

Family and Community Engagement

District and School Improvement at American Institutes for Research (AIR)

AIR's District and School Improvement Center (<http://revivingschools.org/>) provides a smart, real-world, hands-on approach to school improvement that is based on a framework grounded in research and refined by practice. Instead of implementing a one-size-fits-all program, we identify the needs specific to districts and schools and provide guidance for modifying existing programming or starting fresh. District and School Improvement Center staff believe that sustained district and school turnaround and transformation can be achieved through building capacity at all levels of the educational system and developing a strong collaborative partnership among teachers, leaders, families, and communities.

Background

Decades of research show that family engagement in children's education matters and can lead to improved student academic achievement, attendance, and behavior (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mapp, 2003; Read, 2008; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). Current research also indicates that family and community engagement makes a difference in school improvement efforts (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). However, educators often see family engagement as a separate activity, something done largely in compliance with district, state, or federal mandates, and moving beyond procedural compliance is often a struggle (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Similarly, many families also struggle with knowing what to do to engage in their children's learning and school improvement (Mapp & Kutner, 2013). To bridge the gap between acknowledging the need for family and community engagement and implementing strategies to facilitate that engagement, a supportive district-level infrastructure is needed, and capacity building of both school staff and family members is required (Wood, Shankland, Jordan, & Pollard, 2014).

Service Description

Our services include professional development for school personnel to help them build an understanding of how to partner with the families and members of their school community to support student learning. We provide research- and evidence-based resources and strategies to guide district and school teams on how to engage a variety of stakeholders, plan and implement systemic engagement approaches, integrate engagement into school or district improvement processes, determine effectiveness of implementation, and develop sustainability plans.

Value We Bring

We focus on helping to build partnerships between home and school in which student achievement and school improvement are seen as a shared responsibility, relationships of trust and respect are established, and families and school staff see each other as equal partners. These conditions, when coupled with strategic community partnerships that can provide students with a variety of supports to enhance learning and prepare them for the 21st century, can create a family, school, and community engagement that is systemic, sustainable, and integrated into an effective plan for school improvement.

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