Welcome

Association of California School Administrators

ACSA Every Child Counts Symposium
February 5-7, 2020

Transforming Schools Into An Oasis of Hope
Parent Engagement
Through the Lens of Equity

Presenters

Mildred D. Browne, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Services &
Special Education (Retired)
Ascendancy Solutions, LLC

Felicia Stuckey-Smith, J.D.
Director, Student Services
Mt. Diablo Unified School District, Contra Costa County
Creating inviting and welcoming school environments is essential for all school communities. Under LCAP, many school districts have added or strengthened parent engagement strategies.

Traditional parent engagement strategies often involved “getting parents through the door.”

Parents and guardians from diverse backgrounds have expressed concern that they do not feel welcome or comfortable in some school settings.
Amid advances in technology, schools have opportunities to connect with parents and guardians in ways that did not exist ten years ago.

This presentation will present innovative programs and strategies to increase parent engagement at home, school and in the community.
Intended Outcomes for this Workshop:

- **Define:** Parent Engagement Through the Lens of Equity.
- **Examine:** Obstacles to successful family involvement with people of color.
- **Provide examples:** Engaging parents and guardians from diverse backgrounds.
- **Share Framework:** Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Engagement
- **Review:** Steps to improve parent engagement through the lens of equity.
engagement
parent
teacher
respect
relationships
achievement
performance
participation
support
motivation
reciprocity
community
empowered
literacy
ownership
communication
cooperation
expectations
graduation
school
connection
retention
enrolment
attendance
literacy
mathematics
transitions
aspirations
competence
partnerships
performance
partnerships
self-esteem
behaviour
trust adaptation
confidence
dialogue
autonomy
involvement
welcome
ownership
Parent Engagement
Through the Lens of Equity

Why family involvement in schools?

1) **Teachers** and staff want to work with parents in positive ways, and to involve the community to increase student success.

2) **Parents and guardians** want to know that their children are being challenged academically in a caring, safe and supportive environment.

3) **Students** want to do well in school. They need guidance, support and care from their teachers, parents and family members, and the community.
Over 40 years of research and direct experience tells us... 

- Student success is directly related to parent engagement in schools.
- The more actively involved parents and guardians are, the more successful students are: academically and socially.
When parents and guardians are actively involved with their child’s education, there is a positive impact on achievement, attendance, and connectedness with the school community.

A sense of belonging to a welcoming community is essential for all schools seeking to engage parents and guardians from diverse backgrounds.
What are the obstacles and barriers to active parent engagement?

• **School Administrators** report that parent participation in schools tends to decline as children get older.

• **School Administrators** report that affluent communities have more “through the school doors” family engagement than economically disadvantaged communities.

• **School Administrators** report that often, parents and guardians are actively involved in the community.
What are the obstacles and barriers to active parent engagement?

• Single parents, parents who work more than one job, parents living far from school, and fathers are generally less involved in school committees and events. This is sometimes erroneously interpreted as not “caring about,” prioritizing or valuing education.

• The backgrounds and ethnicities of staff members may not reflect that of the community.

• Trust and feelings of mutual respect may be lacking.
Reach out to connect with parents where they already are.

- Be visible in the parent community.
- Families appreciate effort and openness to learning *from them*.
- Willingness to enter diverse settings, where the majority are people of color.
Educators recognize the importance of parents and guardians being involved at school, but struggle to develop sustainable plans for meaningful engagement, particularly among families of color and recent immigrants.

Parent Voice and request for open dialogue: Meetings that are content-driven (with PowerPoint) must be balanced with opportunities to provide input, share recent experiences, and give suggestions.
Almost all teachers and administrators want to involve families in schools, but many have not been trained or prepared to build positive and productive partnerships with families from diverse cultures, backgrounds and ethnicities.
Premise: All families care about their children and want them to succeed, even if they can’t attend many (if any) events or meetings at school.

What % of your team agrees with this statement?
Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement

Type 1: Parenting Skills and Knowledge
- Families learn about parenting skills, child development, and home conditions that support learning and development. Schools learn about families.

Type 2: Communicating Between Home and School
- Focuses on effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

Type 3: Encouraging Volunteering at School and in the Community
- Focuses on recruitment, training, and schedules to involve parents as volunteers and audiences for schools and other locations that support students and school programs.

Type 4: Supporting Student Learning at Home
- Family involvement with children in learning activities in the home.

Type 5: Involvement in Decision-making and Advocacy
- Focuses on family involvement in school decision making, governance and advocacy through a variety of committees and parent organizations.

Type 6: Collaboration with the Community
- Coordination of schools', families', and students' needs for resources and services with businesses, agencies and other group who may address these needs.
6 Types of Parental Involvement in Schools

1) **Parenting:** Helping families establish home environments to support children as learners.

2) **Communications:** The use of effective forms for school-to-home- and home-to-school communications.

3) **Volunteering:** The recruitment and organization of the school’s volunteer program.

4) **Learning at Home:** Helping families assist their children with homework and recognizing other learning at home opportunities.

5) **Decision making:** Including parents, students, and community members in the school decision making process.

6) **Collaborating with the Community:** The identification and integration of resources and services from the community.
Building Authentic Relationships with Students and Families

This is a checklist you may use to determine your strengths in building authentic relationships with your students and their families. **There are two categories:**

- √ Check “In Place” if you are comfortable with your knowledge and skills in this area and exhibit appropriate and consistent behavior.
- √ Check “Improvement Needed” if you need to strengthen your knowledge and skills and demonstrate appropriate behaviors consistently.

If you have multiple “Improvement Needed” categories checked on your completed assessment, you should consider developing a personal action plan with a timetable to implement strategies and activities that will increase your effectiveness in reaching and teaching all students. Your personal action plan should focus on steps you will take in the appropriate categories. You might also choose to pursue additional learning for yourself or your staff in these areas.

### Building Authentic Relationships with Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you rate yourself on …</th>
<th>In Place</th>
<th>Improvement Needed</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projecting an image that tells students you are here to build rather than destroy them as people?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting students know that you are aware of and interested in them as individuals?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveying your experiences and confidence that each student can meet well-defined standards of values and demands for competence and can follow guidance toward solutions or problems?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing the academic expectations and evaluations that parents or guardians hold for their children’s ability?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as a model of sensitivity and high ideals for each student?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking every opportunity to establish effective private or semi-private communications with students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging students to express their opinions and ideas?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveying to students concern and interest for their needs?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making certain the classroom climate is inviting physically and emotionally?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibiting enthusiasm for learning tasks and for the students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interjecting humor into the school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a concerted effort to interact with each student?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging student to praise their peers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting realistic but challenging expectations for students?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing a desire to learn more about the various cultures represented in your school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing opportunities for all students to shine?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with each student to establish goals, develop strengths, and overcome weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is Parent Engagement only the job of Parent Liaisons?

“It’s everyone’s job, therefore it’s no one’s job.”

What positions might need to be realigned with your LCAP Goals in order to strengthen parent engagement?
What does it mean to be a “parent-friendly” school?

• Friendly and professional when parents are there, and when they are not.
• Friendly greetings, but not informal.
• Address parents by last name Ms. Mrs. Mr. Dr. in respectful tone.
• Diverse cultures represented and welcomed.
• Polite on the phone, and speak slowly if needed.
• Proactive communication in multiple languages.
• A quick reply to email.
• Parent feedback and suggestions are requested.

“It makes me sad to see parents not being treated respectfully by school staff.”

Latina Parent, 2018
Parents feel welcome…

• When they are greeted in a friendly manner.
• When verbal *and nonverbal* communication is approachable.
• When people introduce them to nearby school personnel.
• When they feel that school personnel genuinely have their child’s best interests at heart.
• When school personnel reach out to them through telephone calls, text, email, **apps**, (next slide) and handwritten notes.
• When the school provides opportunities for parents and foster parents to connect *with other parents*. 
**Parent Engagement: Through the Lens of Equity: Technology and Apps:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology/App</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Dojo</td>
<td>Pinterest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind *</td>
<td>Instagram / Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Classroom</td>
<td>Ringya (group projects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids A-Z</td>
<td>Collaborize Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live School Parent</td>
<td>Class Messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power School Mobile</td>
<td>Edmodo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aeries Homelink</td>
<td>School Rack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seesaw</td>
<td>School Circle (Closed loop)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Kit</td>
<td>Word Press (blogging)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents feel welcome...

• When spoken to politely “even when you’re there for the 10th time.”
• When school personnel try to be helpful, even if the parent’s question or concern is outside the scope of their position.
• When recognized and acknowledged by school personnel.
• When thanked for visiting the school, and for supporting the school community in specific ways.
• When they are included in school-wide efforts to “give back.”
• When schools have an open-door policy.
• When staff members slow down, take time to repeat information when needed.
• When staff members take time to listen, and communicate important information.
Unwelcoming School Experiences for Parents...

- Being ignored by school personnel when they arrive at the school.
- Arriving at scheduled appointment, made to wait for more than an hour.
- Being told “you should have called first” when they drop by.
- Being asked to “sign in” before greeting, saying “hello.”
- Being asked to “sign in” at front desk, and at each office visited.
- Being told that they cannot go to their child’s class without a scheduled appointment.
- Informal interactions in person and via technology, i.e. “my new BFF” IKR  LOL  TBH
• **Good News!** – when schools develop and implement school-wide and classroom parent engagement practices, barriers to family involvement can be reduced, and partnerships with parents can be strengthened.

• We can now use technology to communicate *good news* with extended family members, all over the world.

• **Parent and family engagement** can be strengthened when teachers and administrators *work together* to involve people *across role groups* to build positive relationships with students’ families and extended families.
• **Reflections through the lens of equity:** School personnel sometimes assume that parents from culturally diverse backgrounds need “parenting skills” to overcome their child’s “lack of engagement” in class. Such an approach has been shown to generate resistance among African-American and Latino parents (Olivos, 2004; Sobel & Kuglar, 2007).

• Many parents of color are relationship-based, carefully paying attention to body language, tone, and intonation of speech.

• Parents are tacitly asking: “Do you care about my child?” “Do you have an understanding of our family’s journey and life experiences?”

• **Parent Empowerment:** Open dialogue, listening to concerns and facilitating conversation *among* parents has been shown to strengthen parent engagement.
**Good news:** Many families are involved and invested in their children’s education, but many tell us that they must feel TRUST before agreeing to attend or participate in events at school.

**Bad news:** Some families are less *visibly* involved in their children’s school. This can be interpreted as indifference, lack of concern, or “different values.” Research and direct inquiry shows this not to be accurate.

**Bad news:** School personnel sometimes interact with a limited number of parents (the same parents have been on committees for years). Parent-centered activities must be engaging and culturally relevant activities. Let’s not assume that parents from culturally diverse backgrounds need “parenting skills” to overcome their child’s “deficits.” Such an approach has been shown to generate resistance among some parents (Olivos, 2004; Sobel & Kuglar, 2007).

**Good news:** Schools are beginning to focus on building relationships with families from diverse backgrounds, rather than *one-size-fits-all* approaches. It helps to have clear plans for meaningful participation once parents get there.
Sample Best Practices

- Welcoming letters in multiple languages.
- Handouts for parents regarding parent involvement, supporting education at home, and tips for navigating school and school district system.
- Calendars and lunch menus with invitations for parent engagement.
- Training for teachers and staff regarding culturally proficient meetings with parents and guardians, i.e. parent/teacher conferences.
- Proactive positive communications with parents and guardians, including parents of students who enroll mid year.
- Conferences with every parent or guardian at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.
- Language translators assist families as needed.
Sample Best Practices

- Weekly or monthly folders of student work are sent home and reviewed, parent and guardian comments returned to teacher.

- Student ambassadors encourage and assist families to learn about the myriad of ways that families can connect with school.

- School lunch menus with tips for parents re Healthy Eating, Mindfulness, Exercise, and Sleep.

- Parent and student pick-up of report card, with conferences on improving grades.

- School calendar with schedule or parent involvement activities, notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.

- Clear information on choosing courses, access to programs, and activities at schools.

- Clear information on all school policies, program reforms, and transitions.
Parent Engagement: Innovative Practice

- Co-location of district personnel (resource worker, social worker, parent liaison) at a community agency.
- “Beyond Co-Location” – coordinated and integrated services.
- Go to them, establish trust, meet parents “where they are.”
- Start by listening: Informational meetings are valuable, but create space to request feedback, input, and suggestions.
- Establish Parent-to-Parent support meetings: Facilitate parent and guardian connections with each other.
Parent Engagement: Innovative Practice

- Parent education and multi-generational support is a key factor to prevent youth from becoming involved in juvenile crime.
- **The 180° Program - Community Partners for Gang Prevention** offers youth and family support, gang prevention, weapon suppression, and crime-reduction services and support.
- Professional development increases capacity and comfort for teachers and other staff to discuss behavioral concerns with parents and guardians from diverse backgrounds.
Communicating with Parents Online

1. Just the facts: Tone and emotion can be difficult to gauge via text.
2. Use clear and concise language. Avoid jokes and sarcasm. Avoid emojis; they may not come through as intended.
3. Positive communication should outweigh concerns or corrections: 80% vs. 20% guideline.
4. View communications through the “lens of equity” and cultural competence and LGBTQ sensitive communications.
5. Ok to use the pronoun “then” and “they”.
6. Protect privacy. Don’t use the names of other students in communications. Only post photos with signed permission on file.
The *School Smarts Parent Engagement Program* is a model for creating meaningful and diverse parent involvement. It brings parents from all backgrounds together in support of their common interest: helping their children and schools to succeed.

**School Smarts:**
- Fosters parent engagement in schools.
- Supports parents as children’s first teachers.
- Develops future parent leaders.
- Encourages parents to advocate for a complete and quality education that includes the arts.
The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) aims to increase parents' knowledge and skills to support the academic achievement of their children. PIQE developed a model for increasing parent involvement in K–12 schools where parent participation has been difficult to achieve. PIQE uses informal education techniques that have been promoted by Paulo Freire and others dedicated to promoting social change, such as using dialogue to build community and social capital, situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants, and raising participants' consciousness about their situations and their own power to take informed action.

www.pique.org
Recipe for Success

1) Set the table: Begin with a shared vision for parent engagement.
2) Insist on transparent decision making.
3) Bring diverse interests together.
4) Bring people together to review data, identify student / community needs /
gaps in service.
5) Involve student and parent voice.
6) Define goals positively, rather than the absence of problems.
7) Reflect openly about implicit bias and assumptions.
8) View resources as instruments of action, not personal possessions.
9) Involve teachers, and other key stakeholders.
10) Define performance measures and outcome measures.
11) Consider realigning positions and programs to increase parent involvement.
12) One cup of accountability, two cups of support.

Thank you!