

Parental Involvement in Child's Education: Importance, Barriers and Benefits

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ABSTRACT

This research article explicates the importance, barriers and benefits of parental involvement in child's education. The authors exemplify the fact that parents' involvement in their child's learning process offers many opportunities for success- improvements on child's morale, attitude, and academic achievement across all subject areas, behavior and social adjustment (Centre for Child Well-Being, 2010). This study underscores that the most common obstacle to parental participation is the parents' pessimistic attitude towards supporting school where their children are enrolled in, and the "we-don't-care-attitude" among parents. It further elucidates the truth about parents' role in the personal and academic performance of the child, as revealed by Conway and Houtenville's (2008) study, stating that "parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial." Pinantoan (2013), Olsen (2010), and Henderson and Berla (1994) corroborate this contention and other claims on the importance and benefits of parental participation in the child's holistic development.

Keywords: parental involvement, child education, importance, barriers and benefits

INTRODUCTION

"We need to begin with the firm belief that all parents are interested in the development and progress of their own children" -Pen Green, Centre for Under Fives and Families

Parental involvement has always been an essential component of every teacher-student-school academic endeavor. Parents, who have been considered as one of the stakeholders of the school community, play tremendous roles in the child's educational and environmental transformation; thus, the intensity or extent of participation that parents have in their child's education and school, more often, have to be realized.

Many parents, whose children are currently enrolled in a particular school, are enormously concerned, more often being active to assist in their child's classroom, communicating constantly with their child's teachers, assisting with their homework, getting involved with school projects, and discussing their child's individual academic strengths and weaknesses with teachers. Regrettably, there are also some, if not many, parents who are quite passive in their child's education. Some of them are not directly involved. Sadly speaking, some parents have obvious manifestations of their "I-don't-care" attitude. Neither are they visible in the school premises and get involved in the desired goals of the school where their children are getting what they need most for life.

Several schools, both private and public sectors, have programs designed at intensifying parental participation such as boys and girls scouting, school-community socio-economic projects, disaster volunteer task force, and school-community work brigade. However, increasing parental involvement remains a tough challenge among school administrators and their teachers despite clear programs, concerted efforts, and strong motivations.

Importance of Parental Involvement

Why do parents have to get involved in their child's education? Basically, parents' involvement in their child's learning process offers many opportunities for success. According to Centre for Child Well-Being (2010), parental involvement in their children's learning not only improves a child's morale, attitude, and academic achievement across all subject areas, but it also promotes better behavior and social adjustment. It further says that family involvement in education helps children to grow up to be productive, responsible members of the society. This means that if we involve the parents in educating their children, it is tantamount to saying that the school is proactive in implementing changes or development among the students. As parent's involvement is increased, teachers and school administrators also raise the chance to realize quality reform in education.

In the research conducted by Mapp K. and Henderson, A. (2002) entitled *A New Wave of Evidence, The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, the authors state that "most students at all levels – elementary, middle, and high school – want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school." The study further points out that "when parents come to school regularly, it reinforces the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected and that school is an integral part of the whole family's life."

In his article on Parental Involvement in Education "Tips to Increase Parental Involvement in Education," Meador (2010) supported earlier contention stating that "true school reform will always begin with increased parental involvement in their children's education. It has been proven time and time again that parents who invest time and place value on their children's education will have children who are more successful in school." There are always exceptions, but teaching a child to value education brings a positive impact on their education.

As a school administrator for almost a couple of decades, this author firmly agrees with the thought that school administrators and teachers are continuously frustrated in an age where parental involvement increasingly seems to be on the decline despite the effort exerted by the school heads and teachers, and the Department of Education (DepEd) through its Orders and memoranda in the local counterparts.

Unfortunately, a fraction of this disappointment rests on the fact that the community often places sole blame on the teachers and school heads, when in reality, there is a natural incapability if parents are not mindful of their obligations. For the past five years in the five school districts, the author has often been observing, that some schools in a certain district is influenced by parental involvement at a certain degree. The schools with more parental involvement are almost always the higher performing schools both in academic and non-academic undertakings. Consequently, the administration and the teachers have become more motivated, more committed, and more active to support the initiatives of the parents.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

As mentioned earlier, school performance is tantamount to the degree or the extent of parental involvement, thus, it is important to identify the roadblocks that create impact on parent's participation and the children's proper education.

Important obstacles that constrain parents' ability to become actively involved in their children's education include the teachers' attitudes and the parents' family resources, among others. These obstacles, however, can be overcome by the school and through teacher's orientation and training.

Based on the author's personal observations and random interviews with her fellow school administrators, the most common obstacle to parental participation is the parents' pessimistic attitude towards supporting school where their children are enrolled in. Many administrators believe that this "we-don't-care-attitude" among parents may be due to their inability to understand their role in the success of their children and the incapability to support the school academic undertakings. Some school administrators and teachers confirm the belief and supported the contention that added to the malady is the parents' lack of skills and resources to support their children and the school.

Posted in National Center for School Engagement, Family Support America shared with its readers the common barriers associated with increasing parental involvement in schools and community programs, as follows:

1. Attitudes – Staff do not feel comfortable talking about issues in front of families. Families don't trust staff. Staff thinks families are too overwhelmed to participate. Staff isn't willing to accept families as equal partners. Families think they have nothing to contribute. Staff thinks that families will violate client confidentiality.
2. Logistics – Schools and programs can't pay for childcare. Transportation is unavailable for families to get to meetings. Meetings are held only during working hours – or at times inconvenient for parents. Families aren't reimbursed for the time they take off of work to attend meetings.
3. System barriers – No systems are in place for paying parent leaders for their time and contributions. Staff time can only be paid during regular working hours. Lack of resources available for supporting parent and family involvement.
4. Lacks of skills – Families have never participated in (school-type) meetings/committees. Families are unaware of applicable procedures and policies. Staff isn't ready to work with families in new ways. Lack of information about the role of families and staff.

To offer local schools and districts' information and materials to expand parent and family engagement in order to decrease the obstacles, if not totally eradicate, and to maximize parental involvement, this article would wish to present this that may also help school reshape parents' and teachers' notion on parental involvement in extensive yet simpler terms. The National Center for School Engagement tried this model and found it very effective based the self-made survey. This model is called Epstein's Framework of Parent Involvement. It is based on six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce Epstein from the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships. This author opts to share Epstein's Framework of How Parents Can Become More Involved in Schools as briefly explained below.

1. Parenting – parenting skills are promoted and supported.

2. Communication – communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
3. Volunteering – parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
4. Learning at Home – help parents understand the educational process and their role in supporting student achievement. Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
5. School Decision-Making and Advocacy – parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families. The intent is to give parents’ voice in decisions that affect their children’s education.
6. Collaboration with the Community – community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

The Benefits of Parental Involvement

This author firmly believes that parent-teacher partnership makes tremendous impact on children’s education. Conversely, the strong collaboration of parents with school authorities can create “tsunami of improvements” in both physical and academic performance of the school. Hence, school administrators have to boldly encourage parents to get involved and make “storm surge of contribution” to help achieve the school’s missions and goals.

In her article *Working Together, Parent - Teacher Partnerships* posted in the net recently, Morin (2013) states that the best tip for school success is to make sure that parents and teachers are working together as allies. Sometimes, though, it can seem that there’s a chalk line drawn down the middle of your child’s life. At home, a parent knows best his own child from head to toe - his academic potentials, social skills, innate attitude – to mention a few, while a teacher may know only a tip of an iceberg about who the child really is. Academically, perhaps, a child’s potential may surface, as well as her social development with peers. Home and school environment combined may create a fuller understanding of a student; thus, a teacher can identify where to tap to benchmark a child’s performance level.

On academic achievement, Pinantoan (2013) pointed out the influence of parental involvement on a student’s academic success should not be underestimated. The article stressed the importance of support system that a student gets from home is equally important as his brain power, work ethics and genetics which all work in the accomplishment of his goal in life. Furthermore, students with two parents operating in supportive roles are 52% more likely to enjoy school and get straight A’s than students whose parents are disengaged with what’s going on at school. This is especially the case during the earliest years of schooling, in Kindergarten through the 5th grade, when students with active parents are almost twice as likely to succeed. Once students enter middle school, the effect diminishes slightly—possibly because they are maturing during this time— but there is still a 22% difference.

Corroborating this article on the benefits of parental involvement is the new research from the University of New Hampshire which shows that students do much better in school when their parents are actively involved in their education.

Researchers Karen Smith Conway, professor of economics at the University of New Hampshire, and her colleague Andrew Houtenville, senior research associate at New Editions Consulting, found that parental involvement has a strong, positive effect on student achievement.

In their study "Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement," Conway and Houtenville (2008) reveal that "parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement."

According to the study, the researchers also found out that parents seemed particularly interested in the academic achievements of their daughters. They discovered parents spent more time talking to their daughters about their school work during dinnertime discussions. They also concluded that parents may reduce their efforts when school resources increase; thus, diminishing the effects of improved school resources.

The abovementioned research used national data from more than 10,000 eighth-grade students in public and private schools, their parents, teachers, and school administrators. The researchers were particularly interested in how frequently parents discussed activities or events of particular interest to the child, discussed things the child studied in class, discussed selecting courses or programs at school, attended a school meeting, and volunteered at the child's school.

Olsen (2010) proved that researchers have evidenced for the positive effects of parent involvement on children, families, and school when schools and parents continuously support and encourage the children's learning and development (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Illinois State Board of Education, 1993). He quoted Henderson and Berla (1994), stating that "the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to: (1) Create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and (3) Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community."

According to Cotton, K., and Wikelund, K. of Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In Parent Involvement in Education, "when parents get involved earlier in a child's educational process the more powerful the effects, and the most effective forms of parent involvement are those, which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home."

In conclusion, this author deems it proper to cite other benefits of parent involvement that her fellow parents and co-educators may find worth-pondering (Henderson and Berla, 1994) research which reviewed and analyzed eighty-five studies that documented the comprehensive benefits of parent involvement in children's education. This and other studies show that parent involvement in activities that are effectively planned and well implemented result in substantial benefits to children, parents, educators, and the school.

Benefits for the Children

- I. Children tend to achieve more, regardless of ethnic or racial background, socioeconomic status, or parents' education level.
- II. Children generally achieve better grades, test scores, and attendance.
- III. Children consistently complete their homework.
- IV. Children have better self-esteem, are more self-disciplined, and show higher aspirations and motivation toward school.
- V. Children's positive attitude about school often results in improved behavior in school and less suspension for disciplinary reasons.

- VI. Fewer children are being placed in special education and remedial classes.
- VII. Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals work together to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the culture in school.
- VIII. Junior high and high school students whose parents remain involved usually make better transitions and are less likely to drop out of school.

Benefits for the Parents

- I. Parents increase their interaction and discussion with their children and are more responsive and sensitive to their children's social, emotional, and intellectual developmental needs.
- II. Parents are more confident in their parenting and decision-making skills.
- III. As parents gain more knowledge of child development, there is more use of affection and positive reinforcement and less punishment on their children.
- IV. Parents have a better understanding of the teacher's job and school curriculum.
- V. When parents are aware of what their children are learning, they are more likely to help when they are requested by teachers to become more involved in their children's learning activities at home.
- VI. When parents' perceptions of the school are improved, there are stronger ties and commitment to the school.
- VII. Parents are more aware of, and become more active regarding policies that affect their children's education when parents are requested by the school to be part of the decision-making team.

Benefits for the Educators

- I. When schools have a high percentage of involved parents in and out of schools, teachers and principals are more likely to experience higher morale.
- II. Teachers and principals often earn greater respect for their profession from the parents.
- III. Consistent parent involvement leads to improved communication and relations between parents, teachers, and administrators.
- IV. Teachers and principals acquire a better understanding of families' cultures and diversity, and they form deeper respect for parents' abilities and time.
- V. Teachers and principals report an increase in job satisfaction.

Benefits for the School

- I. Schools that actively involve parents and the community tend to establish better reputations in the community.
- II. Schools also experience better community support.
- III. School programs that encourage and involve parents usually do better and have higher quality programs than programs that do not involve parents.

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