



# *AN EVALUATION BRIEF*

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## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN TITLE I SCHOOLS 2003-2004**

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### **BACKGROUND**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires school districts to conduct an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of their Title I parent involvement policy. NCLB also mandates that school districts include parents' input in their evaluation. RDA conducted an evaluation of parent involvement in APS by carrying out case studies of four schools in Spring 2004.

Research shows a positive correlation between parental participation in their children's school and education, and the educational success of their children. Research also indicates that students of parents engaged in schools get better grades, stay in school, and enroll in higher education regardless of income and background. Educators have experienced positive outcomes for students when parents are involved in their schooling.

### **RESEARCH TOPICS**

This evaluation focused on three research topics at each school.

1. School leadership:
  - a. What is the school leadership's vision about successful parent involvement?
  - b. What are their goals regarding involving parents?
2. Parent involvement program:
  - a. What are the components of the school's parent involvement program?
  - b. What strategies does the school use to involve parents in the school?
3. Barriers to parent involvement:
  - a. What are the barriers to parent involvement from the point of view of the parents, school staff, and administrators?

### **METHODS**

This case study of four schools included interviews of principals and parent coordinators, parent focus groups, and field observations of school activities involving parents. The researcher attended parent meetings and other events involving parents, and also collected documented information pertaining to parent activities in schools.

### **RESULTS**

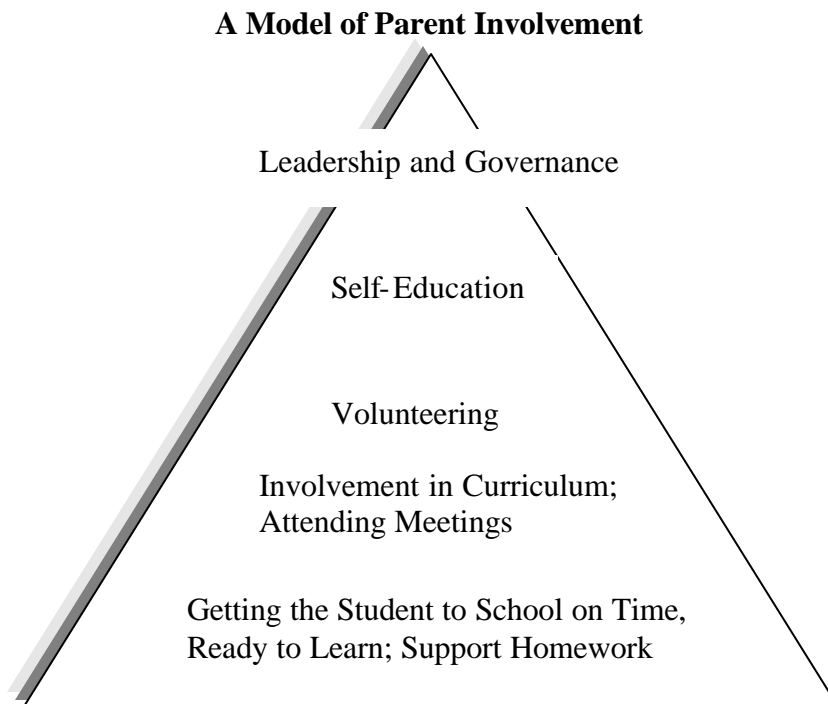
Evidence indicated different levels of maturation in the parent involvement programs in APS schools. All schools appeared committed to parent involvement. One school exemplified a comprehensive parent program and successfully engaged parents at various levels of involvement that suited their needs and abilities. That school administration was respectful of and receptive to any level and degree of parental engagement. When principals have a clear and constructive model of parent involvement, parents respond by becoming involved.

In this school, parents had significant presence on school campus as they attended meetings and volunteered in the classrooms. Parents took advantage of a variety of educational opportunities and other services at the school. The school communicated a clear expectation that parents support student learning and parents responded by supporting homework and monitoring their student's progress through communication with the teacher .

### **A Model of Parent Involvement**

One principal illustrated the vision of parent involvement as a continuum in a five-layer, pyramid-shaped model. This comprehensive model depicted successively more intensive parent involvement. The model assumed parents are advocates for their student's education at all levels of involvement. Ranging from the basic to more complex on a continuum, this model integrated five levels of parent involvement:

- Getting the student to school on time, ready to learn; supporting homework
- Involvement in curriculum and their student's education; attending meetings
- Volunteering
- Self-education
- Taking a leadership role at the school



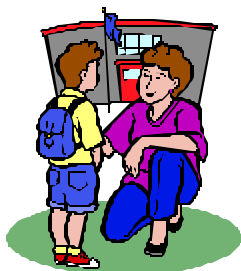
### **The Role of Leadership**

School leadership's role was critical in the success of the school's parent involvement program.

When a school's administrative team articulated a clear model of parent involvement, the teachers and other staff had a clearer direction and focus in their efforts to incorporate parents in their students' education.

Parent coordinators often seemed to lack a clear direction and support from the principals in implementing the parent involvement program. In some schools, parent coordinators spent more time and energy arranging for charitable donations to families and considerably less time implementing strategies to involve parents in their child's education.

### **Barriers to Parent Involvement**



Parents and school staff often mentioned work, language and cultural barriers, and personal and family issues such as health, young children at home, poverty, or divorce as major barriers to parent involvement. One principal mentioned absence of positive experiences in their own schooling as a significant impediment to parent engagement. On the other hand, schools may have offered insufficient opportunities for parents to get involved.

### **Effective Strategies to Involve Parents**

Evidence revealed a comprehensive model of parent involvement in one school that provided a coherent schema with clear goals to achieve parent involvement. In this model the principal assumed a pivotal role by conceptualizing the model, making parent involvement a priority, and providing a clear direction to the teachers and other school staff about incorporating parents. This model implies a paradigm shift in refocusing our view of parent involvement as a comprehensive program rather than a repertoire of activities.

The exemplary school with a well implemented parent involvement model exhibited a rich and meaningful parent engagement in meetings, classrooms, and school activities. The parents had significant presence on school campus and they also contributed to student learning as evidenced by their support for homework and students' readiness to learn. These are examples of the strategies that complemented the school's parent involvement model:



- Vigorously encourage parents to come to meetings, volunteer, and get involved in the classroom through meetings, newsletters, bulletin boards, and parent networks.
  - One strategy to improve parent attendance in the meetings is involving parents in choosing the meeting topics.
  - Provide a variety of opportunities to get involved in school.
- Make translators available to parents to ensure communication with non-English speaking parents.
- Ensure that the staff fully recognizes the value of parent involvement and that parents feel welcome and respected regardless of the level of involvement they can offer.
- Use the parent room to provide parents a place to assemble or to receive educational classes/workshops. Having a familiar place that conveys a sense of belonging is critical.



- Services that support families, such as educational classes or the provision of information about accessing health care or other community-based resources, seem to improve parental involvement.
- Providing childcare on campus is an excellent way to engage parents in educational, self-improvement, and volunteer activities.



Some of the commonly found, effective strategies in the District include bilingual newsletters to reach all parents, providing refreshments at parent meetings and evening open houses to lessen the stress of schedule conflicts for the parents, and offering child-centered activities such as student performances to bring parents to schools.

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

An effective parent involvement model clearly articulates goals as well as strategies to achieve those goals with positive outcomes for the school, students, and the parents.

Title I staff should focus District parent involvement policy on developing and communicating models of parent engagement that help principals bring the necessary leadership to their school's parent involvement. The model suggested above helps coordinate the many varied activities into a meaningful whole.

Principals should have some model that shows a continuum, communicates the value of all levels of parent involvement, and provides a road map for a parent program. A model or a schema provides a common language and expectation for parents, teachers, and administrators to view and work towards increasing parent involvement.

- District support for parent involvement should begin with professional development for the principals and their administrative team around developing a model of meaningful parent engagement incorporating effective activities.
- District support should also include regular professional development opportunities for principals, teachers and educational assistants to effectively implement parent involvement models.
- To date, much of the parent engagement support has focused on building a repertoire of parent activities assuming that a model was in place.

A model of parent involvement, successfully used, can produce great results for students. This model of parent involvement suggests a paradigm shift in our conception of schooling and inclusion of parents in schools. Any model clearly conceptualized and articulated by the principal is critical to parent engagement, while this model is transferable to other schools. A model or a schema provides a common language and expectation for parents, teachers, and administrators to work towards increasing parent involvement. A model communicates to the parents that there is a place for every parent, and value to that place. A model communicates to the staff that all parent involvement is valued and is one phase of a continuing expectation.