

Parent Engagement in School Decision-Making

GOAL: INCREASE MEANINGFUL PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEVEL DECISION-MAKING

A large body of research has demonstrated that parent involvement has a positive effect on their child's educational process and is reflected in improved academic outcomes.^{1, 2} Research has also demonstrated that parents who seek to have a broader influence by participating in school decision-making processes can also affect the students' academic outcomes.^{3, 4, 6}

Examples of Research Findings:

- ◆ In cities where governance and parent engagement reforms have been instituted, significant gains in student achievement have been recorded, as well as increases in parent satisfaction with the quality of the school.^{4, 5}
- ◆ Strong parent-community-school ties were distilled as essential components to advancing student achievement in a 7-year study of over 400 schools in Chicago. 40% of schools with strong parent involvement improved substantially in reading, 42% of schools with strong parent involvement improved substantially in math, and 24% of schools improved in attendance.⁶
- ◆ When parents are involved in school governance, they gain the organizational capacity to exert control and hold schools accountable, in some cases resulting in improvements in student achievement.⁴

Rating the Research:

Scientifically Supported	
Some Evidence	
Expert Opinion	
Mixed Evidence	
Insufficient Evidence	
Evidence of Ineffectiveness	



Parent engagement in school governance and decision-making has not been as rigorously evaluated as parent engagement in their child's educational process (e.g. helping them with their homework). Additionally, language barriers, work schedules and a sense of disenfranchisement have generally resulted in lower level of visible parent involvement (e.g. volunteering, attending parent-teacher conferences, involvement in PTA/LSC meetings), suggesting that the definition and types of parent involvement traditionally measured by researchers should be expanded to include other strategies that low-income parents use to support their children's education.

*Adapted from the County Health Rankings
Evidence Rating: Search, Selection and Assessment
<http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/what-works-for-health/our-methods>



Strategies

Effective and promising intervention strategies to increase meaningful parent engagement in school and district-level decision making are summarized here.

Effective Strategies:

Higher levels of Latino representation on Local School Councils (LSCs) was associated with greater teacher awareness of the cultural and community issues of their students and more school efforts to engage parents and forge stronger parent–school relations.⁵

→ The effect of teacher awareness of cultural and community issues translated into a 9.6 percentage point increase in the share of Latino students meeting/exceeding standards in reading and a 24.1 percentage point increase in students meeting/exceeding standards in math.⁵

Schools in which LSCs employed focused strategies to improve parent involvement and community relations had significantly higher levels of parent involvement in schools.⁵

→ The effect of school efforts to foster greater parent–school relations translated into a 7.8 percentage point increase in the share of Latino students meeting/exceeding standards in reading and a 14.1 percentage point increase in students meeting/exceeding standards in math.⁵

Promising Strategies:

Urban schools with strong family engagement programs used a diverse set of strategies to involve parents in decision-making, governance and advocacy:

- In a study of charter schools, strategies included parent focus groups to help shape school policies, parent surveys to gauge satisfaction and plan new activities, and having parents sit on the school's governing board. These strategies were linked with increasing parent's self-efficacy and comfort level in participating in their children's education.⁷
- Other strategies school districts found to raise student achievement and empower parents include: establishing an Office of Parent Relations to coordinate communication between the school district and parents; creating Parent Centers in neighborhoods; organizing community-based mobilizations (marches, conferences and rallies) to generate active parent participation in school and district wide affairs; having a parent PTA representative on the superintendent's cabinet; and organizing a citywide parent empowerment conference that attracted more than 800 parents each year.⁴

Schools must also reduce structural barriers that prevent parent participation by providing transportation, child care and language translation.^{4, 5}

- One study found that providing parents with opportunities to get involved at school and having contact with teachers was associated with the level of parent involvement in school related activities.⁸

Finally, commitment to developing partnerships between schools and parents based on mutual accountability and responsibility, and recognizing the need to enhance the capacity of parents were common themes across multiple studies of parent empowerment.^{4, 9}

- High levels of achievement are made possible through organized cooperation between teachers and parents.¹⁰
- Efforts to organize and empower parents as decision-makers and advocates have been shown to contribute to the improvement of schools and communities.^{11, 6}



Notes

¹ Jeyes (2003) A Meta-Analysis : The Effects of Parental Involvement on Minority Children's Academic Achievement

² Fan X & Chen M (2001) Parental Involvement and Students' Academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1): 1-22.

³ Cooper CW & Christie CA. (2005). Evaluating parent empowerment: A look at the potential of social justice evaluation in education. *Teachers College Record*, 107(10): 2248–2274.

⁴ Noguera PA (2001) Transforming urban schools through investments in the social capital of parents. In S. Saegert, JP Thompson, MR Warren (Eds), *Social Capital and Poor Communities* (pp189-212). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁵ Marshall (2006) Parent involvement and educational outcomes for Latino students. *Review of Policy Research*, 23(5): 1053-1076; Also Marshall (2005): Marschall, M. J. (2005). Minority incorporation and local school boards. In W. Howell (Ed.), *Besieged: School boards and the future of education politic*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

⁶ Bryk AS, Sebring PB & Allensworth E. (2010) *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press

⁷ Smith et al (2011) Parent Involvement in Urban Charter Schools- New Strategies for Increasing Participation. *The School Community Journal*, 21(1): 71-94.

⁸ McKay et al (2003) Inner-City African American Parental Involvement in children's schooling: Racial socialization and social support from the parent community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(1/2): 107-114.

⁹ Terriorn JL (2006) Building social capital in vulnerable families: Success markers of a school-based intervention program. *Youth & Society*, 38(2): 155-176.

¹⁰ Fischer C, Hout M, Jankowski SL, et al. (1996) *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹¹ Hess Jr AG (1995). Restructuring Urban Schools: A Chicago Perspective. New York: Teachers College Press.

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