

JOINING TOGETHER TO CREATE A BOLD VISION FOR NEXT GENERATION FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ENGAGING FAMILIES TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION BY GLOBAL FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT FOR THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF AMERICA.

It is time for the “next generation family engagement” that involves aligned, strategic and systemic approaches to family and community engagement from a child’s birth to young adulthood.

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This paper, completed by the Global Family Research Project for the Carnegie Corporation of America, uses case studies to examine the decades-old research confirming the power of family engagement in children’s development, educational attainment, and success in school and life. This challenge paper is part of Carnegie’s initiative to establish a “broad, diverse and inclusive conversation about how family and community engagement can be a key strategy for building excellent and equitable education systems.” The paper is intended to stimulate work that can result in “next generation family engagement” that involves aligned, strategic and systemic approaches to family and community engagement from a child’s birth to young adulthood.

The authors of the study conclude that the current system of family and community engagement is little more than scattered and unaligned programs and policies. The change will occur only with a change of thinking about family and community engagement programs, policies and initiatives. It is no effective to “do for” families. It is critical that families and their needs be valued and that they be involved in creation of any solutions.

The paper includes an overview of 50 years of research in the field of family and community engagement research, practice and policy. The authors of the study explained that the rich research and practice knowledge have provides a strong platform for next generation family and community engagement. Three dominant ideas have governed the thinking and work surrounding how to give children the best chances to learn and acquire skills for success:

- Children learn at any time and in any place;
- Families play many and key roles throughout children’s development;
- Communities as well as public policy are drivers for ensuring that families create strong and equitable learning pathways.

A variety of longitudinal tests have confirmed the validity of the proposition that high-quality early education combined with strong family engagement generates lasting success for children. Further studies have also confirmed that it is critical to pay attention to the entire learning ecology, not just schools, especially when seeking to reduce achievement disparities for economically disadvantaged students.

Case studies include:

- A family engagement program operated by the SEIU in Los Angeles and involving janitors who are mostly new immigrants and parents or grandparents. The janitors, who are already working long hours, eagerly participate in a family engagement workshop because they want to change the educational trajectory for their children and grandchildren and ensure that they have better lives.
- The attendance trajectory of the Zavala Elementary School in Austin, Texas that transformed from a school with high teacher change, low student attendance, poor pass rates on state reading and math tests to one where teachers didn’t want to leave, where students came to school and scored well on tests. Leadership and advocacy from families played a key role in the success.

Recommendations:

- Family-school relationships are critical and must be co-created and predicated upon “mutual respect, trust, open communication and inclusion in decision-making.”

- It is critical to understand the context in which families live. Schools and community groups must recognize inherent constraints facing some or many families and establish conditions and opportunities for them to establish strong learning pathways for children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, linguistic or cultural background.
- Empathy is central to changing family engagement practices that educators believe families need and want to one that is based in reality about what families actually need and want. Schools and communities must really listen and learn and not fear conversations about race and ethnicity. Empathy is critical for the needed co-design of programs and initiatives. The authors cited several successful examples of programs that have been co-designed, including “Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors,” a training program by and for Latino parents with children under 5 and work by Dr. Marta Civil at the University of Arizona, who changes the contexts in which teachers come to know families. Much of the work involves teacher home and community visits in order to be able to integrate existing learning community or family educational strengths into the classroom. The home visits are also heralded as a way of helping build trust and accountability between parents and teachers and disrupting the cycle of blame. Another cited program that is credited with allowing teachers valuable insight and a path to acquire empathy is a program offered by the Ohio Association of Foodbanks where participants participate in a poverty simulation where families are shuffled from one agency to the next. This simulation has resulted in educators being mindful to not replicate the demoralizing practices they experienced in the simulation.
- In order for this work to happen and the mindsets to change, it is important to build collaboration skills in families, teachers and organizations.
- Human-centered design thinking was also cited as an effective tool for creating strong relationships between families and educators. With design thinking, educators have an opportunity to listen and learn from parents and co-create action steps to address cited issues.
- Relational trust must be established with ties and bonds among all community stakeholders all united for supporting students’ academic success. This relational trust requires codesign of instructional systems, investment in strong parent-community-school ties, an emphasis on student-centered learning and building professional capacity.
- Creating a culture of shared responsibility through numerous channels, including awareness campaigns. Researchers cited communications work by National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement; studies by Learning Heroes to better understand parental perception of schools and their children’s performance; and the mission of the Changing the Narrative Coalition which is committed to alter negative perceptions of low-income parents and those of color.

The researchers offered five “high leverage” practices that can create broader effects and deliver meaningful impact on family engagement and student outcomes:

- Attendance
- Data sharing
- Academic and social development
- Digital media
- Transitions

Global Family Research Project. (October 2018) “Joining Together to Create a Bold Vision for Next Generation Family Engagement Engaging Families to Transform Education.” Project for the Carnegie Corporation of New York. <https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/f8/78/f8784565-4bd6-4aa3-bd80-2b98fd43380e/parent-engagement-2018.pdf>

Thanks to generous support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Our Neighborhood*, is a compilation of stories and research from the family engagement field. It is intended to be a living repository and guide for STEM Learning Ecosystems and other communities interested in cultivating strong community partnerships to prepare the next generation.

This annotated bibliography was compiled by TIES for *Our Neighborhood*.