



Family Engagement and Home Libraries

“Parents are the first, the best, and the most reliable teachers of their children.”

—Alma Flor Ada

One to Know: Family Engagement

When parents are engaged and involved, children succeed. The research is resounding—creating meaningful partnerships with parents will help the children in your care thrive both academically and socially. Dr. Karen Mapp (2017), one of the nation’s leading experts on family engagement, explains that when families are partners we can expect the following:

- Children’s grades go up.
- They attend school more regularly.
- They are more likely to enroll in higher-level programs.
- They are more likely to graduate and go on to college.
- They are more excited and positive about school and learning.
- They have fewer discipline issues inside and outside class.



What to Do: The Difference Families Make

With such far-reaching effects, we believe engaging parents is essential for the short- and long-term success of your students. We also know what happens when families are able to build a home library of books their children love.

A home library helps establish a reading or “scholarly culture” in the home. This culture continues from generation to generation within families. It is largely independent of education and class. It entails creating a “taste for books,” and promoting the skills and knowledge that foster both literacy and numeracy and, thus, lead to lifelong academic advantages (Evans, et al.,

2010). According to the 2014 Scholastic Kids & Family Reading Report, having parents who serve as “reading role models,” who have books in the home, has a greater impact on kids’ reading frequency than household income.

Building reading into children’s schedules and regularly bringing additional books into the home for children positively impact kids’ reading frequency (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2014). Since children spend the vast majority of their time outside of school, those who don’t read at home are far less likely to become proficient readers (Allington, 2012).



It turns out that having books in a child’s home can change the course of his or her life. Regardless of how many books in the home the family already has, each addition to a home library helps children get a little further ahead in school—but the gains are not equally great across the socio-economic spectrum. The gains are larger for families of more modest means. Children from families of lower means actually gain more in the first few years of school. Moreover, having books in the home has a greater impact on children from the least educated families, versus children of the university-educated elite (Evans, et al., 2010).

More to Know and Do: Support Family Engagement

Students are more likely to become avid readers with the support of their families. Stimulate family engagement by sending home a friendly letter asking for each family’s help. Or, create a Family Literacy Night to introduce and explain the importance of independent reading. Below are some tips to share with families.

- **Make time for reading.** Many children have busy, highly scheduled lives. Be sure that children have time for independent reading since it is important to their academic growth. Consider replacing the TV with a reading night. Curl up and read side-by-side for half an hour before bedtime.
- **Model reading.** The best way to encourage children to read more is to read in front of them. You are their role models. What you do speaks louder than what you say. If you are going someplace where you are likely to have to wait, pack a book to while away the time, rather than relying on a magazine or an electronic device.
- **Create a cozy reading nook.** Help your child find a cozy place to read without distraction. Get creative! You may wish to fill a dry tub with pillows. Make a reading cave by throwing a blanket over two chairs and give your child a flashlight. Earplugs or headphones can help block out distracting noises.

- **Talk about books together.** Ask your child to summarize what he or she is reading. Find out whether your child would recommend the book, and why or why not. Have a book discussion at mealtime or when you are in transit somewhere together.
- **Read to your child.** Even older children enjoy being read to. It's a great excuse to snuggle up and bond over a book.
- **Listen to your child read.** Ask your child to read something to you. It could be a favorite book or a favorite scene from a book. Try not to interrupt with corrections, but do provide help if you're asked.
- **Visit the local library together.** Make going to the library a best-loved weekly or every-other-week routine. The library is a great place to learn about your child's interests!
- **Praise your child's effort.** Remember that your child is going to encounter increasingly difficult texts as he or she progresses through school. Always emphasize the importance of effort in learning to read. Praise their attempts to encourage them to keep trying.



As you strengthen your family engagement practice, you strengthen your success with the children in your care—in a school setting, after-school program, medical clinic, or homeless shelter. Families are a valuable asset for your community, supporting your work and goals for student success and achievement. Additionally, you'll experience the immeasurable benefits as you create a productive team of allies that surround and support you as the teacher (or director, specialist, etc.) as well as each and every student. Working closely with your students' families is the best way to create a loving and supportive circle of care around every child.

References

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