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Learn more about NSDC's standards, www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

REFERENCE

Overview of Research on Family Involvement in Children's Learning. (www.ed.gov/pubs/PFIE/conrsrch.html)

Family involvement: A far cry from room mothers and cupcakes

I'm afraid when it comes to family involvement many educators remain mired in the idea that parents should be like the family portrayed in *Leave It to Beaver!* June was always available for her kids, made meals from scratch, and always checked their sons' homework. I'm not sure that this "traditional" family ever existed except on television. The demographics of families are different now. Our idea of family involvement must also change.

A key concept in the rationale of the Family Involvement standard is that educators need to *learn* how to develop partnerships with families and caregivers in order to meaningfully support the education of their children. This seems a far cry from asking mothers to bring in cupcakes and make copies of worksheets for the classroom. A key task for principals, according to this standard, is to **learn about and implement strategies that increase family involvement.**

The principal and school faculty can **educate families about strategies that support student learning at home.** Family involvement does not require that parents be physically present in the school building. According to studies (www.ed.gov), what parents do at home has twice as strong an influence on children's achievement as does a family's socioeconomic status. When parents are informed, they can reinforce classroom instruction at home and reinforce concepts through naturally occurring situations. For example, if a student is working on measurement, parents can involve children in

home improvement projects that use measurement authentically.

The school can sponsor parent education workshops on child development and identify home conditions that support learning. Parents may need to understand how reading with their children; discussing daily events from the newspaper, online news, or television; or monitoring the amount of time spent watching television or playing videogames impacts learning in school. "Helicopter parents" who

hover over their children's experiences and development may need to learn about deferring gratification and how children build self-esteem and self-concept.

The principal should also ensure that there is strong communication with families about school programs and student progress. This information includes report cards, grading practices, school events, student work, and homework. Technology

has played an important role in this communication in some schools. All this information can be posted on a secured web site so parents can learn about student grades, homework completion, and other school information. Because this technology is not universal, the principal will still need to work at ensuring that parents are provided information about student progress through more traditional means.

While the principal can hope for and expect family involvement because it is important to student achievement, a more proactive stance is to learn how to develop parents' knowledge, skills, and actions so that they support education at home.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately.