Family Engagement with Schools: Strategies to Build Strong Partnerships

Accessible Video Transcript

- [Narrator] Students learn best when educators at school and family members at homework together to support education. That approach pays off right away and for years in the future.

- Students do better in school when the parent is involved with school. They're more likely to graduate. They're more likely to go to college. They're more likely to have a lasting career.

- [Narrator] This powerful home-school partnership is called family engagement.

- Family engagement simply means building authentic, collaborative relationships between parents, family members, the students, and the community for the success of all children.

- [Narrator] In this video, we focus on this shared responsibility, and show what families can do to partner effectively with educators. Family engagement is key to the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports. The framework is called different names in different school districts, but the goal is the same. To create effective learning environments for all students. It provides distinct levels of supports that improves success in academics, behavior, and social-emotional wellness. Tier 1 services are for all students. Tier 2 services are for students who need help to strengthen specific skills. Tier 3 services are for students who need intensive, individualized services.

- The multi-tiered systems of support really is about providing supports for the students, and in some cases, supports for the family that help wrap around a kid, wrap around a family to make sure that that student can have success.

- [Narrator] Schools use six components to guide family engagement in the multi-tiered approach. These practices strengthen family and school partnerships and improve outcomes for all students. A good working relationship lets families and schools focus on the needs of students in ways that pay off. Here are some tips and strategies families can use to engage with schools.

- Be present in the school as often as you can. Show appreciation for the people that work with your children: the cafeteria staff, the janitors, the office staff, the clinic, anyone that your child engages with.

- I would suggest that you be very intentional and reach out to the school. Do not wait for them to reach out to you. Be very proactive in sharing with the school your desires, your hopes, and your dreams.

- I know a lot of times you might see all the moms are always engaging, but for a dad it's beneficial as well. I mean, I have attended events, and sometimes I'm the only father there. But I feel like it shows, in terms for not only the teacher, but the admin staff, and even the students when you attend that it's good to have a father there.

- It can be a challenge if you had a bad experience or non-pleasant experience as a child with school yourself. But coming at it with an open mind will ensure that you want something different for your child.

- Sometimes we as parents have to realize, the system might have failed me, but I don't want the system to fail my child. So let me reach out instead.

- [Narrator] Learning how to actively support their children's learning and success at school is one way families build empowerment.

- You don't know what you don't know. Which means going to schools and saying, "Tell me more about, why is something happening? "What should I be asking you about "that I haven't asked about yet?"

- If you're not feeling welcomed in your school, your child's school, I would encourage you to have a conversation with the administration. Share with them and give examples of what it felt like or what you're sensing or seeing within the school.

- It's really important for parents and parent leaders to work closely with the school, especially in communities that have very diverse needs. A lot of times we see from one year to the next even, the needs might change. We're constantly trying to refine what we're doing and find new ways to engage everyone.

- [Narrator] Strong schools unite families and school staff in shared leadership and decision making.

- Something that families can do is join a committee at a school, or the PTA, but be in some type of position where they can make decisions or give suggestions.

- We have a parent advisory council. We call it our PAC team. We want to get our parents involved and see what problems we have, so that they can come up with solutions.

- [Narrator] Schools and families should work together to set engagement goals that are based on school and student data, and crucially, information and insights from families.

- There's always a story behind numbers, and being informed as a parent helps you understand and add your voice to the story.

- When there are opportunities to take surveys, by all means, fill them out and take them. All of those answers definitely add up and can then be used as concrete data to implement change.

- So, when we get the surveys and take the time to complete the surveys, as parents, we always like to see the results and get the data of what our community felt. The thing I really appreciate about seeing the data is it gives opportunity to point out areas that we can really use for improvement.

- [Narrator] Finding the right ways to communicate and the right supports for each student are key goals of family engagement.

- It's important to establish face-to-face communications with your teachers, especially when your child starts a new school year or a new level. It's also important that once you establish those face-to-face interactions that you are able to then follow up with communications that are more convenient to you and the teacher's schedule.

- Call, email, text. I would say get involved. Because your child needs you there. Your child needs you as your advocate.

- If your child has reached tier 2, tier 3 level of support, you're gonna find a greater need to be in the school, calling the school, speaking with your student's teachers, school counselor, social worker. You might be asked to attend meetings.

- [Narrator] Effective problem solving is key when families and schools collaborate to solve challenges in meeting the needs of students who require more supports.

- If your family is experiencing some difficult times, or if your child has experienced some traumatic events, it's important for the school to know that, for the teacher to know that, because it's gonna impact the child in their day. And the teacher's gonna respect that information. They're gonna keep it confidential. And they're gonna use it to help problem solve, and that's it.

- Try to find someone at your school that you would be able to actually talk to, that you're comfortable with. Because once you find that one person, that one person can help you achieve so much more.

- We're here to make a difference. And the way we make that difference is in collaboration with you as a family member, you as a parent. I don't know what your child is going through at home. But it's my job to make sure that while they're here they're successful, and the only way I can do that is by having honest dialogue with you.

- Keep your mind on the main thing. And the main thing is the student and their success. It's not about me, it's not about you. It's about the student.

- Teachers can't do it alone. They need us so that we can let them know who our children are. Because we know our children. And we need to make sure that the teachers know our children as well so that they're fully supported in that classroom.

- Stand up and say, "Yes, I care. "And because I care, I am coming forward with this issue." And once we communicate, then our problems can be solved.

- We want students, when they get out of school, regardless of where they go, we want them to be well rounded, want to be able to problem solve, want to be able to communicate, want to be able to resolve conflict. If we're not modeling that at the parent/school level, how are the kids gonna learn those tools they need for life?

- Family engagement does lead to family empowerment. The value in families being connected to what's going on in the school is that their children will be more successful. And that's what we're looking for. Our goal is for students to succeed.

- [Narrator] Learn about strategies educators can use to strengthen family-school partnerships in their other short films produced by Formed Families Forward.