3 WAYS TO TAKE PARENT ENGAGEMENT TO MEANINGFUL PARENT PARTNERSHIP
What Exactly is Parent Engagement?

For over a decade, under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), educators focused on parent involvement in schools. NCLB emphasized “building parents’ capacity for using effective practices to improve their own children’s academic achievement” and “shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement.” This included involving parents in school activities and providing materials and training to support parents in contributing to their child’s academic achievement.

With the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the emphasis shifted from parent involvement to parent and family engagement. Larry Ferlazzo states in his article Involvement or Engagement: “a school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth—identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement, on the other hand, tends to lead with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about” (Ferlazzo, 2011).

Additionally, his research shows that family engagement can produce even better results—for students, for families, for schools, and for their communities (Ferlazzo and Hammond, 2009).

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— Larry Ferlazzo
Parent Partnership is the Next Level of Parent Engagement

“Both school staff and families may have the desire to collaborate, but when not prepared with the right tools or experience base, there can be barriers to true partnership... well-intentioned partnership efforts fall flat. Rather than promoting equal partnerships between parents and schools at a systemic level, these initiatives default to one-way communication and ‘random acts of engagement’. However, evidence indicates that meaningful family partnership programs build the capacity of both educators and families to engage in thriving partnerships around student success” (Coulehan, 2018).

Benefits of Meaningful Parent and Family Partnerships

When parents are involved at school, the performance of all the children at school, not just their own, tends to improve. The more comprehensive and well planned the partnership between school and home, the higher the student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1995).

Meaningful family engagement partnership models provide opportunity for improved parent teacher communication and interaction. Teachers can benefit from information about individual student needs and the home learning environment. Parents who are engaged tend to have a more positive view of teachers, which can result in improved teacher morale. Research also shows that when parents have a positive attitude toward learning and academics, it results in better child behavior in the classroom with fewer disciplinary actions.

Research indicates that students with involved families are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores; attend school regularly; have better social skills; show improved behavior; have higher graduation rates.
Partnership building emphasizes the value of communication between parents and teachers that is ongoing, two-way, meaningful, and focused on student learning. Two-way communication is defined as the receiver of the message is always able to send back a response or acknowledge that the message was received, and the communication can be extended and continued. Meaningful communication also allows the exchange of questions, suggestions, points of view, and concerns.

The channel of communication should be discussed and agreed upon between the partners to meet the diverse needs and schedules of parents and teachers.

**Two-way communication strategies include:**
- Regular communication about how the child is doing both academically and behaviorally
- Meet face-to-face at the beginning of the year
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Parent communication logs and communication notebooks

**GOAL:**
Communication includes regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between parents, teachers, and staff regarding student academic learning and other school activities.

**TIP**
Connecting and engaging with parents should happen as soon as possible at the beginning of the school year. An introductory message from the teachers can open the door for early two-way communications. Provide important phone numbers and communication options. Make parents feel comfortable in communicating and stress the importance of keeping the lines of communication open.
Successful partnerships share a common goal and the partners share the responsibility for the desired outcome. Shared common goals are important because they bring people together and encourage commitment and follow-through. Determining the shared common goal includes asking for and listening to parents’ points of view, concerns, and contributions. Supporting parents in understanding the importance of their role in supporting their child’s academic achievement paves the way for improved communication, collaboration, and student outcomes.

**Successful common goal strategies include:**

- Provide teacher and staff professional development and training on how to facilitate a partnership model
- Shape the partnership plan to meet parents “where they are”
- Clearly communicate the parent and family engagement plan with identified goals and actions
- Provide initial and ongoing parent training opportunities to inform and engage parents and families in the partnership process
- Identify and solve potential barriers with attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, or have limited English proficiency

**GOAL:**

Parents understand the partnership and are encouraged to actively commit to staying informed about their child’s academic progress and work with teachers and school staff to help their child achieve academic success.

**START EARLY**

Strong parent and family partnerships in the early grades are extremely important and have been found to predict literacy and math skills as well as teachers’ report of children’s academic progress. An emphasis on parent and family engagement in preschool through third grade can build a strong foundation for both parents and students and sets the stage for continued parent engagement partnerships (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006).
3. CONNECTIONS

**Connect Parent Engagement to Learning and Academic Support at Home**

Epstein’s Framework on Involvement encourages the involvement of families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Parent engagement in education practices with their children at home has been linked to increasing student outcomes (Epstein & Salinas, 1992).

The most accurate predictors of student achievement in school are not family income or social status, but the extent to which the family creates a home environment that encourages learning, communicates high yet reasonable expectations for the child’s achievement, and becomes involved in the child’s education at school (PTA, 2000).

**Connect Parents to Webinars and Training**

The webinar, trainings, and classes can provide information to supports parents and families with the following:

- Enhance parenting skills and families’ skills to support education and learning
- Understand progress monitoring and what to watch for
- Develop homework and study habits
- Learn tips to motivate and engage their child
- Incorporate scheduling and planning techniques

**GOAL:**

Connecting parents and families to district, school, and community resources to enhance family engagement partnerships.
Connect Parents to Progress Monitoring and Data Tracking

Parents should be informed about their child’s progress and how their child is responding to instruction. Student data tracking and monitoring can be communicated in a variety of ways depending on the schools’ procedures and technology availabilities.

Online parent portals are an excellent way for parents to stay regularly informed and engaged in their child’s performance and progression. Many districts provide parent portal systems with real-time student data. These parent portals give parents a quick and easy option to view and stay up-to-date on performance and provide the information needed to support their child’s academic success.

Additionally, many online curriculum and program providers offer parent and mentor portals to view detailed progress data within the curriculum and online learning environment. Parents can view information such as how much time their child student has spent working on their curriculum and courses, what their grades are, and if they are on track to finish their courses on time.

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**Connect with Home Visits**

The Family Engagement Partnership Student Outcome Evaluation, a study conducted by the Johns Hopkins University School of Education, indicated that students whose families received a home visit, had 24 percent fewer absences than similar students whose families did not receive a visit. These same students also were more likely to read at or above grade level compared to similar students who did not receive a home visit (Sheldon & Jung, 2015).

**Connect Parents to Resources**

A parent resource center can provide information and resources such as child development, health and safety, drug education, social and emotional learning, special education, and school and community resources and contact information.

**Additional resources include:**
- Newsletters, blogs, and websites
- Volunteer opportunities
- Parent-teacher organization activities
- Homework hot line
- Grandparent or “special person” events

**TIP**

**CONNECT TO THE SCHOOL’S MISSION AND GOALS**

Successful family partnerships are most effective when integrated and supported with the school’s mission and goals.
Waterford Institute

Waterford is a nonprofit early education partner that combines innovative technology, dynamic learning science, and mentoring relationships to influence education at its most impactful time in children’s lives. As a nonprofit, Waterford strives to provide the highest quality education solutions through research, assessment, and iteration.
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Evidence indicates that meaningful family partnership programs build the capacity of both educators and families to engage in thriving partnerships around student success” (Coulehan, 2018).

3 Keys to a Meaningful Family Partnership Model

The 3 keys to launching a meaningful family partnership model include:

- **COMMON GOALS**
  Successful partnerships share a common goal and share responsibility for the desired outcomes. Shared common goals are important because they bring people together and encourage commitment and follow-through.

- **COMMUNICATION**
  Partnership building emphasizes the value of communication between parents and teachers that is ongoing, two-way, meaningful, and focused on student learning.

- **CONNECTIONS**
  - Parent Engagement to Learning and Academic Support
  - Parents to Progress Monitoring and Data
  - Parents to Webinars and Training
  - Parents to Resources
  - Parents with Home Visits
  - Parents to the School’s Mission and Goals
Bibliography


Additional Resources:

- National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement Resources: [https://www.nafsce.org/page/Resources](https://www.nafsce.org/page/Resources)