



# Parent Engagement in Community Schools



**Abe Fernández**  
Deputy Director

The Children's Aid Society

**The solution to adult problems tomorrow  
depends in large measure upon how our  
children grow up today.**

**Margaret Mead**

## Objectives



- ◆ Review some of the research on why parent engagement is important
- ◆ Explore and challenge our underlying assumptions regarding parent engagement and barriers to participation
- ◆ Learn strategies for strengthening the connections between caregivers and children
- ◆ Design an action plan for parent engagement



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**Why is Parent Engagement  
Important?**

## Why is Parent Engagement Important?



- ◆ **Joyce Epstein & Anne Henderson**

Children do better in school when their parents support, monitor and advocate for their education.

- ◆ **Francis Ianni**

Consistent messages from home, school and family promote positive child and adolescent development.

- ◆ **Robin Jarrett**

Successful parents in high-risk neighborhoods employ targeted strategies (youth-monitoring, resource-seeking, in-house learning).



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## Ben Carson



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## Research on Parent Involvement



- ◆ It tends to drop off in middle school and more so in high school (compared to elementary school). Family/parent involvement is needed, though parents may not think so.
- ◆ 80% of parents want to know how to help their own children at home and how to help them succeed at school.
- ◆ The social, academic and personal problems require a concerted effort. The school and families work separately without knowledge of or communication with the others.



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## Benefits of & Challenges to Parent Engagement

## Benefits of Parental Engagement



- ◆ Children achieve more when their parents are involved; e.g., higher grades and test scores, more time on HW and better attendance (regardless of parents' ethnic background, education level, or socioeconomic status).
- ◆ Children exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior when parents are involved.
- ◆ Children have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in postsecondary education when parents are involved.
- ◆ Youth risk behaviors (such as alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behaviors) decrease as parent involvement increases.



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## Challenges to Parent Engagement



- ◆ Lack of time and money
  - Average work hours have increased (Americans work longer than any other industrialized country)
  - U.S. has fewer vacation days than other countries
  - More mothers in the workforce
  - Welfare reform – more poor mothers entered the work force without benefits of higher wages, time off, etc.
- ◆ Lack of childcare or transportation



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## Challenges to Parent Engagement



- ◆ Cultural - language, customs & beliefs
- ◆ Lack of communication between the youth development professional and parent - understanding what they are being asked to do
- ◆ School staff or administration fail to recognize or legitimize parents' role in education
- ◆ "Ghosts in the Classroom" - parents' own negative experiences in school



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## Parents of Successful Youth:



- ◆ Participate in school activities and conferences
- ◆ Have high expectations of academic performance and attainment
- ◆ Are active at home -- frequent conversations with children about school and world around them and make homework a priority
- ◆ Monitor children's activities during and after school



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## Effective Strategies

### OST Programs Involve Families



#### Opportunities to:

- ◆ Enrich their own educational enrichment
- ◆ Engage with their children in meaningful shared OST experiences
- ◆ Participate in program governance and community leadership
- ◆ Build stronger links with schools

Harvard Family Research Project  
Number 4, August 2002



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## Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement



1. Parenting
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at Home
5. Decision Making
6. Collaborating with Community

Joyce Epstein, *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action.*



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## Parenting Across the Developmental Continuum



Developmental Stage	Parenting Characteristics
Childhood 6-10	Protecting, nurturing, teaching, modeling
Early Adolescence 11-14	Offer opportunities for personal autonomy, foster independence
Mid-Adolescence 15-17	Guidance, encouragement, increasing flexibility of family boundaries
Late Adolescence 18-19	Mentor beyond guidance, confirming worth, sponsor (to get work)



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## Strategies for Gaining Input & Communicating with Parents



- ◆ Ask and involve them about what their needs are (survey, focus group, etc.). Structure parent programming based on findings.
- ◆ Establish systemic ways for regular, ongoing communication with parents (newsletter, liaison).
- ◆ Varied communication so it does not rely on the child to deliver the message or a flyer.
- ◆ Develop a network of active parent leaders.
- ◆ Create multiple opportunities and entry points for parent engagement (not only meetings).



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## Other Strategies



- ◆ Remove potential barriers (e.g. child care needs or fare for transportation).
- ◆ Build on current structures and successes.
- ◆ Stay focused, set priorities and don't let yourself get overwhelmed. (Keep your eye on the prize—helping students succeed and plan next steps.)
- ◆ Be creative—use technology (e.g., voicemail, e-letter)
- ◆ Host some out-of-neighborhood experiences – to museums, parks, camps, etc. – where they may take their children.



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## More Strategies



- ◆ Recognize that all parents care
- ◆ Create a welcoming environment
- ◆ Create programs that provide support
- ◆ Focus activities that build trust and respect among families and community members
- ◆ Work with families to build their social and political connections
- ◆ Link efforts to youth



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**Taking Action**

Parent Engagement Planning Worksheet		
Community School:		
<b>Buy-in:</b> Is Parent Engagement valued by CS staff (the principal, teachers, secretaries, partners, etc.)? If not, list strategies to change/influence their views.		<b>Assumptions:</b> What do you know about the attitudes, beliefs, barriers, etc. that might promote or prevent parent engagement?
Resources (human, programmatic, financial, etc.)	Desired Outcomes for Parent Engagement: List shared characteristics/objectives	Strategies/Activities
CAS National Center for Community Schools		

## Resources



- ◆ **Joyce Epstein-** School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action. Joyce L. Epstein et al. Corwin Press, Inc., second edition, 2002
- ◆ **Francis Ianni-**Meeting Youth Needs with Community Programs. ERIC Digest, Number 86.  
[www.eric.ed.gov/sitemap/html\\_0900000b801b4a1f.html](http://www.eric.ed.gov/sitemap/html_0900000b801b4a1f.html)
- ◆ **Robin L. Jarrett -** *Successful Parenting in High-Risk Neighborhoods*. The Future of Children: WHEN SCHOL IS OUT. Volume 9, No 2 – Fall 1999.
- ◆ **FINE (Family Involvement Network of Educators)**  
Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 3 Garden Street, , Cambridge, MA 02138  
Tel: 617-495-9108, Fax: 617-495-8594  
Email: [fine@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:fine@gse.harvard.edu), [www.finenetwork.org](http://www.finenetwork.org)
- ◆ **About GreatSchools** 301 Howard Street, Suite 1440, San Francisco, CA 94105, [www.greatschools.net](http://www.greatschools.net) GreatSchools is an independent, nonprofit organization that has been improving K-12 education since 1998 by inspiring parents to get involved.



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