Core Function → Parental Involvement

Effective Practice → Parents of ELs are well integrated into the school community.

Success Indicator PI03: School leaders, staff and faculty meet regularly with families of ELs in their communities (e.g. families' homes, community center, or library) and not always in school buildings. (5873)

Overview: Student achievement improves when their families are included and valued as part of the school community. Families aware of and contributing to school expectations and practices are better able to extend academic learning at home. Likewise, staff who understand students' lives outside of school are well-positioned to foster meaningful personal connections with students, as well as support their learning. Family involvement with schools takes many forms, and developing this engagement requires broad outreach. Efforts by administrators and teachers to meet outside of the school building sends a powerful message that they value all families and their contributions to students' learning.

Questions: How do regular meetings with the families of ELs impact student learning and school-community relationships? Why should staff meet with families outside of the school? Where might school personnel and families meet outside of school? How can school leaders facilitate and support these meetings?

How do regular meetings with the families of ELs impact student learning and school-community relationships?

Family decisions of when and how to engage with schools are often complex and gradual (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Reynolds, Crea, Medina, Degnan, & McRoy, 2014). A family member's involvement with a school can include assistance with homework, visiting as guest speakers, chaperoning school events, leadership in caregiver-school partnerships, attendance at school exhibitions, regular contact with teaching staff, and many other activities. Teachers and parents, however, may not always have the same beliefs of what kinds of involvement will positively impact a student. Misunderstandings may be especially prevalent between school staff and family members of ELs who have been educated outside the United States.

On-going collaboration with families can help establish clear expectations (Lawson, 2003). Regular meetings between families and school personnel can prevent simplistic viewpoints of family involvement that blame a perceived lack of involvement or care for low student achievement (Lightfoot, 2004). Through these meetings, educators gain awareness of students' lives outside of school, which helps them see and serve the whole child. Specifically, staff with more knowledge of students' communities and families can:

- establish close, trusting relationships with families and students (Bartel, 2010)
- design more culturally responsive programming, which have been shown to increase achievement (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; López, 2016)
- learn about experiences that students will draw on as background knowledge in the classroom (Gonzalez, et al., 1995)
- share and receive information about problematic student behavior that may be better understood and addressed with family input (Schecter & Sherri, 2009)

• support families in helping students with quality homework completion (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008).

Why should staff meet with families outside of the school?

Family involvement researchers note the importance of time poverty, or the lack of available time to devote to children's educational concerns, in considering how to prioritize family needs (Newman & Chin, 2003; Williams & Sánchez, 2011). Family work schedules, childcare responsibilities, or transportation needs can be accommodated by developing multiple options for contact with families. When meeting family needs is prioritized, collaboration and involvement are possible even in difficult circumstances (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Greater efforts to include families sends a powerful message that they are respected by the staff at their children's school.

Meeting outside the school does not just make the meetings easier for families. For teachers and administrators, meeting in students' homes and communities provides a direct and intimate view of where students live. For those unfamiliar with the communities served by their school, these visits can yield new ways to connect students with academic content (i.e. draw on funds of knowledge) as well as inspire class policies and assignments (more) compatible with students' lives outside of their school.

Where might meetings take place?

Home visits can be effective ways of getting to know families and can serve as introductions before the start of the year. A visit at home relieves the burden of transportation and possibly the care of young children, making a meeting more feasible in certain situations. Home and community visits help show the knowledge and experiences students may draw on in class (Gonzalez, et al., 1995). Not all families will be comfortable with a home visit, but meeting in a nearby community center or library will have many of the same benefits.

Events featuring student work, such as sporting events, art shows, and performances, offer a chance for families and staff to join together to celebrate student progress. A relaxed and fun atmosphere can strengthen family-staff relationships. Depending on local circumstances,

hosting these events in partnership with organizations that already use space in religious buildings or community centers may allow more family members to attend. Community partnerships are also an opportunity to honor family and community member leadership in already existing organizations (Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012).

Schools may devote staff time to identifying community events that school staff can attend to be better known by community members. Contact with families does not need an ultimate academic goal. A successful meeting might focus only on staff and families getting to know each other (Bartel, 2010).

How can school leaders facilitate and support these regular meetings with families?

Organizing and sustaining family collaboration for the long term requires significant staff attention (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Sanders, 2008; Williams & Sánchez, 2011). Schools with effective family engagement often include the following in their planning:

• Retain a full time professional family liaison.
• Provide ample interpretation services for contact between staff and family members who do not share a common language.
• Allow time in teacher responsibilities for meetings with families outside the school building.
• Solicit and plan based on family ambitions and desires for family-school partnerships.
• Reach out to community leaders directly for their assistance.
• Provide parent leadership opportunities and support parents' efforts to organize collectively.
• Include family perspectives and needs when planning school functions that affect them.

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