Chapter 6. *Home Involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement in Schooling*

> *Research findings accumulated over ... decades ... show that ... parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievement, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account.*
>
> <div align="right">Joyce Epstein</div>

> *The strongest predictors that a student is likely to drop out are family characteristics such as: socioeconomic status, family structure, family stress (e.g., death, divorce, family moves), and the mother's age. Students who come from low-income families, are the children of single, young, unemployed mothers, or who have experienced high degrees of family stress are more likely than other students to drop out of school. Of those characteristics, low socioeconomic status has been shown to bear the strongest relationship to students' tendency to drop out.*
>
> <div align="right">National Education Association</div>

Research findings over the past 30 plus years consistently indicate the value of home support for schooling. Moreover, with respect to students who are not doing well at school, efforts to enhance home involvement are a basic element of the overall approach to addressing factors interfering with school learning and performance.

Despite the long-standing call by policy makers and researchers for schools to enhance parent involvement, the challenges in doing so have confounded many schools. Our analyses indicate that this will continue to be the case as long as the focus fails to account for the variety of individuals providing "parenting" and until "involvement" is designed as a mutually beneficial, equitable, and engaging process.

Instead of just focusing on *parent* involvement think about students being raised primarily by grandparents, aunts, older siblings, "nannies," and in foster homes. Primary child caretakers differ. That is why we stress the term *home* involvement.

Other home involvement complications stem from factors such as caretaker economic status, work schedules, immigrant status, ethnic and racial considerations, single parent families, number of youngsters in the home, homes where English is not spoken, extended families, military families, families where a parent is in prison, foster homes, and homeless families and youngsters. In addition, some caretakers have disabilities, and some are dysfunctional.

Home situations also differ in caretaker attitudes about school. Such attitudes often reflect personal past experiences as well as current encounters and how well their youngsters are doing at school. (Remember, some have more than one youngster who is not doing well.) Involving reluctant primary caretakers is difficult and often handled at school as a low priority.

In general, as with students, parents and other caretakers vary in their personal motivation and ability to participate. And as with many students who are not doing well at school, (re)establishing productive *working* relationships with some caretakers involves addressing individual psychosocial and educational barriers and doing so in a personalized way.

The various c omplications that must be addressed in enhancing home involvement can be categorized as institutional, impersonal, and personal barriers (see Exhibit 6.1).

Exhibit 6.1

General Types and Forms of Barriers to Home Involvement

Forms of Barriers

		Negative Attitudes	Lack of Mechanisms/Skills	Practical Deterrents
		Examples	Examples	Examples
Types of Barriers	Institutional	School administration is hostile toward increasing home involvement	Insufficient staff assigned to planning and implementing ways to enhance involvement; no more than a token effort to accommodate different languages	Low priority given to home involvement in allocating resources such as space, time, and money
	Impersonal	Home involvement suffers from benign neglect	Rapid influx of immigrant families overwhelms school's ability to communicate and provide relevant home involvement activities	Schools lack resources; majority in home have problems related to work schedules, childcare, transportation
	Personal	Specific teachers and parents feel home involvement is not worth the effort or feel threatened by such involvement	Specific teachers and parents lack relevant languages and interpersonal skills	Specific teachers and parents are too busy or lack resources

Increasing attention has been given to reducing institutional and impersonal barriers. However, as with so many endeavors to address barriers to learning and teaching, home involvement policies and practice are not well-developed.

From the perspective of transforming student and learning supports, interventions to engage and re-engage those in the home who seem uninterested or resistant raise all the issues and problems associated with intervening with reluctant individuals in general. For such parents and other home caretakers, extraordinary outreach strategies and a full continuum of supports probably are required to enable effective home involvement in schooling. The current imperative in this arena is to

- broaden the focus beyond thinking only in terms of parents

- enhance the range of ways in which schools address factors that interfere with (re)engaging primary caretakers (with particular attention to outreaching to those who have a youngster who is not doing well and those who are reluctant to engage)

- transform current policy and practice to fully encompass home involvement and engagement into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

Over the years, the agenda for home involvement in schooling has reflected multiple aims and contrasting but not necessarily mutually exclusive rationales. For example, parents may be viewed as consumers, citizens, or both. A t the root of the matter are debates about the role of schools as political and socialization agents, as a marketplace, and as a source of helping, especially for those with specific needs.

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Underlying Rationales for Involving the Home

In general, underlying rationales shaping home involvement interventions can be contrasted as pursuing *political, socialization, economic,* and/or *helping agenda.* A *political* agenda focuses on the role the home plays in making decisions about schools and schooling and on the degree to which that agenda only is personal or also is socially responsible. Examples of venues for political participation include advisory and shared governance committees, lobbying politicians, and supporting school bond measures.

A *socialization* agenda is seen in many of the messages sent home and in the widespread emphasis on school-based parent training. The intent is to influence parent-caretaker practices and attitudes in ways that facilitate what goes on at school.

An *economic* agenda is seen in views of the school as a marketplace choice and parents as consumers, in conflicts related to privatization of facets of public education, and in the ways the home is used as a supplementary resource to compensate for budget limitations.

A *helping* agenda is reflected in interventions designed to aid students and their families to address barriers to learning and teaching. This can include facilitating family access to health and social services at the school and referral to community services.

From a special education perspective, Dunst and colleagues (1991) offer an example of conflicting agenda for home involvement. They differentiate family intervention policies and practices in terms of the degree to which they are (1) family-centered, (2) family-focused, (3) family-allied, or (4) professional-centered. Their view is that, in contrast to professional-centered approaches, a family-oriented agenda is much more committed to

- enhancing a sense of community (i.e., "promoting the coming together of people around shared values and common needs in ways that create mutually beneficial interdependencies")

- mobilizing resources and supports (i.e., "building support systems that enhance the flow of resources in ways that assist families with parenting responsibilities")

- sharing responsibility and collaboration (i.e., "sharing ideas and skills by parents and professionals in ways that build and strengthen collaborative arrangements")

- protecting family integrity (i.e., "respecting the family beliefs and values and protecting the family from intrusion upon its beliefs by outsiders")

- strengthening family functioning (i.e., "promoting the capabilities and competencies of families necessary to mobilize resources and perform parenting responsibilities in ways that have empowering consequences")

- ensuring proactive services (i.e., "adoption of consumer-driven human service-delivery models and practices that support and strengthen family functioning").

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Early Frameworks

As stressed, the prevailing focus has been on *parents* (usually mothers). Thus, early frameworks were built around connecting with parents. For example, many years ago Joyce Epstein (l988) described five types of parent-school involvements. As categorized by Epstein, the focus is on:

(1) *basic obligations of parents to children and school* (e.g., providing food, clothing, shelter; assuring health and safety; providing child rearing and home training; providing school supplies and a place for doing school work; building positive home conditions for learning),

(2) *basic obligations of school to children and family* (e.g., using a variety of communication methods to inform parents about school schedules, events, policies and about children's grades, test scores, daily performance; treating children justly and effectively -- including accounting for differences),

(3) *parent involvement at school* (e.g., assisting teachers and students with lessons, class trips; assisting administrators, teachers, and staff in cafeteria, library, computer labs; assisting organized parent groups in fund-raising, community relations, political awareness, program development; attending student assemblies, sports events; attending workshops, discussion groups, training sessions),

(4) *parent involvement in student learning at home* (e.g., contributing to development of child's social and personal skills, basic academic skills, and advanced skills by aiding with schoolwork, providing enrichment opportunities, and monitoring progress and problems),

(5) *parent involvement in governance and advocacy* (e.g., participating in decision making groups; advocating for improved schooling).

Jackson and Cooper (l989) added a sixth and seventh category to Epstein's work. The sixth, *parent decision making*, stresses parents as consumers in the marketplace of available educational choices (e.g., making the best feasible arrangements to ensure their child's success). Their seventh category, *parent community networks,* covers involvements related to using "the unique culture of the local parent community to help all parties concerned." Included in this category are schools as places for parents to congregate and solve problems, activities that improve parents' skills, schooling that builds on parents' cultural traditions, and networking relevant to parents' agenda.

Reframing Parent Involvement

Building on the early work, as noted, we place greater emphasis on the full range of those influencing the student's life at home and on addressing barriers to engagement. In doing so, we present the agenda for involvement as a continuum of potential interventions that reflect the differences in primary caretakers needs and interests and the needs of the school (see Exhibit 6.2).

At one end of the continuum, the focus is on helping those in the home address their own basic needs so that they are able to meet basic obligations to their children. At the other end, the emphasis is on increasing home involvement in improving what goes on at schools and supporting public education. In between, there are interventions to enhance communication between school and home (especially with reference to matters related to the student), participation in making essential decisions about the student, support at home related to the student's *basic* learning and development, and involvement in solving problems and providing support at home and at school with respect to a student's *special* needs.

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Exhibit 6.2
    Framing a Continuum of Interventions for Home Involvement

Addressing the Needs   *Involving those*
of Primary Student   →   *at Home in*
Caretakers   *Addressing*
(e.g., parents,   *the Needs*
other relatives,   *of the School*
foster parents)

Enhancing the learning and support needs of adults in the home	Helping those in the home improve how basic student obligations are met	Improving basic communications with the home	Engaging participation by those in the home to help with student learning and in problem solving and making decisions	Recruiting those at home to collaborate in strengthening school and community

While not strictly a hierarchy of needs, it is evident that when those in the home need significant help in meeting their personal basic needs and obligations, they probably will not be highly motivated to engage in addressing the school's needs.

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Here are some overlapping examples related to each of these agenda items:

(a) addressing the specific learning and support needs of adults in the home (e.g., support services to assist in addressing basic survival needs and obligations to the children; adult education classes to enhance literacy, job skills, English-as-a-second language, citizenship preparation; enrichment and recreational opportunities; mutual support groups)

(b) helping those in the home improve how basic student obligations are met (e.g., enhancing caretaker literacy skills; providing guidance related to parenting and how to help with schoolwork; teaching family members how to support and enrich student learning)

(c) improving forms of basic communication that promote the well-being of student, family, and school (e.g., facilitating home-school connections and sense of community through family networking and mutual support; facilitating child care and transportation to reduce barriers to coming to school; language translation; phone calls and/or e-mail from teacher and other staff with good news; frequent and balanced conferences – student-led when feasible; outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families – including student dropouts)

(d) enhancing home support for student learning and development and for problem solving and decision making essential to a student's well-being (e.g., preparing and engaging families for participation in supporting growth and in planning and problem-solving)

(e) recruiting those at home to support, collaborate, and partner in strengthening school and community by meeting classroom, school, and community needs (e.g., volunteering to welcome and support new families; participating in school governance)

Whatever the agenda, as with students, all interventions related to home involvement and engagement must address differences in motivation and capability. In particular, outreach strategies must account for differences ranging from individuals who are motivationally ready and able to those whose attitudes and/or capabilities make them reluctant and even avoidant.

As with all student and learning supports, the work is strengthened when there is broad involvement of stakeholders in planning and being responsible for effective implementation. Garnering a wide range of stakeholder involvement provides a large pool from which to recruit resources for the work. In this respect, some schools establish a *parent or family center* to enhance the attractiveness of home involvement. In doing so, care must be taken to ensure no one group dominates use so that such venues remain inviting and open to all.

> *Reminder:* The other five arenas of the learning supports component overlap home involvement and engagement in a variety of ways. For example: Supports for transitions emphasizes providing welcoming and ongoing social supports for newcomer families. Student and family special assistance is concerned with addressing individual family factors that interfere with family involvement. Community engagement strategies include a focus on ways for the community to increasingly support students and their families.

WHAT ARE PRIORITIES IN ENHANCING HOME INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT?

Multi-year strategic development requires gap analyses and priority setting. This chapter and the self-study survey in Appendix D are intended as aids for this work. After conducting analyses, a workgroup can establish priorities for strengthening the most vital interventions and filling the most critical gaps. The first priorities are to enhance school improvement policy, planning, and action so that barriers to home involvement are reduced, and supports are enhanced in ways that increase engaged involvement.

Enhancing Policy, Planning, and Action to Minimize Barriers to Involvement

Countering barriers to home involvement and engagement begins with ensuring a strong policy commitment to the work. Then, the focus turns to translating the policy into detailed strategic and action plans. This includes general and personalized staff development to ensure that all personnel (administrators, teachers, student and school support staff) understand the various barriers to home involvement and are well-prepared to assume their roles and responsibilities in addressing them. In personalizing staff development, special support is given to teachers who feel enhancing home involvement is too much of an added burden and those who feel threatened (e.g., because they think they can't make the necessary interpersonal connections due to racial, cultural, and/or language differences).

In general, the following are potential priorities for minimizing

- *institutional barriers* – modifying bureaucratic procedures to reduce negative and enhance positive home-school interactions; enhancing the attractiveness of involvement by opening schools for community use and offering a range of adult education and literacy opportunities on school sites

- *impersonal barriers* – countering practical problems related to work schedules, transportation, childcare, cultural differences, and levels of literacy; providing interactive communications and invitations; using social marketing to convey the mutual benefits of home involvement

- *personal barriers* – identifying and outreaching to specific school personnel or family members who may lack requisite motivation and skills or who find participation uncomfortable because it demands time and other resources or who have little interest or feel hostile about home involvement.

Improving Supports in Ways that Increase Involvement

Given the full continuum outlined in Exhibit 6.2, gap analyses usually identify priorities for ways to improve supports related to each need. Examples follow:

- To enhance the learning and support needs of adults in the home, schools have offered
  >adult classes (e.g., focused on basic literacy and vocational skills,
    English as a Second Language, citizenship preparation)
  >mutual support groups
  >assistance in accessing outside help for personal needs.

- To help those in the home improve how basic student obligations are met, schools have offered a range of education programs (e.g., focused on child-rearing/parenting, creating a supportive home environment for students, reducing factors that interfere with a student's school learning and performance, helping a student deal with challenges at home and school and in the neighborhood).

- In improving basic communications with the home, schools have included family members and foster care parents in designing and implementing the schools communication mechanisms (e.g., helping to improve front office interactions, newsletters, websites, email messages and other forms of messages to the home).

- To engage those in the home in participating in problem solving and making decisions essential to the student's well-being, schools have designed all interactions with those at home as natural opportunities for focusing on such matters.

- To recruit those at home to collaborate in strengthening school and community, schools have offered a variety of volunteer opportunities (see Exhibit 6.3).

Exhibit 6.3
Parent Participation at Pali High

PARENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM (http://www.palihigh.org/volunteeropps.aspx)

Parent Outreach/Office Assistance

Attendance Office, Health Office, Library,
College Center, Study Center,
School Tours, Tutoring,
Language Translation.
Test Prep SAT/ACT Boot Camps

Fundraising

Educational Foundation,
Booster Club -
Fall Phon-A-Thon, Holiday Boutique,
Casino Night, Silent Auction, Grant Writing,
Grant Writing (Community Based)

Parent Organizations

Booster Club, Education Foundation,
PTSA/PAC

On Campus

Fuerza Unida (Latino Student Union),
Village Nation (Black Student Union),
Music, Drama

School Governance

Board of Trustees Committees:
Communications, Educational Programs,
Finance & Budget, Operations & Facilities &
Technology, Policy, Strategic Planning (Academic,
Budget, Culture & Community, Facilities, Technology)

Hospitality

Baking/Cooking/Shopping, Graduation Reception,
Senior Activities (Picnic, Breakfast, Awards),
Student Events & Assemblies,
Teacher & Staff Lunch/Dinners

Communication / Technology

Website Maintenance/Design,
 Email Communications: Writing or Editing
 Social Media Networking/Tech Support

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Campus Beautification/Recycling/Gardening,
Health and Safety/Emergency Preparedness,
Field Trip Chaperone/Transportation, Athletic Events,
Educational Programs/Presentations

A Few Comments About Enhancing
Understanding of Engagement and Re-engagement

> *A typical situation:* Someone at home is called to school because their youngster is misbehaving or is not learning well. The resulting encounter is unpleasant for family members and school staff. The dynamics certainly don't encourage positive engagement of the home with the school; more often than not they are a source of a growing disconnection.

Understanding the problem of increasing home involvement as that of *engaging* and, as necessary, *re-engaging* individuals helps rethink such encounters and makes engagement and re-engagement central in designing interventions to enhance home involvement.

Engagement reflects a person's motivation. Engagement has three facets: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. From the perspective of intrinsic motivation theory and research, the emphasis in enhancing engagement is on (a) avoiding processes that mainly make people feel uncomfortable, controlled, and coerced and (b) moving away from practices that overrely on the use of reinforcers.

In general, research indicates that engagement is associated with positive outcomes and is higher when conditions are supportive, authentic, ensure opportunities for choice and provide sufficient structure. Conversely, disengagement is associated with threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and/or relatedness to valued others. Practices for preventing disengagement require minimizing conditions that negatively affect intrinsic motivation for school involvement and maximizing conditions that enhance such motivation. Maintaining engagement and re-engaging disconnected individuals also requires minimizing conditions that negatively affect intrinsic motivation and maximizing conditions have a positive motivational effect.

Re-engaging those who have disconnected is a great challenge, especially when negative experiences in dealing with the school have resulted in a strong desire to avoid contact.

Reversing well-assimilated negative attitudes and behaviors is particularly difficult. As with disconnected students, personalized intervention strategies are required. Our work suggests outreaching to

  (a) *ask individuals to share their perceptions of the reasons for their disengagement* (This provides an invaluable basis for formulating a personalized plan to alter their negative perceptions and to prevent others from developing such perceptions.)

  (b) *reframe the reasons for and the processes related to home involvement to establish a good fit with the family's needs and interests* (The intent is to shift perceptions so that the process is viewed as supportive, not controlling, and the outcomes are perceived as personally valuable and obtainable.)

  (c) *renegotiate involvement* (The intent is to arrive at a mutual agreement that includes a detailed process for reevaluating and modifying the agreement as necessary.)

  (d) *reestablish and maintain an appropriate working relationship* (This requires the type of ongoing interactions that over a period of time enhance mutual understanding, provide mutual support, open-up communication, and engender mutual trust and respect.)

CONCLUDING COMMENTS FOR CHAPTER 6

Difficulties in connecting homes and schools are inevitable because schools increasingly are coping with marketplace principles, as well as pursuing their responsibilities to the society for economic, social, and political goals and for stakeholder collective and individual benefits. The situation is further compicated because those at home have different needs and are both consumers and citizens. As such, they include supporters, helpers, combatants, and underminers.

Policy may call for and mandate "parent" involvement, but that has been no guarantee of effective practice. The lack of home involvement is especially acute in middle and secondary schools, schools serving low income homes, and for families who feel blamed when their child is not doing well at school.

Enhancing home involvement requires greater attention to the full range of caretakers and embedding this intervention arena into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to productive participation. Interventions include school-wide and classroom-based efforts designed to strengthen the home situation, enhance family problem solving capabilities, increase support for student development, learning, and well-being, and strengthen schools and the community. With all this in mind, transformation of student and learning supports stresses establishing authentic collaborations, countering inherent inequities in power and resources, and empowering homes and communities, especially in impoverished neighborhoods. Toward these ends, the next chapter outlines ways to outreach to and enhance connections with a wide range of community resources.

> *At this point, those already enmeshed in initiatives to make schools better are probably a bit overwhelmed. If so, skip ahead to Part III for clarification about how current resources can be reorganized and redeployed and collaborations with the community can help fill critical gaps.*

Your mom said that she never saw this report I sent her about your work. What do you know about that?

Gee, I guess the dog has been eating more than my homework.
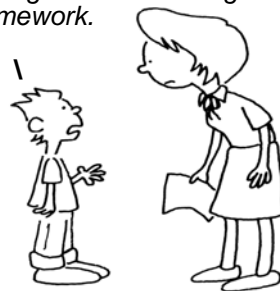
For Free and Easily Accessed Online Resources Related to
Home Involvement and Engagement

See our Center's Quick Find on
Home Involvement in Schooling
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/homeinv_tt/homeinvolvfull.pdf

Also see related topics listed on the Quick Find menu
>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm

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