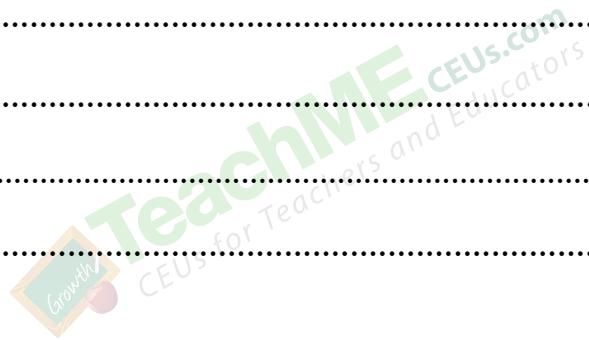


# Supporting Parents with School-Aged Children



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# Introduction

Parental involvement plays an essential role in shaping students' educational experiences, significantly influencing their academic performance, social-emotional growth, and long-term success. Today's parents face unique challenges and shifting expectations that have reshaped their roles in supporting their children's educational journeys. As a result, educators and schools must recognize and understand these evolving dynamics to foster stronger partnerships and create an inclusive environment that engages and supports families from diverse backgrounds. This course will explore key areas in understanding and supporting parents, focusing on strategies for effective parent-teacher partnerships, addressing the needs of diverse families, and creating a welcoming school environment.

**Section 1: Understanding the Role of Parents in Education** offers a comprehensive look at how parental involvement impacts student success, the shifting role of parents in modern society, and the ways in which parental well-being and family dynamics affect a child's academic journey. We'll review current research on the benefits of parental involvement, with an emphasis on the academic and emotional support parents provide, and the impact of their involvement on students' behavior, resilience, and motivation. Additionally, this section explores the challenges parents face, such as balancing work and family obligations, managing mental health, and navigating economic uncertainties—all of which influence their ability to engage in their children's education.

**Section 2: Building Strong Parent-Teacher Partnerships** emphasizes the importance of trust, communication, and collaboration between educators and parents. Effective partnerships begin with a foundation of mutual respect and open communication, which create a positive school culture where parents feel valued and empowered to participate actively. We'll explore strategies for establishing rapport with parents, providing educational resources for families, and creating flexible opportunities for involvement. This section also includes real-

life case examples showcasing successful parent-teacher partnerships and the positive impact these relationships can have on students and their families.

This course aims to equip educators with the knowledge and tools needed to understand and support parents effectively, ultimately creating a school environment that values and strengthens family involvement. By the end, educators will be prepared to build meaningful connections with families, support diverse needs, and enhance student achievement through robust parent-teacher partnerships.

## **Section 1: Understanding the Role of Parents in Education**

The role of parents in education has never been more crucial, especially in today's rapidly evolving social landscape. Parental involvement significantly impacts student success, affecting academic achievement and social-emotional well-being. As research consistently shows, when parents engage actively in school-related activities, students exhibit improved academic performance and develop essential life skills. However, modern parents face a myriad of challenges that can hinder their ability to participate fully in their children's education. From evolving family dynamics to the pressures of intensive parenting and the pervasive influence of technology, contemporary parents navigate a complex environment that shapes their engagement in the educational process. Understanding these dynamics is essential for educators and policymakers seeking to foster meaningful parental involvement and enhance student outcomes. This section will explore the vital role of parents in education, the challenges they face, and the implications for student development.

## **1.1 The Importance of Parental Involvement in Student Success**

Parental involvement in a child's education plays a vital role in enhancing student success, both academically and emotionally. Research from around the globe supports this, showing that when parents are actively engaged in activities like parent-teacher conferences, school events, and conversations at home about school, students tend to perform better academically and display improved social-emotional skills (Stanford, 2023).

### ***Academics***

Studies reviewed by the American Psychological Association highlight that students whose parents are involved tend to exhibit higher academic engagement, motivation, and a more positive attitude toward school (Stanford). Parental involvement in education significantly boosts students' academic achievement, engagement, and motivation. The American Psychological Association's 2019 review, which analyzed 448 studies, found that when parents actively participate in their children's education, students consistently perform better academically (Stanford). For instance, a study from Johns Hopkins University highlighted that school practices encouraging family involvement in math learning at home led to a notable increase in the number of students reaching or exceeding proficiency levels in standardized math tests.

In addition, parental engagement in reading activities positively affects reading achievement, language comprehension, and expressive language skills. Research from the National Literacy Trust reveals that students whose parents are involved in reading at home are not only better readers but also more interested in reading and attentive in the classroom (Stanford, 2023). Beyond academic gains, parental presence at school events, such as open houses or volunteering, fosters social connections that provide parents with valuable insights and resources. These networks strengthen parents' social capital, allowing them to better support their children through resources like teacher assistance and guidance on completing homework—further enhancing students' academic success.

## ***Social-Emotional Benefits***

Parental involvement positively influences students' social-emotional well-being, enhancing their emotional engagement, self-esteem, and school satisfaction. Research, including a 2014 International Education Studies report, highlights how students with actively involved parents often feel safer and more connected at school, leading to greater enjoyment and engagement (Stanford, 2023). These benefits extend globally, as shown in studies from various countries, including Jordan, where increased parental engagement correlated with improved emotional stability in 9th and 10th graders (Stanford).

Moreover, when parents attend school events or communicate with teachers, it fosters a sense of security for students, which is crucial for their school participation and enjoyment. This engagement also enables teachers to understand students' unique challenges, allowing them to provide more tailored support for emotional and behavioral development (Stanford, 2023).

## ***Different Support for Different Ages***

The impact of parental involvement in education varies with the child's age and the type of support provided. For younger children, parents' presence at school-based activities, like open houses and volunteer events, tends to have a strong effect on academic performance, as their involvement helps build early enthusiasm for learning (Stanford, 2023). However, in high school, the influence of school-based parental involvement diminishes, likely due to fewer opportunities for parents to participate directly in the school environment as students become more independent. At-home involvement, such as discussing schoolwork and encouraging learning activities, consistently benefits students across all age groups but is particularly impactful for high schoolers. This type of engagement fosters self-motivation and academic focus, which are essential during these formative years. Activities like reading together or library visits promote literacy and critical thinking, while direct homework assistance, however, may have limited academic impact and, in some cases, can even hinder achievement



(Stanford). Instead, encouraging a supportive learning atmosphere at home can improve students' motivation and engagement across developmental stages.

### ***Consistent Across all Groups***

Parental involvement in education brings benefits to students across diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Research shows that when families are engaged in their children's schooling, students achieve better academic outcomes, regardless of whether they come from low- or high-income households (Stanford, 2023). These benefits extend across different racial and ethnic groups, with positive academic impacts observed among Black, Asian, white, and Hispanic students. In fact, school-based involvement has been found to have a particularly strong effect on academic success for Black and white students, although the benefits are seen in all demographics. These patterns hold true globally, suggesting that the advantages of parental involvement in education are universal. By participating in school events, communicating with teachers, and supporting learning at home, families from all backgrounds contribute meaningfully to their children's academic success.

## **1.2 The Evolving Role of Parents in Modern Society**

The role of parenting has evolved significantly over the past few decades, with modern parents encountering challenges that their predecessors didn't face. According to Gibson (2021), sixty-six percent of U.S. parents feel that raising children is harder now than it was twenty years ago. This is largely due to shifts in family dynamics, lifestyle demands, and the influence of technology. First, family structures have changed. While the majority of children—sixty-nine percent—still live with two parents, more kids are now growing up in single-parent households or with extended family members, compared to the nuclear family dominance of the 1960s. Family sizes are also shrinking, as U.S. fertility rates have dropped, with many parents now waiting longer to have children. In 2020, for example, mothers typically had their first child at age 27, compared to 21 in 1970 (Gibson).



Parental time at home has decreased as well. Only a quarter of today's two-parent households have a stay-at-home parent, compared to nearly half in the 1970s. Dual-income households with both parents working full-time are now the norm, which influences how much time parents spend at home with their kids (Gibson, 2021). Nonetheless, parents today dedicate more time to directly interacting with their children, often at the expense of personal leisure time. Another change in modern parenting is the rise of "intensive parenting." This trend pressures parents to devote extensive resources to their children's development and success, driven in part by social media, where many parents feel scrutinized for their choices. Finally, the influence of technology is pervasive; digital devices and social media add new complexities to family life, with sixty-eight percent of parents reporting that their phones sometimes distract them from quality time with their children (Gibson).

Values and aspirations amongst parents have evolved as well. When considering their children's futures, parents emphasize financial independence and job satisfaction. About 90% rate financial independence and career satisfaction as crucial goals for their children's adulthood, while only 41% view earning a college degree as highly important, and even fewer prioritize marriage or parenthood (Minkin and Horowitz). The value placed on education varies significantly by racial and ethnic backgrounds, with Asian parents being the most likely to consider a college degree essential (70%), in contrast to 29% of White parents who share the same sentiment. These insights highlight the varied aspirations that parents hold, shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors.

### **1.3 Modern Challenges**

#### ***Mental Health and Safety Concerns: Top Parental Worries Today***

Parents today are increasingly concerned about the safety of their children, encompassing a range of fears from mental health issues, bullying and abduction to violence and substance abuse. According to recent findings, nearly three in four

parents express extreme or moderate concern about their child potentially experiencing anxiety or depression, reflecting the ongoing youth mental health crisis (HHS, 2024). Other worries include the potential for their children to be bullied, kidnapped, attacked, or encounter issues related to drugs or alcohol. A particularly alarming trend is that firearm-related injuries have become the leading cause of death among U.S. children and adolescents aged 1-19 years (HHS). This grim statistic exacerbates the anxiety parents feel regarding school safety, which often escalates following high-profile mass shooting incidents. Research indicates that school shootings, or even the mere possibility of such events, are a significant source of stress for nearly three-quarters of parents (74%).

Parents and caregivers of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities encounter heightened stressors surrounding health, such as the need to acquire specialized caregiving skills, navigate complex service systems, and manage financial pressures associated with their children's care (HHS, 2024). Research indicates that these caregivers report elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety compared to those caring for children without such disabilities. In the United States, nearly one in five children aged 0-17 have a special health care need, which includes those with chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions that require additional health services (HHS). Commonly reported health conditions among these children include allergies, ADD/ADHD, behavior/conduct issues, asthma, anxiety, learning disabilities, and developmental delays. When surveyed, more than twice as many parents and caregivers of children with special health care needs reported experiencing "fair or poor mental health" (HHS).

### ***Financial Stressors***

Financial stress is a significant contributor to the challenges faced by parents today, particularly concerning child care costs, health and education expenses, and employment insecurity. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (2024) Surgeon General's report, the cost of child care has

risen dramatically, increasing by approximately 26% in the last decade. This sharp rise in expenses places a considerable burden on families, leading to heightened financial worries. In 2023, a survey revealed that 66% of parents reported feeling consumed by financial worries, significantly higher than the 39% of other adults experiencing similar stress (HHS). This disparity highlights the unique financial pressures that parents face.

Alarmingly, one in four U.S. parents reported instances in the past year where they struggled to meet basic needs, such as affording food, rent, or mortgage payments. Additionally, 24% indicated they could not pay for necessary health care, and 20% faced challenges in covering child care expenses. For parents living in poverty, the stress of meeting their children's basic needs can be overwhelming, negatively impacting their mental health and parenting capabilities. Research, including a comprehensive review of 108 studies involving over 250,000 parents, found a significant correlation between food insecurity and increased symptoms of parental depression, anxiety, and stress. Such financial burdens not only affect the parents but can also have detrimental effects on children's mental health and overall well-being.

### ***Time Demands***

Time scarcity is one of the most prominent challenges in the 21st century. Parents are often overwhelmed by the need to juggle household chores, work responsibilities, and personal care, all within the limited confines of a day. The average work hours for parents have significantly increased over time, with parents now dedicating an average of 33.5 hours per week to employment or work-related activities (HHS, 2024). This increase reflects a 28% rise for mothers, who went from working an average of 20.9 hours per week in 1985 to 26.7 hours per week in 2022. Fathers have seen a more modest increase of 4%, from 39.8 hours per week in 1985 to 41.2 hours per week in 2022. Balancing work commitments with family responsibilities can lead to work-family conflict, feelings of guilt, and burnout among parents (HHS, 2024). Despite the rise in employment hours, parents are also spending more time on primary child care. Mothers have

increased their weekly time spent on child care by 40%, from 8.4 hours in 1985 to 11.8 hours in 2022. Fathers' involvement in child care has surged by 154%, increasing from 2.6 hours in 1985 to 6.6 hours in 2022. However, it is important to note that the overall time parents report providing primary child care is just a fraction of the total time they spend with their children.

The demands of work and child caregiving have come at a cost, often reducing quality time with partners, sleep, and opportunities for parental leisure (HHS, 2024). Moreover, many parents are also caring for aging family members, which adds another layer of stress. In 2021, nearly a quarter of U.S. adults (23%) had a living parent aged 65 or older, along with either a child under 18 or an adult child for whom they provide financial support. Caregivers who tend to both children and aging family members report significantly greater financial (23.5% vs. 12.2%) and emotional challenges (44.1% vs. 32.2%) compared to caregivers who do not have these dual responsibilities.

### ***Technology Use***

The surge in technology use brings both benefits and challenges. It reshapes family dynamics, with increased reliance on digital tools replacing face-to-face interactions. While helpful in many ways, these shifts can lead to disconnection within families and may expose young children and teens to concerning content, impacting social and cognitive development (Ringler, 2024). Social media is another major factor, posing risks to youth well-being. Studies suggest that prolonged social media use can lead to higher rates of mental health challenges, leaving parents uncertain about how to moderate its influence on their children's lives (Ringler). Finally, information overload has become a common challenge. With endless online advice, parents may find it hard to trust their instincts, sometimes experiencing lower confidence as a result. Studies show that increased online searching does not enhance parental self-assurance, highlighting that sometimes, less information can be more beneficial (Ringler).

## ***Changes in Values and Norms***

Additionally, economic pressures and changing social values have shifted traditional roles and expectations. Many parents now balance multiple jobs while navigating a more individualistic culture, making it harder to establish family norms. Today's youth, empowered by these societal shifts, are more likely to question authority and assert their independence (Ringler, 2024). Although positive in some ways, these behaviors can create complex dynamics within families.

### **1.4 How Parental Well-Being Influences Child Development**

The mental health of parents plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional environment, responsiveness, and consistency of care that children receive at home (HHS, 2024). When a child lives with a parent or caregiver struggling with mental health issues or substance misuse, it constitutes an adverse childhood experience (ACE), which is linked to a range of negative outcomes in mental, physical, and behavioral health throughout a person's life. The impact of a parents' mental health on their children largely depends on how it affects their caregiving behaviors—specifically, the frequency and quality of care provided. In some cases, a parent's mental health challenges may not harm the child if the child's sense of safety and stability remains intact. Children with parents who have mental health conditions are at a higher risk for developing anxiety and depression, as well as facing difficulties that may lead to early onset and prolonged issues with mental health (HHS). Research indicates that children whose primary caregivers report poor mental health are significantly more likely to have poor overall health and to experience mental, behavioral, or developmental disorders.

Both mothers and fathers with mental health conditions can impact their children's well-being. Maternal mental health, in particular, has been shown to significantly affect a child's development and environment. Studies suggest that maternal stress during pregnancy can lead to an increased likelihood of mental

health challenges in the child later in life (HHS, 2024). Although there is less research on paternal mental health, it is also known to have a significant effect on child development, with studies showing links between fathers' perinatal depression and children's emotional and behavioral problems. When both parents face mental health challenges, it can be particularly stressful for children. However, having at least one parent who is mentally well can help alleviate some of these negative effects. Furthermore, the risks posed by parental mental health conditions can be heightened by additional stressors like poverty or exposure to violence, but can be mitigated by protective factors such as strong social support systems and effective parenting practices.

## **Section 1 Conclusion**

The exploration of parental involvement in education underscores its profound impact on student success, both academically and emotionally. The evidence clearly illustrates that engaged parents contribute to higher levels of academic achievement, improved social-emotional well-being, and better overall school experiences for their children. However, modern parents encounter unique challenges, including financial stressors, time constraints, and the complexities introduced by technology. These factors can complicate their ability to engage meaningfully in their children's education, highlighting the need for schools to actively support and facilitate parental involvement. In recognizing the evolving role of parents and the barriers they face, educators can develop targeted strategies to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. The next section will explore these strategies, providing actionable insights on how schools can foster effective collaboration with families to enhance educational outcomes for all students.

## **Section 1 Key Terms**

Parental Involvement - The active participation of parents in their children's education, which includes attending school events, engaging in conversations about schoolwork, and collaborating with teachers.

Parental Support - The various forms of assistance and encouragement that parents provide to their children in their educational journey, which can include emotional, financial, and logistical support.

Social-Emotional Well-being - A component of health that encompasses individuals' emotional and psychological state, influencing how they interact socially and cope with challenges.

Social Capital - The resources and networks that individuals gain from their social connections, which can enhance their ability to access support and opportunities.

Technology Use - The engagement with digital tools and platforms, which can impact family dynamics, communication, and children's social and cognitive development.

Time Scarcity - The perceived lack of time to manage daily responsibilities, often experienced by parents who must balance work, caregiving, and personal care.

Values and Aspirations - The beliefs and goals that individuals hold regarding what is important in life, including their expectations for their children's future.

Youth Mental Health Crisis - The increasing prevalence of mental health issues among young people, including anxiety and depression, which has raised concerns among parents and educators.

## **Section 1 Reflection Questions**

1. What challenges do you believe modern parents face that hinder their involvement in their child's education? How can educators better support parents in overcoming these obstacles?
2. Consider the findings from the Surgeon General's Report regarding parental well-being. How do you think these findings can inform your approach to supporting families in your school?



3. In your opinion, why is it essential for schools to support parents? How does this support translate to improved student outcomes?
4. How has the rise of technology changed the way parents engage with their children's education? In your opinion, what are the potential benefits and drawbacks of this shift?
5. Reflect on the impact of parent-child interactions on academic success. How can educators encourage and support these interactions to foster a positive learning environment?

## Section 1 Activities

1. **Parent Engagement Audit:** Conduct an audit of existing parent engagement practices in your school. Identify strengths and areas for improvement, then develop a plan to enhance parental involvement in school activities.
2. **Parent Survey Design:** Design a survey for parents to gather their perspectives on barriers to involvement and their preferences for engagement opportunities. Use the data to inform school policies and practices.
3. **Create a Parent Handbook:** Develop a handbook for parents outlining ways they can support their children's education, including tips for engaging in school activities and homework.
4. **Classroom Observation:** Observe classrooms where parental involvement is high. Note the strategies used by teachers to encourage engagement and how it impacts student behavior and learning.
5. **Reflection Journal:** Maintain a reflection journal documenting your observations and insights about parental involvement throughout the school year. Use these reflections to adapt your teaching practices and communication strategies.

## **Section 2: Building Strong Parent-Teacher Partnerships**

In an increasingly interconnected world, the importance of robust parent-teacher partnerships cannot be overstated. These partnerships serve as a cornerstone for student success, enabling schools to create environments where children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Effective collaboration between educators and parents fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility for student learning, ultimately benefiting the child's educational journey. This section will explore key strategies for building strong parent-teacher partnerships. Next, we will explore how schools can support parents through education and resources. Providing parents with the necessary tools to help their children at home empowers them to contribute meaningfully to their child's educational experience. Finally, this section will highlight real-life examples of successful parent-teacher partnerships, showcasing practices where strong collaboration has led to improved student outcomes and enhanced family well-being. We will also examine the challenges faced in building these partnerships and explore strategies that have been effective in overcoming these barriers. By emphasizing the importance of collaboration, trust, and support, this section aims to provide educators with actionable insights and strategies for building strong, lasting partnerships with parents, ultimately contributing to a more effective and holistic educational experience for students.

### **2.1 Establishing Trust and Positive Relationships**

Trust and communication between parents and teachers are essential components of a successful educational partnership. Effective communication is vital for building strong relationships between teachers and parents, significantly enhancing the educational experience for students. According to Pepperdine University (2024), one of the foundational steps in establishing these relationships is to actively get to know the parents. Understanding their backgrounds and

concerns allows teachers to tailor strategies that meet the unique needs of each student. Personal touches, such as remembering the names of parents or caregivers, create an atmosphere of trust and connection. An introductory phone call at the beginning of the school year can set the tone for this relationship, providing an opportunity for teachers to listen and understand parent dynamics, including any special circumstances that may affect the student.

Clear lines of communication are equally important. Parents value communication that is consistent and straightforward, keeping them informed about their child's progress without overwhelming them with excessive information (Pepperdine University, 2024). By selecting a few effective communication tools—whether it's email, a dedicated app, or take-home folders—teachers can ensure that parents know exactly where to find important updates. This approach not only reduces confusion but also allows teachers to focus on delivering quality content in their communications, creating a more efficient and effective environment for engagement. Regular communication also plays a crucial role in maintaining a transparent flow of information between teachers and parents. By providing updates on upcoming events, class activities, and student progress, teachers can keep parents informed and engaged (Pepperdine). For instance, a weekly summary of class content and achievements can foster a sense of connection to the school community. Moreover, celebrating small successes through regular communication positively impacts a child's self-esteem and motivation, reinforcing a culture of encouragement. By fostering these open and consistent lines of communication, teachers can cultivate a collaborative partnership with parents, essential for supporting the holistic development of each student.

### ***Using Technology to Facilitate Communication and Engagement***

Technology plays a pivotal role in enhancing parent-teacher communication and fostering strong school-home partnerships. Digital communication platforms provide a direct line to parents and guardians, facilitating instant updates, announcements, and essential information about school activities (Gudith, 2024). Tools such as ClassDojo, Remind, and Bloomz enable schools to keep parents

informed and engaged in their child's educational journey, strengthening the overall partnership between home and school. In addition to communication, technology enhances opportunities for parent involvement—an essential component of a child's success. Schools can easily share volunteer opportunities, schedules for parent-teacher meetings, and details about events through digital platforms. Resources like SignUpGenius, Calendly, and YouCanBook.me streamline the process for parents, making it simpler to sign up for activities and attend meetings, thereby increasing their participation and investment in the school community (Gudith).

Digital communication also creates a convenient medium for ongoing parent-teacher dialogue. Through Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Google Classroom, Schoology, or Canvas, teachers can share progress reports, assignments, and vital updates, while parents can effortlessly provide feedback and ask questions (Gudith, 2024). Video conferencing tools, such as Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams, facilitate real-time communication, fostering a collaborative environment that supports student learning and development. Moreover, digital platforms empower schools to share educational resources, tips, and articles that help parents support their child's academic journey. School websites and blogging platforms like WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace can disseminate content that equips parents with the tools to engage actively in their child's education beyond the classroom. Finally, technology promotes inclusive communication by offering features that support multi-lingual outreach. Tools like Google Translate in emails and communication apps help bridge language barriers, ensuring that all parents can participate (Gudith). Social media platforms such as Facebook Groups, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn serve as channels to reach diverse parent populations, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued.

## **2.2 Meet Parents Where They Are**

Meeting families where they are is crucial for enhancing engagement in schools, especially considering the diverse backgrounds and experiences that caregivers

bring to the educational landscape. As highlighted by Stanford (2024), caregivers come to schools with varying histories, and many may have had negative interactions with the school system or may not have the time and resources to engage in traditional school events like parent-teacher conferences. This disparity in experience can create barriers to effective communication and partnership between families and educators. Yvonne Johnson, president of the National Parent Teacher Association, emphasizes the need to simplify interactions with families: “It’s so important that we put things on the families’ terms, where we’re not making things so complicated and difficult and hard for them” (Stanford). This approach acknowledges that when schools expect families to navigate complicated systems or processes, they inadvertently alienate a significant portion of their community.

To foster better relationships, schools must adopt both literal and figurative strategies for engagement. Some districts have successfully implemented home visits, allowing teachers to meet families in a comfortable setting (Stanford, 2024). This practice is aimed at building trust and enables the understanding of student’s needs through the lens of their parents. One educator notes, “The ideal is where a teacher is literally meeting a family before the school year or right at the very beginning of the school year with the sole goal of better understanding that child” (as cited in Stanford). While this method may require additional resources and training, it can lead to stronger connections between educators and families.

Karen Mapp, a professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education, advocates for smaller, community-based meetings where parents from various backgrounds can share their insights. She suggests that schools organize small group discussions to explore what families want for their children: “Meet families where they are, meet families in the community, have small group discussions where you get to say, what does everybody want for our kids?” (Stanford, 2024). This approach not only makes families feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts but also helps educators better understand the diverse needs of their community.

Furthermore, investing in translation services can ensure that all families comprehend school communications, bridging language barriers that may exist (Stanford, 2024). Schools should also seek feedback through surveys to understand parents' experiences and preferences better. Shana McIver from Learning Heroes emphasizes that “the feedback that schools and districts collect from families should influence the tools and tactics they use to communicate” (Stanford). By genuinely listening to families and adapting strategies based on their input, schools can create an inclusive environment that fosters collaboration and engagement, ultimately enhancing student success.

## **2.3 Strengthen School-Based Support**

Strengthening and establishing school-based support programs is crucial for enhancing parental engagement and addressing the diverse challenges parents face today. Many parents and caregivers are connected to educational institutions primarily through their children, which provides a unique opportunity for schools to foster social connections and support networks among families (HHS, 2024). For instance, local Early Head Start and Head Start programs exemplify effective support initiatives by offering group-based, evidence-informed classes designed for parents and caregivers of young children. These classes, developed by resources such as the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, provide vital information and skills that empower parents to support their children's development and learning. By utilizing existing gathering spaces within schools and early childhood education programs, educators can facilitate these connections, making it easier for families to access support and resources.

In addition to educational programs, schools can partner with community organizations and health agencies to connect parents to essential resources that address underlying economic, social, and health challenges (HHS, 2024). Such partnerships are vital, as they help mitigate parental stress, which can adversely affect children's learning and well-being. For example, schools could work with local health departments to offer workshops on nutrition and wellness or

collaborate with community service organizations to provide financial literacy classes. By addressing the broader context in which families operate, schools can create a more supportive environment that acknowledges and responds to the complexities of parental responsibilities.

By implementing these school-based support programs, educational institutions can create a robust network of resources for parents. This not only enhances parental engagement but also contributes to the overall success and well-being of students. When parents feel supported and connected to their children's education, they are more likely to engage actively in school activities and advocate for their children's needs. As schools take proactive steps to strengthen these supports, they help build a more inclusive and resilient educational environment that benefits the entire community.

## **2.4 Strategies to Encourage Active Participation in School Activities**

Effective school leadership recognizes that while principals and educators can implement positive programs, parent support is critical to driving school success, particularly at the secondary level (Handy, 2019). Establishing a culture where parents feel welcome and eager to participate is essential. Below are strategies to enhance parental engagement effectively.

### ***School Level***

#### **Hold Informal Social Gatherings Outside of School**

Like Mapp's suggestion of community based meetings discussed above, one successful strategy to promote parental engagement is hosting informal social gatherings outside of school, at times that can accommodate various schedules. At Gaithersburg High School, the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) president initiated "Backyard Chats" (Handy, 2019). Parents volunteered to host gatherings at their homes or community centers, collaborating with their high



school children to invite others. These casual events allowed parents, school leaders, and staff to mingle, share meals, and discuss upcoming programs, creating a relaxed atmosphere that fosters relationships. Similarly, Silver Creek Middle School organized "Husky Summer Socials" during their first summer. Principal Traci Townsend worked with the PTSA to host events in community centers and homes to ensure inclusivity and strengthen community ties. These gatherings established foundational relationships that contributed to an engaged school community.

### **Offer Volunteer Opportunities**

Principals can also enhance parental engagement by providing clear volunteer opportunities. Handy (2019) emphasizes the importance of informing parents about available roles within the school. The PTSA created a bilingual list of volunteer opportunities and distributed it during meetings, making it accessible in the school office and counseling areas. By utilizing platforms like SignUp Genius, schools can effectively organize and recruit parent volunteers for various events, thereby encouraging active participation. Encouraging parents to share their skills with students can further enhance involvement. For example, Townsend mentioned inviting parents to present during lunch periods, assist with International Night, or accompany students on field trips (Handy). Such initiatives not only foster engagement but also highlight the valuable contributions parents can make to the educational experience.

### **Emphasize Continuing Communication**

Establishing ongoing communication between parents and the school is crucial for building strong relationships. Handy (2019) maintained a monthly meeting with the PTSA president to discuss upcoming activities and address parent concerns. Keeping parents informed about significant incidents at the school is essential. Schools can utilize various communication tools, such as Remind for sending announcements, Blackboard messaging for important updates, and social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Townsend also emphasizes sending weekly

voice and email messages to families in both English and Spanish, fostering a sense of connection and community.

### **Form Special Interest Groups**

Creating special interest groups allows schools to address the unique needs of different communities. At Gaithersburg High School, Handy (2019) highlights the establishment of Latino Parent Meetings, which were tailored to Spanish-speaking families. These meetings provided critical information and reinforced the idea that parents are essential partners in their children's education. Silver Creek Middle School also implemented "Cafecitos," informal gatherings conducted in Spanish, allowing parents to ask questions and build relationships with one another. Townsend organized similar events, like "Mochas and Muffins" meetings for African-American parents, to discuss relevant topics such as race and the achievement gap. Additionally, hosting grade-level meetings ensures that parents feel supported throughout their children's educational journey.

### **Engage in Collaboration and Inclusion**

Engaging parents and students as integral members of the school team fosters a sense of belonging. Handy's (2019) philosophy that "parents are our partners" is exemplified by involving the PTSA president in the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), allowing parents to contribute to decision-making processes. This inclusion helps parents understand the rationale behind school practices and policies. Silver Creek Middle School employs study circles to foster dialogue about race and address achievement gaps, actively encouraging parent involvement. Townsend also uses restorative justice practices to engage parents in resolving conflicts, which builds community and enhances their connection to the school.

### **Emphasize Recognition and Appreciation**

Recognizing and appreciating parental contributions is vital for sustaining engagement. Handy (2019) advocates for expressing gratitude through letters, cards, and public recognition during events like Back to School Night and PTSA meetings. Highlighting parent contributions on social media platforms further

fosters a culture of appreciation, motivating parents to remain involved and engaged in school activities.

### ***Classroom Level***

Teachers can take proactive steps to engage parents, creating partnerships that enhance learning experiences and build a strong school community. By actively involving parents in classroom activities, teachers can bridge the gap between home and school, enhancing the educational experience for students. Here are four effective strategies that can promote parental engagement in the classroom (Scheer, 2024):

- **Mystery Reader Program:** This program invites caregivers to become Mystery Readers in the classroom, where they read a book of their choice aloud for 10 to 15 minutes. Caregivers provide three clues about their identity, creating excitement and engagement among students. To accommodate families, teachers offer flexible scheduling, provide books if needed, encourage reading in home languages, and allow for video calls if in-person participation isn't possible. The outcome is a welcoming environment that connects home and school, introduces new literature, and helps students learn more about their classmates' families, particularly benefiting those whose parents may not typically attend school events (Scheer).
- **Special Events Volunteers:** Teachers encourage parental involvement in classroom activities, such as holiday crafts, game days, or science experiments. By organizing these events in shorter time frames (45 minutes or less) and allowing parents to bring younger siblings, participation increases, even among busy families (Scheer). This strategy enriches the learning experience, introduces new perspectives, and ensures there is always an adult present for activities like using hot glue guns.
- **Teacher's Helper:** Teachers assign simple classroom tasks, like organizing the library or preparing materials, to parent volunteers. This allows family

members to engage in the classroom environment without needing to lead activities, which can be intimidating for some (Scheer). Monthly emails list tasks for parents to choose from, allowing them to sign up based on their availability and interests. This approach reduces the teacher's workload and encourages caregivers to feel a sense of ownership in the classroom, creating joy for students when they see their family members participating.

- **Academic Coaches:** Parents are invited to volunteer as academic coaches during specific activities, such as math stations or writing workshops. After a brief training session, volunteers assist students with tasks like sounding out words or practicing math strategies. Though initially challenging, this strategy has proven impactful by providing students with more individualized attention while helping parents gain insights into their children's learning processes and classroom activities (Scheer).

Scheer suggests several additional tips to maximize the success of the strategies discussed above. One effective approach is to wait until after the first six weeks of school to invite family members, allowing students to acclimate to classroom routines. For more challenging groups, consider delaying invitations until after winter break. It's also essential to prepare students for guest visits by teaching and practicing expected behaviors in advance. After each event, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved to enhance future experiences.

Collaborating with a colleague can also provide valuable support; partnering with a member of your professional learning community or a veteran educator can offer inspiration and guidance. Lastly, when utilizing sign-up websites for events, be attentive to families who may struggle with technology. Reserving spots for these families and reaching out directly can help ensure their inclusion, creating a more welcoming environment for everyone involved (Scheer).

## 2.5 Real-Life Examples of Successful Parent-Teacher Partnerships

### ***Chicago Public Schools: Parent University and Parent Leadership Council***

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) offers robust support for parents through initiatives like Parent University and the Parent Leadership Council (PLC). **Parent University** provides families with valuable learning experiences aimed at empowering them to support their children's academic success (Chicago Public Schools, 2024). The program covers a wide range of topics, including Common Core standards, GED preparation, English as a Second Language (ESL), parenting skills, health and wellness, financial literacy, and career development. By equipping parents with these skills, CPS fosters a collaborative environment where families can actively engage in their children's education. Each Parent University site is designed with resources such as computer labs and activity rooms, creating a welcoming space for parents to learn and connect.

In addition to Parent University, the **Parent Leadership Council** plays a vital role in school governance and advocacy. The council works closely with CPS leadership, including CEO Martinez, to inform district decision-making regarding policies, initiatives, funding, and advocacy efforts. Council members receive ongoing training from subject matter experts and the district's adult programs team, enhancing their ability to contribute effectively. This two-year term position emphasizes the importance of partnership between families and CPS, ensuring that parents have a voice in shaping educational practices and policies.

Participation in the PLC is open to all interested parents and guardians, requiring a time commitment but offering the opportunity to make a significant impact within the school community. By providing these avenues for involvement, CPS demonstrates its commitment to fostering strong family engagement and supporting parents in their roles as advocates for their children's education (Chicago Public Schools, 2024).

## ***Michigan's Adlai E. Stevenson Elementary: Open Door Policy***

At Stevenson Elementary School in Southfield, Michigan, Principal Tonya Hickman highlights the significance of an open-door policy in fostering a positive and welcoming environment for parents and families (Stanford, 2024). While educators should make a concerted effort to engage parents, it is equally important for school buildings to be inviting spaces. Instead of restricting parental access to designated times, schools can implement open-door policies that encourage more frequent interactions. Stevenson Elementary exemplifies this approach by allowing parents and community members who have passed background checks to freely navigate the school (Stanford). Additionally, the school has designated specific areas within its hallways and library for other parents and community members to meet with educators and school leaders. This thoughtful balance of security and accessibility not only enhances communication between families and the school but also cultivates a collaborative atmosphere that strengthens the entire school community.

## **Section 2 Conclusion**

Building strong parent-teacher partnerships is essential for fostering an enriching educational environment where students can flourish academically, socially, and emotionally. As this section has illustrated, effective collaboration hinges on establishing trust, having open communication, meeting families where they are, strengthening school-based support, and encouraging active participation in school activities. By implementing these strategies, educators can create meaningful connections with parents, enhancing their involvement in their children's education and promoting a sense of community. Real-life examples showcase how these partnerships lead to improved student outcomes and family well-being, reinforcing the idea that when parents and teachers work together, everyone benefits. However, the journey toward effective parent-teacher partnerships is not without challenges. It requires dedication, adaptability, and a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing the diverse needs of

families. Ultimately, the collective effort of educators and parents paves the way for a holistic educational experience that values collaboration and shared responsibility. By fostering a culture of openness and engagement, schools can build lasting partnerships that support student success and create a positive school climate, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## **Section 2 Key Terms**

ClassDojo - A digital communication platform used by teachers to share updates and communicate with parents, fostering a connected school-home relationship.

Collaborative Partnership - A relationship between parents and teachers centered on shared responsibility and joint efforts to support a child's educational experience.

Community-Based Meetings - Meetings held within the community rather than at school, making it easier for parents to attend and engage with school staff in a comfortable setting.

Digital Communication Platforms - Tools such as ClassDojo, Remind, and Bloomz that facilitate direct communication between teachers and parents.

Engagement - Active involvement by parents in their child's education, often through school events, volunteer opportunities, or consistent communication with educators.

Google Translate - A translation tool that helps schools communicate with non-English-speaking parents, fostering inclusive engagement.

Learning Management System (LMS) - Digital platforms like Google Classroom or Schoology that allow teachers to share assignments, progress reports, and updates with parents.



Mystery Reader Program - A classroom activity where parents or caregivers read a book aloud to students, fostering engagement and a sense of community in the classroom.

Parent-Teacher Student Association (PTSA) - An organization within schools that involves parents, teachers, and students in school activities, decision-making, and support initiatives.

Restorative Justice Practices - Approaches used to resolve conflicts by involving all parties in dialogue, often including parents, to build community and mutual understanding.

School-Based Support - Resources and programs offered within schools to assist parents and caregivers, connecting them with social networks and community resources.

SignUpGenius - A platform used by schools to organize and recruit volunteers for events, facilitating parent engagement and school involvement.

Social Media Platforms - Channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram used by schools to share updates and foster communication with parents.

Special Interest Groups - Groups within schools, such as Latino Parent Meetings or Cafecitos, that address specific needs and provide tailored information to diverse parent communities.

Transparency - Open, consistent communication between schools and parents that keeps parents informed about school activities, student progress, and other important matters.

Trust - A foundational element in parent-teacher partnerships, built through consistent communication, respect, and understanding of each other's roles in supporting student success.

Volunteer Opportunities - Roles provided by schools for parents to participate in events and activities, enhancing their involvement and connection to the school community.

## Section 2 Reflection Questions

1. What challenges might schools encounter when attempting to build strong partnerships with parents, and what strategies could help overcome these obstacles?
2. What strategies can teachers use at the beginning of the school year to set a positive tone with parents?
3. Why is it essential for teachers to understand the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the families they serve?
4. What digital platforms or tools have you found most effective for keeping parents informed and engaged?
5. Reflect on the concept of “meeting parents where they are.” What does this mean in your school’s context, and how could it be implemented?
6. If you could implement a new school-based support program for parents, what would it look like, and how would it meet your community’s specific needs?
7. If you were to organize a small group discussion with parents to discuss their goals and concerns, what key questions would you ask?
8. Reflect on the challenges in fostering active parent participation at the classroom level. What classroom-based engagement strategies would you like to try?

## Section 2 Activities

1. **Community Resource Mapping:** Map out local community resources available for parents (e.g., mental health services, parenting classes) and share this information with families.
2. **Audit Parent Communication Methods:** Review all current methods of communication with parents and evaluate their effectiveness. Identify one or two ways to make communication more inclusive or accessible.
3. **Develop a Parent-Teacher Communication Plan:** Create a plan for regular, positive communication with parents, outlining topics, frequency, and goals. This could help establish ongoing trust and transparency.
4. **Audit Parent Event Inclusivity:** Evaluate how inclusive your parent events are for non-English speaking parents or those with different work schedules. Brainstorm ways to make events more accessible.
5. **Interview Experienced Educators:** Talk to colleagues about their experiences with parent engagement. Gather strategies that have worked well, especially in connecting with hard-to-reach parents.
6. **Develop a Community Resource Board:** Create a physical or digital bulletin board with local community resources for parents, covering areas like after-school activities, family counseling, and financial support.
7. **Create a Parent Networking Guide:** Develop a brief guide that suggests local parent groups or online communities where parents can connect for support and advice.
8. **Outline an Action Plan for Parent Support:** Draft a simple, actionable plan for how you will support parents' needs based on classroom observations, school data, and community resources, revisiting it throughout the year to make updates.

## Course Conclusion

The role of parental involvement in education is pivotal in shaping the academic and emotional landscapes of students. As we have explored throughout this course, understanding the complexities of modern parenting—along with the challenges and expectations parents face—enables educators to foster more effective and inclusive school environments. The insights gained from Section 1 underscore the direct correlation between parental engagement and student success, highlighting how parents' well-being and family dynamics profoundly influence children's educational journeys. By recognizing and addressing the barriers that parents encounter, educators can work collaboratively to create supportive frameworks that empower families to engage actively in their children's education. In Section 2, we have emphasized the critical importance of building strong parent-teacher partnerships. These relationships, rooted in trust and open communication, not only enhance the school culture but also facilitate student achievement. By implementing the strategies discussed, educators can cultivate a welcoming environment that values diverse family backgrounds and encourages participation. Ultimately, this course aims to inspire educators to view parental involvement as an integral component of the educational process. By equipping themselves with the knowledge and tools to support families, educators can create a collaborative community that not only benefits students but also enriches the broader school environment. As we move forward, let us commit to strengthening these vital partnerships, recognizing that when families and educators work together, we set the stage for our students' lasting success and well-being.

## Case Example

Mr. Pepper, a dedicated elementary school teacher in a suburban district, has been working diligently to strengthen the support system for parents of his students. He recognizes that active parental involvement is crucial for enhancing

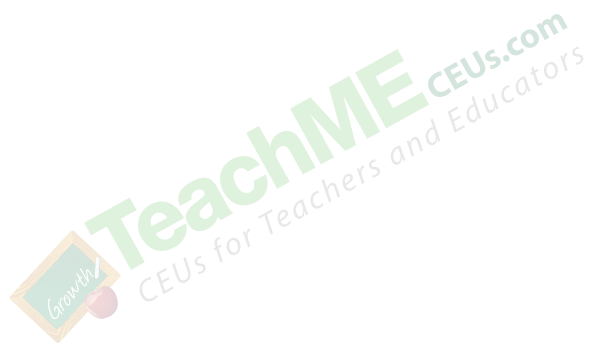
student learning and well-being. However, Mr. Pepper faces significant challenges in fostering strong connections with families and addressing their diverse needs.

## Challenges

1. **Balancing Diverse Family Needs:** Mr. Pepper's classroom includes students from varied backgrounds, each with unique family structures and challenges. Some parents are single caregivers, while others are working multiple jobs. This diversity makes it difficult for Mr. Pepper to find strategies that effectively engage all parents and encourage their participation in school activities.
2. **Communication Barriers:** Many of Mr. Pepper's students come from families where English is not the primary language spoken at home. This language barrier complicates communication, making it challenging for parents to understand school expectations and involvement opportunities. As a result, some families may feel disconnected from the school community.
3. **Limited Resources for Parental Support:** While Mr. Pepper wants to provide resources and workshops for parents on topics like child development and effective parenting strategies, he struggles with a lack of funding and administrative support. This limitation hinders his ability to offer programs that could significantly benefit families and strengthen their involvement.
4. **Parental Anxiety and Lack of Engagement:** Mr. Pepper has observed that some parents feel overwhelmed by their own challenges and may not prioritize school involvement. This lack of engagement can stem from a sense of inadequacy regarding their ability to support their children's education, particularly if they have had negative experiences with schools in the past.
5. **Resistance to Change in Traditional Practices:** Although Mr. Pepper is enthusiastic about fostering a collaborative environment, some colleagues

are hesitant to embrace new approaches to parent engagement. They prefer sticking to traditional methods, which can create friction and limit the potential for innovative strategies that support parents.

As you analyze this case study, consider how you might support Mr. Pepper in overcoming these challenges. What strategies could he implement to build stronger relationships with families? How might he improve communication, engage parents effectively, and create a more inclusive school environment?



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