



## **ASHA Position Statement: Building Effective School-Family Partnerships**

*The American School Health Association (ASHA) believes that schools and families share responsibility for the health and academic success for children and youth. Schools need to implement consistent, collaborative approaches to engage parents and families in their child's education. Schools must acknowledge that parents and families possess important information about their child that may significantly impact the child's health and learning. This is particularly important when addressing student health and safety issues.*

*Working together, schools and families can build and sustain effective partnerships that improve the school's climate and culture and increase the student's chances for success in school and life. The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child ([WSCC](#)) model of coordinated school health separates parent/family engagement from community involvement. While both are vital and necessary for schools to provide the support and resources needed for students to be healthy and achieve, for the purposes of this paper, ASHA specifically addresses parent and family engagement as the key to effective and successful school-family partnerships.*

### **BACKGROUND**

Getting parents and families involved and engaged with their child's school is difficult. In the past, family involvement was defined as volunteering, chaperoning, and fundraising. Even now, family involvement may include activities planned for parents with little attention to their needs or interests. On the other hand, parent and family engagement is defined by "shared responsibility" for activities linked to school improvement goals. Effective parent and family partnerships consider the needs and interests of parents, respect their ideas, and focus attention on collaborative strategies to meet those needs.

Parent and family engagement is critical to the implementation and success of school health programs. For example, students and their parents and families serve as key partners with school health services personnel in the management of chronic health conditions. Similarly, health education and physical education instruction is more

effective when parents and families support healthy behaviors at home. When parents and families are viewed as partners, school health programs can be more effective and health risk behaviors amongst students can be reduced.

In his book “The New Meaning of Educational Change,” Michael Fullan examines the role of parent involvement in schools:

*Teachers cannot do it alone. Parents and other community members are crucial and largely untapped resources who have (or can be helped to have) assets and expertise that are essential to the partnership...parents are their children’s very first educators. They have knowledge of their children that is not available to anyone else. They have a vested and committed interest in their children’s success, and they also have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute that spring from their interests, hobbies, occupations, and place in the community.*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, ([CDC-DASH](#)) publications on [Promoting Parent Engagement](#) describe how parent engagement in schools contributes to students’ health and learning. Parent engagement enhances connectedness and builds valuable networks of support for student learning and healthy development. Studies have shown that students who have parents engaged in their school lives:

- are *more* likely to have higher grades and test scores, better student behavior, and enhanced social skills; and
- are *less* likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, become pregnant, be physically inactive, or be emotionally distressed.

Today’s diverse families include mothers, fathers, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents, and other caregivers. Our valued diversity presents additional challenges. According to the [Harvard Family Research Project](#):

*One of the biggest challenges in education lies in the disparities-based on race and class--in children's access to the resources and opportunities that promote learning. Decades of research confirm that family and community engagement is a vital element in student success. Families provide their children with social and emotional strengths, intellectual and informational assets, and access to learning resources in and out of school. Children of engaged families are likely to succeed in school and beyond, and this is an enormous advantage in their life trajectories. Furthermore, family and community engagement is especially important for achieving educational equity for children and families experiencing economic disadvantage, racism, incarceration, and the challenges of immigration.*

The [Harvard Family Research Project](#) believes that “systemic family engagement as a core component of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement and school turnaround.” Family engagement should be integrated into structure and processes designed to meet school goals including training and professional development for both teachers and parents, teaching and learning, community collaboration and the use of data for continuous improvement and accountability.

The “Every Student Succeeds Act” ([ESSA](#)) requires school districts to develop evidence-based strategies for school improvement in partnership with parents and school staff. Parent involvement, defined as regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, has always been a centerpiece of Title I. Title I requires schools to ensure that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning, that they are encouraged to be part of their child’s education in school and they are full partners in their child’s education and included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child. In addition, Title IV specifically provides federal funding beginning in 2017 and continuing through 2020 to support statewide Family Engagement in Education Programs. These programs will, among other purposes, “assist the Secretary, state educational agencies, and local educational agencies in the coordination and integration of federal, state, and local services and programs to engage families in education.”

## **CONCLUSION**

Schools and school districts must develop comprehensive policies and practices that are consistently implemented and constantly evaluated. A primary motivation for parents to become involved is the belief that their actions will improve their children’s learning and well-being. When parents and families perceive that school staff want and expect their involvement, they are more likely to become involved.

### **ASHA believes**

- that schools must understand the distinction between family involvement and family engagement. By definition, involvement implies a more passive process. For example, school health policies are developed and communicated to parents and families but their input was not solicited during the development of those policies. Involvement has been described as “doing to” while engagement implies “doing with.” Thus, it is critical that schools acknowledge the valuable contributions of parents and families and “engage” them in all facets of the school.

- that parent and family partnerships and engagement are important topics for teacher and administrator preparation programs. Because the culture and climate of the school are dependent on school leadership and governance, all school personnel should participate in regular professional learning experiences that address best practices in parent and family engagement.
- that schools must make concerted and deliberate efforts to involve and engage students, their parents, and family members in both health and learning.

To assist schools in this regard, ASHA has developed a companion document, “Twenty Tips: Building Effective School-Family Partnerships.” (insert link)

## **ABOUT ASHA**

The mission of the American School Health Association is to transform all schools into places where every student learns and thrives. ASHA is a unique multidisciplinary organization that provides a means for those employed by local, state and national education and health organizations to work collaboratively and synergistically with concerned parents and community members and with colleagues in higher education to meet ASHA’s mission. ASHA members represent the ten components of the coordinated school health model. ASHA helped build the foundation for such a collaborative approach and today, the organization continues to define and strengthen our nation’s efforts to improve the lives of children, families, and communities.

### References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health. Parent Engagement. Accessed February 2016. [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent\\_engagement.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent_engagement.htm)

Center for Health and Learning, <http://healthandlearning.org/family-engagement/>

Fullan, M. The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fourth Edition; New York: Teachers College Press. 2007. p. 190.

Harvard Family Research Project. Resources Promoting Educational Equity Through Family Engagement. Accessed February 2016. <http://www.hfrp.org/hfrp-news/news-announcements/resources-promoting-educational-equity-through-family-engagement>

“Programs in the ESEA Framework (Every Student Succeeds Act) as Approved by the Conference Committee,” Committee for Education Funding, 2015. ESSA, Sec. 1010.