

Parent Involvement: Nine Truths You Must Know Now

John H. Wherry, Ed.D., President
The Parent Institute®



This Parent Involvement: Nine Truths You Must Know Now Special Report was prepared by John H. Wherry, Ed.D., President, The Parent Institute®, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039.

Phone: 1-800-756-5525.

John H. Wherry email: jhw@parent-institute.com.

Website: www.parent-institute.com.

Photo Credits:

iStockphoto—cover (center), pages 3, 9 (left and center), 13, 16 (left and right)

Getty Images—cover (left and right), pages 6, 9 (right), 16 (center)

The Parent Institute®, "Education's #1 Source for Family Involvement Information," publishes a wide range of parent involvement materials for schools all available in both English and Spanish, all in print as well as electronic formats ready to distribute to parents—including newsletters, booklets, pamphlets and videos as well as the School Success Web Content Service® providing daily-updated parent involvement information to parents through schools' own websites. For details, visit The Parent Institute® website at www.parent-institute.com.

Copyright © 2010 The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc.

Parent Involvement: Nine Truths You Must Know Now

Right now, when getting a good education has never been more important—and when school resources are stretched as thin as most of us can ever remember—it is essential to make sure that parents are fully engaged in the education of their children, both at home and at school.

There is no question that parent and family involvement has a profound influence on children's school success, yet school improvement and reform efforts to date have focused almost entirely on what happens in school buildings and on what school staff can do.

It is time to get serious about enlisting parents in the education of their children and putting their research-proven potential to work as a team with your staff to improve learning and student achievement.

This report summarizes the best of what we at The Parent Institute have learned about effective parent involvement in the past 20 years. It is packed with practical, proven ideas that you can implement right away with virtually no impact on your budget.

These are the truths you need to know now!



John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
President
The Parent Institute®

1. Parent involvement is all about the children.
2. Parent involvement boosts student achievement.
3. Communication with parents must be carefully planned and two-way.
4. It is important to treat parents as partners instead of as clients.
5. Parent trust in your school is required for student achievement.
6. Parent involvement barriers are real—and must be addressed.
7. School staff makes all the difference in parent involvement.
8. It is important to make sure you don't have a parent involvement disconnect.
9. It is important to know why parents say they are not more involved.

Truth #1: Parent involvement is all about the children.

It's important to be clear about the purpose of parent involvement. Parent involvement is **not** about:

- » Keeping parents happy or out of your hair.
- » Tapping parent expertise.
- » Getting volunteer help—or field trip chaperones.
- » Getting votes for a school bond election.
- » Fundraising.
- » Building personal support for your leadership.

It is all about making sure that children get the best education possible. Dr. Joyce Epstein at the Johns Hopkins University Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships makes the point very well when she says:

“The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children’s families.

If educators view children simply as **students**, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools.

If educators view students as **children**, they are likely to see both the family and the community as **partners with the school** in children’s education and development.”

Our schools alone cannot provide the complete education children must have.

Parent involvement is all about the children and making sure they receive the kind of education they deserve and must have.

Truth #2: The evidence that parent involvement can make a significant difference in student achievement is beyond question.

If we can point to anything in education that is “research based” it is that parent involvement boosts student achievement! Studies include:

- **The landmark Coleman Report** (1966). It documented the impact of both families and schools on educational achievement and found that the impact of families was overwhelmingly more important than that of schools in explaining differences in school achievement. Coleman’s findings have been replicated again and again over the years in the U.S. and around the world.

- **The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study** on the differences between the highest- and lowest-achieving schools in mathematics and science in 39 countries.

In the U.S., 64 percent of the differences in achievement from one school to another were attributable to “home” variables including “parental support for academic achievement” and “socioeconomic status.”

Similar results were found in all 39 countries.

- **Research that finds** that while socioeconomic status is important, the best predictors of student achievement are:
 - » A home environment that encourages learning.
 - » Parents’ high expectations for achievement and future careers.
 - » Parents being involved in a child’s education.



- **The landmark Westat study** (2001). It found that in schools where teachers reported high levels of “outreach” to the parents of low achieving students, reading and math test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

Only one other factor was as consistently linked to student achievement gains—professional development programs that were highly rated by teachers.

So, what were the magic ingredients that the Westat study called “outreach” to parents? It was defined simply as teachers:

- » Meeting face to face with parents.
- » Sending materials home to parents on ways to help their child at home.
- » Telephoning parents, both routinely and when their child was having problems.

Parent involvement research goes on to say that:

- **When fathers are involved**, children do better in school.
- **Student success is related to parent expectations** and forcefulness in educational goal-setting. And much, much more.

The research findings on the critical role of parent involvement in no way diminish the importance of schools, great principals and teachers, or a rigorous curriculum. Of course those things are necessary—but they are not sufficient!

Let’s think of it using a health care analogy:

We would never accept a health care system where doctors and hospitals are expected to take total responsibility for a patient’s health—and be solely accountable for it no matter what the patient does or doesn’t do himself!

What the patient does to take care of himself at home is critical. And if the patient is a child, doctors (and society) expect parents to protect and maintain the child’s health through proper hygiene, exercise, food, clothing and shelter—and by carrying out the doctor’s treatment plans.

In education, research shows that the same kind of shared responsibility must also apply to educators, parents and students.

Truth #3: Communication with parents must be carefully planned and two-way.

As important as newsletters, memos, booklets, pamphlets and your school website are in providing information to parents (and they do help), you have not “communicated” with parents unless you get some feedback.

You have to know the people you are talking to and find ways to connect with them.

It’s especially important to know today’s parents since the majority of them now belong to what we call Generation X.

Consider what school communication experts Meg Carnes and Kitty Porterfield point out about today’s parents.

Things you need to know about Generation Xers:

- They have grown up hearing about “failing schools.”
- Excerpts from *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983:
- “... the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”
- “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.”
- They’re skeptical problem solvers who thrive on collaboration.
 - They’re more family-oriented.
 - They don’t trust institutions to automatically do what’s right; they don’t trust that their children are always safe at school.
 - They expect to communicate instantly with you and your teachers.
 - They expect you to have a first-class website with information on ways they can help their children succeed in school.
 - They expect to hear about school problems immediately—along with what is being done about them.
 - They value their time very highly and don’t want it to be wasted with school activities that don’t directly help them or their child.

Two-Way Communication includes outgoing and incoming communications

1. Outgoing communication ideas:

Here are some things I have found by watching people read almost anything other than a text-book—a newsletter, flyer, magazine, catalog, instruction manual, their email or regular mail:

- **Virtually everyone** gives each piece of written material a one- or two-second “triage” scan, quickly trashing it if they’re not interested.

Of those interested enough to start reading immediately ...

- **Almost 80 percent** will spend less than 30 seconds “reading” it.
- **Around 20 percent** will spend up to three minutes carefully reading some short articles.
- **Less than one percent** will spend up to 30 minutes reading an entire long publication.

The question is: Can you get your critical points across in the less than 30 seconds most parents will likely spend reading your publication? Try these ideas to help you beat the clock:

- **Write strong, attention-getting headlines.** In both print and online, the reader’s eye goes first to the headline (or subject line on email) and then, if he is still interested, on to the text of the message. The headline is your best, and sometimes only, chance to deliver your message.
- **Add an illustration or photo** that clarifies or emphasizes your message.
- **Include a related sidebar box** near your main article containing a related point or example, a fact box, checklist, a short Q&A or a timeline.

Use these tips to boost readership:

- **Limit a newsletter to one sheet of paper.** Front and back is okay, as is using a single sheet that is folded. Even an 11" x 17" sheet folded to make four pages can work. The key is the single sheet of paper.
- **Keep articles short:** 75-150 words, 250 max.
- **Use simple, plain language**—fourth to sixth grade reading level. Use the readability utility built into most word processing programs. Short words, short sentences and short paragraphs are easier for everyone to read.
- **Use an attractive newsletter nameplate** to reflect the professionalism of your school.
- **Use the “Dollar Bill” test** to make sure every page is attractive and inviting. A dollar bill placed completely on the page and moved around at any angle, in any direction, should touch some graphic element that adds visual interest to the page, such as:
 - » Bullets.
 - » Boldfaced type.
 - » Headlines or subheads.
 - » A picture or drawing.
 - » A background screen.
 - » Rule lines.
- **Standardize one design** and stick with it. Two or three narrow columns are often easier to read than a single wide one.

Grab parents by the headlines:

- **Keep your headline short and simple**—six to 10 words.
- **Be sure the headline summarizes the article** and teases the reader into reading more.
- **Include a powerful verb:** “Bully Stopping Secrets Revealed” is better than “Workshop on Bullies Planned.”
- **Use both a subject and a verb.** If there’s no verb it’s a label, not a headline.
- **Try asking a question or using a number** in the headline: “Do You Know the Six Ways to Stop a Bully?”
- **Make the benefits of reading the article** clear in the headline.
- **Use bigger, bolder type** for headlines.

2. Incoming Communication ideas (feedback):

Surveys work like magic to improve parent involvement:

- **If you ask people what they think**, they will tell you.
- **If you pay attention to what they say**, you will succeed.
- **If you think you already know what they think**, you may be surprised.

Consider free online survey utilities like *SurveyMonkey.com*. Here are ready to use mini-survey questions that always work:

1. What did you like best about what we did today?
2. How could we have improved it?
3. Other comments?



Truth #4:

It is important to treat parents as partners instead of as clients.

Anne Bouie, a parent involvement expert with decades of experience working with parents and schools in disadvantaged areas points out that, despite the problems parents may have, they still know their children better than anyone else and can be vitally important school partners if they are allowed to be.

In her recent book, *After School Success: Academic Enrichment Strategies With Urban Youth*, Anne details her work with underachieving urban youth and their families at Project Interface, a math and science enrichment program, where she developed a unique approach to raising achievement. Bouie argues that, rather than identifying deficits and dysfunctions in the family, a more effective method would focus on strengths and build on the inherent resilience of the community.

“The answer,” Anne explains, “is to stop treating parents like ‘clients’ and start treating them like partners in the task of helping children learn.”

When we view parents as **clients**, we expect them to respect us, listen carefully to us, answer the questions we ask them, respect our expertise and follow our advice.

When we see parents as **partners**, we listen to each other, share ideas and respect each other's unique experience and expertise; we develop plans together and stay in touch as we carry them out. Partners do not diminish themselves by working together. They reinforce one another and create synergy from their different strengths.

The simple attitude difference between “clients” and “partners” makes all the difference.

And the issue is not just with disadvantaged, poor and uneducated parents. Consider this quote from a mother:

“When my own two children became school-aged and I found myself participating in parent-teacher encounters, I—like most parents—felt the imprint of my early experiences as a child. Sitting in the tiny kindergarten chair, facing my daughter’s teacher, I was drawn back in time, immediately made to feel small, powerless, and infantilized.”

You’ll recognize that as a fairly common reaction. As the quote continues, keep in mind that the mother is Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, sociologist and distinguished professor of education at Harvard University.

The quote is from her book, *The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers Can Learn from Each Other*.

“What is fascinating about my experience ... is that my own hard-earned wisdom as an educator and social scientist ... did not prepare me for the depth of emotion and drama I felt in parent conferences. It did not prepare me for the subtle institutional barriers that made me feel strangely unwelcome in my children’s school—as if I were trespassing on foreign ground—even when the stated policies promoted welcome and openness. It did not prepare me for the terror I experienced anticipating my meetings with teachers, the uncertainty and awkwardness that kept me off balance during the conference, and the inevitable inadequacy and guilt I felt afterward as I reflected on and rehearsed what I had heard and said.”

— Pages xvii to xviii

Partners or Clients?

Despite the way parents sometimes appear on the surface, the huge majority love their children, want the very best education for them and are worthy partners to work with educators. Listen to what NAESP President-Elect, Diane Cargile, principal of Rio Grande Elementary School, in Terre Haute, Indiana, recently said, responding to a national Parent Institute survey about today’s high levels of parent diversity:

“The more diversity there is, the less difference we find among people and families. Most parents want their children to have a great education AND they are doing the best they know how to obtain it.”

In a study at Johns Hopkins University, **over 90%** of parents surveyed agreed that parental involvement is important. But **80%** of those parents said they needed more information about how to help their children at home. (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University, summarized.)

Finally, on this point about parents as partners rather than clients, remember that considering all the learning, waking hours children have from the time they are born until they graduate from H.S., they spend only **about 15% of that learning time at school** and the rest somewhere else, primarily at home with their parents.

You can do the math and see what percentages you come up with. Here is the math I have used:

Calculating the Time Children Spend at Home vs. at School, From Birth to Age 18

- Assume children sleep 8 hrs/day.
- 24 hrs./day - 8 hrs. sleeping = 16 waking hrs./day.
- 365 days/yr. x 18 years = 6,570 days.
- 6,570 days x 16 waking hrs./day = 105,120 waking hrs. by age 18.
- Avg. 6 hrs. per day at school.
- Avg. 180 school days/yr.
- 180 school days/yr. x 6 hrs./school day = 1,080 hrs. per school year.
- 1,080 hrs./school year x 13 school years (1 yr. kdg. + 12 yrs. through H.S.) = 14,040 school hrs.
- 14,040 school hours / 105,120 waking hours = .13356 or ... Just 13.36% of waking hours by age 18 spent in school.

Truth #5:

Building parent trust in your school is a prerequisite for student achievement.

In their recent book, *Trust in Schools*, University of Chicago professors Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider argue that unless schools can develop and maintain trusting relationships among teachers, principals, parents and students, there is likely to be little increase in learning.

In their study they found that when school trust levels were high, so was student achievement. When trust was low, achievement suffered. The results are directly applicable to all schools.

Critical steps you can take:

- **Stress working with parents** to help children learn.
- **Ask teachers to contact parents regularly**—about what they are doing in class and how parents can help at home.
- **Show a personal interest** in families.
- **Show respect** for parent and student concerns
- **Set forth a compelling school vision** and back it up with action.
- **Start by promoting** friendly, cooperative employee relationships.
- **Hold social events to build relationships** within the school staff—and with parents.

Truth #6: Parent involvement barriers are real— and must be overcome school by school.

The existing NCLB Act (Section 1118, <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html#sec1118>) requires schools to focus on overcoming barriers to parent involvement.

Members of Congress and their legislative staff members working on the reauthorization of NCLB have asked The Parent Institute® to help them develop a list of the most common parent involvement barriers.

Here are highlights from the list we have provided lawmakers. We identified them in cooperation with the New Horizons Family Counseling Center (<http://education.wm.edu/centers/newhorizons>), School of Education, College of William and Mary.

Use this list, or work with your staff to create your own, as a starting point for developing strategies to overcome the barriers at your school. Barriers include:

- **Parents who believe they do not have the ability** to help their child do better in school.
- **Parents who do not feel that the school invites, welcomes, or encourages** their involvement. (See expanded list of barriers below.)
- **Schools that do not provide practical advice to parents** about what they can do to help children learn.
- **Schools that fail to alert parents** as soon as children begin to have problems.
- **Lack of true, two-way, respectful partnership communication** between parents and school personnel.
- **Parents who feel intimidated by** and don't trust the school.

The first step in overcoming barriers is to identify them. Once identified, the solutions are often simpler than we expect.



Expanded list of barriers to parent involvement

Following is compilation of parent involvement barriers recently identified by counselors working with parents, students and schools in the course of their work with students at risk of failure in school. The students and their families were referred to The New Horizons Family Counseling Center, of the School of Education at the College of William and Mary.

—Summarized by John H. Wherry, Ed. D., *The Parent Institute*.

Barriers to effective parent-school involvement

- **Parents** who come to school and interfere with school plans to work with the student.
- **Parents** who do not take responsibility for monitoring the child's schoolwork, medications, etc. at home.
- **Lack of understanding** by parents about how to work with the school, procedures, etc.
- **Parents' fears** that the school staff will not respect their privacy and that of their child, fears that sensitive and confidential information about their child will become known in the community.
- **Parents and others** with legal custodial rights who are treated rudely by school secretaries and other staff who do not understand about custodial parents.
- **Schools** that do not believe that parents will, or are even able, to follow through and do their part in agreed-upon plans to overcome children's school problems.
- **Parents** who do not know what to do to help their children succeed in school and/or do not believe they are capable of doing what needs to be done.
- **Parents** who do not understand their children's homework themselves and feel they cannot help their children.
- **Parents** who do not believe their child is capable of acting badly in school in spite of consistent reports from teachers to the contrary.
- **Parents' fear** of communicating, or their inability to communicate their concerns to school personnel.
- **The differences** in perceived power between parents and school personnel. Parents often feel they have very little power compared to the "expert power" held by the school.
- **Lack of true, two-way, partnership** communication between parents and school personnel. In many cases school staff talk and parents simply listen.
- **School personnel** who do not understand how to communicate with a student who has special needs. As one mother said, the school needs to "take the time to sit down with her to understand what works for Charlene and what doesn't."
- **Schools** who do not reach out to parents to seek parents' perspectives regarding their children and any problems they may be having. Parents, therefore, sometimes ask "advocates" to attend disciplinary meetings with them to provide their input regarding effective strategies to help the child.
- **Parents** who believe their school does not want to communicate with them and does not take the parents' role in their child's life seriously.
- **Schools** who do not respect parents and do not explain school policies to them until they are convinced the parent is being a consistent, positive force in the child's life.

As one mother said, the school needs to "take the time to sit down with her to understand what works for Charlene and what doesn't."

- **Teachers and counselors** who feel that their overwhelmingly busy schedules make it impossible for them to find the time needed to build strong family-school collaboration.
- **Families** who sometimes feel that teachers don't understand children and their problems.
- **Families** who sometimes do not trust the school staff enough to reveal the extent of their problems to them. Schools often interpret this as an unwillingness to "get involved."
- **Educators** who spend very little time talking to parents—even though they agree that parents are crucial to student success.
- **School personnel** who use professional jargon that parents cannot understand.
- **Problems** that develop when parents don't care about their child's school success. Trust, loyalty, and mutual support are key elements that underlie family relationships and hold families together.
- **Families and school staff** who often underestimate one another's commitment to and interest in working with a child to help him or her succeed in school. Both sides frequently form attitudes and take actions without having accurate (or sometimes any) information about each other.

Facilitators to effective parent-school involvement include:

- **Regular open communication** with teachers, counselors
- **Teachers** who are easy for parents and others working with parents to talk with.
- **Schools** that are sensitive to the family's needs.
- **Schools** with support groups to help students and families deal with common problems, i.e., the death of a loved one.
- **Mutual respect** of parent and school staff for one another.
- **Support groups** for parents, sponsored by the school or other agency.
- **Schools** who understand that most parents *do* think education is a priority.
- **Schools** that build parents' skills and help them communicate effectively with their child's school.
- **Trust, loyalty, and mutual support** are key elements that underlie family-school relationships and make it possible to work together.

A final note about the value of working with parents to help their children succeed:

Schools often see children's problems as rooted in their dysfunctional families. But New Horizons counselors say the process of helping children succeed in school aids families as well. Once a family can pull itself together to help a child do well in school, everything else seems to fall into place.

More on the importance of inviting, welcoming and encouraging parent involvement

Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler at Vanderbilt University published some of the most important research on parental involvement in the education of their children in 2005. The research resulted in the development of a revised parental involvement model that, as explained in the Executive Summary of the study, addresses three central questions:

1. **Why do parents become involved** in children’s education?
2. **What do they do when they’re involved** (i.e., what mechanisms of influence do they engage when they are involved)?
3. **How does their involvement**, once engaged, influence student outcomes?

The executive summary explains that parents’ decisions to become involved in children’s schooling are influenced by:

- a) **Their motivational beliefs** (role construction, sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school),
- b) **Their perceptions of invitations to involvement** from others (perceptions of general school invitations or school climate, specific invitations from the child, and specific invitations from the teacher), and
- c) **Their perceptions of personal life context issues** pertinent to involvement (perceived knowledge and skills for involvement, perceived time and energy for involvement).

– Pages. 8 , 20, *Final Performance Report for OERI Grant # R305T010673: The Social Context of Parental Involvement: A Path to Enhanced Achievement*. Vanderbilt University, Principal Investigators: Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler.

The following model of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process shows the results of the study in a chart format:

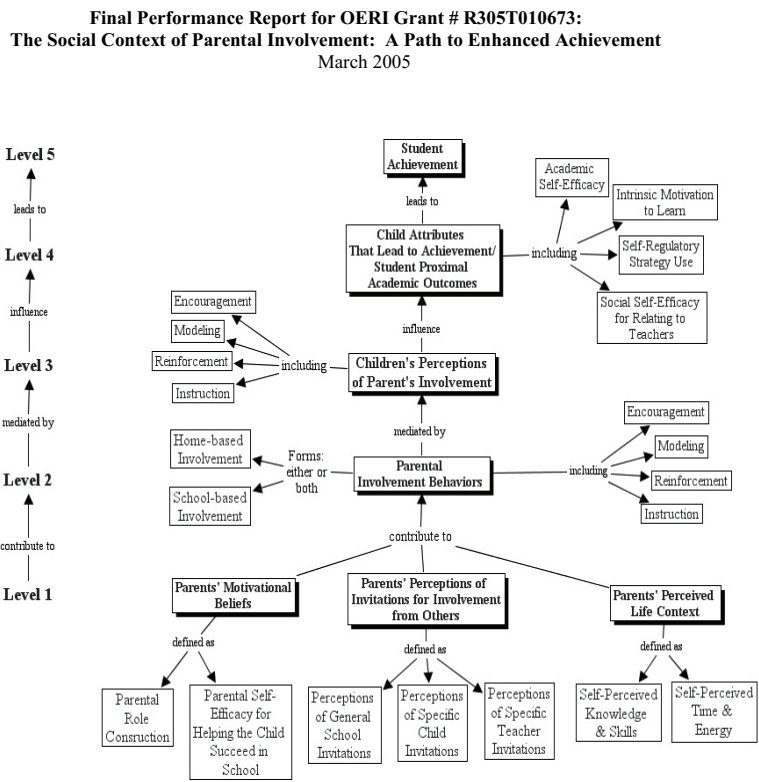


Figure 2: Revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parental involvement process. P. 74, *Final Performance Report for OERI Grant # R305T010673: The Social Context of Parental Involvement: A Path to Enhanced Achievement*. Vanderbilt University, Principal Investigators: Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey and Howard M. Sandler.

Truth #7

School staff makes all the difference in parent involvement.

The principal cannot build parent involvement alone! Your entire school staff is the primary force in developing the kinds of positive attitudes about your school necessary for working cooperatively with parents.

Your entire staff is the school in the eyes of parents and the community. Who do parents think of as “staff”? In repeated surveys they identified:

1. School secretary.
2. Custodian.
3. Food service person.
4. Bus driver.
5. Long-time teacher.
6. Other “old-timer” staff.
7. The principal.



Surprisingly, the principal is usually *dead last* on the list. Your staff—professional and support staff—are *critically important* public relations agents representing your school to parents and others in the community.

Just picture this scene on an imaginary first day of school with bus drivers ...

Transportation Director (*giving a pep talk*): “You are the best drivers; passed all the exams with flying colors. Buses passed all their safety inspections—they’re washed and waxed and every light works! This is going to be the best school year ever! So, now, go forth, get into your busses, pick up the kids and take them to school!”

Someone shouts: “But, you haven’t given us any routes!”

Transportation Director: “Oh, gee! We just don’t have time to do it now—just drive around until you see some kids and ask, ‘Where do you go to school?’—and pick ‘em up and take ‘em there!”

We would never a transportation system like that! But that’s all too often how we run our school public relations programs. We tell our staff, “You are our most important school representatives; so go forth into the community and PR ... in public!”

We would never *want* to run our parent involvement programs that way, but we do it!

Parent involvement depends on engaging every staff member in promoting effective parent involvement. *It’s your job as a principal to make sure that all of your staff “have the routes”—that they know what they need to do to encourage parent involvement to build school success.*

Truth #8: Make sure you don't have a parent involvement disconnect.

In several Parent Institute surveys we have asked both school leaders and parents the same question: **What do you feel are the most important things parents can do at home to help their children do better in school?**

Try this survey at your school:

Parent Involvement Survey: What can parents do at home?

Which of the following do you feel are the most important things parents can do at home to help their children do better in school?

Please circle your rating of EACH of the following options. A rating of "1" is very important; "5" is not important.

Very Important					Not Important	
1	2	3	4	5		Provide daily routines and a loving, stable home life for your child.
1	2	3	4	5		Set a good example by being honest, respectful and tolerant of others.
1	2	3	4	5		Give your child practice exercising responsibility.
1	2	3	4	5		Remember that you are the adult and YOU are in charge.
1	2	3	4	5		Provide alternative activities to computer games and TV.
1	2	3	4	5		Talk to your child and pay attention to what your child says to you.
1	2	3	4	5		Read to your child every day and have your child read to you.
1	2	3	4	5		Tell and show your child that you love him, every day.
1	2	3	4	5		Make sure that your child gets enough sleep each night.
1	2	3	4	5		Employ firm, fair and consistent discipline at home.
1	2	3	4	5		Teach your child a new word every day.
1	2	3	4	5		Remember that you are your child's first and most influential teacher.
1	2	3	4	5		Spend time paying attention to your child.
1	2	3	4	5		Show your child respect and expect her to respect others.
1	2	3	4	5		Try to eat at least one meal a day with the entire family.
1	2	3	4	5		Provide a quiet place for your child to do homework.
1	2	3	4	5		Don't overload your child with activities.
1	2	3	4	5		Make sure your child knows that you expect him to do his best.
1	2	3	4	5		Make sure your child is required to live with the consequences of his actions.
1	2	3	4	5		Talk with your child about his homework.
1	2	3	4	5		Talk about school every day and make sure your child knows you think school is important.
1	2	3	4	5		Help your child develop homework routines.
1	2	3	4	5		Give your child lots of stimulating experiences, show her things and explain them to her.
1	2	3	4	5		Teach your child to listen and follow directions.
1	2	3	4	5		Manage your child's TV time.
1	2	3	4	5		Other: (Please specify.)

Since it is vitally important that schools and the parents of their students have the same educational priorities, this simple survey can easily identify any significant parent involvement disconnects.

Here are highlights of the results from a recent national Parent Institute survey of school leaders and of parents. It's easy to spot the school-parent disconnects here:

Selected Survey Options:	Educators' Ranking	Parents' Ranking
Read to your child every day and have your child read to you.	1	15
Employ firm, fair and consistent discipline at home.	4	11
Talk about school every day and make sure your child knows you think it is important.	6	14
Make sure your child is required to live with the consequences of his or her actions.	9	17
Talk to your child and pay attention to what your child says to you.	10	1
Help your child develop homework routines.	13	2

What to do:

Give parents and staff identical surveys to see if your school has a parent involvement disconnect. Create your own response choices or the one provided here.

The latest version of the above survey and several others as well are included in *The Complete Toolkit on Parent Involvement*, published by The Parent Institute®. For more information, go to <http://www.parent-institute.com/educator/products/presentation-kits/toolkit.php>.

With your staff, choose three or four priorities each year from the survey list. Feature them in parent newsletters, memos, conferences, and meetings. Repeat them and repeat them—it's the only way to get your message across!

Truth #9: It is important to know why parents say they are not more involved.

Here's what parents often say:

1. **Don't have time.**
2. **Don't know what to do.**
3. **Don't realize it's important.**
4. **Don't speak English.**

More about why parents are not more involved from the New Horizons Family Counseling Center, School of Education, College of William and Mary:

- **Time.** Supporting children in their education is particularly tough for parents whose work schedules are extensive and demanding. Nontraditional hours deprive parents, especially single parents, of opportunities to participate at school and at home.
- **Financial resources.** Parents with low pay often need to work more, which reduces time and energy for family and school activities. Being absent from work can cost parents their jobs. Many families can't provide technologies that match those in the classroom. Lack of transportation also presents challenges.
- **Miscommunication/Distrust.** Poor communication between schools and parents often results in mutual distrust. Families who are contacted only when students have trouble are less likely to believe that staff members notice children's strengths. Parents may feel that their efforts and circumstances are ignored. Stereotyping by both parties hurts effective teamwork.



Final Thoughts

Once again here are the nine key truths that our work at The Parent Institute has found are vital to developing effective parent and family involvement at any school:

1. **Parent involvement is all about the children.**
2. **Parent involvement boosts student achievement.**
3. **Communication with parents must be carefully planned and two-way.**
4. **It is important to treat parents as partners instead of as clients.**
5. **Parent trust in your school is required for student achievement.**
6. **Parent involvement barriers are real—and must be addressed.**
7. **School staff makes all the difference in parent involvement.**
8. **It is important to make sure you don't have a parent involvement disconnect.**
9. **It is important to know why parents say they are not more involved.**

There is nothing technically challenging or budget-prohibitive about parent and family involvement. Simple steps, a focus on children, good communication, mutual respect, earning trust, overcoming easily identifiable barriers and keeping the entire staff involved are what it's all about.

And help is available any time you need it. Check our website at <http://www.parent-institute.com> for hundreds of research-based, helpful publications, audio and visual materials, newsletters, kits for holding meetings and making presentations, daily-updated parent information for your website, materials in electronic form that you can print or email to parents whenever, and in whatever quantities, you need them—and everything is available in both English and Spanish.

For additional help, call our experienced customer service staff at 1-800-756-5525. Helping schools with parent involvement is why The Parent Institute exists!

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

P.O. Box 7474
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
(800) 756-5525
www.parent-institute.com