Empowering PARENTS to Transform Schools
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Empowering Parents to Transform Schools

Expert Presenters:

Arnold F. Fege, president, Public Advocacy for Kids, Washington, D.C.

Alberto Retana, executive vice president, Community Coalition, Los Angeles

Karran Harper Royal, parent advocate, New Orleans
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24 hrs.
Family Engagement: Priority or Lip-Service
Percent of Low Income Students in All Public Schools
compiled by the Southern Education Foundation, 2013

Percent of Low Income Students in All Public Schools
2011

Percent of Students
0.0 to 38.3
38.3 to 42.6
42.6 to 47.6
47.6 to 50.0
50.0 and Above

National Average: 48.0
Two Gaps

The ACADEMIC gap between white and more affluent students in the U.S. and students of color and those in poverty

The ENGAGEMENT, EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY gap between low income and more affluent families

Linked to RELATIONSHIPS, CONNECTIONS, SOCIAL & POLITICAL CAPITAL AND VOICE
Effective family engagement embraces a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children’s educational development is a shared, collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members. Effective partnerships are built on family assets and the strengths parents bring to the table.
ORGANIZING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: LESSONS FROM CHICAGO

Anthony Bryk, President, Carnegie Foundation

- Strong Family Engagement and Community Partnerships
- Professional Competency of Principal, Teachers and Staff and Ability to Team
- Student Centered Learning Climate
- Instructional Guidance Systems Including Alignment & Consistency
Keeping Families on the Sidelines: What if the Families Came First in Education Change

- Public gets assigned tasks from schools
- Random acts, but little systemic change
- Participation not valued by educators
- Current reforms are imposed: NCLB waivers, Common Core, testing, school closings,
- Often have trouble in understanding jargon/data, or communicated in a language they don’t understand
- Don’t know who to hold accountable
- Often treated as liabilities/threat to the system, rather than assets
Policy Makes a Difference: National Common Threads

- Examples at Federal Level:
  - Head Start
  - Special Education (IDEA)
  - NCLB/ESEA
- National priority and interwoven
- Family has restructured; schools have not
- Building capacity between school and family

- Collaboration, not adversarial
- Evidence and Researched based
- Family as inextricable instructional strategy/decision makers
- One size does not fit all: personalized
- Funding
Policy Makes a Difference: State and Local Level

- Need to be a state/district priority:
- Infrastructure, alignment and capacity building
- Funding

Focus on:
- Response to family needs/listening
- Family supports/wrap-around services/community
- Two way communications
- Decision-making and governance

- Building a “learning community” with families including educator professional development
- Involve families in school improvement
- District/school family coordinators
- Family as inextricable instructional strategy/decision makers
- Function of school leadership
FAMILIES AT THE TABLE

If families are not at the table, they are on the menu

from recent Parents for Public Schools board meeting
Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.

Martin Luther King Jr.
Three Assumptions

• School transformation requires an all hands on deck strategy that addresses the ecology and the anatomy of a school—parents are a central force in both understanding and changing both.

• Transforming schools is more than just a battle of ideas; it is a battle over resources and power.
Three Assumptions

• Transforming racial and economic inequity, of the kind that results from systemic change, requires power to be confronted by “masses” of organized people.
Some Parent Organizing Principles

• Grounds the battle over ideas, policies, and resources in the lives of the families directly impacted by the inequity we seek to transform.

• Parents view themselves organizers; as change agents not only for their only children, but all children.

• Parent organizing is more than about education and training, its about changing policy and re-directing resources equitably.
Tools for Parent Organizing

• Build a committee of parent leaders that is committed to principles of organizing for systemic change—must have independence.

• Relationship building is core to growing a base, but understanding power is key to winning changes.

• On-going leadership training program that builds organizing capacity of parent leaders (public speaking, policy 101, power, outreach).
Tools for Parent Organizing

• Identify the core systemic problems that parents seek to change—develop short term, intermediate, and long term goals that incrementally tackle the problems you seek to change.

• Analyze who has the power to change policy, competing interests, likely and unlikely allies.

• Organizing for change is an incremental process of winning small victories, building a base, and developing leaders --- growing your power to take on more fundamental reforms.
**Relationship Building**
- Hold one-to-one meetings
- Share stories
- Identify common concerns
- Find new leaders

**Turn concerns into actionable issues**

**Evaluate and reflect**

**Conduct research**

**Build alliances**

**Leadership Development**
- Conduct power analysis
- Learn about issues
- Find solutions
- Leadership training sessions

**Action**
- Mobilize networks
- Demonstrate community support for solutions
- Hold officials accountable

**Power**

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*Figure 6.1 Organizing as a Cycle*

Credit to Mark Warren
First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, then you win.

Mahatma Ghandi
Resources

• A Cord of Three Strands, Soo Hong

• Public Engagement for Public Education, Marion Orr and John Rogers

• A Match on Dry Grass, Mark Warren and Karen Mapp
Parental Involvement in a Changing Education Landscape

Karran Harper Royal, Parent
New Orleans
Our Voices Matter

- Parents want a voice in how reform is done
- Experiences of families must be factored into how districts change
- Adequate time and resources must be allocated to engaging parents in a meaningful way
- Parents need to see evidence of their voice implemented in the changes
We Are Not The Same

Districts must consider the needs of a diverse minority majority community in making changes to public education
Information Empowers Our Voices

• What schools are available
• Quality of the instructional program
• Who is currently being served by the school
• The school’s success with academically challenged students
• Teacher turnover rate
• How are challenging behaviors handled?
• And more…
Parental Involvement at Every Level

It’s not enough to ask our opinions of the options others have decided. We must be a part of creating the options as well.
Karran Harper Royal

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Empowering Parents to Transform Schools

Required Reading from *Education Week*:

Commentary Package: **The Role of the K-12 Parent**
A collection of Commentaries and multimedia that offer different perspectives on the changing nature of parent empowerment and the role that family engagement can play in student achievement, including the following:

- **Missing: A National Education Policy for Low-Income Families**
  When it comes to transforming public education, poor families wield the least power even as their children attend the lowest-performing schools, writes Arnold F. Fege.

- **Parents Can Inform Meaningful School Change**
  When it comes to assessing school options for their children, parents must ask the right questions and stay informed, Karran Harper Royal writes.