



## What do we mean by “family and community connections with schools?”

When some people think of family involvement, they think of parents volunteering in their child’s classroom and attending parent-teacher conferences. The reality is that schools, families, and communities can connect in many different ways to support students. Connections can take place at the school, in the family’s home, and out in the community. School-community connections can include school events sponsored by local businesses, immunizations provided on school campuses by a local health department, or a retired citizen who volunteers as a reading tutor. In addition, schools can play a crucial role in the community, serving as an important partner to improve the lives of children and their families.

Many people have good intentions in trying to make connections between the school, families, and the community. They are disappointed when their efforts don’t always result in the kinds of positive outcomes they are hoping for. One of the challenges about understanding school, family, community connections is that different kinds of connections can have very different results (Fan & Chen, 1999). Many forms of “at-school” connections, such as attending school meetings and student performances, don’t necessarily have a strong impact on student achievement. However, they can be valuable in other ways, as they increase communication and understanding among school staff, family members, and community partners.

Understanding that connections have many dimensions can also help explain why some of the research seems to contradict itself about what difference these connections can make. As we create partnerships and programs, it is important to understand what kinds of connections make what kinds of impact. Then we can be deliberate about making connections that will support the specific results we want to achieve.

We should also make sure that the connections we make will meet the goals of all of the partners involved. Research has shown that educators, community partners, and parents often have very different ideas of what role parents should play in their child’s education. Connections that meet the school’s needs, such as a booster club fundraiser, may not be important to parents who want to learn ways to help their children prepare for college. Meeting the goals of all partners requires an understanding that one definition of parent involvement does not fit all.

### Related Research

*Below are some examples of research studies related to the topic of defining “school, family, community connections”*

Abrams and Gibbs (2000) found that school staff and community members (including parents) had very different views about the reasons for low student performance, the appropriate role for parents in the school, and the role of the principal. They also found that developing a mutual understanding of roles, clarifying how power would be shared, and setting specific goals created potential for improvement.

Keith and Keith (1993) found a significant link between parent involvement and student achievement. They also found that the different components that made up “parent involvement”—parent’s educational aspirations, parent-child communication, home structure, and parental participation in school activities—were not strongly connected to one another. In other words, although parents may communicate with their child about school, they might not necessarily participate in school activities.

Lopez (2001) found that although parents of successful migrant students did not regularly attend school functions, they strongly perceived themselves as being highly involved in their children’s education. These families saw the transmission of a work ethic as their way of helping their children succeed in school.

### Find More Research

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the Center’s Connection Collection at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources>. If you are looking for information on defining “parent involvement”, useful keywords to help narrow your search are **define** and **perception**.

# Putting it into Practice

1. Think about the ways that schools, parents, and community groups are working to connect in your school community. Create a list of the connections, grouping similar efforts together into categories (such as school-home communication and help with schoolwork).
2. Ask the people involved in these efforts what kinds of outcomes they are hoping will result from the connections. Try to get a variety of perspectives—from school personnel, parents, and community partners—since each partner may have different goals for the connection.
3. After you have compiled a list of the connections and their intended purposes, search the Connection Collection at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources> to find out what the research has shown are possible results of these connections.
4. Based on the research you find, think about these questions: Do you have a mismatch between the connections you are working to create and the kinds of outcomes you are hoping to produce? Are you missing any connections that would help your school community accomplish its goals?
5. Share the results of your research with your local school, family, and community partners. Discuss how you can work together to make sure that your connections are effective and meet the goals of all of the partners involved.

## References

- Abrams, L., & Gibbs, J. T. (2000).** Planning for change: School-community collaboration in a full-service elementary school. *Urban Education, 35*(1), 79-103. EJ602753.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (1999, April).** *Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada. ED430048.
- Keith, T. Z., & Keith, P. B. (1993).** Does parental involvement affect eighth-grade student achievement? Structural analysis of national data. *School Psychology Review, 22*(3), 474-496. EJ486048.
- Lopez, G. R. (2001, April).** *On whose terms? Understanding involvement through the eyes of migrant parents.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

## For More Information:

The Institute for Educational Leadership has produced a publication “Education and community building: Connecting two worlds.” The authors offer information about the differences in philosophies, organizational cultures, operating styles that influence how schools and community-based organizations work together. They also suggest “rules of engagement,” to guide and strengthen school-community partnerships. For more information, call IEL at (202) 822-8405 or download the publication at <http://www.communityschools.org/combuild.pdf>

The National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University brings together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining school-family-community partnerships. Their Web site at <http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/program2.htm> has a list of six kinds of partnerships, and the results that can be expected from each kind. The Network offices can also be reached at 410-516-8800.



Southwest Educational Development Laboratory  
National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools  
211 East Seventh Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-3281