



## Family Engagement Matters

*Students do better in school and in life when their families are engaged.* A strong body of evidence is clear that family engagement, from birth through adolescence, contributes to a range of positive student outcomes:

**Family engagement is associated with reduced drop-out rates and higher graduation rates.** In a study of high school dropouts, 71% of diverse teenagers interviewed said that more communication between parents and schools might have prevented them from dropping out of school.<sup>1</sup> Another study found that students were more likely to stay in school when their families were more engaged in their education.<sup>2</sup> Evaluations of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), a nine-week program that builds immigrant parents' skills and knowledge about how to support their child's education, found that children of program participants were more likely to go on to college than similarly matched students.<sup>3</sup>

**Family engagement leads to increased student achievement.** Meta-analyses of over 40 studies investigating the impact of family engagement have found that there is a significant and large association between family engagement and the academic achievement of urban elementary and middle school students. These findings also suggest that certain forms of family engagement, such as having high expectations and helping a child make real-world connections to their learning, are the strongest predictors of achievement.<sup>4</sup> In a study of Title I schools, growth in reading test scores was 50% higher for students whose teachers and schools reported high levels of parental outreach versus those that reported low levels.

**Family engagement can reduce absenteeism.** Researchers examining family engagement practices at 18 schools found that communications with families and family workshops helped both chronically and occasionally absent students. Home visits, particularly those that can "humanize" school policies around absences, also improved chronic absence rates.<sup>5</sup> Studies of schools instituting high-quality family engagement programs also show that these schools have higher attendance rates than similarly matched schools without such programs.<sup>6</sup>

**Family engagement encourages students to have better attitudes towards learning.** Research on the federal Head Start program shows that children with parents who were more involved at home or at school were more motivated and had higher attention and persistence.<sup>7</sup> A randomized study of low-income, African American parents also demonstrated that children of parents receiving home-based family engagement programs displayed significantly more positive academic self-concept than students whose parents did not receive this additional support at home.<sup>8</sup>

**Family engagement leads to better social skills and less conduct problems.** A review of 13 empirically tested family-strengthening programs found that robust family engagement interventions can lead to improved socio-emotional competence in children.<sup>9</sup> For example, evaluations from over ten randomized trials demonstrate that youth whose parents participated in the Families and Schools (FAST) program were less likely to be referred to special education services, had less anxiety, were less aggressive, had more social skills, and had more self confidence than non-participating students.<sup>10</sup>



Schools benefit from family engagement. Emerging evidence suggests that family engagement can have important benefits for the inner-functioning of schools:

**Family engagement is associated with higher expectations.** Teachers' expectations for students are affected by their beliefs about and interactions with families. A study of at-risk first-graders found that teachers' self-reported relationship quality with parents impacts their perceptions of student ability, and that teachers report their relationship to be better with white (and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic) parents than they do with African American parents.<sup>11</sup> A study of Latino middle and high-schoolers found that parent-reported family engagement efforts were also associated with teacher perceptions of student aptitude.<sup>12</sup>

**Family engagement can lead to better student-teacher relationships.** A national longitudinal study found that school-based family involvement from kindergarten through fifth grade was associated with improved student-teacher relationships among low-income families and their children. When parents increased their involvement their child's relationships with their teacher improved and when they decreased their involvement this relationship decreased in quality.<sup>13</sup>

**Family engagement helps improve trust in schools.** When researchers studying the characteristics of high-performing schools in Chicago compared the 30 schools with the least amount of improvement to the 30 schools with the highest rate of improvement, they found that teachers in high-performing schools reported higher levels of trust and respect with one another *and* with parents.<sup>14</sup>

**Family engagement leads to more cultural competence.** Research on decentralized decision-making shows that teachers report more cultural and community awareness and more school-wide efforts to involve parents when their schools have governing bodies that include parents who are representative of the community. In turn, teacher awareness of the culture and community of their students translated into a 9.6 percentage point increase in reading scores and a 24.1 percentage point increase in math scores.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., & Morison, K. (2006). *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

<sup>2</sup> Barnard, W. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2: pp. 39-62.

<sup>3</sup> National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group. (2010). *Taking Leadership, Innovating Change: Profiles in Family, School, and Community Engagement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

<sup>4</sup> Jeynes, W. (2005). A Meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 40(3): pgs. 237-269. Hill, N. & Tyson, D. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3): pgs. 730-763

<sup>5</sup> Epstein, J., & Sheldon, S. (2002). Present and Accounted For: Improving Student Attendance Through Family and Community Involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(2): pgs. 308-318.

<sup>6</sup> Sheldon, S. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research*, 100: pgs. 267-275.

<sup>7</sup> Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., Perry, M., & Childs, S. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *School Psychology Review*, 33(4): pgs. 467-480.

<sup>8</sup> Fantuzzo, J., Davis, G., & Ginsburg, M. (1995). Effects of Parent Involvement in Isolation or in Combination With Peer Tutoring on Student Self-Concept and Mathematics Achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 87(2): pgs. 272-281.

<sup>9</sup> Caspe, M. & Lopez, W. (2006). *Lessons from family-strengthening interventions: Learning from evidence-based practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

<sup>10</sup> Hernandez, L. (2000). *Families and Schools Together: Building Organizational Capacity for Family-School Partnerships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

<sup>11</sup> Hughes, J., Gleason, K., & Zhang, D. (2005). Relationship influences on teachers' perceptions of academic competence in academically at-risk minority and majority first grade students. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43: pgs. 303-320.

<sup>12</sup> Kuperminc, G., Darnell, A., & Alvarez-Jimenez, A. (2008). Parent involvement in the academic adjustment of Latino middle and high school youth: Teacher expectations and school belonging as mediators. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31: pgs. 469-483.

<sup>13</sup> Dearing E., Kreider, H., & Weiss, H. (2008). Increased family involvement in school predicts improved child-teacher relationships and feelings about school for low-income children. *Marriage and Family Review*, 43(3/4): pgs. 226-254.

<sup>14</sup> Payne, C. & Kaba, M. (2001). So much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to urban school reform. *Northwestern University*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Marschall, M. (2006). Parent involvement and educational outcomes for Latino students. *Review of Policy Research*, 23(5): pgs. 1053-1076.