

Parent Engagement in Middle and High School

Overview

Parent engagement often decreases as students progress through school. Parent engagement significantly decreases from elementary to middle school and further declines as the child moves through school. Parents of elementary school students are more engaged in school activities than parents of older students. A 2003 report found that only 59% of ninth and tenth grade parents attended a scheduled parent-teacher conference, compared to 90% of parents with students in grades K-5.

However, research has shown that parents maintain a significant and positive influence on student achievement. When families and schools work together, students' academic development increases.⁸³

The School's Role In Middle And High School

Two-way Communication

Families are more likely to engage in both traditional and non-traditional engagement activities when they are personally contacted by school staff. Educators and administrators should use multiple methods of communication and provide appropriate translation services when necessary. Principals and other school administrators play a key role in engaging parents during the middle and high school years. They should help create a positive school climate and engage in personal outreach to send the message that parents are welcome. In fact, all school personnel – including teachers, paraprofessionals, and other support staff – should be trained to welcome visitors and answer any questions they may have.

Defined Roles

As the student progresses through school, parent roles become less defined and more difficult for parents to understand. What was considered effective parent involvement at the elementary level is not necessarily appropriate in middle and high school. School staff, both teachers and administrators, should receive adequate training in promoting family engagement and provide parents with meaningful ways to be involved in their child's education.⁸⁴

Focused Programs

Educators and school staff should inform parents about the importance of family involvement throughout children's education and support learning opportunities both at school and in the home. Research has found that to be effective, parent engagement should be focused on improving student achievement and designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.⁸⁵

Easy Access

Provide parents with regular opportunities to meet with teachers and counselors to help their student plan his or her academic program. Also offer information about

academic options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and postsecondary education options and how to plan for them.⁸⁶

Promoting Adolescent Development

During middle and high school, adolescents are experiencing new levels of responsibility and independence. School staff should be trained to help parents learn how to support their child in this experience and promote sound decision making.⁸⁷

Planning Ahead – College and Career Assistance

“Fifty-two percent of all parents want schools to better educate parents at the start of high school about the requirements for graduation and getting into college.”⁸⁸ Without the proper guidance, students may miss out on post-secondary opportunities. Schools should help parents guide their child in making college and career decisions. School staff, including teachers and counselors, should be able to answer questions about course scheduling, college applications and financial aid, as well as offer resources for more information.

Job Shadow and Mentoring Programs

It is especially important for high schools collaborate with parents and the community to support students with career exploration programs such as job shadowing. A parent or community member might work in a career that interests a student. Connecting those individuals and providing the students with an opportunity to consider several post-graduation and higher education options will help him or her to make the most fitting decision.

Additional Information & Resources

1. Parent Involvement In Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies that Promote Achievement
<http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/dev453740.pdf>
2. Parent Involvement Essential to Student’s Successful Middle School Transition to High School <http://www.eduguide.org/library/viewarticle/2077/>
3. The Future of High School Success: The Importance of Parent Involvement Programs <http://horizon.unc.edu/projects/HSJ/Hickman.html>