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# Parental Engagement For Academic Sucess Of Students

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PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS: A  
POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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## **ABSTRACT**

This policy advocacy plan aims to increase parent involvement in Ford Heights School District 169. A review of two separate board policies and an evaluation of the current level of parent involvement—gained through observations, surveys, and needs assessment data—led to the development of this policy. The result is a policy advocacy plan that will be implemented by Ford Heights School District 169 as a means to reinforce parent involvement for students’ success.

## PREFACE

As an educational administrator, I understand and believe in the importance of education. As a parent and grandparent, I understand and believe in the positive effects my involvement can have on children's lives. I want to make sure that the parents in my district have the same understanding and belief. "If you are a parent of a school-age child, you play an essential role in your child's education" (A Parents Handbook, 2013, p. 3).

Many avenues lead to student achievement, and all of those avenues should be supported. Data on parent involvement clearly demonstrated how it affects students' educational success in so many ways. Children with more involved parents tend to have better attendance, socialization skills, and test scores, and are actively involved in extracurricular activities (A Parents Handbook, 2013, p. 5).

As an administrator in the educational environment, I think it is important to make that environment inviting to parents. If they feel welcomed and able to contribute in planning their children's education, parents become involved and stay involved. The partnership between the school and the home has a significant impact on how students' performance. I feel it is my duty as an administrator to ensure that my students' parents understand that they are a part of this partnership. This proposed parent policy plan can help encourage parents to be involved and understand that their involvement matters.

This policy advocacy plan is grounded in set standards that are regulated by the state of Illinois to maintain parent involvement in public education. I am excited about the outcome of this proposed policy plan, as it has given me insight on the vital role of

parent involvement in many aspects of education. My writings in this doctoral program have helped me grow professionally and personally as an educator and parent.

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## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

In addition to being an educator, I am also an elected official in my community. My experiences in both of these roles have created concerns regarding the need for more parent engagement. As a member of the Board of Education, I work closely with the Superintendent of School to support our vision of student achievement. This relationship gives me a better perspective on how important parent involvement is. Administrators are always searching for ways to gain parents' interest and increase their involvement in student learning. "Students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, enroll in higher-level programs, have higher graduation rates and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education" (Information Briefing: Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2007, p. 1). My vision advocates for a more effective partnership between parents and the school district to achieve those outcomes.

### **Introduction to the Problem**

I was first introduced to the parental involvement policy at a district Educational Foundation Committee meeting in July 2015. At the time, I was serving as a school board member in the district in which I lived. The policy contained information regarding the general expectations of the district, a description of required and discretionary parental involvement components, and instructions on how to implement them. When I became aware that such a policy existed, I requested a copy of the policy to use in my work district. As I began to learn more, I realized that my work district already had created a written policy on parent involvement, dated February 2010. However, that existing policy had never been effectively implemented or managed.

One tenet of the existing policy called for meetings to provide parents with opportunities to participate in school-level involvement activities. These meetings were supposed to be scheduled and convened at flexible times. However, for two years, those meetings had taken place only in the mid-afternoon, presenting a problem for the parents, many of whom were only available in the evenings, after work.

Another issue with the existing policy emerged in relation to the influx of Hispanic families in our district over the past two years. Hispanic parents began attending meetings that failed to provide information in their native language, even though the parent involvement policy required both an interpreter and information that was understandable and presented uniformly.

The existing policy also required the provision of a district wide home/school coordinator, who would organize a parent center, to inform parents of programs and resources. Though the parent center existed, it was not being monitored. Instead of providing information and resources to all parents within district boundaries, the coordinator decided which parents she would inform, and was not held accountable for this shortcoming. Parents began to complain that they were being overlooked when certain programs became available for enrollment. Finally, the policy indicated that any necessary revisions would undergo an annual review that included parents' input. The last revised date on the parent involvement policy was October 5, 2010--no revisions had been made in five years. There were no indicators that anyone made any suggestions for improvements since October 2010.

The District Parent Involvement Policy from my work district that I advocate for defines the general expectations of the school district, the requirements outlined in

section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and the steps to implement these components. This policy must be monitored closely, and the district must accept the responsibility of carrying out the policy's requirements. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) requires districts to support schools in efforts to be more open and transparent in their operations, communicate more often with outside stakeholders, and partner with parents in the learning process (Auerbach, 2012). This proposed policy fulfills those obligations by outlining the expectations of how our schools will communicate and become partners with all stakeholders.

A child's academic success depends just as much on what happens at home as what happens in school. "What is said and done at home has an impact on the type of attitude that a child has towards school" (Smart Guide, 2012). Supporting educational goals is just as important as feeding and clothing children. Parents' involvement in their children's learning is vitally important throughout their K-12 years (Smart Guide, 2012). Educational leaders must help parents understand their role in the educational process and how it will change as their children develop. The school climate should be comfortable enough for parents to want to develop relationships with teachers and administration. Leaders must work to make that climate a reality.

The current parent involvement policy needs to be repaired. Collaboration empowers parents to become more active in their children's education (Auerbach, 2012). For that reason, I intend to work with a committee of parents and teachers to do just update and better the parent involvement policy. The committee will recommend changes that hold all stakeholders accountable for parental engagement.

On March 20, 2015, I had the opportunity to hear Lonnie Rashid Lynn Jr. (Common) speak at The Faith Community of Saint Sabina about purpose. As I was listening to him speak, I began to reflect upon my purpose here on earth. I started to ponder my service and commitment to others. In my pursuit of becoming a better servant leader, I must understand, in the words of Common, what I am willing to die for.” My dedication to the empowerment of our children has been the height of my purpose. But, to take that purpose to another level, I will need to give more than I have been. Analyzing the District Parental Involvement Policy and reorganizing its structure and content will enable me to have a guided plan for engaging parents in the educational success of our students. A successful implementation of parental engagement would increase parental involvement in the school community.

### **Critical Issues**

Parental engagement has tremendous potential effects on student performance. Because of that potential, parents must take a sense of ownership in their roles in the educational practices of their children. Cultural exposure and the home environment have a significant impact on how students learn (Smart Guide, 2012). Connections between home and school afford students a better opportunity to achieve educational success.

My district currently has an active parent teacher organization (PTO) that meets once a month from September to May, with an average of 20 parents in attendance. A total of 465 students attend schools in my district, and 23 percent of the parents participate in the PTO.

As educators, we recognize that the cultural norms of our students and their families are different from ours. In recognition of this fact, the district has provided

professional development on cultural diversity. The Pupil Personnel Service (PPS) department supports staff when they face difficulty understanding the cultural norms of their students. The director of federal and state programs provides support to parents in PTO meetings, in the form of workshops, through a partnership with SPEED Special Education Joint Agreement #802. These workshops are meant to address parents' concerns about organizational policies and procedures as they relate to the educational and behavioral components of their children's school environment. The district encourage parents to be a part of that environment by attending the PTO meetings to add their voice, receive support, and build partnerships to create a sound educational environment for all students.

At a meeting on February 19, 2015, parents were asked what the district could do to improve their involvement. Parents indicated that one potential way to accomplish that was by providing greater access to their children's academic performance. As a result of that suggestion, the home/school coordinator provided information to Power School, the online student information system, for parents to access their children's account.

Parents also requested alternate times for PTO meetings. The meetings are currently held from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., a time during which many others are at work, stated the parents. They suggested that alternate 6:00 p.m. meeting times to accommodate those individuals. The parents also inquired about the purpose of half days. They were concerned about how frequent half days were which indicates less time in school for their children.

In addition, parents suggested that schools provide some sort of reward to students whose parents participate in school events. The most popular of suggested prizes was a “no uniform day.”

Finally, the parents’ last suggestion was to have a “grandparents’ day,” in which students’ grandparents would have an opportunity to get involved. Administrators are taking all their suggestions into consideration as we brainstorm how to expand on our parental engagement.

I am proposing that the district come together to figure out ways to get our parents involved in the schools. Administrators have to understand the parents’ needs and the barriers that hinder their involvement. Parents need to know that they can have a voice in their children’s education.

### **Recommended Policy and Envisioned Effect**

As stated, parental involvement in children’s academic lives leads to a number of positive benefits. My policy reflects the need to increase that involvement to increase student achievement. I am proposing Parental Engagement for Academic Success of Students to the superintendent of schools in an effort to have him make a recommendation to the Board of Education for approval. This policy will address ways in which the district can enhance parents’ involvement and build on their knowledge of district goals and student achievement so that they can help the district ensure student success. The policy will encourage parent participation through district activities, committees, volunteer opportunities, partnerships, policy making, and community engagement. Parents should play an integral role in assisting with their child’s learning, and this policy should help welcome and encourage all parents to take a hands-on

approach in their children's learning. I am advocating for a school board policy that will view parents as full partners in their children's education and as a result include them in decision-making. They will have opportunities to serve on committees that will address academic achievement, discipline, and social interactions.

This policy will serve as a guide for creating accountability in improving and maintaining school-parent relationship. These partnerships can help create a culturally diverse and effective learning environment. The policy will also outline the goals, objectives, and expectations of parental engagement. I feel if we are able to put all of the above in place, we will raise student achievement, test scores, accountability, social interactions, and extracurricular participation.

My district conducts an annual needs assessment through surveys distributed to parents and teachers. As a result of the assessments, the district develops programs, implements new initiatives, and provides resources to existing programs. During this process, the district tries to capture the voices of as many stakeholders as possible. Efforts are made to provide opportunities for everyone's voices to be heard. When that effort is made, when stakeholders are provided ways to get involved, they are able to use their voices and work with educators for the best interest of students.

## **SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED**

Strong parental involvement is unquestionably a need from an educator's perspective, but examining parents' perceptions on the topic allows us to study the issue in their context. To accomplish this, randomly selected parents in the district were asked to complete a brief survey on their interpretation of the relationship between the home and school environment. One the best ways to improve parental involvement is by understanding and communicating its importance for student growth. "Research shows that children with involved parents are more likely to attend school regularly, earn better grades and higher test scores, and show improved behavior and social skills" (Parent Involvement, 2008). After studying the results of the survey to understand both the scope of the problem and specific areas of need, the issue of parental involvement will be analyzed from educational, economic, social, political, and moral and ethical standpoints. Those analyses will demonstrate how a parent involvement policy can help guide practices to promote student achievement.

### **Survey: The Relationship Between Home and School**

Qualitative data from parents formed part of the needs assessment. This data was obtained through a survey that consisted of eight questions addressing the relationship between the home and school. Thirteen parents in the district completed the survey in October 2015.

The following are the eight survey questions that were asked and the responses from the parents:

**On a scale of 1-4, how would you rate the communication between you, (parent/guardian) and the school/district?**

**1=Unsatisfactory, 2=Needs Improvement, 3=Satisfactory, 4= Excellent**

The majority of parents (10 out of 13) rated communication as excellent. The remaining three reported that they were satisfied with communication.

**Why did you choose the above rating?**

In their responses, parents stated that they had a positive relationship with the schools. For example, they indicated that the school has notified parents whenever there are concerns. Schools also kept parents informed about upcoming events. "I love that," one parent said. Responses also indicated that the schools treated the parents with respect when they were present, and provided information that was helpful at school and at home. This information was provided to parents on a weekly basis. Parents stated that, based on the communication between the home and school, they felt they were on the same path as far as teaching and discipline were concerned. The teachers explained information very well, and parents learned about things that hadn't known, they said.

**What are ways you think the school/district can improve on communicating with the home?**

Three parents indicated that notes about activities and events could be sent home with the children. Parents also indicated a desire for more telephone communication by the school.. Internet and text messaging were also indicated means of communication that could be improved. One parent indicated that the level of involvement is up to the parent.

**Why do you think it is important for the school/district to communicate with parent(s) guardians(s)?**

About half (6 of 13) of the parents surveyed felt that they should be aware of everything going on with their children. It was important that parents knew what their

children were being taught and learning in school, they indicated. Four of the parents felt it was important to communicate with teachers, so that educators would get to know students and their families, building solid relationships that would in turn help promote students' growth and development.

**What limits do you have with participating in school/district activities?**

Three parents indicated that their work schedules interfere with their ability to participate in activities. Four parents replied that they had no limits and were willing to do whatever was necessary to be involved in their children's lives.

**What are some of the activities that you participate in with the school/district?**

Two parents provided lists of events in which they'd participated, including; cheerleading/tumbling, drama, sports, music/band, parent/teacher conferences, open house and, parent meetings. One parent reported going on outings and helping out in classes. Five parents reported that they have never participated in school activities. One parent stated that completing this survey was the first step in becoming involved. Another parent reported that they did not know there were activities to get involved in, stating a need for better communication with the school.

**Do you have any recommendations on improving communication between the school/district and the parent(s)/guardian(s)?**

One parent reported that while they felt the calls that go out from the district robo-call center were adequate, the calls only needed to be made twice a day, instead of six or seven times. Too many calls about the same subject were annoying to some parents. Five of the parents did not have recommendations for improving communication. Six parents did not respond.

### **How can you contribute or be more involved in the school/district?**

Four parents reported that they could come to more meetings and participate in more activities. One parent indicated that they needed to increase everyday communication with their child's teacher. Parents reported that they needed to go on more outings, volunteer in the classroom, and be more involved with the parent center.

### **Survey Summary**

Most of the parents surveyed indicated that they felt the communication between the home and school was satisfactory or excellent. Their responses from indicated that they were satisfied with the ways in which information was provided. However, parents did indicate a few areas that could be improved—notably, that more information could be sent home through notes, phone calls, Internet, and text messaging.

Parents discussed a need to know what is going on with their children at all times. They felt that communication between the home and school leads to strong relationships, which are important for student growth. The only limits on parent involvement that were indicated in the survey were work constraints. A higher number of parents indicated that they did not participate in school or district activities, compared to those who did. The latter group listed multiple ways in which they were involved with the schools and district. Very few parents had recommendations for ways to improve communication. They only indicated that too many robo-calls go out in one day. Moving forward, parents indicated that they can be more involved by volunteering, going to meetings, and communicating with teachers.

### **Educational Analysis**

Educators are always looking for ways that students can enhance their academic performance. Schools cannot improve unless parents want them to and know how to participate in that improvement (Murnane & Levy, 1996, p. 91). Successful schools and programs ask parents for their input and incorporate their views (Parent Involvement, 2008, p. 2). Research and evidence has shown that consistent positive interactions between parents and educators have a major influence on student achievement (Cary, 2006). Parents are key contributors motivating children toward their education. When parents become involved in their children's academic lives, students seem to take more ownership in applying themselves in the classroom. When parents demonstrate accountability for their children's achievement, the children themselves become more accountable for their academic success (United States of America Department of Education, 2004). Students even tend to have better health when their parents are involved in their education (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

In his 2011 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama discussed the shared responsibility of the home, school, and community in enhancing the U.S. education system, stating, "...the question is whether all of us—as citizens and as parents—are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed (Mapp, 2012, p. 1). Parents are their children's first advocates. If they don't advocate for their children, who else will?

The educational benefits of parent involvement are substantial. Attendance rates improve. Students have higher grade point averages and improved scores on standardized tests or rating scales. They tend to enroll in more challenging academic programs. They pass more classes and earn more credit. . Students become more engaged in school

activities when their parents are involved. Behavioral issues decrease. Students gain better social skills, form better interpersonal relationships, and adapt to school more easily when their parents are involved (Henderson & Map, 2002, p. 7).

Education is a key component in helping students develop the skills necessary to become productive members of society. In his book *New Paradigms for Parental Involvement*, Rick Allen (2005) quoted Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center for School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University: “We don’t want parents to be the teachers of every subject in the school—that’s the teacher’s job. Parents still can be highly supportive in academic areas. Everybody’s contribution to the student’s learning makes for equal responsibility” (p. 2).

All parents want their children to be successful in school and to enjoy learning. Their cultural values and beliefs have a significant impact on how their children respond to their educational environment. When students come from families that are invested in their education, they tend to develop the prerequisites needed to be active members of their society. When parents model their educational expectations, their children tend to follow through on those expectations.

### **Economic Analysis**

Developed in 1965, the Head Start Program was one of the earliest education-related parent engagement initiatives. It was one of the agencies supported by federal money stemming from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, a piece of legislation aimed at promoting antipoverty programs. These programs operated under the concept that the poor should participate in planning and carrying out initiatives designed for their benefit. Even in the 1960s the federal government recognized the importance of parental

engagement: “From its inception, Head Start emphasized parent participation and provided detailed language for how parents would be engaged in decision making” (Mapp 2012, p. 5). By 1970 the Head Start Parent Advisory Council was upgraded to policy boards and given substantial authority, comparable to that of governing boards. Parents on the Parent Advisory Council participated in planning and carrying out program designs. When the Advisory Council changed to a policy board, they obtained the authority to create policies.

In recent years, the federal government has created regulations regarding parental involvement, in recognition of the impact it has on student achievement. Under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), if a local education agency’s (LEA) allocation is greater than \$500,000, it is required to reserve *at least* one percent of those funds for parental involvement activities, including family literacy training and methods to enhance parenting skills. The LEA must set aside parental involvement funding based on the proportion of private-school children from low-income families who reside in its public school attendance areas; 95 percent of the remaining funds are reserved for parental involvement activities at the LEA level (Mapp, 2012, p. 3). In May 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan created an optional family engagement and responsibility fund to launch state-run competitions supporting innovative and effective local family engagement initiatives. These initiatives were created to increase the capacity of families and school personnel to foster partnerships that support children’s learning and development. In addition, the new initiatives were put in place to improve people’s mindset regarding family engagement. Duncan also sought to promote “random acts of family engagement” to work toward this goal.

Another primary objective was to shift the emphasis of family engagement to “a collective growth model” that would provide a more committed way of monitoring and evaluating parental involvement (Mapp, 2012).

### **Social Analysis**

Many parents have limited involvement in their children’s education. In some cases, this stems from a lack of basic parenting skills. Some parents are under a great amount of stress, and many did not have positive experiences when they attended school. These factors combine to lessen rates of parental involvement. Schools must find ways not only to strengthen their engagement with parents, but also to consider their developmental needs. The most consistent predictors of academic achievement and social adjustment are parents’ expectations of their child’s academic attainment and satisfaction with their child’s education at school (Michigan Department of Education, 2001).

Family culture and norms influence the extent to which parents become involved in their children’s education. Parents are often engaged in that area because *their* parents had been, as well. That exposure to positive parent involvement creates a desire to provide the same level involvement for their children. Parents’ perceptions and past experiences also play a role. Those who had positive social experiences in school are naturally more likely to become involved in their children’s schooling (Mapp, Retrieved 2015). They want to make sure they provide a positive influence on how their children feel about school.

An intimidating educational environment is another common barrier to parents becoming socially involved. Inactive parents are often ashamed of not knowing how to communicate within educational settings. When they feel as though they do not have the

language or communication skills to have a meaningful conversation with their child's teacher, they tend to avoid interacting with the teacher altogether. Even though parents have expectations and mean to do well by their children, some lack the appropriate strategies to effectively communicate with staff. This often leads to a lack of parental involvement, which in turn often leads to behavioral problems at school.

Parent teacher associations (PTAs) and parent teacher organizations (PTOs) are two organizations that can prove instrumental in providing opportunities for parents to become involved and have a voice in their children's school.

A PTA is a nonprofit association made up of parents, teachers and staff with the intent of facilitating parental participation in schools. A PTO is a formal organization that consists of parents, teachers and school staff with goals that include parent volunteerism, encouragement for teachers and students, community involvement, and welfare of students and families. These groups sponsor many of the social activities and fundraisers in the school environment. Their parent members tend to have good working relationships with school administrators, teachers, and staff. They stay updated with current events in the school and become familiar faces in the educational environment. Their children are often favored academically. When my son was in elementary school, I served as the vice president of the PTO, I believed the organization included an active, empowered group of parents who wanted to make a difference in their children's school experience. The PTO organized projects and helped the principal make decisions on specific events. We were able to sponsor children's participation in various events when they could not afford the cost. Serving as a member of such an organization can further parents' level of involvement. My membership afforded me the leverage I needed to

become a member of the Board of Education. These positions empowered me as a parent and gave me a voice in my son's education. Now, I represent other students' voices as a school board member.

### **Political Analysis**

Politics play a significant role in determining how dollars are spent and decisions are made in a school district. Parents who become active in their children's education—those who serve as board members or take part in advocacy forums—have a greater influence on those politics. Involvement with parent advisory committees, educational foundations, and school boards allows parents to help make a difference in many children's lives, not just their own. Elected officials on school boards are often members of the community or school, parents who want to look out for the best interests of both their children and other children in their community. These people have the opportunity to help make decisions and create policies. Parents who are involved in policy are better informed and more confident that adequate funds are allocated to the areas they believe will increase student achievement. Political positions in the educational setting grant parents a certain level of power and respect. Their power exerts some influence on how their children are treated and viewed in the school system. Parental involvement in educational politics opens up opportunities for parents, teachers, and administrators to collaborate and make decisions based on children's needs.

Parent involvement components are required by ESEA, which provides a framework that families, educators, and communities can use to work together to improve teaching and learning. This framework emphasizes four principals: be accountable for results, have local control and flexibility, expand parental choice, and offer effective and successful

programs that reflect scientifically based research (U. S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 1).

Specifically, these provisions stress shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement, including expanded public school choice and supplemental educational services for eligible children in low performing schools, local development of parental involvement plans with sufficient flexibility to address local needs, and building parents' capacity for using effective practices to improve their own children's academic achievement (U. S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 1).

The specific statutory definition of parental involvement under ESEA is "the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This statute tries to ensure that parents play an integral role in their child's education at home and at school. The statute goes on to emphasize that parents are full partners in their child's education, and as such they should be included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in their child's education.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act calls for schools to write and implement specific plans to create parental involvement. These plans are monitored by NCLB. Under the act, parents are offered important insights into their children's education, including the professional qualifications of their teachers and their schools. This allows parents to be able to make informed decisions regarding their children's education and help their children's school develop effective and successful academic programs. When

schools are identified as needing improvement, parents have the necessary knowledge to gauge their school's strengths and weaknesses to determine helpful options.

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

Parents need guidance on how to help their children advance their education. Teachers can provide some guidance on how to work toward that goal at home. Beyond that guidance, schools can create programs to encourage parents to get involved in their children's education. Evidence shows a dramatic drop in parental involvement as children get older (Rapp & Duncan, 2011). Schools must initiate activities to work against that decline. In addition, I believe teachers must change their mindset on the relationship between socioeconomic status and parental involvement. In my experience, teachers often feel that parents of low income do not have as much time to be involved in their children's education as do middle-class parents.

Secretary of Education Duncan's stated the following in his keynote address at the first annual Mom Congress on Education and Learning in May 2010:

My vision for family engagement is ambitious ... I want to have too many parents demanding excellence in their schools. I want all parents to be real partners in education with their children's teachers, from cradle to career. In this partnership, students and parents should feel connected—and teachers should feel supported. ... we need parents to speak out and drive change in chronically underperforming schools where children receive an inferior education. With parental support, those struggling schools need to be turned around now—not tomorrow, because children get only one chance at an education.

Schools must work to create an environment that leads to positive experiences for parents with a history of negative experiences or feelings about the school environment. When schools commend parents for their involvement, it creates a positive cycle, increasing their self-confidence and keeping them involved. When we strengthen the capacity for parental involvement, we in turn strengthen the educational capacity in schools. This type of relationship naturally strengthens the partnership between parents and schools and advances student achievement. Parents who trust their children's school are able to have constructive disagreements and move forward, allowing them to bring about change in the educational environment.

Most parents want what is best for their children and work to the best of their knowledge and ability to make that happen. However, that knowledge and those abilities come from different contexts. Educators must understand the different ethnic groups' cultural differences regarding parental involvement. Hispanic parents generally feel more trusting of teaching practices and do not see the need to question educators' authority (Rapp & Duncan, 2011). Hispanic parents often view teachers as experts and feel that they are being invasive if they question them. Teachers tend to take the passive approach as a lack of involvement, while the behavior is seen as trust and respect in the Hispanic Culture (Rapp & Duncan, 2011).

African-American parents have a different perspective on parental involvement is. When their children do well in school, many African-American parents do not feel the need to give extra support to their children. Most tend to support their children at home, helping with school work and encouraging them to do their best. However, teachers are not always privy to this type of parental involvement, and as a result may assume that

African-American parents are not engaged in their children's education. African-American parents are more comfortable working with their children in the home environment because many feel that some educators are biased against their children and their cultural values. They lack the trust needed for them to feel comfortable becoming involved in the educational setting (Rapp & Duncan, 2011). As discussed earlier, trust is a big concern for parents when it comes to being involved in their children's education.

### **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

This paper advocates for the District Parental Involvement Policy that will lay the foundation for establishing and increasing meaningful parental involvement in our schools. This policy, which I will recommend to my superintendent and the Board of Education, will reflect the district's commitment to the belief that all students can learn when there is shared accountability between schools and parents. This policy underscores the concept that cooperation between the school and home is a vital component in students' growth and education. Its goal is to establish a plan to create effective partnerships with parents to support academic achievement. Anne Cary (2006) stated that to build such partnerships with families and the community, schools must first talk and listen to parents, community groups, business leaders, and other stakeholders in student learning (p. 13). This policy will promote that sort of productive communication, as well as increase support of parental skills, parental involvement in student learning, parent advocacy, and collaboration with the community.

#### **Goals and Objectives of the Policy**

This policy seeks to embrace a philosophy of partnership, of shared responsibility for student achievement. With guidance and support from Ford Heights School District 169, Cottage Grove Upper Grade Center, and Medgar Evers Primary Academic Center, each school in the district will build the capacity for strong parental involvement, both from itself and from its students' parents. To work toward that goal, all school staff members must help create a welcoming environment for parents, one that encourages them to ask questions and learn about their children's school. Parents should be able to voice their concerns and, when appropriate, participate in decision making. They are

more likely to do this when a school facilitates trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members. The policy aims to establish such relationships. The goals should also take into account class and cultural differences, as well as reflect parents' individual relationships with their family and the way in which they interact. .

As a key part of this policy, programs, activities, and procedures will be provided to increase parent involvement at Cottage Grove Upper Grade Center and Medgar Evers Primary Academic Center. These will be planned and implemented in consultation with each school's parents. The schools will notify parents of the newly proposed policy in a straightforward language they can understand. As a further effort to ensure effective communication and strong relationships, the district will provide opportunities for participation by parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and migrant parents.

The district will also establish a Parent Engagement Committee that will meet annually to revise and update the district's Parental Engagement Policy. The meeting will also address strategies to gather suggestions to address concerns from parents and school personnel.

### **Stakeholders Related to the Policy**

Parent engagement requires buy-in from a number of different populations. Student achievement has implications for many groups, and so those groups must all be invested in positive outcomes. The stakeholders in this policy include school administration, teachers, staff, parents, students, and the broader community.. For the

policy to be effective, it will address the needs, values, and preferences of the district's stakeholders.

Parents are interested in obtaining information that will help them support their children in school. Joining bodies such as the parent teacher organization (PTO), the parent advisory council, or various parent support groups can give parents the opportunities to get involved and provide that type of support. Through these organizations, parents are able to voice their concerns and share their values and beliefs with other parents, staff, and community leaders.

Parent meetings in my district feature plenty of discussion and dialogue on how parents can partner with teachers and staff to learn various strategies to support their children's academic success. Oftentimes our parents want to participate in their children's education, but do not know where to begin. These meetings provide a setting in which parents can gather information and participate in discussions and workshops to help them collaborate with their teachers. When parents feel comfortable doing so, they are able to address concerns and be proactive in their children's learning. Establishing such collaborative practices is a key goal of this policy, and this document will provide guidelines for parents and district staff on how to properly engage those practices.

Students can benefit from collaboration between their parents and teachers. For example, one result of such a partnership is consistency in the messages presented to the student. When parents and teachers come together to model shared values and beliefs, students are exposed to the expectations of the home/ school partnership.

The culture of the community can affect student performance, which in turn can affect how students interact in the community. A community culture that encourages

academic achievement heightens the success of its local students. Partnerships between parents, schools, and the community provide more opportunities and resources for students through work-study programs, internships, volunteer opportunities, and scholarship. Access and exposure to enrichment programs in the community can give students the background knowledge they need to navigate their way through the educational environment. When communities share the interests of the schools and parents, students are afforded more opportunities to become academically sound.

### **Rationale for the Validity of the Policy**

Parental engagement in schools is marked by collaboration between parents and school staff to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012, p. 6). The level of parental engagement has a significant impact on student achievement. Considering that a primary goal for any educational institution should be the success of its students, parental engagement should be a targeted way to meet that goal. My policy advocacy document is intended to help schools provide opportunities to increase participation of parents from all cultural backgrounds in their children's educational experiences, to the extent that it is practicable. These opportunities would serve to build the district's and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement.

The requirements of Section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) support and validate this proposal. Districts are required to provide parents of school-age children with a written parental involvement policy (Mapp, 2012). My district does currently have a parent involvement policy that covers the mandated provisions noted in Section 1118 of the ESEA. However, my proposal seeks to revise the

existing policy to address and improve the current state of parental engagement in the district. The revision will include specific examples of the implementation of the District Parental Involvement Policy. As it stands the current policy outlines the steps the district will take to work with parents in building a partnership in making decisions for their children's education. I want to provide detailed examples to support the implementation process of the District Parental Involvement Policy. Adding examples to the steps that are already in place will provide a clearer understanding of expectations that will help administrators and parents move forward in promoting parental engagement that they can maintain.

Through the provisions of my proposed policy, the district will convene an annual Parent Involvement Committee meeting with parents and school representation. This annual meeting will exist for the purpose of revising and updating the district's Parental Engagement Policy. Title I, Part A requires a school district to invite parents to an informational meeting that outlines the school's participation in Title 1, Part A programs, the requirements for doing so, and the parents' right to be involved. My policy will allow for flexible meeting times in order to provide greater opportunities for parents to participate in school-level activities, including parent conferences, workshops, after-school activities, and special family events, (e.g., musicals or spelling bees).

## SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Standards for parent and family involvement programs were set in 1997 by the National Parent Teacher Association. More than 30 years of research and 100 years of practice led to their development (NSPAA, 2006). These standards list practices that have been shown to lead to the success of parent involvement programs, based on the following six core tenets:

- I. **Communicating.** Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- II. **Parenting.** Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- III. **Student learning.** Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- IV. **Volunteering.** Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- V. **School decision making and advocacy.** Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- VI. **Collaborating with the community.** Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

This policy proposal strongly emphasizes the importance of parent involvement in their children's education. That emphasis is echoed by many laws and standards. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) both require meaningful parent involvement in acknowledgment of this importance. In addition, Title I funding provided by the U.S.

Department of Education requires that any district that receives more than \$500,000 in funding must set aside at least 1 percent of its funds to support parent involvement.

### **Pros**

Research has shown that parents' involvement in their children's education has a substantial positive influence. Mapp and Henderson conducted research on high-achieving students from all backgrounds for the 2002 report *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. The authors found that "...their parents encourage them, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework."

In their responses to a survey on the relationship between home and school, parents in my district indicated that communication between those two entities is essential to their children's growth. The Iowa School Boards Foundation (2007) issued a report addressing home/school partnerships. These findings concluded that students earn better grades when their families are involved in their learning. Students also display better behavior and more positive attitudes toward when their families are involved. In addition, the research goes beyond simply *whether* parents are involved to address *the extent to which* they are involved. That is, children do their best when parents play multiple roles in their education. The following themes have consistently appeared throughout my research on parental involvement: better grades, higher test scores, higher graduation rates, better attendance, higher aspirations, greater enrollment in postsecondary education, increased self-esteem, good social skills, and positive attitudes toward school and homework.

The Michigan Department of Education (2001) addressed the research involved in children's education as it relates to academic achievement. Findings indicated that 86 percent of the general public believes that parental support is one of the most important ways to improve student achievement. The more a parent becomes involved in their child's education, the more their child will achieve in school. I am advocating for a policy that addresses and underscores the importance of that relationship.

Research from Iowa, Michigan, and Illinois shows similar findings on parent involvement and student achievement. The research indicates significant student achievement results when parents are involved in some form with their children's education. My personal experiences reflect these findings. As an involved parent and volunteer, I found that my son tended to do better in school when I was attentive and actively involved in his educational environment.

Even though research has shown that parent involvement enhances student achievement, there are no statutes in place that require regular updates of parent policies. As a result of these findings, I would convene annual meetings to update the parental involvement policy to reflect the current state of parental engagement at Ford Heights School District 169.

### **Cons**

Parent involvement alone cannot impact student achievement. Schools must have quality teachers and staff, as well as adequate academic programming. If those elements are not in place, parent involvement could have an insignificant impact on student achievement.

Funding programs that promote and maintain parent involvement can be challenging in itself. Any substantial program requires needs an adequate amount of resources. Furthermore, identifying the specific resources needed for parent involvement in educational programming presents another hurdle. Some resources may be obtained through district or state education funds, public agencies, foundations, Title I, other federal government funds, or local businesses (Cary, 2006). However, meeting the qualifications and criteria to obtain those resources can prove difficult

An obvious prerequisite for parent involvement is parents, who face their own obstacles preventing them from being as involved in their children's education as they would like to be. Many have to work around time constraints. For example, parents with multiple children have to divide their time to attend to each. Child care issues with multiple children often get in the way of parental involvement in educational programming. Language, transportation, and cultural barriers may also place limits on how involved parents can be in their children's education. Levine (2002) indicated that in addition to a lack of time, work schedules, cultural styles, and socioeconomic status all had an impact on parents' level of involvement in their children's education. *How to Be Involved in Your Child's Education: A Parent's Handbook* (2013) refers to the following reasons parents are unsure about becoming involved with their children's education:

- Limited time
- Lack of clarity about their role in the child's education
- A primary language other than English
- Limited progress in their own education
- Concern that they do not have the skills to help their child

- Negative feelings about their own education

Even though there are several barriers that work against parents becoming involved in their children's education, there are many more positive reasons supporting that involvement. The relationships that are built between home and school have a significant impact on student achievement. Teamwork between parents, educators, and students can build an educational atmosphere that promotes student achievement.

I may encounter push back from district administration in developing a new policy that could alter how we engage parents. With an existing policy in place I would have to convince district administration that the changes to our current policy would help increase parent involvement. I have to make sure that the examples of implementation that I want to incorporate align with and do not interfere with the current guidelines of the District Parental Involvement Policy. My proposal must demonstrate how the additions to the existing proposal will help develop the partnership between home and school to increase student achievement.

The supporting examples of implementation to the current policy will add more expectations of maintaining the home school partnership. The increased expectations may deter parents from being as involved as they should in their child's education. I need to make sure that the supporting examples of implementation to the policy are simple and engaging enough that parents want to be involved.

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The outline of this policy implementation is formed by sections 1116 and 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The first deals with assessment for local education agency (LEA) and school improvement, while the second relates to parental involvement, specifically. By following the guidelines of sections 1116 and 1118, this policy will be implemented to provide parents with information regarding their involvement in the school review and improvement process. This plan will highlight the partnership between the school and the home to ensure that parents play an integral role in the decisions that affect their children's education. To work toward this goal, my proposed policy outlines needed educational activities and professional development.

### **Needed Educational Activities**

The district will convene an annual Parent Involvement Committee meeting with parents and school representatives to review the plan and recommend revisions where necessary. The purpose of this meeting will be to obtain input from the parents about the development of the implementation plan. During the annual meeting, parents will also be informed of the district's participation in Title I programs. Monthly meetings will be held at flexible times in the morning or evening in an effort to accommodate parents who work or have other pressing obligations.

Parents will be provided information on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This information will be distributed and reviewed at parent/teacher conferences, parent workshops, and the annual district-wide Title I parent conference. During conferences and workshops, school representatives will provide information to parents with assistance in understanding state and local content standards and assessments, ways to monitor their

child's progress, and tips for working with educators. That information will also be posted online. After obtaining that information, parents will be asked to provide input on what they have learned, as well suggest any improvements that could be made regarding presentation of the content.

The district will provide schools with the necessary support for planning and implementing parent involvement activities. This assistance will work to ensure that information related to parent programs, meetings, and activities is presented in an understandable and uniform format, in language the parents can understand. Parents will be informed of available resources and training in the community, and will be invited to monthly workshops designed to help them work with their children at home. A translator will be provided for the Spanish-speaking population. Parents will receive access information to administrators and teachers via the district website and our Power School Web-based parent portal at the beginning of each school year.

A written parent compact, developed with parental input, will outline the responsibilities of the school, staff, parents, and students in an effort to enhance student achievement. Reasonable and necessary resources will be allocated to support parent involvement activities to enable parents to participate in meetings, trainings, and family programs. Examples of these activities might include family reading night, family fun night, field day, bring your father to school day, and monthly workshops. Quarterly newsletters will be distributed throughout the community to highlight academic achievements, state and federal assessment scores, student activities, community resources, and parent engagement activities. The above activities will be the

responsibility of the director of federal and state programs, director of pupil personnel services, and home/school coordinator.

### **Professional Development**

The district will provide training to a home/school coordinator, who will coordinate activities, workshops, and trainings, all meant to teach parents ways in which they can help their children with homework. The home/school coordinator will also supervise the parent center that will provide workshops and house a library of written and electronic resources parents can use to help them support their children with their education. The district will also provide professional development opportunities that will teach parents how to train other parents to become involved.

All staff members will attend district professional development sessions on how to communicate with parents professionally and respectfully. Online workshops on ways to promote parent involvement will be available to staff. Guest speakers from the district's special education cooperative will discuss ways to be a more involved parent. Administrators will provide information on workshops and conferences that can teach parents how to get involved. The district will develop a partnership with Governors State University to develop involvement courses for parents, as well as parent conferences that encourage involvement.

## SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

The district will assess the implementation of this policy on both a monthly and annual basis. The latter will involve the district gathering input using the Illinois 5Essentials Survey. The former will entail surveys conducted at monthly parent meetings. Attendance logs at from those monthly meetings will also be analyzed. As parent involvement increases, administrators will review test scores and student attendance rates. In addition, teachers will provide essential feedback regarding parent involvement as part of the continual assessment.

The Illinois 5Essential Survey is based on 20 years of research conducted at the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (UChicago CCSR, 2016). The following five items were recognized as the leading components of student success:

- **Effective leaders.** The principal works with teachers to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.
- **Collaborative teachers.** The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development, and works together to improve the school.
- **Involved families.** The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.
- **Supportive environment.** The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students are supported by their teachers and peers.
- **Ambitious instruction.** Classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.

Research found that elementary schools that are strong in three of the 5Essentials were likely to improve student growth in the areas of reading and math (Illinois 5Essentials Survey, 2016).

The 5Essentials Survey will be available to parents, staff, and students via the Internet. The director of curriculum and instruction will schedule sessions for students and teachers to take the survey at convenient times throughout the day. Parents will receive mail notifications informing them of the school's participation in the survey and the importance of their participation in the process. Once the survey deadline has passed, researchers from the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute will electronically score the results. Afterward, an online report will be made available to school officials, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Once the results are available, the data will be used by the district administrative team, staff and, parents to plan educational programming and parent involvement activities.

Surveys conducted at the monthly meetings will give insight into parents' perspectives of their school involvement and ways the school can help maintain and perhaps even increase that involvement. Approximately 5- to 10-question surveys will be distributed to parents after each workshop to gather feedback on the usefulness of the information and interactions. Administrators will ask for feedback on topics that are of interest to them and ways we can increase their involvement. The parent coordinator and director of state and federal programs will review the survey results work accordingly to develop programs and workshops that will encourage parents to remain involved in their children's education. The surveys will also solicit input on whether the presenters were clear, and if the parents have any suggestions on ways to enhance future workshops.

Ideally, the workshop attendance would grow itself: the parents who frequently attend the workshops will be asked to share their experiences with other parents and invite them to join. “The importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful, direct, two-way communication between schools, parents, and the community is one of the defining features of effective parent and community involvement” (Cary, 2006, p. 7).

Our district conducts a yearly needs assessment to gather information from parents and teachers regarding their insight on the district’s offerings. For this assessment, 10 areas of data will be collected from the parents:

1. School(s) the parents have students in attendance.
2. Programs their children participate in.
3. Training topics they are interested in.
4. Programs and services that they may need to be more successful in helping their children with their education.
5. Community and state programs they need help with to access resources that will support their family dynamics.
6. The type of communication the schools and the district provide regarding their children’s educational programming and academic achievement.
7. Feedback on the effectiveness of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and their involvement in the plan (for parents who have students with special needs).
8. Effectiveness of the district’s programs and services.
9. Feedback on the climate and safety of their children’s school environment.
10. Assessment of the district and school programs and services most important in meeting their essential needs.

Once the surveys are completed, they will be sent to SPEED 802 Cooperative, the district's special education partnership, to be analyzed. The results will be sent back to my office in the Pupil Personnel Department, where the information will be used to develop programs and activities to maintain and enhance parent involvement.

The plan includes several different assessment tools to help determine the type of supports and programs that will be beneficial in maintaining and enhancing parent involvement. Attendance data from parent meetings and feedback on parent involvement from teachers will provide critical information to district administrators.

The actual progress of this new policy will be revealed through regularly gathered quantitative and qualitative data. Parents will be surveyed quarterly for their perceptions on the progress of parent/school communication. These surveys will provide information and insight into the current state of parent involvement and the ways to improve it. In addition to the surveys and other identified means, the district will conduct focus groups with parents to discuss a variety of agenda topics and to gather meaningful information to help get our parents more involved.

## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Implementation of this proposed parent involvement policy will support the district's vision. Furthermore, the proposal is supported by federal policy, specifically the parental involvement provisions of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Even the federal government realizes that parents' roles in their children's education affects academic achievement. Keane reported that "...in a recent report by the National School Public Relations Association, results showed that improved parental involvement leads to higher academic achievement, better attendance, and improved behavior at home and school" (as cited in Padgett, 2006, p. 44).

"More than 30 years of research clearly shows that children learn best when schools and parents work as a team" (Amundson, 1999, p. 4). Parents are a child's first teachers. They can continue to further their children's academic development by forming collaborative partnerships with educators.

This proposed parent involvement policy advocacy is part of a strategy I am promoting to boost student achievement. The basis of my proposal reflects the data from the most recent district parental involvement policy, as well as survey responses dealing with parent involvement and ways in which the district can increase parent involvement and ultimately, improve student achievement. This plan is aligned with Section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which aims to ensure that requirements for school-level parental involvement policies are met. This plan will include strategies and actions that will help all stakeholders in the home and school understand their roles in building parental involvement, a key to enhancing student achievement.

This policy advocacy proposal is founded on the belief that students learn best when schools and parents share in the commitment to ensure the educational success of children. The goals and objectives laid out are done so in the support of that belief. This policy also ensures accountability and responsibility of parents and educators to make sure students have the support they need to achieve academic success. The professional development opportunities advocated by this proposal will help foster successful partnerships between those groups. Encouraging parents to participate in the implementation of the policy will ensure they have the input and accountability necessary to enhance their children's academic success.

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