

Chapter 1

Strategies of Engagement: Parent and School Connections

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ABSTRACT

School, parent involvement, and at-risk students do not always make a winning combination. However, for the students at Mountain View High School, things were different. Strategies used by the Mountain View Parent Advisory Group helped to transform education for students of color who participated in their program. This chapter follows a study at a high school located in an upper/upper middle-class neighborhood where barriers to academic growth were considered addressed. However, there was a pocket of students of color who were not being successful academically. Strategies used by a parent group to help re-engage at-risk students, raise their GPAs, and redirect their future towards success are highlighted. Understanding that these strategies can be initiated by any group of parents or teachers provides promise for at-risk students, parents, and schools.

INTRODUCTION

Questions of engagement are at the forefront of the educational reform conversation especially for at-risk students. How do we engage at-risk students in the educational process? What factors related to engagement impact at-risk students fostering school engagement and academic success? Conversations are happening in the national and international arenas in an effort to define the factors that are most important when looking at student engagement. The role of the family/parent is an important component that must not be overlooked. This chapter briefly examines and connects with the practices of communities, organizations and schools around the world who are creating opportunities for families/parents to actively participate in the educational process with their children. Specifically, this chapter also takes a closer look at strategies used by a high school located in an upper/upper middle class neighborhood and

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a parent advisory group who worked together to increase student engagement and academic success for failing students.

This qualitative study was completed in 2014 using narrative inquiry. Using the authentic voices of the students, parents, teachers, school administrator and district personnel who were involved in the re-engagement of at risk students at the Mountain View High School, the researchers retell the story of transformation and success. The socially and culturally situated lens of social capital, cultural capital and structures of social class were used to identify strategies of engagement and examples of how these strategies changed perspectives for the students who participated in the program. African American, Hispanic, Middle Eastern and low achieving white students all benefited from strategies used by the Mountain View Parent Advisory Group. Through the efforts of the parent advisory group who unified the teachers, the students and the community surrounding the school, the students became more engaged. Results, such as higher GPAs, increased graduation rates, increased participation in school functions and higher college and university matriculation by student groups who had previously been identified as at-risk of failure, have been documented and continue to be in effect.

This chapter provides a context for principal, teachers, and school districts to use when considering the role that parents can play in the educational process. In a 2014 survey by Education Week Research Center regarding student engagement and motivation where more than 500 teachers and school-based administrators responded, 100% of the respondents said that student engagement was a very important factor in academic achievement. Additionally, 91% of the respondents stated that parental involvement was also a key factor in student academic success. Student engagement and parent involvement are two important factors of student academic success (Education Week Research Center, 2014). Understanding the importance of these two factors, it is important to address methods where schools and parents can work together to engage students for academic success. This chapter takes a closer look this type of model where school and parents work together for the academic success of students.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REFORM

Educational reform around the globe has called for increased parental involvement in educating children. Studies ranging from homework assistance (Gonida & Cortina, 2014) to patterns of patterns of parent involvement (Daniel, 2015) have been completed with results indicating the importance of parent involvement at all levels. A report from the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau published in 2012 identified strategies to use that foster engagement of parents in the educational process. Consistently, numerous studies suggest that academic socialization and parental role constructions lie at the foundation of effective parental engagement (Fear, J., Emerson, L., Fox, S., and Senders, 2012).

Academic socialization comes from the 2009 research of Hill and Tyson. Their meta-analysis looked at three types of involvement, namely, home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization. Academic socialization involves engagement that communicates the value of parent expectations, links schoolwork to current events, fosters students' aspirations in both their education and their occupation, discusses strategies of learning with children, and helps children make plans for the future. They found that the most positive impact on academic achievement occurred when parents are engaged through academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

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