

Executive Summary of Statement by Anne T. Henderson, Senior Consultant
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The evidence is clear—schools cannot close the achievement gap without partnering with families. Over 40 years of research has demonstrated that engaging families in their children’s education improves student achievement, attendance, and behavior, and increases graduation rates.¹ Children spend 70 percent of their waking hours outside of school, and how they spend that time is critical to their success in school.² Modest investments in increasing families’ knowledge and skills to support learning can leverage our larger investment in teacher quality and school improvement.

Despite this strong evidence, there is a lack of capacity at the state, district, and school level for engaging families, and federal and state policies offer few incentives to remedy the situation. Teachers have repeatedly identified parent involvement as one of the most important ways to improve education, yet they also list parent engagement as the area where they feel least prepared and least satisfied with their own performance.³

Instead, schools often commit “random acts of parent involvement”—a back-to-school night or a flyer home on parent teacher conferences. Rather than focusing on scaling up innovative, research-based practices that engage families, districts and states tend to direct their resources toward monitoring compliance with the law.

The National Family, School, and Community Engagement Working Group, composed of leading researchers, practitioners, policy experts, and funders committed to effective family engagement, has developed a research-based definition of what effective family engagement should look like: *a shared responsibility for student success, in which schools and community organizations are committed to engaging families in meaningful ways and families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development. This shared responsibility is continuous from birth through young adulthood and reinforces learning that takes place in not only in school, but at home and in community settings.*

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provides a critical opportunity to strengthen family engagement in education and build local capacity to scale up research-based practices that drive student achievement. Since 1965, Congress has recognized the involvement of parents as a key drivers of school improvement, especially in Title I and low-income schools. As Congress works to reauthorize ESEA, it must ensure that effective family engagement is again a cornerstone of the law.

Below is a brief summary of our recommendations:

1. Provide incentives to scale up research-based family engagement practices at the school, district, and state level.
2. Strengthen Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) and focus their role on capacity-building to scale up research-based family engagement practices that improve student achievement.
3. Provide high-quality in-service and pre-service professional development to strengthen the knowledge and skills of teachers and principals to engage parents in raising student achievement.
4. Build statewide capacity to develop, coordinate, and implement family engagement initiatives from cradle to career.
5. Strengthen federal support for research and coordination of cradle-to-career family engagement strategies and initiatives that reach families in underrepresented and underserved communities.

¹ Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of Family, School, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002). H.B. Weiss, S.M. Bouffard, B.L. Bridgall and E.W. Gordon, *Reframing Family Involvement in Education: Supporting Families to Support Educational Equity*. Campaign for Educational Equity (Teachers College, Columbia University, December, 2009).

² Reginald Clark, “Ten Hypotheses about what predicts student achievement for African American student and all other students: what the research shows,” in Walter L. Allen et al. (eds), *African American Education: Race, Community, Inequality and Achievement – A Tribute to Edgar G. Epps* (Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science, 2002).

³ The MetLife Survey of the American Teachers: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships (NY: Harris Interactive, 2005)