# Enhancing Student Success Through Parental Involvement: Exploring Roles, Challenges, and Strategies for School-Community Partnerships

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## Abstract

This reflective study explores the vital role of parental involvement and engagement in supporting student learning and strengthening school-community partnerships. The paper highlights how active parental participation positively influences student academic achievement, motivation, and behavior by examining research and real-world dynamics from Belize, Costa Rica, and the United States. It identifies key barriers to effective involvement, including socio-economic challenges, language differences, and limited school-family communication. The paper also reviews successful strategies to enhance parental engagement, such as creating inclusive school environments, flexible involvement opportunities, parent education, and leveraging technology. Emphasizing the mutual responsibilities of families, schools, and policymakers, this study underscores that fostering meaningful home-school collaboration is essential for improving educational outcomes and building supportive communities.

*Keywords*: Parental involvement, student learning, school-community partnerships, academic achievement

## Resumen

Este estudio reflexivo explora el papel vital de la participación e involucramiento parental en el apoyo al aprendizaje estudiantil y el fortalecimiento de las alianzas entre la escuela y la comunidad. A través del análisis de investigaciones y dinámicas reales de Belice, Costa Rica y Estados Unidos, el documento destaca cómo la participación activa de los padres influye positivamente en el rendimiento académico, la motivación y el comportamiento de los estudiantes. Identifica las principales barreras para una participación eficaz, incluyendo desafíos socioeconómicos, diferencias lingüísticas y comunicación limitada entre la escuela y la familia. Además, revisa estrategias exitosas para mejorar el compromiso de los padres, tales como la creación de ambientes escolares inclusivos, oportunidades flexibles de participación, educación para padres y el uso de la tecnología. Al enfatizar las responsabilidades mutuas de las familias, las escuelas y los responsables de políticas, este estudio subraya que fomentar una colaboración significativa entre el hogar y la escuela es esencial para mejorar los resultados educativos y construir comunidades solidarias.

*Palabras clave:* Participación parental, Aprendizaje estudiantil, Alianzas escuela-comunidad, Rendimiento académico

## 1. Introduction

Parental involvement and engagement support student learning and foster solid school-community partnerships. Research shows that a child's academic performance, including cognitive and emotional aspects, improves when parents actively participate in their education (Hara & Burke, 1998). Most educators hold this position, and parents are increasingly leading parental involvement to take center stage as an educational strategy, perhaps when a child's academic performance has fallen below
expectations. When parents and guardians actively participate in their child's education, it improves educational outcomes, increases student motivation, and creates a more positive school environment (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ateş, 2021; Eden et al., 2024). Furthermore, Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) asserted that "parents' involvement in their child's learning process offers many opportunities for success" (p. 43). Therefore, this document explores the multifaceted role of parents and guardians in supporting student learning and fostering effective school-community partnerships. This paper seeks to thoroughly understand parental involvement by examining its status, the challenges encountered, and possible strategies for enhancement, while providing practical solutions.

### Problem & Rationale

Parental involvement encompasses parents' engagement with their own children, interaction with other parents, and participation in their children's school activities (Redding, 2000). This suggests that child-rearing practices may be those aspects of parenting that have application to a child's performance at school. Redding (2000) further described that "parental involvement is an all-encompassing and imprecise term that includes everything from the parent's child-rearing practices at home to the parent's participation in events held at school" (p. 20).

The education systems around the globe have been battling to create a strong bond between parents, teachers, and schools for decades. In the 21st century, the situation is not improving; many schools still need parental support and involvement. According to Durisica and Bunijevac (2017), the level of parental involvement is associated with academic success. Children whose parents are actively involved in their schooling benefit more and better than

those whose parents are passively involved. Parents serve as the primary educators in their children's lives. From early childhood, they lay the foundation for learning through daily interactions, providing the initial exposure to language, numbers, and social norms. As children enter formal education, the role of parents evolves but remains equally significant. They continue influencing their children's attitudes toward learning, motivation, and academic performance.

Parental involvement can take many forms, including attending parent-teacher conferences, helping with homework, volunteering at school events, and engaging in educational activities at home (DepEd Tambayan, n.d.). Each of these activities contributes to a comprehensive support system that aids in the child's overall development. Research consistently shows a positive correlation between parental involvement and student academic achievement (Won-Tack Lim, 2021).

Given this, the failure to attain accurate educational outcomes may stem from a lack of foundational skills due to insufficient early childhood development, a lack of needed skills and motivation from teachers, low-quality school management, or outdated school inputs and insufficient resources, as highlighted by the World Development Report (World Bank, 2018). However, those may not be the only factors affecting student learning. Consequently, we will zoom in on the role parents play in student learning and illustrate evidence of effective strategies for more parental involvement. The lack of parental involvement may result in many parents and guardians facing various barriers that hinder their active participation in their children's education. These barriers may include time constraints for working parents and other commitments, language barriers, a lack of knowledge about how to support their child's learning, and limited access to resources and information. As a result, students may need more support and guidance at home, which can negatively impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Scholarly articles will be used to analyze this educational phenomenon and present possible solutions.

**Justification:**

The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the global closure of schools and affected an estimated 1.5 billion students, revealed the critical role of parental involvement in student

learning. This was particularly challenging for parents, often mothers, with low literacy skills, who had to support their children's learning at home, often in a language different from the school curriculum (UNESCO, 2020).

Parental disengagement in student learning is a persistent concern for educators. It can lead to a range of challenges for students, from completing homework to understanding complex concepts, and can ultimately result in lower academic achievement, decreased self-esteem, and disengagement from school. Moreover, schools and communities also suffer from the lack of parental involvement, as it hinders the establishment of strong partnerships and limits the resources and support available to students.

Many researchers recognize the crucial role that strong positive bonds between homes and schools play in the development and education of children (Mora & Escardibul, 2018). The sole reason for parental involvement lies in the academic success of students. Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) acknowledged that "many parents, whose children are currently enrolled in a particular school, are enormously concerned, more often being active to assist in their child's classroom, communicating constantly with their child's teachers, assisting with their homework, getting involved with school projects, and discussing their child's individual academic strengths and weaknesses with teachers" (p. 42). Therefore, student success, in many cases, has a lot to do with the level of parental involvement.

According to Sheldon (2009), as cited by Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017), research has shown that successful students have strong academic support from their involved parents. This implies that students can be successful in school if their parents are involved and show interest in their academic development. In the educational context, it is frequently observed that students who demonstrate strong academic performance
often have parents who maintain a consistent and active involvement in their child's education, regularly inquiring about progress and supporting learning. Conversely, students who exhibit lower levels of academic achievement are frequently associated with limited parental engagement, as evidenced, for instance, by parents who do not collect report cards or demonstrate regular follow-up on their child's performance.

## 2. Methodology

The narrative reflective article employs a qualitative synthesis approach to explore the multifaceted role of parental involvement in supporting student learning and strengthening school-community partnerships. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to analyze research findings, policy documents, and real-world dynamics primarily from Belize, Costa Rica, and the United States. The sources include empirical studies, theses, meta-analyses, educational reports, and scholarly articles accessed through academic databases and institutional repositories. The literature encompasses a broad spectrum of methodologies to provide a holistic understanding of the topic.

The analysis was critical in identifying key themes related to the status of parental involvement, barriers to effective engagement, and successful strategies for enhancing parent participation in education among the three countries. Comparative insights from diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts were synthesized to highlight variations and commonalities in parental roles and challenges. The reflective nature of the study enabled the integration of theoretical perspectives with practical implications, aiming to inform educators, policymakers, and communities on fostering meaningful home-school collaborations for improved educational outcomes.

This approach was necessary to examine the interplay between families, schools, and broader educational systems, emphasizing the importance of mutual responsibility and partnership in student success. The findings and recommendations are thus grounded in a wide, interdisciplinary evidentiary base, reflecting both quantitative data trends and qualitative experiential insights.

## Development

The education system consists of three essential elements: parents, teachers, and students. Together, these components must work in unity for an education system to work well and succeed (Epstein et al., 2002). However, if one fails, the others suffer significant effects and instability, indicating a direct connection between the three (Mesh, 2010). Shoukat et al. (2023) note that the contact between a student's home and school significantly impacts their personal, social, and emotional growth, recognizing that every person influences the educational process

due to their ongoing social, physical, intellectual, and ethical growth. Moreover, it should come as no surprise that parental involvement in their child's activities can result in improvements. Accepting that parents are children's first and most reliable teachers, the dynamics of parental involvement in Belize, Costa Rica, and the USA are analyzed.

**Dynamics in Belize, Costa Rica, and the U.S.A.**

As in many countries, parental involvement is a vital component of education in Belize. However, such involvement is often limited, creating additional challenges for teachers and the broader education system. The Belize Education Statistics at a Glance (2021) highlights a concerningly high number of student dropouts at the secondary level. Discussions with teachers and school administrators reveal that, in many cases, parental involvement in these students' education was minimal or entirely absent. A significant proportion of these students resided with extended family members and received only financial support from their parents. This trend suggests that many parents are employed outside of their home district or work irregular hours, limiting their ability to supervise their children directly. In other cases, students live with a single parent who must simultaneously provide for and sustain the household, leaving little time to monitor academic progress or participate in school-related activities.

Mesh (2010) identified several significant barriers to parental involvement at the primary education level in the northern rural region of Belize. These barriers included parents' work responsibilities, limited communication skills, low educational attainment, financial constraints, and, in some cases, negative attitudes from school staff.
Collectively, these factors have contributed to a major gap between rural parents and their participation in their children's education, with some parents reporting feelings of intimidation when engaging with educational institutions and personnel. Geographic location further compounds these challenges, influencing both the degree of parental involvement and the nature of interactions parents have with their children.

Teachers working in rural primary schools have shared insights that illustrate these barriers. For example, some reported, *"Some parents have never been at school,"* while others explained, *"We are trying to teach parents the class lessons first so that they could teach their*

*children."* In contrast, one teacher observed that, *"Right now a lot of the parents are young, and it is almost like the children are leading the children"* (Mesh, 2010). These accounts suggest that in many rural areas of Belize, parents often face intersecting challenges such as limited education, illiteracy, poverty, and young age, all of which can hinder their ability to actively support their children's educational journey and, at times, even their broader personal development.

In southern districts in Belize, in certain cultures, minimal females were being pushed to continue their education because females were not seen as a priority investment. Therefore, after primary school, most females would be assigned training to become housewives. In some cultures, like the Maya, they would be married off before the age of sixteen, therefore minimizing any parental involvement in their child's education, as it now is non-existent. Nonetheless, implementing the Belize National Curriculum Framework under Section 4—Values and Principles embraces the idea that students, teachers, and parents are responsible for optimizing learning achievements (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, 2022). Belize's education system is now widely accepting that parents are equally responsible for maximizing student learning.

Like Belize, Costa Rica's education system also has concerns over parental involvement in school. Sandoval (2006) describes different strategies used to improve the quality of education and asserts that one of the strategies is the enlargement and improvement of the involvement and participation of parents in the education of their children in Costa Rica. A strong commitment and involvement of parents in their children's schooling is considered to be one of the features of the education of the future of Costa Rica (Sandoval, 2006). He continues to stress the participation and involvement of parents to construct a better connection between the curriculum and methods used at school and the social, economic, and cultural world of children's everyday lives. Sandoval (2006) also mentions that this parental connection is missing, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, in Hispanic cultures, males tend to interact according to the machismo tradition of being emotionally detached, masculine, and dominating within the family. At the same time, females tend to be the exclusive caretakers of children and are passively obedient (Castro-Carrasco et al., 2017).

A study conducted in Caño Negro, Costa Rica, revealed that mothers consistently reported being involved both as breadwinners and as primary caretakers. Their responsibilities extended beyond providing financially to include preparing meals, putting their children to bed at night, and ensuring they were awake in the morning.

Mothers also emphasized the importance of dedicating time and attention to their children by engaging in conversations, participating in activities, and providing general upbringing. However, some mothers indicated that due to demanding work schedules, caregiving responsibilities were often shared with other family members. For instance, one mother explained that her own mother, the children's grandmother, assumed a greater role in nurturing her sons because she worked all day. Another mother noted that her older daughter played a significant part in caring for and raising her younger sisters, as both parents were occupied with work obligations. In contrast, fathers were described as minimally involved in nurturing responsibilities. Their contributions were often limited to preparing meals on occasion, while in some households, tasks such as cooking and supervising younger siblings were delegated to the eldest child.

Compared to the United States, parental involvement is also seen as a critical factor in the success of children's education. When parents are involved in their children's education, they are more likely to perform well academically and have better social and emotional development (Llego, 2022). U.S. parents are of the sound belief that their involvement provides a more holistic and mentally stable child and thus helps in the positive upbringing of their children. Llego (2022) asserts that parents in the United States demonstrate their interest and involvement in their child's education by helping with homework and, at the same time, providing guidance, support, and positive encouragement by attending school events such as open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and many extracurricular activities; by participating in school decision-making processes, such as serving on a school committee or joining a parent-teacher organization; and by communicating regularly with school personnel.

In the United States, parents have been legally allowed to immerse themselves in their child's education to the extent that the law now protects these parents. Some policies have been passed in several individual school districts, states, and the U.S. House that have spelled out

parents' rights to inspect curriculum materials and withdraw their children from lessons they deem objectionable, restricted teaching about race, gender identity, and sexuality, and resulted in the removal of books from school libraries (Stanford, 2023). Vito Borrello, executive director of the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, shared that the parents' rights bills have elevated parents' vital role in their child's education. In addition, families in the U.S. are now creating an environment of learning and supporting learning at home, which is probably even more important and influential than the number of times these parents go to school (Borello, as cited in Stanford, 2023).

**Strategies for Parental Involvement**

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) acknowledged that while research shows that parental involvement in school has little impact on pupil achievement, the relationship is not linear. Therefore, parental involvement in the school can benefit in other ways, such as an effective means of communication in which parents can support children and, thus, be a means of at-home involvement. They also noted that there may be other reasons for parents working in schools that have more to do with the needs of schools or parents than with the benefit of children. The types and forms of parental involvement vary considerably and range from the day-to-day support and influence parents give their children in education. Brien and Stelmach (2009) also contended that many practices that have become accepted as parent involvement are 'school-centric' practices that teachers prescribe. They suggest that activities such as volunteering at school, monitoring children's report cards, attending parent-teacher conferences, and participating in school committees are conventional determinants of what an 'involved' parent looks like. These are the ideal parents that all schools wish they had.

Additionally, they suggested that school-initiated engagement sees parents as 'co-equals' in education and supports parents in understanding their role as their children's first educators. Therefore, it can be said that parent involvement is a complex array of behaviors, attitudes, and activities that occur both within school and, more importantly, in the home. It is at home that children learn their first words. Many times, we remind students that manners are learned at home.

Building foundations on strategies that improve parental involvement is always possible.

Minshew (n.d.) states that the sooner parental involvement strategies are set in place, the "more equipped your students will be to reach their academic potential." Such strategies can include, but are not limited to, parent-teacher communication through meetings, emails, or phone calls, school-related activities such as family fun day; and ensuring that the communication medium to reach parents is the family's home language. Recent studies have demonstrated that increased parental involvement in children's learning is generally associated with better grades, test scores, attendance, increased motivation, and an easier transition between grades. For instance, sending text messages to parents when their children have missed assignments has improved students' performance in a low-income area (Bergman & Chan, 2017). Additionally, it was concluded that delivering brief weekly messages to parents about their children's progress reduced the number of dropouts in an urban school in the Northeast United States (Kraft & Rogers, 2014). Looking at the literature, as previously mentioned, the educational reality for Belize as a developing country is fundamentally different, where many parents are unable to follow what happens at school; this could be a result of their socioeconomic status, among other factors.

Parent-teacher communication has been highlighted as an essential factor in positively impacting children's school results. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) asserted that to overcome the barriers that prevent parental involvement, the school needs to provide a welcoming environment for the parents. Parents must feel that the school's staff is respectful and responsive to them. Wherry (2009), as cited by Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), further claimed that "it is critical that administrators and teachers encourage respectful two-way communication between the school and home" (p. 146).

Additionally, these students showed a more positive attitude and higher aspirations, spent more time studying, and got more help from family members (Islam, 2019). Furthermore, the author contended that if parents are provided with adequate information and encouraged to become involved, even parents from disadvantaged backgrounds in developing countries can significantly contribute to their children's school performance. Secondly, it is essential to provide opportunities for parents to connect with the school through parent-teacher committees. Another critical strategy outlined is sharing classroom goals or expectations openly with parents at your first parent meeting and asking them to do the same at home. When parents know what

the teacher has established, they are more likely to render assistance. Lastly, connecting with parents in person as much as possible or using emails, texts, or apps to keep parents up-to-date on upcoming class events are all important.

Baker et al. (2016) contended that in setting in place the two-way communication that is interactive, equal, and feedback-oriented, it yielded a higher homework completion rate, more classroom participation, and fewer absences because communication serves as a bridge to engagement and involvement, ultimately fostering a strong partnership with parents. Communicating with parents using the family home language is a strategy that needs to be implemented in the education system. Parents have often expressed the critical need for good communication because it provides information and assists in the ability of parents to help the child (Baker et al., 2016). Not using the family's language based on student diversity results in poor communication that can make parents perceive a school to be less family-friendly. This reasoning implies that when it comes to Spanish-speaking families, the appropriate language would be Spanish, even if someone is hired to translate or notes are sent in both Spanish and English to cater to the cultural diversity among families. Therefore, literature reveals that students gain more significant benefits from more frequent parent-teacher interactions over time.

**Challenges of Parental Involvement**

Previous research has consistently shown that many forms of parental involvement decline as children enter middle and high school (Park & Holloway, 2018). Parents view secondary school students as older, more mature, and independent. Therefore, they require less monitoring and involvement at their school. Moreover, many high schools are in urban areas, far from most parents' homes, and thus parents are less likely to want to visit the school (Antoine, 2015). Also, suppose the parent did not visit the school on the first day of classes or for the first school activity. In that case, they are less likely to want to visit the school throughout the year, as they may feel uncomfortable or unwanted in the school, especially because they have not had any contact initially with their child's teacher(s).

Research has established that economically disadvantaged parents may view education as the sole responsibility of the school rather than a shared endeavor with the family, or they may feel uncertain about how to support their children as the curriculum becomes increasingly

complex (Park & Holloway, 2018). When parents lack the knowledge or confidence to assist their children academically, they may develop negative perceptions of the school, which can further reduce parental engagement.

Additionally, substantial evidence suggests that many teachers and administrators perceive low-income parents as uninterested in their children's education, and, as a result, may fail to foster a welcoming or supportive environment (Antoine, 2015). This issue is particularly pronounced when parents speak a language other than English or the language of instruction. Language barriers often leave parents feeling uncomfortable engaging with teachers or participating in school activities, as they fear being misunderstood or dismissed. When parents feel excluded or are treated with disrespect, they are less likely to maintain a connection with the school, often limiting their presence to occasional visits, such as during report card distribution.

Considering these challenges, schools play a crucial role in creating a caring and inclusive environment, one in which parents feel genuinely welcomed and respected regardless of their socioeconomic status, religion, beliefs, practices, or ethnicity (Nurhayati & Rondonuwu, 2023). Fostering such an environment is essential, as it can significantly enhance parental involvement and, by extension, positively impact student success.

Many families are faced with overwhelming and unpredictable schedules and circumstances while juggling school, sports, family situations, family time, work schedules, and other responsibilities, allowing minimal time to provide support in any one given area (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). Today, both parents are often working outside the home, leading to clashes in school activities, teacher conferences, and school visits. It is only when the parent is called by the school administrator for an emergency parent consultation that the parent shows up at school. Therefore, working parents are involved less in their children's school life; it is not that they do not want to be involved; they just can't be due to their own responsibilities and duties in their workplace. This underscores the need for schools to develop strategies to assist working parents and increase their involvement in their children's education.

While some parents would like to be involved in their child's educational life, others refuse and do not want anything to do with the school. Some parents could care less about their

child's educational life, what happens in school, or how they perform.

Lack of parental support and involvement leads to an increase in misbehavior, delinquency in assignments, frequent absenteeism, and lower academic achievement. Without the assistance of the parents, educators are limited in what they can do. This then burdens the teachers because they are expected to produce good results, yet they are not receiving any support from their parents (Ntekane, 2018).

**Conclusion**

School and family are two essential social institutions where students spend most of their lives. Hence, the two-way interconnection between school and family cannot be disjointed, where unity of goals, sustainable balance of trust and power, and quality of parental involvement are determinants of student success (Ates, 2021). It's important to point out that families are not just caregivers but also educators. This understanding should lead to a greater appreciation of families as partners in the education and development of students. Thus, Ates (2021) espoused that when the interaction between the school and the family increases, the positive effect of the family on the education of the child increases through this increase in interaction. This underscores the responsibility and commitment of all involved in ensuring the success of the student.

We know parents and the family are crucial to providing students with the best possible education. We have seen, and with the limited literature available, at least for Belize, research reveals that when families and communities are involved in their children's education, students attend school more regularly, stay longer, and perform at higher levels. Furthermore, Epstein et al. (2002) assert that the way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school, where the family now leaves the education of children to the schools. Now, if educators view students as children, they will likely see the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development.

Consequently, there are many reasons why establishing prenatal involvement and engagement in supporting student learning and school-community partnerships is crucial. This partnership can help improve school programs and the school climate, connect families with

others in the school, and facilitate the learning process for both the teacher and the student while ensuring student success.

**Recommendations to Increase Parental Involvement**

1. *Create a welcoming school environment:* Schools should establish a culture that welcomes and values parental involvement. This can be achieved through continuous parent workshops, parent conferences, and timely consultations with parents. Schools should include open lines of communication (messages, phone calls, online posts), provide regular updates on student progress (online gradebook), and invite parents to participate in school events (Family Fun Day, sports) as well as decision-making processes (strategic planning).
2. *Provide flexible involvement opportunities:* Recognizing that parents have diverse schedules and commitments; schools should offer various ways for parents to become involved. Flexible meeting times, virtual participation options, and a range of volunteer activities can help accommodate different needs throughout the school year.
3. *Educate and Empower Parents:* Schools can organize workshops and provide resources to help parents understand the impact of their involvement and offer practical ways to support their children's education at home. Providing parents with a support student guidebook that includes practical strategies that they can implement at home and school with their child.
4. *Utilize Technology*: Leveraging technology can enhance communication between schools and parents. Online portals for tracking student progress (abacus-online gradebook), virtual parent-teacher conferences, and digital newsletters or social media posts (school Facebook) can keep parents informed and engaged.
5. *Encourage Two-Way Communication*: Schools should actively seek feedback from parents and involve them in decision-making processes. This collaboration can help create educational policies and practices that reflect the needs and priorities of families.
6. *Policy Makers*: Policy makers need to collaborate with schools by partnering with them to offer services and programs that support families, such as after-school programs, health services, and family literacy initiatives. They should also encourage community organizations to provide volunteer opportunities and resources for parents.

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