
Come Together: A Look at Increasing Family Engagement

A Professional Development
by Makayla Dowling

Family Engagement

Over the last 10 years studies have shown that family engagement and involvement in the school system is decreasing. The question is: Why?

Are our lives getting too busy to be involved in our children's education? Or is it due to the lack of communication between families and the school?

As a parent and educator, these initial questions intrigued me and led me on an adventure to dig much deeper into the issue.



WHY?

Some may wonder why I care so much about this issue?

As an educator, I often struggle with parent involvement and engagement. This issue stems from my very first year teaching. I was brand new to the school and district. The principal thought an open house would be a great way to get the parents in to meet the new Kindergarten/First Grade teacher. Now the school I work at is extremely small in size. Everyone knows everyone. The night came of my very first open house. I sat in my newly decorated classroom full of excitement and hope but no one came. Not a single parent. Ever since that experience I have struggled to communicate with parents. I personally felt like they just didn't care. Unfortunately, that feeling has followed me year after year and sadly I am not the only teacher who struggles and feels this way about family engagement.

LET'S FIGURE IT OUT...TOGETHER

In my research, I have focused on the following questions:

How/what teachers can do to get more family engagement/involvement in schools to help the success of the students.

My main research question created some sub questions that I had to analyze first before I could dive into how to **create** more involvement. These questions were;

Why is family engagement/involvement on the decline? What are the problems with parent/teacher communication from the perspective of parents and the perspective of teachers? What are the specific benefits for students because of family engagement?

My Discoveries:

- Families do indeed want to be involved in their children's education but in a way that is more accessible and understandable to them.
- School jargon and state curriculum are intimidating!
- **Teachers and families are both misunderstood in their intentions and expectations of involvement-clear lines of communication need to be in place at the very beginning of the year.**
- What information is important? Families want to know when and what their children are succeeding with. They want to know what exactly they are struggling with and what they can do to help.

My Discoveries:

- Teachers want to establish a partnership with families. They also want to feel supported and trust by their class families and the administration.
- There are many different platforms and strategies that can be used to help establish better communication between families and teachers that need to be taken advantage of.
- When families and teachers work together, there are many benefits for all involved especially the students!
- **If we (teachers and families) come together and work as a team, they (the children) will succeed!**

GREAT INFORMATION, BUT NOW WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?

WE COMMUNICATE!

FIRST WITHIN THE SCHOOL - What do we want to change and how do we want to change it. Make a plan!

THEN WITH THE PARENTS- Ask for their feedback!

LASTLY, CREATE OPEN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND FAMILIES!

OUR ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

As a school...

- How do we feel family communication is being addressed as a whole and in our individual classrooms?
- Where are our strengths with communication?
- Where are our weaknesses?

Let's discuss...

Gather in groups of about 3 and answer these questions.

Let's begin with the data.

Parent's were given a survey about family involvement on the first days of school. In the survey they were asked:

1. How do you prefer to be contacted? (email, text, call...)
2. What information do you find important to be communicated about? (grades, difficulties, successes, behaviors...other)
3. How often do you want to hear from or have meetings with your child's classroom teacher?
4. Do you have access to technology and are you familiar with online learning tools?
5. Would you take part in an online communication platform such as Classdojo, Klassly, Seesaw?
6. Would you be willing to volunteer to come into your child's classroom for various events or field trips?
7. Anything you would like the school or teachers to do better with communication?

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO AS A SCHOOL?

How do we want to go about addressing family communication and involvement?

What can we do to get people in the school and involved in their children's academics?

FAMILY FUN NIGHTS!

*In small groups again discuss some ideas of ways to get parents into the school and involved! Dream Big and Bold!

*When you are finished take a piece of paper and design a poster for a family fun night. This can be any theme, it can be rooted in curriculum, it can be just for fun.

Some questions to ask yourself:

1. What activities will there be?
2. How can we provide parents with opportunities to be involved?
3. Do we offer a prize or some sort of dinner?

Fun academic activities. Give the families a chance to hear their children read, read to them and as a family be read too. It provides a great opportunity to demonstrate what book discussions sound like. This can help encourage families to talk about what they read with their children and show how to boost their comprehension.

Something free to entice the families to come.



The Sapphire Class presents:

Family Reading Night

A Reading "Camp-In" at Hancock

Thursday, February 19, 2022

5:30-6:00 p.m. Hot Dog Dinner

6:15-7:30 Reading Camp-In Activities



Sing campfire songs with
Ms. Talbot!



Make and enjoy a fun
S'mores snack!



In-tents reading of some
favorite classic stories!



How to support your child's
reading. Ideas and resources
from teachers about reading
at home!



A wild raffle to win prizes!

RSVP to Mrs. Dowling by email by February 17th.

Something to promote family dinnertime..

Something for fun!

Something free to entice the families to come.

Provide information for families to better understand the importance of reading and how to help support their learning.

Volunteer protocols?

Any specific school events that we would want volunteers for like Read Across America Week, field trips, classroom grandparents?

Let's Brainstorm!

What's our final plan for getting families engaged?

Now that we know what we are going to do as a school, what are we going to do in our individual classrooms.

***THINK! What are some strategies that you use in your classroom to get families involved? Turn and talk to a neighbor.**

Parents want more and clear communication. We as teachers need to provide them with access to platforms that allow the communication to take place and allows them to be involved.

Let's take a look at some different online platforms...

Messaging, announcements, websites, and more

Class Dojo



- Developed specifically for easy communication with families.
- Allows families and teachers to instant message each other
- A message board for announcements
- A portfolio for each individual students work so parents can see what their child is working on
- Backed by a Social Emotional/Growth Mindset curriculum
- Builds a positive community
- Students can earn/lose points from both teachers and families for positive and negative behaviors.
- Fun avatars for the children
- **FREE**
- **SIMPLE ONLINE TRAINING VIDEOS! 1 hour PD certification.**

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- Newsletters
- Social media
- Frequent parent-teacher conferences
- Emails and calls with positives and negatives

Studies show that parents want accessible opportunities. They also have expressed that they need to be written/spoken to in a way that they understand. It's important to leave out the school jargon. The last thing you want is to make a family member feel inferior due to language. All notices home should be in the students spoken language at home if they are an EL student.

*Take some time to now to jot down what are some new ways you are going to get families engaged in your class?

READY, SET, ENGAGE!

Now that we have a plan for what we are going to do as a school and in our classroom, we need to get to work. The benefits will be endless for everyone involved. **Most importantly we will give our students the greatest opportunity to succeed!**

Matthew A. Kraft (2017), former teacher, researcher of parent-involvement and author of *Engaging Parents Through Better Communication Systems*, reported, “Simply put, while effective teachers and solid curricula are crucial, the role that parents play in shaping students’ educational experiences and supporting their in-school success cannot be overstated. When parents foster positive learning environments at home and are engage in their students’ schooling, kids have much better academic outcomes” (p. 59).

Curt M. Adams, author of *Promoting a Culture of Parent Collaboration and Trust: An Empirical Study*, explains, "Numerous child development, social work, psychology, and education studies point to parent-school partnerships as a determining factor in student cognitive and psychological development" (p. 3).