

Moving Forward: Building the Capacity for Effective Family Engagement

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What is the definition of Family Engagement?

*Family Engagement is any way that a
child's adult caretaker (biological parents,
foster parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.)
effectively supports learning and healthy
development.*



What's happening in the field of Family Engagement?

- Proposed increase in Title One set-aside for family engagement from 1% to 2%
 - Senior level positions are being created in districts around the country to coordinate family and community engagement initiatives
 - More family engagement language priority language is being included in federal notices (13, 21st Century, Promise Neighborhoods)
- ...and
- "Tiger Mom" phenomenon
 - "Parent Trigger" – "Won't Back Down" movie
 - Parent Organizing

When families are effectively engaged in their children's education and in the improvement of schools, what are the various roles they can play?

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Families are engaged as:

- *Supporters* of their children's learning
- *Encouragers of an achievement identity, a positive self image, and a "can do" spirit*
- *Monitors* of their children's time, behavior, boundaries and resources
- *Models* of lifelong learning and enthusiasm for education
- *Advocates* for improved learning opportunities for their children and at their schools
- *Decision-makers/choosers* of educational options for their child, the school, and community
- *Collaborators* with school staff and members of the community

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Impact of Family Engagement:

- Faster literacy acquisition
- Earn higher grades and test scores
- Enroll in higher level programs
- Are promoted more and earn more credits
- Adapt better to school and attend more regularly
- Have better social skills and behavior
- Graduate and go on to higher education

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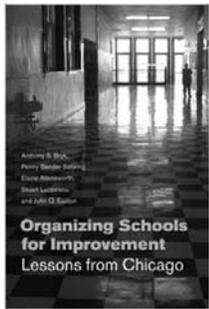
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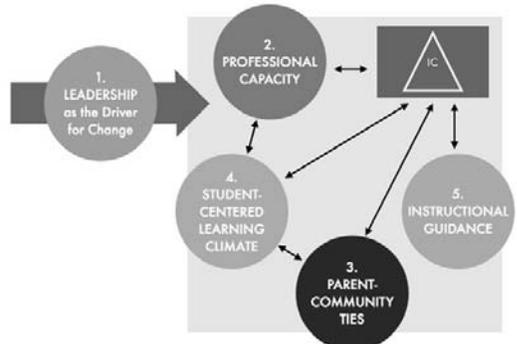
**Organizing Schools for Improvement
(2010)**



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FIVE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research



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What does an Effective Family-School Partnership Look Like?



Beyond the Bake Sale

The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships

Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson and Don Davies

The New Press, 2007



Fortress School (Below Basic)

- “Parents don’t care about their children’s education, and they are the main reason the kid’s are failing”



- “Parents don’t come to conferences, no matter what we do”
- Principal picks a small group of “cooperative parents” to help out
- “We’re teachers, not social workers”
- “Curriculum and standards are too advanced for these parents”

Come-if-we-call School (Basic)

- Parents are told what students will be learning at the fall open house
- Workshops are planned by staff
- Families can visit school on report card pickup day
- Parents call the office to get teacher-recorded messages about homework



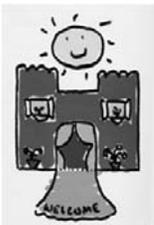
Open-Door School (Proficient)

- Parent-teacher conferences are held at least twice a year
- There is an "Action Team" for family engagement
- School holds parent events three or four times a year
- Parents can raise issues at PTA meetings or see the principal
- Diversity of families is recognized through multicultural nights are held once a year



Partnership School (Advanced)

- Families are seen as partners in improving educational outcomes
- All family activities are connected to student learning
- There is a clear, open process for resolving problems
- Parent networks are valued and cultivated
- Families are actively involved in decisions on school improvement
- Staff conduct relationship-building home visits to families



Why has it been difficult to cultivate and sustain effective family-school partnerships that support student achievement and school improvement?

The various stakeholders (parents, school leaders, and school staff) have not had the opportunity to develop the collective *capacity* to engage in effective partnerships.

What is *capacity*?

- Connections – social capital, the internal and external relationships and the strength and structure of those connections
- Capabilities – the specific types of human capital, skills knowledge and know-how
- Confidence – the types of individual self - efficacy
- Cognition – beliefs, assumptions and worldviews

– Higgins (2005)

Example: Title One, section 1118 requirement for families to be engaged, with district/school staff, in the development of family engagement policy for districts and schools.

Where do we start?



Requires a paradigm shift:

From seeing parents as a part of the problem to seeing them as a part of the solution.



Build the capacity to shift:

From		To
Focus on programs	➡	Focus on relationships
Deficit-based and adversarial	➡	Strengths-based and collaborative
Random acts	➡	Systemic
Individual	➡	Collaborative/shared responsibility
Compliance driven	➡	Learning and outcomes driven
Service	➡	Developmental
One-time project	➡	Sustained

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Systemic Family Engagement

- Focused on improving the core enterprise and is linked to learning and development
- Aligned and coherent with the overall whole school improvement goals
- Inclusive of various stakeholders in the community
- Integrated across the system and not “stand alone” or “boutique” projects
- Attempting to shift school structures and cultures to share power and resources with stakeholders, especially families.

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Example:
Home Visits
Academic Parent Teacher Teams
District of Columbia Public Schools

**Home-School Partnerships:
An Essential Ingredient!**