

PROMOTING PARENT ENGAGEMENT: Improving Student Health and Academic Achievement

Information for School Districts and School Administrators

Parent engagement in schools is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents. Studies have shown that parent engagement in schools can promote positive education and health behaviors among children and adolescents. This fact sheet provides guidance for school districts and administrators to support parent engagement in school health.

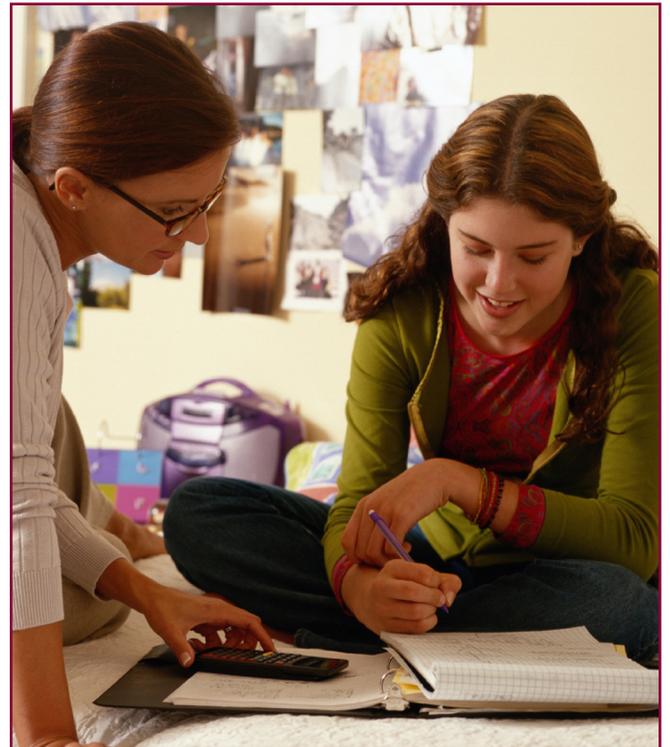
Why is it important for parents to be engaged in their child's school?

Parent engagement in schools contributes to students' health and learning. 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.
- Enhanced social skills.

In addition, students who have parents engaged in their school lives are less likely to

- Smoke cigarettes.
- Drink alcohol.
- Become pregnant.
- Be physically inactive.
- Be emotionally distressed.



What factors can increase parent engagement in school health?

Research shows the primary motivation for parents to become involved is the belief that their actions will improve their children's learning and well-being. Research also shows parents tend to be more involved if they perceive school staff and students want and expect their involvement.

To increase parent engagement in school health, schools must make a positive **connection** with parents. Schools should also provide a variety of activities and frequent opportunities to fully **engage** parents. Finally, schools should work with parents to **sustain** parent engagement by addressing the common challenges to getting and keeping parents engaged.

What actions can school districts and administrators take to support parent engagement?

Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health (www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/adolescenthealth/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf) describes strategies for increasing parent engagement in school health. Following are strategies and actions school districts and administrators can take to support parent engagement in school health.

Action 1 Support a positive connection with parents.

- Ensure the school or school district has a clear vision for parent engagement that includes engaging parents in school health activities.
- Ensure that school staff members have the ability to connect with parents and support parent engagement in school health activities.
- Consider asking District and School Health Councils to obtain input from parents on how they would like to be involved in the school's health activities, services, and programs.
- Have a well-planned program for parent engagement in the school.

Action 2 Support a variety of opportunities to engage parents in school health activities.*

- Provide parenting support. Build parents' knowledge, leadership, and decision-making skills to support the development of positive health attitudes and behaviors among students and help build healthy home and school environments.
- Communicate with parents. Establish clear communication channels between parents and school staff.
- Provide a variety of volunteer opportunities. Involve parents as school volunteers to enrich health and physical education classes, improve the delivery of health services, and help create safe and healthy environments for students.
- Support learning at home. Engage parents and students in health education activities at home.
- Encourage parents to be part of planning and decision making in schools. Include parents as participants in planning for special health-related events, school decisions, school activities, and advocacy activities through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), the school health council, school action teams, and other school groups and organizations.
- Collaborate with the community. Coordinate information, resources, and services from community-based organizations, businesses, cultural and civic organizations, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, health clinics, colleges and universities, and other community groups that can benefit students and families.

Action 3 Support working with parents to sustain parent engagement in school health.

- Appoint a dedicated team or committee that oversees parent engagement.
- Identify challenges that keep parents from being connected and engaged in school health activities.
- Work with parents to tailor school events and activities to address those challenges.

* Epstein, J. L. et al. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

How should school districts and administrators approach planning to make improvements in parent engagement in school health?

Improving parent engagement in school health by advancing students' health and academic outcomes is a team effort. It involves the school community as well as individuals, groups, and organizations outside of the school. It also requires 1) convincing these stakeholders of the importance of parent engagement in helping students learn and be healthy, 2) involving them in the development, implementation, and evaluation of these actions, and 3) securing their buy-in to ensure that parent engagement happens.

Some of the strategies and actions described above require small changes in school processes that can be done in the short term with relative ease. Others might be broader and longer-term and might require administrative or budgetary changes. Schools and school districts should determine which actions are most feasible and appropriate, according to the needs of the school and available resources.

Resources

Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/adolescenthealth/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf

Healthy Youth

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth

Student Health and Academic Achievement

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/index.htm

Coalition for Community Schools

www.communityschools.org

FindYouthInfo.gov

www.findyouthinfo.gov

Harvard Family Research Project

www.hfrp.org/publications-resources

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

www.ncpie.org/

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

www.partnershipschools.org

National Parent Teacher Association

www.pta.org

Parental Information and Resource Centers

www.nationalpirc.org



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