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Importance of Parental Involvement in their Child(ren)'s Learning

ABSTRACT: Involving parents in their child(ren)'s learning provides many opportunities for success. Research has demonstrated the positive effects of parent involvement on children, families, and school when schools and parents continuously support and encourage the children's learning and development. Opportunities for parental involvement in children's learning signify possibilities for healthy children, families and communities; this can become a reality through a proactive and preventative approach.

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."

Edward Everett Hale

WHY IS THIS OF INTEREST?

Parental involvement in their children's learning, not only improves a child's morale, attitude, and academic achievement across all subject areas, but it also promotes better behaviour and social adjustment. In all these ways, family involvement in education helps children to grow up to be productive, responsible members of the society.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY ABOUT THIS?

"The family makes critical contributions to student achievement, from earliest childhood through high school. Efforts to improve children's outcomes are much more effective if they encompass their families". When schools engage parents and students, there are significant effects. When parents are involved at school, not just at home, children do better in school and they stay in school longer" (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

According to Henderson and Berla (1994), "the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to":

- Create a home environment that encourages learning
- Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
- Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (p. 160)



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Epstein (1995) describes six types of parental involvement in schools:

1. **Parenting:** The basic obligations of parents include housing, health, nutrition, and safety for their children. Parents also should provide home conditions for learning at all levels.
2. **Communicating:** The basic obligations of schools include school-to-home communication (such as memos, notices, newsletters, report cards, conferences, and phone calls) and information (on schools, courses, programs, and activities). Parents provide home-to-school communication, making a two-way channel for interaction and exchange.
3. **Volunteering:** Parents volunteer their time and talents at school activities and fundraising.
4. **Learning at Home:** Parents help their children with homework and with setting educational goals.
5. **Decision Making:** Parents participate in school councils, organizations and school decisions on policy, leadership, and advocacy.
6. **Collaborating with the Community:** Parents encourage partnerships with community resources and services.

Henderson and Berla (1994) discuss the benefits of parent and family involvement for students, schools, and the parents themselves:

Student Benefits: "Studies have documented these benefits for students:

- Higher grades and test scores.
 - Better attendance and more homework done.
 - Fewer placements in special education.
 - More positive attitudes and behavior.
 - Higher graduation rates.
- Greater enrollment in postsecondary education." (p. 1)

School Benefits: "Schools and communities also profit. Schools that work well with families have:

- Improved teacher morale.
- Higher ratings of teachers by parents.
- More support from families.
- Higher student achievement.
- Better reputations in the community." (p. 1)

As parents become more involved in their child's school, they begin to develop more confidence in the school. The teachers they work with have higher opinions of them as parents and higher expectations of their children, too. As a result, parents develop more confidence not only about helping their children learn at home, but about themselves as parents. Furthermore, when parents become involved in their children's education, they often enroll in continuing

education to advance their own schooling." (p. 1)

One of the most important things that parents can do is to support the goals and the process of education in that school. It's important that there is a real partnership between the schools and the families; then there's a commonality of interest developed. When parents take interest with their child(ren) at home about what's important and energizing to the children at school, it reinforces the notion that school's a great place to be.

Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis and George (2004) discovered that parents who spent time in the school developed relationships with school staff and felt more comfortable addressing teachers when their children were experiencing difficulties. Amador, Falbo and Lein (2001) reported similar findings in their study of high schools and further elaborated by equating very involved parents with very successful students.

What Are Other Outcomes of Parent Involvement?

- Parent involvement leads to improved educational performance (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003).
- Parent involvement fosters better student classroom behaviour (Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003).
- Parents who participate in decision making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000).
- Parent involvement increases support of schools (NMSA, 2003).
- Parent involvement improves school attendance (Epstein et al., 2002).
- Parent involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002).
- Parent involvement improves student emotional well-being (Epstein, 2005).
- Types of parent involvement and quality of parent involvement affect results for students, parents, and teachers (Epstein, 1995).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES?

“Becoming involved at school has important effects, not just for students, but for all members of the family. Parents develop more positive attitudes towards the school, become more active in community affairs, develop increased self-confidence, and enroll in other educational programs. This strengthens the family not only as a learning environment, but as an economic unit” (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

“No matter what economic, racial, or cultural group, whether it's rural or urban, children's educational academic achievement scores do go up when there's par-



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ent involvement, when there's good relationships between the home and the school, because those relationships serve to motivate students to achieve at the level their ability enables them to" (*Rural Audio Journal*, 1995). Continued family involvement is key in creating sustainable change in behaviours" (Linden, 2010, p.57).

The most successful early intervention programs, deal with the children's families as well as with an enriched school program because the family plays such a critical role in reinforcing the school's lessons (p.57)... The schools also rely on the community to reinforce the lessons and values they teach" (Linden, 2010, p.64).

HOW DOES THIS CONNECT TO START SMART STAY SAFE?

Start Smart Stay Safe (s4) is a strengths-based educational resource utilized by police officers, teachers, and schools in building resiliency and capacity in children and their families. Using a proactive delivery model, this resource intentionally builds skills and knowledge that supports students in successfully navigating through challenging situations like bullying, cyber-safety, pressure to engage in substance abuse or any high-risk behaviour. These models are delivered through affirming messaging, engaging activities, and fostering positive relationships between police officers school communities, and families. Diverse community collaboration is an essential element of **Start Smart Stay Safe**, moving education and law enforcement toward a progressive, research informed model of ethical citizenship. The key [in children's learning] is not to separate teaching children to handle conflict from other kinds of academic teaching, but combine social, emotional and intellectual skills. Through discussions, writing exercises, and role-play, children learn how to appraise complex situations, and then are taught how to resolve conflicts in these situations" (Galinsky, 2010, p.99).



Involving parents is of key importance to this approach. Parental feedback, participation, and support of the program not only reinforces the learnings of the child in the home environment, but allows the knowledge to permeate into other areas of the community as well. Programs which promote interacting more positively as a family and in the community, support a sense of belonging within those groups. Working through a strengths-based lens, in collaboration with children, families and communities, **Start Smart Stay Safe** can enhance the innate resilience that exists in communities, promoting a rich and vibrant city to live in.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Davies (1991) proposes three ways that schools can promote parent involvement and closer working partnerships between educators and parents:

- **Creation of a Parent Centre.** The parent centre is a special room for parents at the school. It is staffed by paid coordinators as well as unpaid volunteers. It offers parents a welcoming atmosphere, conversation, and school information. Various activities can be offered through the centre, such as recruitment of parent volunteers, clothing exchange, grade-level breakfasts, and English as a second language (ESL) and General Educational Development (GED) classes for parents. Davies says that a parent centre makes possible "the continuing and positive physical presence of family members in the schools" (p. 378). The room can be equipped with various materials to help parents: adult-sized table and chairs, a telephone, coffee pot, hot plate, and occasional snacks.
- **A Home Visitor Program.** The home visitor program consists of paid staff who visit homes to help families understand what they can do to encourage their children's success in school. The home visitors can provide information about reading programs, school activities, curriculum, expectations, child rearing, and summer camps. They also serve as liaisons to convey parent concerns back to the school.
- **Action Research Teams.** These teams consist of teachers who study ways to improve their own methods of involving parents. They meet at least monthly to do background reading in parent involvement, receive training, interview other faculty about attitudes toward parent involvement, discuss the success of past efforts to involve parents, and design projects to increase teacher-parent collaboration.

KEY TERMS

Emotional Well-Being: a unity of physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual health, encompassing factors such as safety, environmental and material security, education and socialization as well as a sense of being loved, valued and included in their families and societies.

Parental Involvement: Having an awareness of and involvement in school-work, understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and student success in schooling, and a commitment to consistent communication with educators about student progress.

Resiliency: The ability to cope with challenges or stress in ways that are effective and result in an increased ability to respond well to future adversity (Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, 2009).



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