

Stronger Together

The Vital Role of Family Engagement in Student Success and Safety

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Contents

Reframing the Conversation about Family Engagement.....	3
Why Talk About Family Engagement?.....	4
A Broader Definition of Family	5
Keeping At-Risk Youth on Our Radar	6
Student Success Is Up to All of Us	7
Technologies Can Enable Family and Community Engagement	8
HELPme Supports the Family Engagement Framework	9



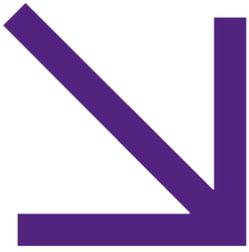
Reframing the Conversation about Family Engagement

Many schools recognize the limitations of traditional one-way communication from schools to parents, such as teacher's notes, emails, and newsletters. Increasingly, education experts are calling for a more comprehensive approach called family engagement, in which schools actively reach out and encourage families to fully support and participate in their children's learning and development.

“The most accurate predictors of student achievement in school are not family income or social status, but the extent to which the family . . . becomes involved in the child's education at school.”

The National PTA





Why Talk About Family Engagement?

Educators and families play integral and intersecting roles in the social and academic development of children. Research shows that when families are meaningfully and continuously engaged in their children's school experience, they positively influence academic achievement, physical and mental health, social-emotional development, behavior, and well-being as youth transition to adulthood.

Academic Benefits

Children with engaged families are more likely to have better attendance, higher grades, fewer disruptive behaviors, to graduate from high school and continue to higher education.

Social Benefits

When parents are involved in their children's development, children are less likely to become involved in substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, violence, and suicide attempts.

School Safety

1. Involving parents and caregivers in the decision-making process can lead to more buy-in and support for safety measures put in place by the school.
2. Parents and caregivers can serve as additional eyes and ears in the school community, and can report any concerns or risky behavior to school staff or administrators.
3. When families are involved in their child's education, children are more likely to feel connected to the school community, which can create a safer and more positive school climate.
4. Involving families in the school community can help build trust between the school and the larger community, which can lead to increased cooperation and support for safety measures.
5. Family engagement can also help schools identify potential risks or challenges that they may not have been aware of, allowing them to take proactive steps to address these issues and keep the school safe.





A Broader Definition of Family

Family engagement requires embracing, accommodating, and supporting all types of families, from the privileged to the disadvantaged. After all, how can students do their best if they're hungry, depressed, bullied, or have experienced trauma? The short answer is that they can't. Unfortunately, many children face serious challenges that compromise their potential for success:

- In 2022 one in four U.S. parents say they've struggled to afford food or housing in the past year.
- In 2020, there were 407,000 children in foster care and the total number of youth in residential placement in 2019 was 36,479
- One in eight children live with at least one parent with a substance use disorder.

When we think of family engagement, the inner circle may include parents, other adult caregivers, and legal or informal guardians. The circle expands when schools collaborate with agencies and service sectors that influence and make decisions on behalf of children—such as education specialists, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and primary health care providers. Beyond this extended support system, local leaders must join in, championing and supporting family partnerships with a full commitment to shared goals.



Keeping At-Risk Youth on Our Radar

What is an “at-risk” student?

At-risk student means any identified student who needs additional support and who is not meeting or not expected to meet the established goals of the educational program (academic, personal/social, career/vocational).

We see students who are at risk for poor achievement every day, dealing with problems that may be visible or unseen. While schools have long been a lynchpin of student mental health in the community, we can do more as parents, caregivers, and trusted family allies. Family and community engagement can help the school’s ability to prevent, intervene, and mitigate the challenges that many K-12 students experience—including social risk factors, mental health issues, and academic pressures.

Social Risk Factors

Teens with social risk factors are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors including drug and alcohol use and/or suicide attempts, self-harm or harming others, especially youth who may be significantly depressed, bullied, shunned, or marginalized.

Demographics associated with social risk factors include:

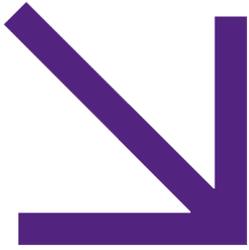
- race/ethnicity
- age
- language
- minority status
- gender identity
- physical disabilities
- family income (socioeconomic status)
- basic needs insecurities
- parents’ level of education
- domestic violence
- substance abuse in the family
- family structure

Mental Health Issues

Mental health problems can affect a student’s energy level, concentration, dependability, mental ability, and academic performance. This presents an alarming picture, with one in six U.S. children between the ages of six and 17* having a mental health disorder such as depression, anxiety, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—many of whom do not receive a diagnosis or treatment.

Academic Pressures

Academics and school environment also influence mental health, with a Pew Research Center survey reporting that 61% of teens reporting they feel tremendous pressure to get good grades and others responding that looking good and fitting in socially created mental stress.



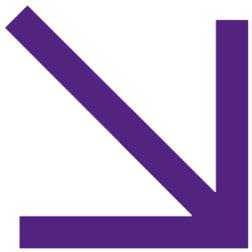
Student Success Is Up to All of Us

These social and mental health risk factors, along with academic pressures, affect all of our children, our families, and the larger community. Schools must engage with families, but there's another piece to the puzzle. Schools, families, and students alike must have easy, direct access to the resources they need to reduce risk factors, get help for mental health issues, and address needs that require the help of community resources.

10 Ways Schools Can Optimize Family Engagement

By establishing and implementing family engagement best practices, schools can become more nurturing places that foster deeper parent involvement, full commitment from the community, and better well-being and academic success for students.

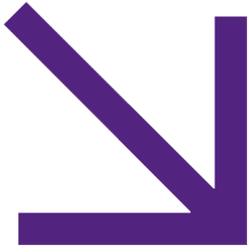
- 1. Assess Program Needs:** Meet with families and community resource agencies to explore current needs and identify ways to build meaningful connections between schools, families, and local resources.
- 2. Invite Parents into the Decision-Making Process:** Invite families and appropriate external supports to set goals and priorities for the student, participate in school planning processes, and join relevant committees.
- 3. Provide Ongoing, Consistent Information:** Using the most effective channels to regularly update families about their child's progress and challenges, plus suggest available resources and support to help their child succeed.
- 4. Identify Effective Channels and Procedures:** Determine the most effective communication channels and procedures for different circumstances—such as getting food assistance or mental health support—and share these procedures and “how-to” information with families.
- 5. Foster a Sense of Community:** Create and communicate how families can be active in their child's education and how to connect and participate in community affairs and events.
- 6. Personalize Engagement:** Recognizing unique needs and preferences, engage with families to identify their strengths and challenges, and create personalized engagement plans.
- 7. Offer Opportunities for Learning and Growth:** Plan and present families with opportunities to learn and grow together, such as workshops, classes, and other educational events.
- 8. Leverage Technology:** Improve access to resources by embedding resources in an easy-to-use, centralized communication technology.
- 9. Recommend and Offer Training:** Share how educators, administrators, and community supports should use procedures and technology, with additional communication if there are supports and resources.
- 10. Invite Feedback:** Provide ways for parents to share needs, concerns, and suggestions on their personalized engagement plan or how to refine the family engagement process.



Technologies Can Enable Family and Community Engagement

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving family engagement in schools, but many experts consider technology to be an essential part of any family engagement strategy, with the capacity to

- ✓ Encourage parent involvement with tools that provide easy access to school and community resources
- ✓ Provide consistent, timely two-way communication between schools and families
- ✓ Establish trusting, meaningful relationships between schools and families
- ✓ Marshal community resources to support active family engagement and student supports



HELPme Supports the Family Engagement Framework

There's no doubt that mobile phones are a fundamental part of modern teen life. HELPme from STOPit Solutions enables mobile technology to be a literal lifeline for schools, students, and families, the hub for immediate and direct access to community resources.

Filling the Communication Gap

6-Point Technology Checklist to Strengthening Family Engagement

1. High Accessibility

- ✓ Convenient mobile platform, with resources and help all in one place
- ✓ User-friendly interface
- ✓ Easily report potential and actual incidents

2. Highly Configurable

- ✓ Can be configured to meet the needs of each school, district, and use case
- ✓ Links can be localized and replaced with the school's own resources
- ✓ Resources can take the form of phone numbers, text numbers, or URLs and recommended resources

3. Efficient Routing and Escalation of Inquiries/Incidents:

- ✓ Step-by-step routing to all of the school's selected emergency contacts
- ✓ Escalate emergencies to contacts and first responders
- ✓ Flag non-emergency but concerning inquiries/incidents for further investigation
Fully configurable down to the campus level reporting/help system

4. Self-Advocacy

- ✓ Trains all school users on the importance of asking for help
- ✓ Helps children recognize that asking for help is a critical life skill
- ✓ Provides a safe way to practice asking for and receiving help from one's first interaction with the school

5. Designed with Full Anonymity

- ✓ Convenient mobile platform, with resources and help all in one place
- ✓ User-friendly interface
- ✓ Easily report potential and actual incidents

6. Other Services for Alternative Forms of Help

- ✓ Teletherapy and Mental Health services for students/staff and parents
- ✓ Building Neuro-Resilience™: This curriculum provides information about trauma, stress, and the brain to build both regulation skills and understanding

STOPit Solutions provides comprehensive safety solutions and services, training, and world-class resources to create safer, better-connected schools, families, and communities. In partnership with your team, HELPme technology supports stronger family engagement and the well-being of the students in our care.

[**Learn More**](#)

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