

Family Engagement

A Critical Piece to Student Achievement

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), is where the funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers was born. It is one of the few federal programs that require a partnership between the school and parents. For over 40 years, research has supported that involving parents or engaging families in children's education is one of the highest for improving education. (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011; Public Impact, 2007). Many theories and debates are swirling about how to fix America's Schools and improve public education. One component that stand out is that failing to engage parents and the community dramatically lowers the prospect of students going to college. Ownership and shared responsibility is what happens when parents partner with student education. A 21st Century Community Learning Center is intended to bridge the school and the community and to build the resources, supports and community buy-in that are essential to making the expanded school time successful. Research validates that 21st Century Learning Centers contribute to increased achievement for pre-K through 6th grade in low-income communities when schools reach out to the parents in integrate community supports (Brown , 2011).

Common perceptions in Title I and disadvantages communities regarding parent participation is that parents do not want to be involved. It has been my experience that this statement has no merit. Most parents want to be connected but often feel intimidated, harbor their own ill feelings of school or lack the resources to be involved.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!! It will take many attempts to contact parents and to gain trust. It cannot be forced, it must be built.

Start by thanking parents for allowing you to work with their child. Let them know how important their child is to you. Compliment them as parents and their children. You cannot fake it, it must be real. If the child is not stellar in addition facts, do not say that they are. You can always find a positive comment to make about even the most struggling student.

Parents need to know why and what your program is going to do for their child. Do not assume that it is understood. Also, do not assume that parents can read communication. You must offer various ways to communicate. Invite parents in often and let them get to know your staff and see what you are about. All it takes is a few parents to start talking positively and then you will see more parents involved. All it takes is a few negative parents to derail as well. Be proactive in all that you are doing so that you build in the positives.

So, how do you start? What does it look like? Start small!!!! **Be specific in what you target.** Are you remediating students? Are you providing enrichment? What does it look like? What does your community need?