



NSTU Position Paper

Parent Involvement

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Background

A review of the literature regarding the impact of parent involvement in children's formal schooling strongly supports the position that student attitude and academic achievement are positively affected by parental participation.

Joyce Epstein, a respected researcher in the field, describes parent involvement programming as: *parenting* - helping families create home environments that support learning; *communicating* - establishing effective two-way dialogue; *volunteering* - recruiting and planning programs; *learning at home* - providing information on methods to support homework activities; *decision making* - developing parent leadership skills for school teams/committees; and, *collaborating with the community* - identifying and integrating community resources and services.

A cadre of scholars conducting research conclusively demonstrate that parent involvement has a direct, positive impact on student attitude and academic achievement across all grade levels. In fact, the more intense the parental participation, the more significant the effects. Variance in family structure in terms of income and educational level *does not affect* the power of parent/school relationships. All parents regardless of circumstances, when involved with their children's learning, make a decided difference. Further, the earlier parents are directly engaged in their children's learning, the more powerful the impact.

Literature indicates that it is the school that has the leadership role in establishing parent involvement programs. The specific types of programs put in place by a school determines the degree of effectiveness of the parent-school relationship. Beneficiaries of strong parent participation programs in an education system are both students and schools - students through enhanced attitude and achievement; schools by increased parent interest, support and communication.

Parent involvement delivers the message that school is important and that the academic tasks children engage in warrant parental attention.



Guiding Principles

Ground rules delineated below are key components of a successful school/parent partnership program as identified by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

1. Parent involvement programs are required at all grade levels in the public school system – primary through grade twelve.
2. Parent involvement programs recognize that all parents are able to contribute to the academic success of their children regardless of income and education levels.
3. Parent involvement programs are well-planned, long-lasting and form an integral component of a school's academic plan.
4. Parent involvement programs offer a broad spectrum of opportunities for parents and other adult participation.
5. Parent involvement programs include orientation and training for all participants – school staff, parents, community resource personnel.
6. Parent involvement programs clearly identify and reduce barriers to ensure that all parents are empowered to become involved.
7. Parent involvement programs require on-going, consistent communication among all partners to be truly affective.



Issues and Needs

Parent involvement programs operate effectively when five critical factors are addressed: leadership; program parameters; professional development; barrier reduction; and, new technologies.

1. *Issue*

Responsibility for establishing effective parent involvement programs lies with school personnel. Recognizing that school communities have varying needs, it is the professional staff that must assume the leadership role when developing and implementing parent involvement programs for particular school environments.

Need

School administrators along with a team of staff members require specific training in the planning and implementation of parent involvement programs. Knowledge of the variety and awareness of the benefits of parent involvement programs is central to successful implementation.

2. *Issue*

Parameters regarding the content of parent involvement programs are critical to successful implementation; in particular, specific parameters for parent involvement in relation to school governance. Parents often do not have the appropriate background or are not equipped with the necessary skills to make positive contributions in the area of school governance. However, parent involvement programs that are designed to focus on student performance are widely accepted and encouraged.

Need

School-initiated orientation and outreach sessions on parent involvement are central to ensuring that all participants are aware of objectives and boundaries for partnership programs. Parent involvement programs must strike an appropriate balance between the needs of parents and the professional autonomy of educators while maintaining a focus on student needs.

3. *Issue*

As leaders in the implementation of parent involvement programs, school staff members require specific professional development. It cannot be presumed that school staff are at ease working with parents or that they consider parent involvement programs to be equally advantageous to both parents and school staff.

Need

Professional development sessions are necessary for school staffs on a variety of issues impacting parent involvement programs: building relationships with parents; identifying parental skills; developing parent leaders; and accessing community resources.

4. *Issue*

Researchers have identified two categories of barriers that impact negatively on parent involvement programs.

Under the barrier - *lack of planning* - are time and knowledge. Lack of time for both parents and teachers is a detractor when designing appropriate programs for school communities. Once programs are identified, implementation can be problematic given the work schedules of parents and the school day framework. Knowledge of the wide spectrum of parent involvement programs available to schools is generally limited to educators and almost non-existent to parents.

The barrier - *lack of mutual understanding* - includes poor communication; unclear expectations; and, mistrust based on past negative experiences for both parents and teachers.

Need

A shared philosophy that parents are central to the successful schooling of their children and that parental involvement is both critical and valued is a driving force for affective programming.

As leaders in the development and implementation of parent involvement programs, school staff need assistance with managing conflict resolution and dealing with difficult people.

Parent involvement programs in school communities must incorporate a range of activities that recognize and accommodate the various schedules, skills and interests of all participants.

5. *Issue*

Availability of new technologies in the 21st century is an opportunity for school communities to embrace new methods of communication. To ensure that accurate

information is conveyed to parents in a timely fashion, school staff must have access to state of the art electronic communication tools.

Need

Availability of electronic communication tools is not consistent across school communities. An objective must be set to have appropriate technological equipment that allows parents and teachers to be connected in a reliable, time-sensitive manner.



Organizational Position

Under the leadership of Provincial NSTU Committees; in particular, the *Comité de programmation acadienne*, the *Curriculum Committee*, the *Equity Committee*, the *Public Affairs Committee*, the *Public Relations Committee*, the *Professional Development Committee*, and the *Teachers With Administrative Responsibilities Committee*, as well as with the assistance and guidance of the *NSTU Professional Associations*, the organization assumes responsibility for the following roles to support the implementation of effective parent involvement programs in Nova Scotia's public schools.

Parent Involvement Advocate

As a parent involvement advocate, the Union promotes the need for resources, funding, community support services, and ongoing member and public awareness initiatives to ensure the implementation of effective parent involvement programs across all grade levels.

Parent Involvement Collaborator

As a parent involvement collaborator, the Union works with education partners to develop relevant policies and guidelines, build teamwork and leadership, and provide a forum for focused discourse to plan, implement, sustain and evaluate parent involvement programs.

Parent Involvement Provider

As a parent involvement program provider, the Union provides a range of professional development opportunities for members to increase their knowledge base concerning parent involvement programs, to focus on their leadership role in parent involvement programs, and to support the use of new technologies in communicating with parents.

Reading List

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