Engaging Every Family: Ideas that Advance Student Achievement

Dr. Steve Constantino
Superintendent
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If we as educators could successfully teach all children by ourselves then it seems to me we would have already done so. The fact that we haven’t should be all the motivation or evidence we need that engaging every family in the educational life of his or her child is essential to school success.

< 1%
What Causes Disengagement?

- Self-Preservation
- Isolation
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Fear

Negative Catalyst
Family Engagement as a Variable in student Performance Improvement: *Research and ROI*

- Attendance Improves
- Grades Improve
- Test Scores Improve
- Student Attitudes and Behaviors Improve
- Achievement Gap Closes
We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose education is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this. Whether we do this or not must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.
How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of all children? If your answer is more than one, than I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background. Whether or not we will ever effectively teach the children of the poor is probably far more a matter of politics than of social science and that is as it should be.”

Ron Edmonds
My Definition of Family Engagement

The degree to which families are empowered to be involved in the educational and academic lives of their children and the degree to which schools and school districts support necessary relationships to sustain the efficacy of parents in shaping their own child’s academic future.
The Five Simple Principles to Engage Every Family™

1. A Culture that Engages Every Family
2. Communicate Effectively and Build Relationships
3. Empower Every Family
4. Family Participation in Decisionmaking
5. Engage the Greater Community
Meaningful and Relevant

Two Major Ideas to Engage Every Family

Before they will come to you, you must go to them
Focus on the Message and the Messenger

– Market how you want families to communicate in non-traditional places (i.e., grocery store, bodega, bus stops, etc.).
– Create family bulletin boards for families to communicate with one another.
– Hire and designate bilingual family-friendly staff.
– Work with community members and groups to connect families and the school as cultural brokers.
– Create a buddy system and phone web for families.
– Arrange networking opportunities so families develop relationships with other families.
– Incorporate students’ demonstrations of their learning into your engagement activities.
– Form a community network to conduct outreach.
Personalize

- Differentiate support for parents so that it is appropriate to their individual needs and strengths.
- Be honest and forthcoming to avoid perceptions of being evasive or guilty.
- Use one-to-one personal connections to build trust.
- Keep communication informal at first.
- Use “family” instead of “guardian” or “parent” in communications.
- Use personal invites from school staff and student volunteers.
- Make events smaller – spread out back-to-school nights over the week with one grade per night.
- Learn and speak simple phrases in families’ native languages.
- Hold dinners for families to target subgroups needing support.
- Create venues for parents to submit questions online and in person.
- Invite families to be cultural brokers and teachers for teachers.
Bridging Differences

• Sensitive with written communication
• Language and literacy solutions
• Translation (I speak...)
• Outreach classes in native language
• Home visits
Hard-to-Reach Families

• Our label...not theirs!
• Believe involvement is important
• Embody the ethic of caring: understand life situations
• Disregard stereotypes
• Develop high expectations
Thank You!

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