



**Family Involvement in Education
What Does the Research Say?**

By Cherie Takemoto, Executive Director

People from diverse cultures are historically under-represented in decision-making in schools. For example, most of the instructional staff, administration, and school boards are not reflective of the diversity of the population. On the other hand, minority children are over-represented among the children receiving special education in services for mental retardation and/or emotional disturbances (Donovan and Cross, National Research Council, 2002). In addition, individuals from some minority communities are much more likely to drop out prior to graduation from high school (U.S. Dept. of Education 23rd Annual Report to Congress, 2002).

It has long been recognized that parent involvement positively impacts children's performance in school. While some parents, often in school leadership roles, have learned how to get what they need for their children, access to that information is not distributed equally and evenly across cultural groups. For parents with limited information about school norms and ways to gain access, there is also limited involvement, and thus, there may be many children who may not be benefiting from access to appropriate validated instructional practices.

When parents talk to their children about school, expect them to do well, help them plan for college, and make sure that out-of-school activities are constructive, their children do better in school. When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make greater gains. When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving school achievement. And when families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable, studies suggest that school districts make positive changes in policy, practice and resources.

(Henderson and Mapp, 2002)

Cultural mutuality promotes the respect and understanding needed for families and school professionals to be successful and supported. Family/professional partnerships implies families, schools and communities working together to solve problems and promote change. It moves from simply cooperating and sharing information to actively seeking new solutions, taking on new roles and sharing resources. When partnerships work, not only do families and schools find understanding and support, but their efforts to promote success for children are multiplied. Do partnerships between families, schools and communities make a difference? Two recent reviews of the literature highlight significant positive outcomes for students and school effectiveness when these partnerships occur.

Anne T. Henderson and Karen Mapp, in their synthesis of research on family involvement, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, found that:

Families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs.
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits.

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- Attend school regularly.
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.
- Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Programs and special efforts to engage families make a difference. Effective practices include:

- Meeting face to face.
- Sending materials home.
- Keeping in touch about progress.
- Training parents to help their children at home.
- Supporting partnership programs with families.

High performing schools engage families from diverse backgrounds by:

- Focusing on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members.
- Recognizing, respecting and addressing families' needs, as well as class and cultural difference.
- Embracing a philosophy of partnership whether or not power and responsibility are shared.

Parent, school and community partnerships lead to positive changes including:

- Upgraded school facilities.
- Improved school leadership and staffing.
- Higher-quality learning programs for students.
- New resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum.
- New funding for after-school programs and family supports.

Schools that recognize the 'interdependent nature of the relationship' between families and schools and value parents as 'essential partners' in the education process will realize the full value of this collaboration.
(Carter 2002)

In a recent report by the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE), Susan Carter's review of the research identified similar findings. *The Impact of Parent/Family Involvement on Student Outcomes: An Annotated Bibliography of Research from the Past Decade* identified 12 key findings:

1. Parent/family involvement has a significant positive impact on student outcomes throughout the elementary, middle school, and secondary years.
2. While in general parent/family involvement improves student outcomes, variations have been found according to students' family cultures, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds.
3. Parent/family involvement at home has a more significant impact on children than parent/family involvement in school activities.
4. The nature of parent/family involvement that is most beneficial to children changes as they reach adolescence.
5. Parent/family involvement in early childhood programs helps children succeed in their transition to kindergarten and elementary school.
6. Parent/family assistance with homework can be beneficial; however, parents may need guidance and assistance in order to work effectively with their children.



7. The ways in which culturally diverse families are involved in their children's education may be different from those of other families. These family practices are nonetheless valuable and should be respected and capitalized on when planning parent/family involvement programs.
8. Promising outcomes have been documented in both mathematics and literacy when children's parent/families are involved in the educational process.
9. The most promising opportunity for student achievement occurs when families, schools, and community organizations work together.
10. To be effective, school programs must be individualized to fit the needs of students, parents, and community.
11. Effective programs assist parents in learning how to create a home environment that fosters learning and how to provide support and encouragement for their children's success.
12. Teachers must be trained to promote effective parent/family involvement in children's education.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education has a wealth of information related to students with and without disabilities for additional information and reference at <http://ncpie.org/>.

The complete publication on research from the Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory that includes decision-making and systems change research related to parents by Henderson and Mapp is available at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>.

The complete literature review by Susan Carter is available in pdf and also can be ordered through the CADRE website, <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/index.cfm>.

The Harvard Family Research Project issued a special report on current and emerging practices on family involvement that can be found at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/content/eval/issue28/winter2004-2005.pdf>



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