



September Asset of the Month: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING

Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young people succeed in school.

This document is designed to help adults throughout Silicon Valley develop materials and activities to promote the asset of “Parent Involvement in Schooling.”

Newsletter Content

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The Importance of Parent Involvement in Schooling

Research shows that youth whose parents are actively involved in their schooling are more engaged in school, less likely to be delinquent or drop out, and more likely to achieve higher grades and standardized test scores. In fact, studies show that the typical correlation between a family’s socioeconomic status and student achievement can disappear when parents are involved: students from poor families whose parents are highly involved with their education do about as well as students from wealthier families.

Working parents will be glad to know that parent involvement in school doesn’t require volunteering in the classroom; working parents can create the same beneficial effect. Joyce Epstein of the National Network of Partnership Schools developed a framework for understanding six different kinds of parent involvement, which include *parenting* (families establish home environments that support children’s learning); *communicating* (families and schools engage in effective two-way communications about student expectations and progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications); *volunteering* (parents directly support the classroom or school); *learning at home* (families help students with homework and school-related decision-making and planning); *decision making* (parents are involved in school decisions) and *community collaboration* (community services are resources are integrated to strengthen schools and families). Parents whose schedules don’t allow volunteering can still support their children’s academic success through parenting, communication, and learning at home.

Unfortunately, Project Cornerstone’s 2004 survey revealed that **only 55% of 4th-6th graders and 31% of 7th-12th graders** reported that their parents are involved in their education. To help raise awareness of this important asset, September is Parent Involvement in Schooling month in Silicon Valley. The following discussion topics can help you talk with young people about ways that their parents can be involved with their education:

- What do your parents do that let you know they care about your education? What could they do to be more supportive?
- What information about school is important to share with your family? What kind of information would you prefer not to share?
- What advice would you give a family who’s new to your school?
- Some workplaces have a “Shadow Day,” where youth follow an employee and learn what their day is like. If you could have a Shadow Day at school where your parents followed you throughout your day, what you want them to see?

This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone's Asset-a-Month program. For more information, visit www.projectcornerstone.org.

Activities

The activities below are a starting point to help create greater parent involvement in schooling.

For families

- Make a point of staying in touch with your children's teachers, even if your kids aren't having problems. Most teachers are glad to communicate with you after school hours by telephone or email.
- Make sure that your kids have a clean and organized location to do their homework, and help them establish a regular schedule for schoolwork.
- Instead of asking "How was your day?" (which begs the monosyllabic answer "fine"), ask open-ended questions like "What was the best part of your day?" and "Did any of your classmates do anything funny?"
- Help your children maintain a positive attitude about school, and make sure they know that you will be their advocate to resolve any problems or challenges that they encounter.

For school administrators...

- Although the benefits of parent engagement apply to children from all backgrounds, parent engagement is typically highest in middle-class families where the parents were successful in school. Schools should create deliberate outreach and support strategies that demonstrate respect and value for the contributions of all children and families, with special attention to those who may feel marginalized.
- Linguistic and cultural barriers can make it difficult for non-English-speaking parents to be engaged in their children's education. Make sure that families who do not speak English understand that their involvement and participation is welcome and encouraged, and ensure that a translator is present at all school events. Try to make sure that written communications are provided in the parents' language.
- Make sure that faculty are fully aware of the importance of parent involvement for all students. Encourage them to create meaningful opportunities for parents with diverse backgrounds to participate through programs that value their unique knowledge, background, and skills.

For teachers...

- Make an effort to establish two-way communication with all families, and let families know that their concerns are important to you.
- If parents volunteer in your classroom, make sure that they are fully prepared for their projects. If they work directly with students, let them know what to do if a child is difficult or uncooperative, and make sure they understand how to provide positive, supportive assistance for mistakes as well as effective praise. You may wish to coach students in advance if they'll be working with a volunteer to make the process smoother for everyone.
- Create homework assignments that involve the entire family. Be sure to include all supplies as well as clear, easy-to-understand directions in the primary language spoken at home as well as in English.

In youth programs

- Make sure that are not scheduled at the same time as school events.
- Provide childcare on evenings such as Back-to-School Nights when parents are expected to attend without their children.
- If youth complete their homework while in your program, make sure that parents are aware of any issues such as students struggling with certain assignments. Use every opportunity to remind parents of the importance of monitoring their children's homework.
- Create programs that support parent involvement in their children's education, such as "Family Reading Nights" or "Math Fun Nights."

Resources

- Project Cornerstone offers literature-based parent engagement programs in schools throughout Silicon Valley. These programs, offered in both Spanish and English, provide parents with an opportunity to build developmental assets in their own children as well as other students in their school by sharing asset-building stories and leading activities and discussions. The Spanish-language Los Dichos program opens new doors for Spanish-speaking parents to support their children's education and build greater positive cultural identity and cultural competence throughout their schools. Programs are also available to support Chinese, Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese cultures. For more information, contact Project Cornerstone at (408) 351-6482.
- Families in Schools is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to involve parents and communities in their children's education to achieve lifelong success. Their Web site offers a wealth of resources in English and Spanish to help families, communities, and schools effectively increase parent involvement. For more information, visit <http://www.familiesinschools.org>.
- Joyce Epstein's framework for parent involvement can help administrators, teachers, and parents understand the different ways that families can be involved and provide a starting point for creating effective parent engagement at a school. The framework and links to information about practices, challenges, and results can be found at http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/nnps_model/school/sixtypes.htm.
- The San José Unified School District's Office of Parent Education and Involvement offers training, workshops, classes, conferences, college and career nights, and special events. For more information, contact Elizabeth Bliss at (408) 535-6405.

OCTOBER Asset of the Month: Positive Family Communication!

If you or your organization can share ideas for creating positive family communications, please contact Elissa Miller at (408) 351-6425 or by email at Elissa@projectcornerstone.org.

About the Asset-a-Month Program

The Asset-a-Month program is an initiative of the Project Cornerstone public policy team, which contains representatives from local governments, agencies, and youth-serving organizations. The goals of the Asset-a-Month program are to help align adults throughout our diverse community in their efforts to promote positive youth development by fostering developmental assets. For more information about the Asset-a-Month program, contact Anne Ehresman, Project Cornerstone's executive director, at (408) 351-6424 or Anne@projectcornerstone.org.