvard Family Research Project**, said that in the past, family-engagement initiatives were often what she calls "one-offs" rather than long-term integrated efforts.

"Now, people realize the need to develop more robust family-engagement plans carefully linked to children learning in and out of schools and also develop the capacity of teachers to implement those plans," she said. "It can't just be math help in 3rd grade."

When Ms. Crain began developing parent-engagement strategies in 2007 for the 63,000-student Washoe County district, she had a \$5,000 budget and one secretary. Today, Ms. Crain's department has nine employees and a \$1 million budget.

From its parent-teacher home-visit project to its academic parent-teacher teams, Ms. Crain said Washoe County's parent-engagement programs are growing and gaining converts from within the district and nationwide. She said her staff fields calls from colleagues and educators weekly asking for advice or to collaborate.

S. Kwesi Rollins, the director of leadership programs at the Washington-based **Institute for Educational Leadership**, has also witnessed the family-engagement field expand nationally. The institute founded the **District Leaders Network on Family and Community Engagement**, a networking and professional-development group made up of district-level administrators, with representatives from about seven districts in 2009.

This year, the network's membership has grown to include 125 urban, suburban, and rural districts. Mr. Rollins noted that some of the parent-engagement administrators report directly to their district superintendents, giving them an opportunity to infuse parent-engagement efforts throughout their school system.

"There are clearly more positions like mine than there ever have been," noted Patricia A. Spradley, who has been the chief parent and community engagement officer for the Springfield school system in Massachusetts since 2007, and was named one of Education Week's 2015 Leaders to Learn From.

Ms. Spradley, who was one of the founders of the network for district family-engagement leaders, said such efforts were at first "haphazard." But she said that "strategic and intentional programs," developed using student data and research, now are having a much greater impact on student learning.

The promise of such programs, coupled with increased interest in the network, led the Institute for Educational Leadership to host its first-ever National Family and Community Engagement conference last year in Cincinnati. This year's three-day conference, which will be held in Chicago on June 22, is already sold out. Mr. Rollins said the number of registrants doubled to 1,000 this year.

"Many national leaders are in a collaborative spirit, which is helping to gain traction and is providing a mechanism for sharing high-impact strategies," Mr. Rollins said.

Just last year, some of the nation's leading family- and community-engagement advocates and practitioners founded the **National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement**, or NAFSCE, in Bethesda, Md., to mobilize family-engagement advocates behind initiatives to gain greater financial and legislative support for the issue.

Pushing for Resources

Thus far, advocates have failed to have the Title I federal funding set-aside for family and community engagement efforts increased from 1 percent to 2 percent in congressional proposals to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. But Karen Mapp, a senior lecturer at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, said school districts that have made family-engagement work a priority consider that Title I funding mandate a "floor, not a ceiling" and are adding more funding to support parents.

True, some districts, like the Springfield school system in Massachusetts are eliminating all or some of their parent coordinators, and some family-engagement departments, like Boston's, have seen their funding reduced in recent years due to shrinking education budgets. But Ms. Mapp said other school systems, like New York City's, have maintained school-based parent coordinators.

Ms. Mapp also said philanthropic organizations are showing an increased interest in family-engagement strategies. For example, **the Battle Creek, Mich.-based W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded \$13.7 million in grants** to strengthen family-school partnerships across the country last year, while the Los Altos, Calif.-based **Heising-Simons Foundation awarded NAFSCE \$350,000 in grants** to help found that group.

Ms. Weiss, of the Harvard Family Research Project, added that interest in family-engagement efforts isn't relegated solely to education circles: She plans to make a speech at a meeting convened by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis board of directors and the University of Minnesota this fall. She said community and business leaders see the potential for a long-term return on their investment in family-engagement efforts in the community.

Building Momentum

Education and civic leaders from cities including Albuquerque, N.M., and New Haven, Conn., have visited Boston for a first-hand look at their family-engagement department before crafting their own plans. Michele Brooks, the assistant superintendent for family and student engagement in Boston, said representatives from up to eight school districts visit her district each year.

Ms. Brooks, who is retiring this month, said school district leaders are becoming more aware that family engagement can no longer be a volunteer-led practice. Family-engagement administrative positions at school districts, Ms. Brooks said, have developed into professional positions requiring high-level skills and experience to "help families understand the language of schools and to help educators understand the culture of home."

"Teachers don't realize that parents are a natural ally for them in managing student behavior and helping them bolster student achievement," said Ms. Brooks, a 2013 Education Week Leader to Learn From.

That's why parent-engagement advocates are pushing more states to adopt family- and community-engagement standards within educator evaluations, as in Connecticut. But to help teachers and principals learn how to engage parents requires professional-development training and in-service opportunities that are aligned to instructional goals, Ms. Mapp said.

Ms. Mapp acknowledges that some teachers are "pretty reluctant" to add parent-engagement strategies, like home visits, to their already daunting duties. Still, she said, once teachers experience how partnering with parents can make their jobs easier as educators, they are eager to encourage their colleagues to join them.

Ms. Crain said the family-engagement field must continue collecting data and research to show both educators and parents how effective these practices can be to improve student achievement. If family-engagement practitioners can convey that message, she added: "I don't think family-engagement is going away."

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