



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

# Family **FACTS** on Education

A publication of the Massachusetts Statewide Family Engagement Center.

Volume 15

## Family Engagement in Every School for Every Child



### Why is family engagement in schools important?

All families want the best for their children. Families know their children the best, and can be a valuable resource to teachers. When families, schools and communities partner together, much can be accomplished and every child can get the support he or she needs to succeed.

Over 50 years of educational research has confirmed the connection between family engagement and student success. In *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp found that students with engaged families are more likely to succeed. This is true no matter how you measure success. Students get better grades. They behave better. They have a more positive attitude. They are more likely to graduate. They are more likely to go to college. Schools also do better when they engage families and communities as partners. An influential study of Chicago schools identified strong “parent and community ties,” as one of five “essential supports” for successful school reform.

Of course, all schools interact with families. Every school sends report cards home, holds open houses, and solicits volunteers. So what, exactly, do we mean by “family and community engagement?” National Association of Family, School and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) defines family engagement as:

- Family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development. Family engagement is continuous across a child’s life and entails enduring commitment but changing

parent roles as children mature into young adulthood. Effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn - at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in after-school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community.

### Sharing responsibility for learning and achievement

First and foremost, shared responsibility means working together in partnership for the best interest of the child. With this in mind, there are many ways schools can get started. According to the Massachusetts Family, School and Community Partnership Fundamentals there are six fundamentals that indicate the ability to build a strong partnership. This tool supports high expectations and acknowledges the important and valuable role played by the family, the student and the school.

The fundamental listed are:

- 1) Welcoming All Families,
- 2) Communicating Effectively,
- 3) Supporting Student Success,
- 4) Advocating for Each Child,
- 5) Sharing Power and,
- 6) Partnering with the Community.

The fundamentals provide shared opportunities for both school

and families to participate in a child's learning and achievement. For example, the school may communicate classroom homework expectations to families so parents can monitor it. The school can also make sure the school is welcoming to all families so families feel a part of the school community. Parents, on the other hand, can share the responsibility for learning by finding opportunities in the community which can enrich a child's classroom learning. They can also be their child's advocate when they feel a need isn't being met. The school-family partnership is strengthened when each stakeholder takes responsibility for doing their part and the students benefit.

## Continuous family and community engagement from birth to young adulthood

We now know that a child's first few years have a powerful effect on his or her future. Even after those crucial years are past, children must overcome a variety of social, emotional, and academic challenges to reach adulthood prepared for a successful life. When the strands of family, school, and community are woven together with caring and frequent communication, they form a safety net to catch struggling children and offer support before it's too late. Families, teachers, peers, guidance counselors, and countless other people affect a child's life. To do their jobs well, these people must learn from a child's past and be invested in the child's future. Family, school, and community partnerships that support children from birth to young adulthood can help make that possible.

## Family and community engagement across multiple settings

When we think about education, we usually think about classroom instruction. In truth, children only spend a small fraction of their lives sitting at a desk listening to a teacher. Research has shown that children who engage in learning activities outside the classroom often make gains, and children who don't, usually fall behind. One of the best ways stakeholders can reduce achievement gaps is to fill every child's life with rich learning opportunities in and out of school. There are many ways schools can facilitate learning outside the classroom.

They can offer supports like after-school homework help. They can also be a crucial link between families and community resources like public libraries, museums, and community cen-

ters. It takes more than high quality classroom instruction for all children to reach their potential; a truly outstanding educational system must take advantage of every opportunity to educate its children.

This issue of Family FACTS only scratches the surface of the ways family and community engagement can help schools prepare our children for success in the 21st century. But, no matter how they do it, families, schools, and communities must share responsibility for the education of every child, from birth to young adulthood, in school and out.

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