



PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

GEAR UP FOR LIFE | K20 CENTER

Making family involvement a central component of the school community positively affects students' success in school and their career aspirations (To et al., 2021). Social cognitive career theory indicates that both social and cognitive factors influence individual achievement aspirations. This means a student's social relationships, especially those within their family and during early adolescence, strongly influence their beliefs about their ability to attain a particular career and their interest level in a career pathway (Smith, 2023). Students measure the appropriateness of their career choices against how they think their families will value that career path, and they judge their own potential competency at a vocation based on their family's support. They are also inclined to hold value for—and self-efficacy toward—certain occupations when those occupations align with themes their family and community support (Smith, 2023). In light of these findings, it is critical to include families in school processes built around developing students' academic and career pathways (To et al., 2021). However, schools are rarely confident in knowing how to better involve families; likewise, families are often unsure of how to best support their children as students and future professionals. This is often a result of tensions in the structures, systems, and norms between homes and institutions of education (Mapp et al., 2019; Hill, 2022).

Successful family partnerships can be achieved by simultaneously building educators' capacity to engage with families and families' capacity to support their students and engage with the school. This dual-capacity building approach requires both process and organizational conditions focused on improving relationships and engagement between families and schools. These conditions include having an organization that is open to change, establishing mutual trust and collaboration between schools and families, and taking an asset-based approach to working with families (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2019).

The shift to an asset-based approach to family-school relationships involves moving from an expert-driven approach to a shared-knowledge approach (Hill, 2022; Leo et al., 2019; Mapp et al., 2019). Just as social cognitive theory suggests that a family's beliefs about their student's ability shapes the student's beliefs about their own ability, a teacher's or principal's beliefs about a family's ability shapes that family's beliefs about their own ability (Bandura, 1977).

If educators and administrators believe the family can participate in their student's academic and career success, then the family-school relationship transforms from families as passive clients who receive advice to families as partners with expertise on their own children's and community's needs (Ishimaru et al., 2019). An asset-based approach further encourages schools to look for families' strengths and help them identify resources for success instead of expecting failure because of perceived liabilities. Educators should give families options and chances to take responsibility rather than seeing them as incapable of affecting change (Mapp et al., 2019). In addition to the traditional one-on-one relationship between a family and a teacher or other school personnel, a great deal of potential can be leveraged through families' relationships with other families (Ishimaru et al., 2019; Kea et al., 2023). Especially in low-income and low English-proficient families, peer liaisons can bridge gaps in engagement by helping each other interpret and navigate systems (Kea et al., 2023). The traditional forms of family engagement are largely creations of white middle-class norms. Family engagement efforts aimed at building community between families can better leverage strengths and resources in ways that reflect the cultural norms and practices of families outside this demographic (Ishimaru et al., 2019).

References

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