



BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
EMPOWERING PARENTS TO CREATE INFORMED
AND EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT
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Education success depends heavily on family involvement

Education is one of the primary indicators of a nation's development. It promotes social and economic progress, and can impact individuals' quality of life. Quality education has been shown to improve communities, raise income levels, boost the economy, and lead to technological advances and improved living conditions. Research continually shows that parent involvement is integral to student achievement, especially in overcoming some of the negative impacts of poverty. When individual families are empowered to prepare their children for success, socio-economic factors can more easily be overcome. The role of the family is threefold: preparing young children to be ready for school, guiding children on their journey through school, and supporting their children as they become successful adults.

A child's health and well-being are necessary to his or her chances for academic success. Research shows that toxic levels of stress in infancy and early childhood can impair growth and limit cognitive development, lowering the chances for academic success later in life. These problems are avoided through strong familial attachments. There is more that parents can do, however. Language development is critical to literacy, and the more a child is talked to, sung to, and interacted with, the stronger language development will be. Early introduction to books and reading, promotes literacy and can inspire a life-long love of reading.

Once children are in school, research shows that the most successful schools are those that partner with parents and share the responsibility of student education. Quality teachers are experts on their subjects, but only parents are experts on their children. Each child is different and parents are uniquely poised to advocate for their child's needs and make sure that their individual learning styles are taken into consideration. Involved parents can also guide their children one-on-one at home to make school, and the lessons children are learning there, part of their family life.

The lessons children learn from their parents are lessons that last for the rest of their lives. They learn how to live, how to love, and how to have faith. The character traits that children learn at home are the traits that allow them to persevere in the face of adversity and to learn from mistakes and failures in order to succeed in the end. Parents can be given the tools to extend their influence beyond the home so their children can apply the character they develop at home to their school life. Together, parents and educators can guarantee that children come to school ready and excited to learn and that what they come away with are the skills to succeed in higher education, in advanced careers, and in the global marketplace.

Knowledge deficits undermine family involvement

Parents want the best for their children. When children succeed, families succeed, and nations succeed. Many parents do not know how they can help their children succeed in school. In fact, two primary obstacles to parent involvement in education are a lack of knowledge about how to contribute and a lack of knowledge about how the school system works. What many don't realize is how important everything they already do for their children is to future success. Feeding and caring for their children, playing with their children, and even singing

to their children are ways they are already teaching their children. They also don't know that literacy begins as soon as children are born and hear their parents' voices for the first time.

Parents do not need to be strong readers themselves to help teach their children about books and about recognizing letters and sounds. Even labels at grocery stores or store or street signs can be used to teach early reading skills. Parents who understand this are better able to prepare their child for school and to support their child's education. These strategies, however, are not common knowledge in many minority and underrepresented communities. Schools and community organizations can help increase student achievement by giving parents the tools and strategies that provide measurable increases in student success.

Families are the key to success, but are underutilized by many education systems and individual schools.¹⁷ Informed and constructive parent engagement can transform the education landscape in our country and can set the stage for a successful future for all children. Regardless of income level, geography, or even political affiliation, parents can make all the difference in their children's lives. Governments, schools, and community organizations can empower parents to do this by giving them the tools they need to succeed. With every parent—every citizen—given tangible ways to contribute to the country and affect real change, citizens will feel a greater connection and affinity to national goals and to the advancement of a system that acknowledges their fundamental importance to the future of nation. Parents are the experts on their children, and that's the only real expertise they need. The tools for optimizing that expertise can be given to them. When every citizen is given the tools and support to participate in the advancement of the entire society, the possibilities are limitless.

Best practices for family engagement programs

Many parents do not have the time or the ability to sit down and read a dense, complicated text in order to learn how they can help their children succeed. They may be mistrustful of the schools and resistant to any attempt by authority to lecture them on how to raise their children. Many products that are currently available on the market are dense, complex texts that may be intimidating for parents who are not strong readers themselves. They are also presented as lectures on why certain practices are right and certain practices are wrong, but leave no room for parents to apply the techniques to their own lives or insert their own expertise or unique perspective. These products rely entirely on in-person delivery in order to make the content accessible to parents.

Best practices indicate that strong visual stimuli can make material more engaging and information more digestible. Programs that demonstrate the highest efficacy include material that can be interacted with, internalized, and directly incorporated into family life.

YOU: Your Child's First Teacher delivers its content in the simple, direct steps that are most easily digestible by individuals without the time or the reading level to comprehend thick texts. Each book is broken down into age groups or school stages. Each section has eight to ten tasks that have a real impact on future success. The burden of reading is low, but the potential benefits are great.

Additionally, each book is an interactive consumable. Parents have ample opportunity to engage with the material and use the pages to organize their thoughts and keep track of their child's development and school progress. Sample questions, sample routines, sample books and songs, and other samples are provided to model how to apply the content and complete the tasks. Space is provided for parents to then include their own questions, routines, favorite books and songs, and other personal applications so that they can easily apply what they learn. The tasks in this series cover everything from providing for a child's health and well-being as an infant to preparing for his or her future after graduation from high school. These tasks build on each other and increase in complexity just as a child's needs increase in complexity as he or she grows into an independent person.

Built within these tasks are academic connections to the Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by almost all states in the United States. By incorporating these habits into their lives, parents can see how they are preparing their children to be competitive in the global marketplace. As the United States works to implement these standards on a national scale, students are expected to struggle and fall behind for quite a few years. Communities can make huge leaps in advancing achievement and overcoming the challenges of introducing new curriculum and assessments by partnering with parents to promote the success of each and every student.

Conclusion

Education and education policy is a topic of constant debate in both national and local politics. Many districts are the midst of wide-spread education reform. While the policies being enacted intend to provide a system of quality schools and quality teachers, students are not always adequately prepared to make use of these powerful resources. Parents must be empowered to create a strong foundation for each student and given the skills to partner with schools for the success of every student. Parents are uniquely positioned to help transform the culture of education from the ground up. When they work together with teachers and schools there will be nothing standing in the way of student success.

YOU: Your Child's First Teacher is the tool that empowers parents to support their children. It recognizes the importance of parents in their children's lives, which include their school lives as well. From cover to cover, each task parents are given are tasks that are grounded in research and best parenting practices, that have direct and measurable effects on student performance, and that leave room for parents to incorporate their own traditions and to tailor each task to their own unique family needs. It is a tool that parents can use to help build a better world for their children, and for all children.

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