

BACKGROUND: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Challenge

Family involvement dramatically declines in the middle grades.¹ Low levels of family engagement can be attributed to several factors: 1) efforts to involve parents in school activities gradually decline by grade level; 2) misconceptions that low-income parents and single parents do not want to be or cannot be as involved as middle-class parents; 3) some families have been impacted by their own negative experiences with the educational system; 4) some parents are not confident in their abilities to help their children with school work; 5) minimal to no effort to communicate in the families' languages; and 6) logistical barriers (e.g. work schedules and transportation).²

Declines in family involvement negatively impact student emotional health, attendance, grades, and graduation rates.³ Using data from a Chicago longitudinal study, Wendy Barnard demonstrated that parental involvement was significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and highest grade completed.⁴ Moreover, family involvement has been found to have a strong association with self-esteem and susceptibility to peer-pressure.⁵

The research is clear, convincing, and consistent—where families and communities are engaged in education, students attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and perform at higher levels. A 2004 study of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) program— a nine-week parent training course—confirmed that children of Hispanic parents who completed the San Diego PIQE program achieved a 93 percent high school graduation rate and 79.2 percent student enrollment in college or university.⁶

The Opportunity

The National Education Association (NEA) believes that efforts to increase family engagement must be initiated at all levels as states, school districts, administrators, educators, and parents all have a role to play. Family engagement strategies should first begin with an effort to identify site-specific barriers to involvement and a plan to mitigate them. The state should review district-level findings and develop policies to support family engagement, along with a plan to sustain proven strategies.

Indicators for Family and Community Engagement

A great public school is defined in part by the relationships it maintains with families and the community. Ongoing efforts by stakeholders to offer the necessary supports vital to student success play a critical role in cultivating successful relationships among schools, families, and communities. The Children's Aid Society of New York, for example, recognized that parents could spend more time on their children's needs if they received assistance with health care, housing, and child care.⁷ Indicators of successful family engagement programs include policies and programs that remove obstacles to engagement and proven strategies to support the family and student. More specifically, indicators include:

Collaboration with Families to Improve Achievement

- ▶ State provides districts with technical assistance and support to address engagement strategies.

