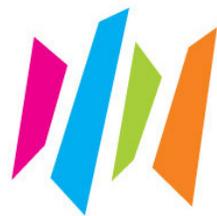


Best practice methods to engage parents to raise aspirations across the family unit

Dr Jo Lyons



SPJ Consultants

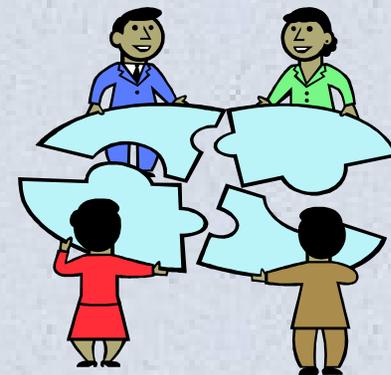
TLO

- Make effective use of local organisations to provide for the needs of all students in their school, including those who have EAL, BESD, are eligible for pupil premium, or have complex family circumstances
- Develop initiatives that engage parents who are typically viewed as 'hard to reach' or 'not supportive'
- Identify, and work with, a range of providers to boost the aspirations of children, young people and families
- Support young people to be 'ready to learn' when they are at school

Is it worth the effort?.....

Research evidence consistently shows that where schools, parents and the community work together to support learning young people

- Enjoy school more
- Do better in school
- Stay in school longer



Improving parental engagement, improves outcomes for young people



Terminology..... words matter! They affect perceptions!

Parental involvement	Parental engagement
<p>Parents taking part in school based or school related activities that may not be directly linked to learning</p> <p>A parent could be very involved with the school, but not be influencing their child's learning!</p> <p>worthwhile in terms of community relations</p> <p>Unless these activities directly relate to student learning, there is little evidence to show that they have an impact on student achievement (Ho Sui-Chu et al. 1996)</p>	<p>Activities that parents engage in that support their child's learning</p> <p>A parent could never be in contact with the school, and never attend parents evenings, but be highly engaged with their child's learning!</p> <p>Activities directly linked to student learning</p> <p>The attitude of the parents towards learning <u>in the home</u> has the greatest impact on achievement</p>

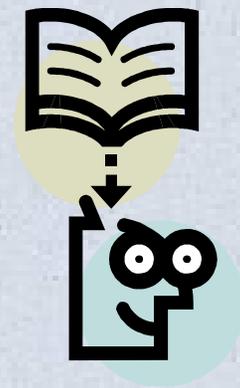
What parents do at home that supports their child's learning

- Communicating education as 'valuable'
- Providing intellectual stimulation
- Discussing learning with their child
- Having high aspirations for their children and supporting sensible plans for these aspirations to be achieved



What can schools offer to help parents support their child's learning?

1. Help parents to support their child's learning
2. Help parents to become better learners themselves
3. Making the school more accessible to parents/ improve communication



Helping parents to support their children's learning



Practical ideas

- Offer regular sessions outlining the school curriculum
- Be explicit about what parents can be doing at home to support achievement
- Varied workshops on how to help with homework (including tips on what to do if the parents do not understand the homework!)
- Learning to learn courses
- Shadowing a year group or subject for a day

Leadership issues

- Survey parents and community groups about what guidance and initiatives they would like
- Involve parents and the community in school improvement planning
- Use data to identify which groups need to be targeted to improve outcomes
- Could you be the local centre for supplementary schools?

Help parents to become better learners themselves

Practical ideas

- Parenting classes
- Literacy and numeracy classes
- Home language GCSEs
- Family learning
- Language classes
- Use of school facilities to offer a range of evening classes: IT, healthy cooking, vocational classes
- Links with universities
- Don't forget older carers!
Host the U3A sessions

Leadership issues

- Ask the parents and local community organisations what their learning needs are
- Make explicit to parents the direct link between their achievements and outcomes for their children
- Could your school become host to job clubs, one stop local information centres, drop in family health sessions?

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Making the school more accessible to parents



Practical ideas

- Simplify the contact structure at secondary school: one named person for parents to contact
- Explain to parents to staff structure at secondary school (SLT, HOY, HOD, DoL, 2ic) and how this structure helps their child achieve
- Offer transition programmes for children AND parents

Leadership issues

- Remember communication is two-way! How far is your school giving information *to* rather than getting information from *them*?
- Use all methods: written, electronic, using student mail and posting directly home, i Reporting, face to face, remote
- Beware information overload
- Do you explain to parents how to use the information they are given?

Group 1: Actively engaged	Group 2: Moderately engaged	Group 3: Not engaged
Child achieving	Child 'could do better'	Child underachieving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child attends school • parents give full support to education at home • Attend events and parents evenings • In contact with the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child attends school • parents do not offer support to the child at home • Usually attend parents evenings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child may or may not attend regularly • Rarely seen at parents evenings

Did you know.....

- research suggests one third of parents actively engaged leads to significant improvements in all student achievement

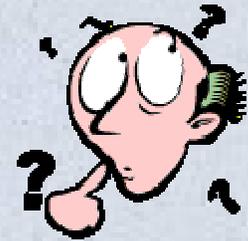
Group 1: Actively engaged



- Can they become community researchers for the school?
- Can these parents be trained to run parent to parent workshops and sessions?
- Can these parents be a contact/ guidance person for other parents?
- Can you work with people respected in the community? Shop keepers? Religious leaders?
- Could these people run a volunteer led parent centre with resources to help, inform and lend to parents?

Group 2: Moderately engaged

- Use 'parents evenings' 'open days' and 'induction day' as multi purpose events!
- Phone home on the day to remind them to come
- Crèche and refreshments!
- Offer more than one event: different times and days
- Academic planning events?? School closed for the day and meeting runs from 3pm-9pm?
- Parent academy days? With repeated workshops?
- All teachers trained to emphasise how the parents can support the child's achievement at home
- Survey at these events: and have people to collect completed forms on exit!
- Once they are engaged, train them to be parental champions!



Group 3: Not engaged

- AKA hard to reach!



Common barriers to parental engagement

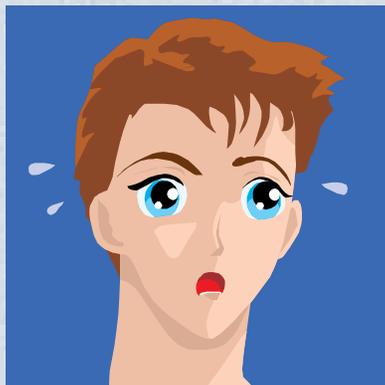
- Parental experience of education
- Parents not understanding school structures and systems
- Practical problems
- School and teacher issues
- Attitude of their child



Parental experience of education

Issues

- Parents remember failure, conflict and unfairness
- They fear not being able to understand their child's learning in school



Suggestions

- On open evenings and induction days, run 'lessons' for parents AND students!
- Use these sessions to show the range of activities that are used to help learning
- Pick topics where little or no prior knowledge is needed

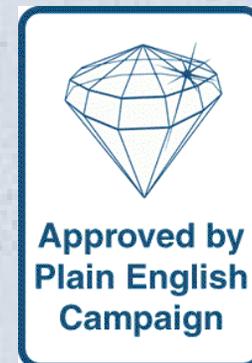
Parents not understanding school

Issues

- Parents do not understand how to communicate with the school
- They do not feel comfortable with formal events that have agendas, minutes
- They feel embarrassed about their lack of understanding of the education system
- The language used by the school makes no sense to them

Suggestions

- Offer adult learning related to 'business and enterprise'
- Offer workshops comparing 'then and now' in education: could these be breakfast sessions?!
- Make 'plain English' a school policy: no jargon



Practical problems

Issues

- The school day clashes with work/ childcare
- The school is not easily physically accessible (location; steps) or does not feel 'safe'
- English as an additional language



Suggestions

- Think flexible: offer events through out the day and throughout the week including weekends
- Take the show to them! Run events in the community! Run sessions at community events!
- There is no excuse!
www.babylon.com

School and teacher issues

Issues

- Often links to parental experiences of education
- The size of school can be overwhelming and feel unwelcoming
- Parents feel that their involvement is an add on: not central to achievement
- The school drowns parents in information that they do not understand which leaves them feeling inadequate



Suggestions

- Run events in the community not in school
- One named contact for the parent regarding their child (choose carefully!)
- Keep events as informal as possible
- How do the staff come across to parents? What does their dress, tone of voice, and non verbal language indicate? Are they culturally sensitive? Do you train staff?
- How and why do you share certain information? Do you explain what parents can learn from it?

Student attitude

Issues

- Student does not want parent engaged due to problems at school
- Students and parents conflict over homework and progress in school
- Students feel that there is a lack of balance between education and leisure
- Student feels that the reality of school life, and their parents expectations, are far apart



Suggestions

- Regularly survey students to find what suggestions they have for parental engagement: as the curriculum changes, so will their needs
- School policy should embed parents being contacted for positive reasons: have regular 'positive phone call home' days
- Be clear to parents and students what things parents can do to support learning
- Listen to all sectors of the parent community regarding their expectations of school life
- Be open about the practicalities and challenges of school life
- Value and model the full range of learning: social, emotional and academic

How can schools embed parental engagement?

- Identified leadership for parental engagement, embedding parental engagement at every level of the school
- Staff time dedicated to managing community working including co-ordinating volunteers
- Providing opportunities for engagement both in school and in the community
- Working with others: community groups, third sector organisations, statutory groups, business
- Ensure activities meet the needs of parents: you only know this if you ask! Remember: do *with*, not do *to*!
- Ensure sustainability by training parental champions: parents and local community leaders

Getting desperate?!

Contact community groups: voluntary, charity
and third sector

- local council will have a directory
- www.volunteering.org.uk
- www.sel.org.uk/directory.aspx



No money



- There is *ALWAYS* money for activities that promote social inclusion
- Get your school bursar/ business manager to find funding strands and foundations who will fund your work
- You *MUST* be working in partnership to be eligible for the majority of funding

Further reading



Engaging parents in raising achievement: Do parents know they matter? Research paper.

http://wiki.ict-register.net/images/0/0a/July_07_Every_parent_matters.pdf+

Engaging hard to reach groups: lots of practical suggestions at the end

http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/pdf/Engaging_Hard_to_Reach_Groups.pdf

Parental involvement: case studies [http://www.ocean-](http://www.ocean-maths.org.uk/reports/Institute_of_Education_London_Challenge%20Parental_Involvement_Report.pdf)

[maths.org.uk/reports/Institute of Education London Challenge%20Parental Involvement Report.pdf](http://www.ocean-maths.org.uk/reports/Institute_of_Education_London_Challenge%20Parental_Involvement_Report.pdf)

Leadership for parental engagement: good theoretical guide

<http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/docinfo.htm?id=134336>

Leadership for parental engagement: audit tool

<http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/docinfo?id=153641&filename=leading-and-developing-parental-engagement-improving-your-own-practice.pdf>

68 Parental engagement ideas that really work

<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/DMGetDocument.aspx/Parent%20Involvement%20Ideas.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F60E528817417B95F3A1EE41ED0086B961EAE510930440CF21&Type=D>