

Family/Community Involvement and Learning

Parent and family engagement is a key element in any successful school health initiative. In general, family involvement can lead to increased student enthusiasm about health and wellness, higher student achievement and graduation, reduced truancy and chronic absenteeism, and better social skills and behavior in the classroom.

Families involved in their students' health education can help transfer the information from the school environment to the home. Parents or other family members can be provided with hands-on projects and learning experiences around many areas of health that can empower them to strengthen their students' academic and wellness experiences.

Why Schools?

Families and community services are an important part of building school capacity and increasing the collective power of the school. The end goal as always is to improve student learning.

Did you know?

- The US Dept. of Education believes that family involvement including parenting style, family participation in learning activities and parental expectations is a more accurate predictor of student achievement than family socio-economic status or income.
- According to the Coalition for Community Schools (August 2009); "Cincinnati Public Schools, which made a commitment in 2002 to make every school a community learning center, has seen a district-wide graduation improvement from 51% to 82% over a period of 6 years".



Community partners and organizations including community based health-care or social services providers, and community health and safety agencies (e.g., American Cancer Society) can supplement the resources available in school. Connecting community partners with families can provide an additional layer of support, a valuable resource for an often overwhelmed, struggling family.

Community services can provide support in the following and many other ways:

- * Counseling for health problems affected by physical activity or nutrition
- * Child abuse or neglect services
- * Dating violence services
- * Treatment for alcohol or substance use
- * Programs for observers of violence at home, at school or in the community
- * Smoking cessation programs
- * Special health care needs or mobility impairment services
- * Asthma management and/or education programs

For further information

National PTA

http://www.pta.org/topic_parent_involvement.asp

American School Health Association

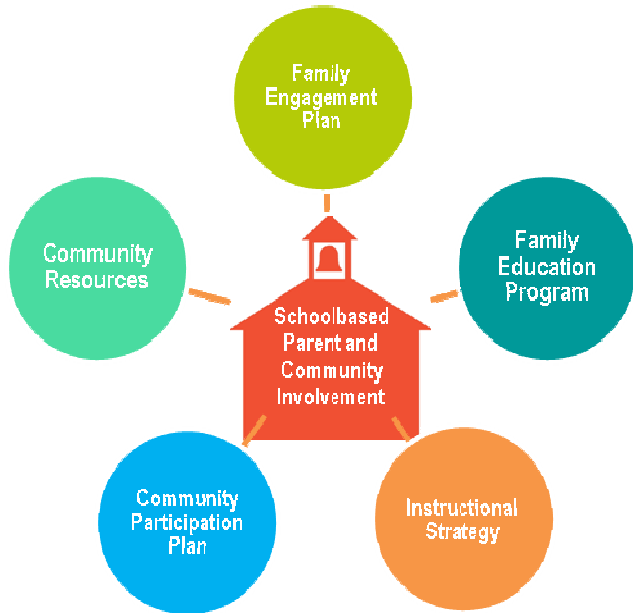
http://www.ashaweb.org/files/public/JOSH_1007/josh77_8_michael_p567.pdf

Harvard Family Research Project

<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement>

Comprehensive Family & Community Engagement

Your school can offer a wide variety of services designed to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and their families. A comprehensive, interconnected school-wide program will make family and community involvement an integral part of your school's culture. A fully integrated program contains each of the following categories.



Family Engagement Plan

The school has identified both staff and external stakeholders who will lead health initiatives. The school has a parent liaison or dedicated person to engage families. Listening sessions are held to determine what is important to parents/family members. Opportunities are communicated to families using various methods. Families are involved in the decision-making process around suitable health-promoting activities including food policies, school gardens, school meals or physical activities. The school has a parent or family center, which provides a pleasant environment for learning and exchanging health information with other parents.

Family Education Program

The school provides families with opportunities to learn about health and safety topics including healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco use prevention, violence or suicide prevention and asthma management. The school education program provide strategies to families for praising and rewarding good health or other behaviors, making time to listen and talk to their children, and modeling healthy behaviors.

School staff encourages parents to take what they have learned into the home. Classes and materials are available multiple languages.

Instructional Strategy

Parents are invited to classes to help with health activities or projects. The school's curriculum contains health-related activities that involve children working with their family (e.g., homework that involves family interviews or participation). Teachers and staff are provided with tools to engage family in health opportunities within the classroom.

Community Participation Plan

Community organizations are invited to be part of the decision-making process around health in the school. The local community is informed about health initiatives taking place through the use of local media, school newsletters or school health displays at community functions. Community members have access to school facilities outside of school hours to conduct health promotion or education programs. Students are involved in projects to develop the health of the local community.

Community Resources

The school has a plan for improving student access to community resources including community health centers, social service agencies, community and neighborhood organizations, colleges and universities, faith-based organizations, hospitals, libraries, businesses, and other community organizations. The school creates community relationships that help students move into the larger world beyond their immediate neighborhood or community. The school staff informs students and their families about community-based resources through materials, media and other channels.

Jump start your family and community involvement program

Start small and grow from there with some simple activities like inviting families to a healthy food sharing session, providing community health resource materials, or encouraging parents to be active with their children.

Long term success

Each of these categories can involve a multitude of strategies to help ensure long term success. To identify the ones that most appropriately meet the needs of your school, please contact Cathy Schmelter at Get Smart Schools – cathy@getsmartschools.org.