The term “family engagement” is used to describe participation and active involvement in a child’s education, physical health, and mental health by a child’s primary caretaker(s) – whether a single mom, two parents, grandparents, foster parents, or an older sibling. The link between families and schools is a critical one. Families are key players in helping to support and reinforce their child’s academic achievement and social–emotional development. The presence of caregivers in schools not only provides additional academic supports, but also creates much needed community and cultural connections.

When families are meaningfully involved in educational activities, their children do better in school – both emotionally and academically. The most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income, social

**Family Engagement**

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*Somersworth High School teacher Caitlin McGurty (center) meets with student Derick Gagnon (left) and his mother, Dina Gagnon, during a parent-teacher night. From the film *Education Revolution at Somersworth High School.*

The benefits of family engagement are wide-reaching:

- Higher test scores
- Improved grades
- Increased attendance
- Higher levels of homework completion
- Decrease in at-risk behaviors such as alcohol use, violence, and other anti-social behaviors, as family engagement increases.
- Improved classroom behavior and motivation
- Higher rates of teacher job satisfaction

*Source: Darsh, Maio, Shippen and National PTA Study 2005*
WHAT WORKS: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

status, or other demographics, but the extent to which the student’s family is able to (1) create a home environment that encourages learning and (2) become involved in their child’s education at school and in the community (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Engaged and involved families are essential to effective processes such as PBIS, RtI, functional behavior assessment, inclusive education, person-centered planning, and wraparound supports.

BEST PRACTICES FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Based on a best-practice model created by Dr. Joyce Epstein of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University and adapted by Seattle Public Schools.

- **Parenting Skills**: Help families create homes that get children ready to learn. Connect families to support organizations that assist with nutrition, adult education/literacy, health, housing and other services. Offer practical workshops on parenting.

- **Home-School Communication**: Regularly communicate with families about their children’s school performance, as well as about school activities, events, and opportunities, and encourage parents to share information on home events, their culture, and their children’s talents and needs. Use varied modes of communication including phone calls, written text, emails, and in-person meetings. Provide translation, when needed.

- **Volunteering**: Recruit and organize parent help and support.

- **Decision Making at School**: Develop parent leaders and include them in school decisions.

- **Collaborating with the Community**: Seek out and use community resources that can strengthen school programs and support families attending the school.

- **Learning at Home**: Let families know the best ways to help students learn. Ensure that families know the essential educational standards for their child’s grade level. Share clear homework policies with families and provide tips on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home. Assign homework that encourages students to interact with families about what they are learning in school. Involve the family in student goal setting each year. Send home summer learning packages at the end of the school year.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PREPARING SCHOOL STAFF TO PARTNER WITH FAMILIES

Based on the Harvard Family Research Project, October 2006.

- Help staff develop new perspectives on situations by discussing hypothetical cases from different family members’ points of view.

- Ask staff to evaluate their own assumptions and beliefs about the families with whom they work.

- Develop staff communication skills.

- Share research on the value of family engagement.

- Provide time for staff to process difficult conversations or situations.

- Encourage staff to contact parents with positive news about their children’s behavior and accomplishments.

SOURCES


