



FAMILY LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

FAMILY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY | K20 CENTER

Introduction

Families play a vital role in shaping a student's academic journey and future aspirations. Their involvement has a profound impact on key areas such as academic performance, behavior, motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy (Chan & Hu, 2023; Ross, 2016). Research consistently underscores the importance of strong school-family partnerships and family-to-family partnerships, showing that collaboration leads to better outcomes for students (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Chlup et al., 2018; Ishimaru et al., 2019; Kea et al., 2023; Yamamura et al., 2010). As students transition from a focus on social development in elementary school to academic growth and future planning in middle and high school, family involvement remains essential in navigating this shift (Chan & Hu, 2023; Winthrop & Ershadi, 2021).

Family Collaboration and Leadership

Building strong partnerships between families and schools requires focusing on the strengths families bring to the table. An asset-based approach values families' knowledge and experiences, moving away from viewing schools as the sole experts. By working together, families and educators can share ideas, identify resources for success, and empower each other to create positive change (Hill, 2022; Leo et al., 2019; Mapp, K. L. & Bergman, E., 2019).

Connections between families are a powerful way to support students. Peer liaisons can bridge gaps in knowledge and experience, helping families navigate school systems and support student achievement and postsecondary aspirations (Kea et al., 2023). Sharing information and experiences makes the education system more accessible to everyone in the community; thus, programs that bring families together can strengthen community ties while reflecting the cultural practices and values of the families in that community (Ishimaru et al., 2019; Kea et al., 2023).

As students transition into middle and high school, parental involvement often decreases, yet staying engaged remains crucial (Ross, 2016). Effective communication between families and schools is key to student success. Additionally, given the opportunity for families to build trust with other families, share school-related information with one another, and encourage each other to be actively involved in their students' educations, they can improve outcomes for all students. By working together, parents can advocate for beneficial changes in their schools while creating a supportive network for themselves (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Winthrop & Ershadi, 2021).

Family Engagement and Involvement

Parental and familial engagement plays a critical role in supporting students' academic success, growth, and future opportunities. It is important for parents and families to trust in school and program leaders to have their student's best interests at heart while also actively engaging and partnering with them to share responsibility for their student's education (Martinez & Everman, 2017). This does not necessitate a hands-off approach, however—a student's academic success is closely tied to how active a parent is in their academic life (Chan & Hu, 2023; Waters et al., 2019). This indicates that parents should embrace face-to-face conversations with teachers as a tool to establish trust and energize both parties for involvement. Ideally, these conversations should engender not just implicit trust, but genuine teamwork. Since parents have a unique understanding of their child's background and family life, cooperation with a teacher—given their expertise in learning development—should lead the student to greater learning. For instance, helping students recognize

their strengths has a positive impact on their academic outcomes (Waters et al., 2019). This is something both family and teacher can guide simultaneously.

Parental involvement can take various forms, including attending school meetings and conferences to advocate for and support students' needs—IEP meetings, for example (Aronson et al., 2020). Participation in extracurricular activities, like attending sporting events, also demonstrates engagement and fosters a supportive environment (Ross, 2016). Additionally, focusing on skill development and self-advocacy while ensuring students receive support beyond the school environment is essential (Aronson et al., 2020). As students grow and transition through different educational stages, parental engagement should evolve. During the shift from elementary to middle and high school, the role of parents and families should move from a supervisory approach to a supportive one to align with students' changing needs (Chan & Hu, 2023; Ross, 2016). However, parental involvement often decreases at the middle and high school level—but at this stage, with postsecondary questions and opportunities rapidly approaching, family support and engagement is crucial (Ross, 2016). This supportive engagement significantly influences students' educational outcomes. Parents and families who hold high expectations and actively participate in their student's education increase students' opportunities in school and postsecondary pathways while reducing the likelihood of dropping out (Ross, 2016).

It follows that family should take care to continue supporting their student as they transition from elementary to middle school, and then from middle school to high school. How this might look shifts with a child's age and grade. For older students, active involvement typically falls into three categories:

1. **School-based or collaboration-based engagement:** Involvement between parents, families, and school staff to support students.
2. **Home-based engagement:** Support for students' academic growth and postsecondary planning within the home and beyond.
3. **Academic socialization:** Setting high expectations and fostering aspirations for academic achievement (Chan & Hu, 2023).

The earlier parents and families become involved in their student's education, the greater the positive impact on academic outcomes; however, benefits are evident regardless of when involvement begins (Chan & Hu, 2023). Parent and family involvement is especially important when it comes to helping students explore their postsecondary futures. Students' decisions can be influenced not only by their real family expectations, but also by their perception of those expectations as well as their view of how their community and family relationships and responsibilities could be impacted (Carey, 2024; Noll, 2022). Only 7% of graduates whose parents anticipated they would stop their education after high school went on to earn a bachelor's degree (Velez, 2020). In contrast, 55% of students achieved a bachelor's degree when their parents expected them to pursue one (Velez, 2020). While it can be helpful for parents to have some personal experience with postsecondary education, parents without experience are equally able to improve the likelihood that their students will pursue postsecondary education as long as they are actively involved in their student's education (Chan & Hu, 2023).

Conclusion

Parental and family involvement remains a cornerstone of student success, particularly during middle and high school when engagement often declines (Ross, 2016). By maintaining high expectations, fostering trust, and staying actively involved, families can significantly enhance their student's academic outcomes and future opportunities (Ross, 2016; Waters et al., 2019). Whether through advocacy, collaboration, or consistent support, families play a vital role in shaping a student's educational trajectory and broader life success.

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