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The importance of parental involvement for children's education.

Many studies conclude that parental involvement is a key factor in a child's academic achievement and that it leads to a more enriched educational experience for the child. Increasing parental involvement increases home and community support for schools and their efforts to enhance their programs. Therefore it is of great social, as well as personal benefit for educators, professionals, and families to work together to find innovative ways to increase parental involvement.

Parents' role in the beginning

The early years of a child's life play a fundamental role in education. It is therefore essential to give in depth attention to the early years for they are the roots of many things to come. The child's family is an integral part of the child as much as to say that the child is not a separate entity. Consequently, the development of children at home and at school must be treated as a whole.

How parents can be involved

Parental involvement is achieved through a variety of different forms and dimensions. Parental involvement or participation can be classified into six functional types:

1. Parenting
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at home
5. Community collaboration
6. Decision making

Challenges to family involvement include ambiguous definitions of family involvement, which can result in programs that are merely a series of disconnected activities with little relevance to family or classroom environments. To be effective, educators need to prioritize their family involvement goals and develop specific family involvement objectives that reflect their school's diverse family school environments.

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Feedback or requests for resources or training welcomed. For more resources on family life education check out the UW Extension Family Life World Wide Web site, "Dreamcatcher" at:

www.uwyo.edu/ag/ces/family/dream.html

Parenting Style

Parenting counts for more in understanding child development and performance than a particular behavior, such as the quantity of parent involvement at school. Parenting style is more important in predicting child academic outcomes than the extent to which parents are involved in school. Higher levels of reported parent school involvement was associated with better test scores in reading and teacher ratings of fewer learning problems. Parent interventions designed to improve child academic outcomes might be focused more productively on more fundamental issues:

- what being a good parent is all about
- what constitutes the contour of an appropriate parenting role
- how to relate to one's child in a manner that enhances cognitive and emotional development.

Gail L. Zellman & Jill M Watermanj. (1998). *Understanding the Impact of Parent School Involvement on Children's Educational Outcomes. The Journal of Educational Research* Jul-Aug 1996, v91 n6p370(11).

School Structure & Environment

Parents who perceived their school as safe, as empowering parents, and as having a positive climate reported higher participation in school activities. Several school structural and mobility characteristics were associated with lower parent involvement:

- larger student enrollments
- more newcomers
- smaller class sizes
- smaller student-teacher ratios

- greater student turnovers
- greater percentage of students in poverty households
- greater percentage of children who were African American Asian American and Hispanic.

James Griffith (1998). *The Relation of School Structure and Social Environment to Parent Involvement in Elementary Schools, The Elementary School Journal, Sept 1998 v99 n 1 p53(28)*

Family-Centered Services

Service providers should have a family orientation rather than simply a child orientation to their jobs. When professionals present themselves as nonjudgmental, amicably curious friends of parents, the family will extend its boundaries and perceive the early interventionists as appropriate and supportive rather than inappropriate and intrusive. Family-Centered Services once meant parent involvement, but has come to include building partnerships with families as a means of empowerment. Thus family centeredness should include philosophy and behavior that require early intervention staff to meet this new view.

R.A. McWilliam, Lynn Tocci & Gloria L. Harbin. (1998). *Family*

Centered Service Providers' Discourse and Behavior. Topics in Early Childhood Education, Winter 1998 v1 8 n4 p206(1).

Putting Inclusion into Practice

Inclusion is the practice of serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support. Findings suggest that attitudes toward inclusion, confidence in skills, and ability to access resources may affect the success of the inclusion process and that teachers who were educated many years ago may have less positive attitudes about inclusion. These results indicated the need for ongoing training for general educators, training that includes

- disability awareness
- information on the benefits of inclusion
- factors that promote successful inclusion.

Tess Bennett, Deborah Deluca & Deborah Bruns. (1997). *Putting Inclusion into Practice: Perspectives of Teachers and Parents. Exceptional Children* Fall 1997v64 n1 p115(7)

Efforts By Public Schools

The following statistics were reported January 1998 in <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98032.html> by The National Center for Educational Statistics Statistical Analysis Report: Parent Involvement In Children's Education: Efforts by Public Elementary Schools.

- ! Between 83 and 85 percent of public elementary schools (K-6) initiated communications with parents to inform them about school curricula and student performance including information about the goals and objectives of a particular instructional program and issuing report cards and performance on standardized tests.
- ! Between 82 and 89 percent of public elementary schools provided parents with information designed to promote learning at home and on topics related to child-rearing issues.
- ! Half or more schools reported that "most or all" parents attended conferences with teachers and school open houses.
- ! One-quarter to one-third of all schools included parents to a moderate extent in decision making, with input on the development of parent involvement activities taken into consideration by 31 percent of schools
- ! The majority of public elementary schools, 79 percent, reported having an advisory group or policy council that includes parents.
- ! During the 1995-96 school year, over 90 percent of the schools provided parents opportunities to volunteer both inside and outside the classroom, to assist in fund raising, and to attend meetings of the parent-teacher organization.
- ! Given a list of concerns that might impede parent involvement in schools, the barrier named by the highest percentage of schools, 87 percent, was lack of time on the part of parents. Lack of time on the part of the school created barriers for 56 percent of schools, and 48 percent indicated that lack of staff training in working with parents was a significant barrier.

Reading Success

Department of Education researchers report that parental involvement and time in the classroom have been isolated as critical factors in reading success for U.S. children in <http://nces.ed.gov/help/sitemap.asp>

- ! Average reading scores were 46 points below the national average where principals judged parental involvement to be low, but 28 points above the national average where parental involvement was high-a difference of 74 points. Even when other factors such as race and parent's education were taken into account, the phenomenon remained.

The Rationale for Seeking Parental Involvement

Why is it desirable that parents be involved in early childhood education?

! Helping the children

When parents support education actively, their children are more likely to feel comfortable and enthusiastic to learn.

! Benefitting the education system

Parents can offer assistance in classroom activities and in special projects sharing their unique skills.

! Rewarding the parents themselves

Participation satisfies parents natural desire to know what and how their children are doing.

The 6 Most Important Activities for Involved Parents

1. Establishing a home environment to support learning

Children learn by example. If parents demonstrate that they value education and encourage it, children will also value learning-a value that will remain with them throughout their lives.

2. Communicating, or designing effective means of communication between home and school

Teachers appreciate willing comments from parents, attendance at parent-teacher conferences, and response from teachers' phone calls and letters.

3. Volunteering in schools or classrooms

Visible parental involvement in school is a most effective way of signaling to students that parents care. It is also a tremendous resource for the school facilitating events and activities, or sometimes the only source that makes them possible. Furthermore, teachers feel that they are supported in their pursuits when parents take part in their activities.

4. Encouraging learning at home by helping children with activities that are specifically coordinated with schoolwork

Verbally stressing the importance of homework, providing quiet work space, keeping students involved with reading, exposing them to educational experiences such as museums or videos, hiring tutors, or checking school assignments are all good activities.

5. Being involved in decision making, advocacy, and committee work

Parent's voices in school matters are a crucial component of an educational system in a democratic society.

6. Collaborating with the community to improve education for all children

Whether or not the parent feels a sense of community ownership is a decisive factor that shapes parental involvement. Once a parent is involved, the sense of community increases and involvement in education is reciprocally increased.

Tips for Increasing Parent Involvement

Parental involvement in children's education enhances the positive ambiance of a classroom and children's learning aptitude. As such, teachers would gain a lot from developing strong relationships with parents. Cooperation and support from parents can lead to a positive climate in the classroom. (Ribas, 1998)

Suggestions to help increase parent involvement in their children's education (Fidler, 1998):

1. Always have a Parent Night early in the year!
2. Work cooperatively with your PTA. Together, parents and teachers can help children succeed in school.
3. Send a monthly newsletter announcing upcoming events, units of study, progress made and materials needed. Consider using a weekly, more detailed newsletter, too.
4. Encourage a homework routine. Be sure to send home information containing suggestions and guidelines that parents may find helpful as well as a homework calendar or notebook detailing specific assignments.
5. Use a daily Home-School Folder for immediate needs, correspondence, and homework.
6. Use a Friday Folder to store the week's lessons and projects. Send it home on Friday with a book for practice reading. Parents should review the folder's contents and return the empty folder and book on Monday. A comment sheet can be included for communication between parents and children.
7. Share literature on limiting and/or monitoring television viewing, along with a list of alternative ways for families to spend time together.
 - └ Home projects
 - └ Reading together
 - └ Nature walk
8. Stress the importance of reading together daily, making parents aware of the numerous benefits shared reading experiences have on future reading performance.
9. Establish a program in which parents can volunteer in the classroom on a basis or regular during special events.
 - └ Room monitor
 - └ Field trips
 - └ Parties
10. Remember to thank parents often for their assistance and continued support!
 - └ Call afterwards
 - └ Send thank you note

Fidler Stephani R On your mark, get set, get parents involved! (parent participation in education) Childhood Education Fall 1998 v7.5 n1 p62(2). Ribas, William S. Tips for reaching parents. (parent-teacher relationship). Educational Leadership Sept 1998 -56 n1p83(3).

Tips for Presenting to Parents

Parents are invited to come to school, usually at the beginning of the school year, to hear teachers explain their classroom plans. All teachers want to make positive first impressions on parents. As the saying goes, "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression." Thus, it is important to be prepared and organized. In most schools, teachers vary in their ability and confidence to conduct parent presentations. Teachers often find that as their ability to present increases, their confidence also increases, leading to even better presentations.

1. Have a handout or an outline on the desks when parents arrive.
2. Tell parents how and when you prefer them to contact you when they have questions. Tell parents what you prefer and most of them will cooperate. Include this information in your handout.
3. Check and be familiar with the Parent Handbook or other information about curriculums or procedures that parents have received from the school or district.
4. Be organized, clear, concise, and cordial. Parents will assume you conduct your presentation in the same way you teach your class.
5. When parents make unrealistic suggestions, fight the urge to talk about what you can't do. Focus your answers on what you can do.
6. Leave some time at the end of your presentation for questions. Scheduling question time at the end of the presentation and telling parents early on about this scheduled time avoids disruptive questioning that may break the flow of your presentation.
7. Anticipate the difficult questions and prepare responses. Take a few minutes to think about your class. Consider all the questions you hope parents won't ask.

8. Consult with the principal or a colleague if you have trouble coming up with an answer. Don't panic if you are faced with a confrontational question or statement. Here are some tactful responses:

- ! "That is a good (or interesting) question (or point), and I need to think about it more. Please call me (or send a note), and we'll set up a time to talk."
- ! "I understand your point of view and know that others think similarly." Then, go on to a new topic. When you acknowledge that parents are not alone in their thinking, they feel validated, thereby decreasing the need to prove the point with a debate.
- ! If you feel you must disagree with a statement, start by pointing out the areas of agreement. You can then say, "We obviously differ on some points, and I would be happy to discuss this with you further at another time." You may want to leave it there or invite the parent to set up a time to talk later.

9. Don't be embarrassed to practice in front of the mirror, a colleague, or a friend.

10. Discuss your presentation with your colleagues who teach the same grade or classes. Coordinating or at least sharing information, with colleagues will prepare you for the inevitable comparisons and may possibly reduce their occurrence.

11. Use innovative technologies, such as slide shows and videos. Media programs may take time to prepare, but many teachers find they are effective ways of telling and showing parents what really happens in the classroom.

Ribas, William B. Tips for reaching parents. (parent-teacher relationship). Educational Leadership Sept 1998 v56 n 1 p83(3). Bill Ribas@brookline.mec.edu.

Getting Parents involved with their child's mathematics

Central to the school-mathematics-reform movement, guided by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Inc. (NCTM) standard documents, is parental involvement. Parents are showing an increased interest in the children's mathematical experiences. It is essential that parents and community members be involved in mathematics education so that they understand, support, and contribute to the teaching of school mathematics. The mathematics education community has recognized the importance of garnering this support and views parental involvement as necessary in increasing public support for the ongoing school-mathematics-reform agenda (Peressini 1996) Mathematics educators can promote the involvement of their students' parents in mathematics education:

COMMUNICATION:

***Mathematics Newsletters** can be created by the individual teachers, groups of teachers by grade, or the mathematics department and can be published weekly, monthly, quarterly. Newsletters can contain updates on what is occurring in the mathematics classrooms, description and explanations of curricular content and teaching methods, samples of student's work, student-written articles, sections from parents' questions, and invitations to parents to visit the mathematics classroom. (Peressini, 1998)

*Establishing **networks of families** that serve to keep one another informed regarding what is occurring in their children's mathematics classrooms. This allows parents an alternative to receive information about their child (if they do not have the time or if they feel uncomfortable contacting a teacher). (Peressini, 1998)

***Back-to-School nights** offer families an opportunity to hear about the mathematics program and instruction. These presentations may include teachers' teaching actual lessons and mathematics activities for both the parents and the children. (Peressini, 1998)

***Parent-teacher conferences**, both formal and informal, allow an opportunity to discuss individual students as well as the mathematics program. (Peressini, 1998)

Mathematics portfolios of student work can be sent home on a regular basis and/or discussed during conference. Portfolios could contain written work, projects, assessments, and other activities that help parents to better understand what their children are encountering during mathematics lessons. (Peressini, 1998)

Mathematics-education course which focus on parents histories and abilities to perceive mathematics education in new ways. Parents learn to be better listeners and have discovered their own genuine curiosity for their children's ideas and realize their potential for engaging in mathematical thinking with their children. (Morse & Wagner, 1998, for more information contact Amy Mores, amorse@edc.org)

VOLUNTEERING

Encouraging parents to become active in the mathematics classroom is a powerful way of helping them to understand the changes in their children's mathematics education. Parents can facilitate lessons that incorporate their unique backgrounds and professional experiences and guide field trips to their working environments. In addition, by involving a variety of students' parents in the mathematics classroom the school culture can more accurately reflect the diverse cultures of its student population. (Peressini, 1998)

LEARNING AT HOME

Learning at home involves parents' monitoring and assisting their children with learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions. Mathematics teachers can assist parents and the student by organizing and offering activities that are meant to be completed by both the parents and the children to learn from each other as they progress through the activities. (Peressini, 1998)

*The **Family Math program** is a well-organized program that focuses on parents and their children learning mathematics together. A typical Family Math experience includes sessions led by a classroom teacher or experienced volunteer, in which parents and their children develop problem-solving skills and mathematics understanding in different contexts. Family Math books are also available for home use and contain an assortment of mathematics activities designed to assist parent and children home learning. (Stenmark, Thompson, and Cossey 1996)

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

This refers to the coordination of work and resources of community businesses, agencies, colleges or universities, and other groups to enhance student learning, family practices, and school programs. The following are examples of community collaboration:

* **Mathematics Carnivals** can be organized by the schools with community support to allow students to demonstrate mathematics projects and activities, such as running school stores; estimating impromptu calculations; and demonstrating on computers mathematics software, geometric constructions, and games of chance. (Peressini, 1998)

***Mathematics, Olympics** can involve parents and the community from the planning through the implementation stage and help to foster positive attitudes and a strong sense of mutual trust between homes and schools. Mathematics Olympics can include *the following* activities and corresponding skills.

Milton Bradley's Battleship	Understanding of coordinate geometry and strategic planning
Tangram exercise	Solving puzzles and reinforcing geometric terms
Juggling	Envisioning transformation geometry such as rotations, flips, and slides
Kalah (an ancient count and capture game that originated in Africa)	Promoting logical strategies and patterns of thinking

Koes, Mary T & Joy Faini Saab. *Where all are winners.- a mathematics Olympics for parents, students, and teachers.* *Teaching Children Mathematics* Feb 1998 v4 n6 p360(6).

Peressini, Dominic D. *What's all the fuss about involving parents in mathematics education?* *Teaching Children Mathematics* Feb 1998 v4 n6 p320(6). dominic.peressini@colorado.edu

Morse, Amy B. and Polly Wagner *Learning to listen: lessons from a mathematics seminar for parents.* *Teaching Children Mathematics*, Feb 1998 v4 n6 p360(6).

Stenmark, Jean Kerr, Virginia Thompson & Ruth Cossey *Family Math*. Berkeley, CA: Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California, Berkeley, 1986.

Recruiting Parents and the Community

A SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN

Members of the Virginia Beach Education Assn. have successfully conducted activities in support of early learning among children by involving the community. Support for the group's projects came from various sources such as civic groups, schools, parent organizations and the city government. One crucial determinant to the endeavor's success was the involvement of parents in the learning experiments. The Association established a steering committee charged with improving the community's commitment to school readiness. Members came from city government, community groups, schools, and parent organizations. Its first project, "Summit for Children", was attended by more than 5,000 community residents and leaders (Chapman, 1996).

"Never before had there been a cohesive effort to support young children and families."

"By working to provide networking opportunities among child-serving agencies and educating business and elected leaders about the importance of supporting families with young children, we're forging strong community ties that are bound to help children avoid becoming at-risk statistics."

For more information, contact Jamie Chapman Virginia Beach Education Association, 445 Kings Grant Rd., Virginia Beach. VA 23452, 804/4860202.

THE I LIKE ME! PROGRAM

The "I LIKE ME" program brings parents, community leaders and educators together, touching the very basis of healthy self-concept growth and reading enjoyment of children in their critical developmental years.

Results of empirical testing during the twelve-weeks of program utilization conclude the program significantly improved self-concept and reading and writing development in elementary students from the perspectives of students, their teachers, and their parents. Reading comprehension also improved significantly in 22 percent of the students, and teachers reported strong improvement in parental involvement and home/school relationships. (DeMoulin & Sawka, 1998)

Community sources such as existing school/ business partnerships, corporations, PTA, and others provide funding. The program then works with the school collecting data to be included in each child's personalized reader to be published and delivered on special distribution nights.

"I LIKE ME" is not only an educational program and a rewarding community service project, but an opportunity to make a significant impact on the lives of children-before the adverse effect of gangs and drugs interrupts a child's chance to grow and develop.

For more information, contact the International Office of the Telephone Pioneers of America at 1-800- 976-1914, or <http://www.telephone-pioneers.org> and click "Pioneer News" for "I Like Me!".

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

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National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

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Contact: Sue Ferguson
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National Parent Information Network

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave.
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Success for All

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