

What the Research Says About the Relationship between Parent Engagement and Academic Achievement¹

I. When families are involved at home and at school, children do better in school, and the schools get better. The effects are greatest for low-income students.

No matter what their income or background, students are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits
- Attend school regularly
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education

II. Families are doing more at home than we realize or give them credit for. Low-income and culturally diverse families DO value education and they DO want their children to succeed.

III. The more that programs and activities for families are linked to what their children are learning and doing in class, the greater impact they will have on student achievement.

IV. The most powerful link to learning is close, regular communications between teachers and families. A study of 81 high-poverty, Title I schools by Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) found that three practices of teacher outreach to families lead to a 40-50 percent faster gain in both reading and math among third to fifth grade students:

- Meeting with families face to face
- Sending materials on ways to help their children at home
- Telephoning both routinely and when their child was having problems

V. Community organizing to build parent and community leadership results in upgraded school facilities as well as

- improved school leadership and staffing
- higher quality learning programs for students
- new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum
- greater parent and community involvement in school activities and programs
- new funding for family services and after-school programs.

¹ Excerpted from the testimony of Anne T. Henderson, Senior Fellow Community Involvement Program, Annenberg Institute for School Reform to the U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS NCLB Reauthorization: Effective Strategies for Engaging Parents and Communities in Schools Wednesday, March 28, 2007

VI. When families are welcomed and treated with respect, honored for their contributions, and connected to teachers, other parents and what's happening in the classroom, they become motivated to be involved over the long-term, in ways that can improve their children's success in school.

Whether parents feel invited – both by their children and the school is a crucial indicator on whether or not parents will get involved in their children's education. This “sense of invitation” is strongly influenced by signals that parents receive from their children and school staff.

At Wyman Elementary School in St. Louis a couple of years ago, I was attending a breakfast for parents. Standing just outside the door was an African American parent, hesitating to come in. I went over and greeted her, introducing myself. She said she was “Tyrone's mom” and had never been inside the school before. “Why did you come this time?” I asked. “Because Tyrone's teacher called and invited me,” she said. When I asked if she had ever gotten other invitations to come to the school, she said, “Yes, I got flyers and other stuff. But I didn't think they meant ME. I didn't think they wanted ME to come.” I'll never forget her.