

SDDFS NOTES

on Parent Involvement

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Special Points of Interest:

- Parental Involvement: A Renewed Focus
- The No Child Left Behind Act
- Strategies for Implementing Successful Parental Involvement Initiatives
- What the Research Says about Parental Involvement
- Profiles of Notable Programs

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Parental Involvement: A Renewed Focus on a Key Asset

Early in the seventeenth century, poet George Herbert wrote, “One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.” In modern terms, this quote could be reworded to read, “One involved parent is more effective than a hundred FTE’s of instructional staff.”

When you think of parental involvement (PI), what do you envision? The parent who is frequently spotted on school grounds? The one who exchanges weekly e-mails with teachers? The one who attends school events? If so, broaden your definition of PI to embrace the parent who doesn’t fit this mold. For some parents, it is progress to simply look at their child’s homework, or get to know their child’s peers. Some parents are still learning that parenting does not end when their child crosses the school threshold and teaching

does not end when their child departs at the end of the day.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) defines PI as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. This includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in their children’s learning, are encouraged to be actively involved in their children’s education, and are full partners in their children’s education.”

Although some parents may feel powerless to take action, the majority of parents want to know how best to help their children to succeed (National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), 1992, as cited in Fager & Brewster, 1999).

Many prevention



curricula address risks associated with the various domains in which a child interacts, e.g.: school, individual, peer, and family and community. For example, in the **school** domain programs may address the availability of tobacco, alcohol and drugs at school; in the **individual** domain programs may address the individual’s low perceptions of risk or harm of substance use; and in the **peer** domain, programs may address the positive and negative impact of peer pressure on decision mak-

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What the Research Says



Why PI Matters

- High father involvement reduces the likelihood that children in grades 6 to 12 will be suspended or expelled from school (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 1996, as cited in Fager & Brewster, 1999).
- Good family relationships may act as a protective variable, decreasing the effects of low academic motivation on the likelihood of subsequent substance use (Elder, 1980, as cited in Andrews & Duncan, 1997, p. 542).
- Poor family relationships and family conflict drive adolescents toward deviant peer groups (Dishion et al., 1995, *ibid*).

Parental Involvement: A Renewed Focus on a Key Asset

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ing. However, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, the family domain (parent involvement) receives less emphasis than do the other three domains in many major prevention programs.

The benefits of PI include improved school behavior and lower dropout rates among students. Benefits to parents include positive rapport with the school, as well as an enhanced sense of adequacy, self-worth, and self-confidence (Manitoba Department of Education and Training (MDET), 1994, as cited in Fager & Brewster, 1999). Teachers and schools benefit too, in ways both measurable and nonquantifiable. An increased emphasis on PI fosters better parent and community relationships, as well as greater support and respect from the community (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989, *ibid*). Parent participation can lead to better work environments for teachers (MDET, 1994, *ibid*). An additional benefit of note in lean fiscal times is that PI can help the school use its resources most effectively, by helping schools maximize the materials, resources, and personnel available (MDET, 1994, *ibid*).

A 1988 study released by the Center for Research of Elementary and Middle Schools at Johns Hopkins University found that 70% of parents never went to their children's school building in any volunteer capacity (Epstein and McPartland, 1988, as cited in Grossnickle et

al., p.47). Hopefully more than 30% of your schools parents have come to your school as a volunteer. If not, why not? This issue of *Notes* will equip you with new tools to promote PI, remind you why PI is so essential, and reinvigorate your commitment to preventing this critical resource from languishing.

The Effect of Peer and Parent Influences on Smoking Initiation Among Early Adolescents

A study by Bruce Simons-Morton shows that peer affiliation and perceived prevalence of smoking were positively associated with smoking initiation, whereas social competence and parental monitoring were negatively associated with smoking initiation. A significant relationship between parental involvement and peer affiliation indicated that among teens with problem behaving friends, those with parents who were more involved were at a decreased risk for smoking initiation. This finding held true for the overall population and for subgroups including boys, girls, Whites, Blacks, and teens living in single parent families. These findings provide evidence that parenting behaviors may protect early adolescents against smoking even in the context of negative peer affiliation.

The Complete PI Program

In developing its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and accompanying quality indicators, the National PTA sought to promote meaningful parent and family participation, raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs, and provide guidelines for schools that wish to improve their programs. The standards are:

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

- Standard I: **Communicating** – Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Standard II: **Parenting** – Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- Standard III: **Student Learning** – Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Standard IV: **Volunteering** – Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Standard V: **School Decision Making and Advocacy** – Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Standard VI: **Collaborating with Community** – Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.
- Source: *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, 1998.



What Works for You?

Are you involved in a prevention program that is incorporating PI in a unique, especially effective, or otherwise notable way?

We want to hear about it!

Please contact Patricia Elton, Resource Librarian, to share your ideas.

Phone: (850) 414-0236

Suncom: 994-0236

Email: Elton_p@popmail.firn.edu

What the Research Says



About Effective PI Programs :

- It is teachers' practices, not the education, marital status, or work place of parents that [makes] the difference in whether parents are productive partners in children's education (Epstein, 1988, as cited in Fager & Brewster, 1999).
- For low-income families, programs offering home visits are more successful in involving parents than programs requiring parents to visit the school (*National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, 1998).

The “No Child Left Behind” Act – A Strengthened Legislative Acknowledgment of Parental Involvement

When President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act on January 8, 2002, the former Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 was suffused with stronger policies related to PI. The NCLB bases its definition of PI on the National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement Programs developed by the National PTA. The NCLB is structured around four basic educational reform principles including expanded options for parents. The other three principles are: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, and an emphasis on teacher methods that have been proven to work.

Action Steps Families Can Take to Reduce the Risk of Drug Use	
⇒ Talk with your child	⇒ Be a role model
⇒ Get involved	⇒ Teach kids to choose friends wisely
⇒ Set Rules	⇒ Monitor your child’s activities
<i>For more details on the Action Steps, visit www.family.samhsa.gov.</i>	

Practical Ways to Support Parental Involvement

Regardless of the degree to which the research touts the benefits of PI, without programs that make it inviting and easy for parents to become a more active part of their children’s educational environment, many parents simply will not become engaged. Incoming Chancellor of K-12 Education James Warford states it most succinctly: “Parents have the most important job of all!!” He points out that “involving parents in positive activities develops ownership as a part of the school environment.”

Some strategies for supporting PI have to do with removing barriers which may prevent parents from being able to participate in school activities. For instance, providing affordable child care during evening meetings increases the likelihood that more parents can participate. Realistic meeting lengths also can create a positive impression on attendees. Some schools tie PTO or PTA meetings in with a grade level music performance; once the parents are present to enjoy the show, they are more likely to linger for a little school business. Providing food also helps stave off those after-work hunger pangs for evening meetings, and provides a popular draw for school-day events.

It is important to take children’s ages and developmental needs into account when implementing PI practices. For preschool children, consider lending libraries that offer games and learning materials that help build children’s skills at home. Families of elementary and middle school students particularly benefit from meetings with teachers. Such conferences promote discussion about the child’s progress and the materials being learned. For high school parents, programs that encourage learning about such topics as financing post-secondary education and applying for financial aid are especially useful (Henderson and Berla, 1994).

No Parent Left Behind

Although the legislation discussed on the previous page focuses on “No **Child** Left Behind,” it is incumbent on school systems to ensure that parents (as well as other interested family members and adults) perceive PI efforts within the school system as inclusive.

Lower-income, minority, and non-English speaking individuals are frequently underrepresented in parent-involvement activities (Decker, et al., 1996, as cited in Fager & Brewster, 1999).

In an interview conducted by Carol Sills Strickland of the Institute for Responsive Education (*Supporting Parents as Leaders*, 2002), Dr. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine commented on the differing ways that various cultures view PI. She discusses a historical view among the African American community originating with the idea that teachers were held in very high esteem, and children were “handed off” to the teachers on the first day of school. She stated, “A lot of poor African American parents don’t see themselves sitting on a committee deciding on what curriculum, what textbooks, what principal is the best principal.” Dr. Irvine further states that African American parents tell her that “the language is often alienating and they use all kinds of jargon.” These parents like the idea of sitting on these boards, but do not feel their input is taken seriously.

Dr. Irvine says that in her work, members of the Hispanic community share similar ideas about teachers. Her understanding of Hispanic perspective on PI is that these parents see the teacher as the professional and do not see volunteering and chaperoning as their role.

An important point to remember about parent involvement is that school practices of informing and involving parents are stronger determinants of whether inner-city parents will be involved with their children’s education than are parent education, family size, marital status, and student grade level (*National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*, 1998).

Regardless of cultural background, it is perennially wise to “focus on the family as a whole, promote a family’s self-sufficiency, and emphasize their assets.” (Chang et al., 1994, as cited in *Building Successful Partnerships*.)

Parental Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification

The National PTA’s *Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification* process is designed to help schools throughout America assess their parent involvement practices, make improvements where needed, and earn one of two distinctions:

- ★ A “Certification of Excellence,” for schools that have outstanding PI practices in place, or
- ★ A “Recognition of Commitment,” for schools that are committed to pursuing excellence in PI.

The next submission date for interested schools is November 1, 2003, for notification on January 20, 2004. Nomination instructions and an online nomination form are available at:

<http://www.pta.org//parentinvolvement/certification/index.asp>.



A lifetime in education has taught me:

- That parent awareness doesn't just materialize; it must be developed,
- That parents who are not strangers to the school may find it easier to accept recommendations from schools regarding counseling and intervention programs,
- That building parent trust increases the level of parent acceptance of a student problem, and
- That parental involvement transcends economic status, ethnicity, cultural diversity, and educational background. There is a role in school for everyone.

--Jeff Miller, former Director of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program (Personal communication, April 28, 2003).

Programs with Parent Involvement Components

The Florida Institute of Education's Program Inventory has information about the vendors for each of the programs listed below. Some, such as *Creating Lasting Family Connections (CLFC)*, are featured in this issue of *Notes*. To access the Program Inventory, visit www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs/program_inventory.

Program Name	ATOD Program	Violence Prevention	Age/Grade
Creating Lasting Family Connections (CLFC)	✓	✓	11 -15 yrs
Incredible Years	✓	✓	4-10 yrs
Positive Action	✓	✓	5-18 yrs
Project ACHIEVE	✓	✓	3-14 yrs
Reconnecting Youth	✓	✓	9th-12th grade
Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT)	✓		1st-12th
Dare To Be You	✓		2-5 yrs
Families and Schools Together (FAST)	✓		4-12 yrs
Family Effectiveness Training	✓		6-12 yrs
Family Matters	✓		12-14 yrs
Keep A Clear Mind	✓		8-12 yrs
Families That Care -Guiding Good Choices (formerly Preparing for the Drug-Free	✓		8-13 yrs
Project Alert	✓		6th-8th grade
Project Northland	✓		6th-8th grade
Project STAR (Midwestern Prevention Project)	✓		adolescents
Project SUCCESS	✓		14-18 yrs
SAFE Children	✓		K-1st
Strengthening Families Program	✓		10 - 14 yrs
Second Step		✓	4-14 yrs
Bullying Prevention Program		✓	K-8th

Program of Note

Creating Lasting Family Connections (Bay County)

Description: Bay County has a partnership with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to deliver Life Skills Training (LST) to middle schoolers. One program funded through this grant is “Creating Lasting Family Connections” (CLFC). The family program was designed to be delivered in five weekly two-hour sessions. Bay County modified the program by hosting a single longer family session with donated dinner and door prizes. Additionally, since the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS) and local data indicated a need that universal prevention programs to be started earlier than middle school, Bay is using SDFS funding for a pilot LST program at selected elementary schools. Because of the need for active parental consent for the LST pre/post surveys, staff took considerable time to engage the parents before the start of the elementary program.

Evaluation: Results of the program evaluation will be available in July, 2003.

Lessons

Learned: Devote time and resources, before initiating content sessions, to explaining prevention programs and the need for them to parents. Be prepared to spend more time educating parents of elementary school students, who may be concerned with exposing children to sensitive topics too early. Parents who originally claimed their children didn’t need LST and wanted to block the program’s use at their child’s school ultimately ended up supporting the program as well as informing their fellow parents at their children’s little league games and other community events. Be open to modifying your program without sacrificing fidelity. CLFC was changed to a shorter, more concentrated format, making it more accessible to parents experiencing employment, time, and transportation barriers.

Contact: Anne Kirkpatrick, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Coordinator (kirkpat@mail.bay.k12.fl.us)

Source: Kirkpatrick, Anne. Personal communication, May 13, 2003.

“They become advocates instead of critical observers.”

—Lance Bowie, Principal of West High School in Anchorage, Alaska, describing the changes he has observed in parents who become a part of the school community.

Program of Note

Second Step Program (Escambia County)

Description: Escambia County uses the Second Step Violence Prevention curriculum in PreK through 8th grade. The program is in 12 elementary schools, as well as in the district's 13 middle schools. The program, deemed "exemplary" by the U.S. Department of Education, focuses on developing social skills such as empathy, anger management, and problem solving through role playing, adoption of appropriate vocabulary for conflict situations, and teacher training. The program includes a Family Guide, produced by the Committee for Children (www.cfchildren.org), which includes six Facilitator-Led Family Sessions and, a Family Overview Video. The Family Guide aims to offer school personnel a systematic way of including families early on in their efforts at social-emotional training and the prevention of aggression.

Evaluation: Escambia is still evaluating the Second Step program. However, decreases in discipline referrals are common among participants.

Lessons Learned: The program teaches exemplary behaviors in managing conflict, and when children model these behaviors at home, the home environment is changed too. Violence prevention is an appropriate topic for Pre-K students.

Contact: Vickie Mathis, Teacher on Special Assignment in the Department of Alternative Education (Vmathis@escambia.k12.fl.us)

Source: Mathis, Vickie, Personal Communication, May 13, 2003.

Websites for PI Resources:

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education — <http://www.ncpie.org>
National Network of Partnership Schools — <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/default.htm>
Institute for Responsive Education — <http://www.responsiveeducation.org>



Program of Note

Project B.L.A.S.T. (Broward County)

Description: Project B.L.A.S.T. (Building Lasting Attitudes and Strategies for Tomorrow) serves students in 17 Broward County Alternative to External Suspension sites. The program, which includes a mandatory family therapy component, is aimed at preventing and treating student behavior problems, especially behaviors involving substance abuse or violence. Typically, 8 to 12 family therapy sessions are held. One focus of the staff therapists involves teaching parents to control their anger and be role models for their children. Additional focuses include effective communication, conflict resolution, respect and responsibility, and decision making. Administrators utilize the B.L.A.S.T. program as a tool in reducing the number of student out-of-school suspensions.

Evaluation: Nationally, studies of Brief Strategic Family Therapy, the foundation of the B.L.A.S.T. program, indicate:

- 42% improvement in conduct problems,
- A 75% reduction in marijuana use,
- A 58% reduction in association with antisocial peers,

Reductions in substance abuse, and
Improvements in family functioning

Lessons

Learned: Programs must allot enough time to establish rapport with the families (Project B.L.A.S.T. staff recommend at least eight sessions).
Parent participation is critical, if only for some of the sessions.
Make sure you have a strong follow-up component.

Contact: Patricia English or Amalio Nieves
Nieves_amalio@bcpsgw.broward.k12.fl.us

Source: Nieves, Amalio. Personal Communication, May 13, 2003.

“I came with fear and left with hope.”

“We were able to come together as a family and focus on our child’s problem and found that the problem was not just his problem, but all of our problem.”

—Comments from
B.L.A.S.T. participants

More Websites for PI Resources:

FL Partnership for Family Involvement in Education: <http://www.fndfl.org/partnership>
Pathways to School Improvement: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pa0cont.htm>
FL DOE Office of Family & Community Outreach: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/family/>



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ENDNOTES

The members of the SDDFS staff, as well as the staff of the Safe Schools Office at the Department of Education, stand ready to provide support through training and technical assistance to schools and school districts. Please encourage educators to take advantage of our services. For additional information on these resources or to find out how to access these resources, please contact Patricia Elton at (850) 414-0236 (SunCom 994-0236) or by email at elton_p@popmail.firn.edu.

Florida Safe and Drug-Free Schools Project

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Website: www.unf.edu/dept/fie/sdfs

The Department of Education, through the Bureau of School Safety and School Support, funds the Florida Institute of Education's (FIE's) Safe and Drug-Free Schools Project. FIE is an institute of the University of North Florida. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools Project offers technical assistance and support in the development and implementation of drug use and violence prevention strategies. For more information, contact the FIE/SDFS Project.
