



# Research Report

**Parental Involvement, Parental  
Engagement, and Parent Academies: A  
Review of the Literature**

**Erhan Sinay and Samuel Zheng  
Research Co-ordinators**

**Amie Presley  
Research and Information Analyst**

**09/10 – 06  
November 2009**

Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, and Parent Academies:  
A Review of the Literature  
Erhan Sinay, Samuel Zheng, and Amie Presley

Copyright © November 2009 Toronto District School Board

**Reproduction of this document for use in schools of the Toronto District School Board is encouraged.**

For any other purpose, permission must be requested and obtained in writing from:

Organizational Development/  
Research and Information Services  
Toronto District School Board  
1 Civic Centre Court, Lower Level  
Etobicoke, ON M9C 2B3

Tel.: 416-394-4929

Fax: 416-394-4946

Every reasonable precaution has been taken to trace the owners of copyrighted material and to make due acknowledgement. Any omission will gladly be rectified in future printings.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE REVIEW</b> .....	Pg. 1
<b>METHODOLOGY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	Pg. 2
<b>PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION</b> .....	Pg. 3
Impacts of Parental Involvement and Engagement on Student Learning ....	Pg. 3
Barriers and Mediating Factors on Parental Engagement .....	Pg. 7
Strategies for Promoting Parental Involvement and Engagement.....	Pg. 9
<b>FAMILY LEARNING</b> .....	Pg. 11
Family Literacy .....	Pg. 11
Adult Learning .....	Pg. 13
<b>THE PARENT ACADEMY</b> .....	Pg. 14
The Miami-Dade Parent Academy .....	Pg. 15
Service Delivery Model.....	Pg. 16
Partnerships, Marketing, and Funding of the Academy .....	Pg. 17
Program Evaluation of the Academy .....	Pg. 19
Other Examples of Parent Academies .....	Pg. 20
<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	Pg. 21
Parent Involvement and Engagement .....	Pg. 21
The Parent Academy .....	Pg. 22
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	Pg. 25
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
Appendix A – Other Examples of Parent Academies .....	Pg. 29
Appendix B – Toronto District School Board Parent Survey Results.....	Pg. 33
Appendix C – Toronto District School Board Student Census Results .....	Pg. 35



## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE REVIEW

This literature review was conducted in response to a Board request to examine recent literature and research regarding the concept of parent academies. In general terms, parent academy refers to a myriad of courses/events offered to parents/caregivers in the community which are intended to support student success through the involvement and engagement of parents at home and at school.

The research evidence is consistent in demonstrating that families have a major influence on their child(ren)'s achievement in school and throughout life. When schools, families, and communities work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and enjoy school more (Cole-Henderson, 2000; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Reynolds, 1989; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). While parental engagement is widely understood to be vital for the success of students, it is also acknowledged that we need to know more about effective means of engaging parents in learning, particularly those parents who are 'hard to reach'. Recognizing that parental involvement and engagement is an important component of student success, The Ontario Parent Engagement Office, within the Ministry of Education (People for Education, 2009, p. 1) is working on a new *Parent Engagement Policy* which envisions an inclusive education system in Ontario where students are supported and inspired to learn in a culture of high expectations in which parents:

- “are welcomed, respected, and valued as partners by the school community in their children’s learning and development;
- have a full range of choices and opportunities to be involved in to support student success;
- are engaged through ongoing communication and dialogue to support a positive learning environment at home and at school; and
- are supported with resources and tools which enable them to participate in school life.”

Toronto District School Board (TDSB) research is also quite conclusive with respect to the benefits of parental engagement on academic achievement. Findings suggest that parents' direct involvement in school meetings and events and their volunteer work in the schools has a positive impact on their child(ren)'s achievement (Sinay, 2009). In the TDSB, it is also evident that only about half of the Kindergarten to Grade 6 students are receiving help with homework

outside of school. Approximately, one in six Grade 7 to 8 students and one in three secondary students say they do not get help with homework outside of school. The percentage of parents who attend parent-teacher interviews, speak with their child's teachers, and attend meetings and events at school decreases as students move from the elementary to the secondary panel (Yau & O' Reilly, 2007 & 2009). For detailed results of the TDSB Parent Survey and Student Census, refer to Appendix B and C.

The purpose of this review is to provide a systematic assessment of the literature regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the parent academy as a model for parent and community engagement to policy-makers and practitioners for evidence-informed decision making.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

This review describes the value of and barriers to parental involvement and engagement in education to explore the need for a parent academy as a more comprehensive and sophisticated model for parent and community engagement in schools. In doing so, the detailed findings specific to parent academies and various service delivery models will be the main focus of this review; however, to provide context, the first portion of the report details review findings on the broader topics of parental involvement and parental engagement.

This review was informed by the experience and expertise of the TDSB research team and embraced a wide range of sources including disciplines outside of education such as child development, psychology, and family practice databases (e.g., ERIC database, ProQuest Education, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, school board websites, and organization websites).

The literature search was conducted in two phases. The search terms "parental involvement" and "parental engagement" were used first and it was found that "parental engagement" did not produce the same amount of literature as "parental involvement", possibly because "parental involvement" is a much broader term than "parental engagement". The selection of resources specific to parental involvement and engagement was mostly limited to professional journals and organizations. Second, the search terms "parent academy" and "parent university" were used to generate resources to reflect the parameters of the literature review. Specific to parent academy/parent university, it should be noted that the collection of resources largely reflects the perspectives and models of the United States (US) and was mostly limited to actual school board/district references.

## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION**

Parental involvement and parental engagement are both broad terms and encompass a vast array of strategies, actions, and theories. The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) states on its website that parent involvement is crucial to the health and well-being of a child: “Parents are the most important influence in their child's success in school and in life. Parent involvement in children's education allows children to perform better in school, and navigate more easily some of the challenges of growing up” (National Parent Teacher Association, 2009). The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) distinguishes parental engagement in learning from parental involvement in schooling: “The definition [of parental engagement] was made to ensure that practitioners and policy makers were not confusing the objective of getting parents involved with school life (e.g., attending parents' evening, which is seen as reactive to the school) and the objective of engaging parents with their child's learning” (Family and Parenting Institute, 2009). Similarly, the definition of parental engagement by the United Kingdom's Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF) aligns with the premise that parental engagement is an extension of the classroom (2008). Harris and Goodall (2007) state that “parental engagement implies that parents are an essential part of the learning process, an extended part of the pedagogic process” (p. 67).

However, during the search it was found that much of the research literature referring to parental involvement actually encompasses aspects of both parental involvement and parental engagement. In some cases the terms are used interchangeably, creating some confusion in arriving at a consistent definition of the two. Therefore, for the purpose of this review, the terms parental involvement and parental engagement will be used interchangeably with greater emphasis on parental involvement and engagement strategies that include learning at home and ‘good’ parenting practices.

### **Impacts of Parental Involvement and Engagement on Student Learning**

The research does not dispute that parental involvement and parental engagement are both important to student success. Harris and Goodall (2007) point out that the goal of raising achievement can only be fulfilled if parents are both involved in schools and engaged in learning. Evidence indicates that the two have significant effect on achievement from the early years into

adolescence and even into adulthood. For example, Henderson and Mapp<sup>1</sup> (2002) found that the benefits for students from parental involvement and parental engagement include:

- higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests;
- enrollment in more challenging academic programs;
- more classes passed and credits earned;
- better attendance;
- improved behavior at home and at school; and
- better social skills and adaptation at school.

Harris and Goodall (2007) reviewed over 50 sources and found that current empirical evidence points towards an association between parental involvement and student achievement. Their review highlights that parental engagement in learning at home, beginning in the early years, has a significant effect on student achievement. Studies conducted by Melhuish, E., Sylva, C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2001) and Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1999) reinforce the impact of parental engagement in learning activities in the home with better cognitive achievement, particularly in the early years.

Expanding on the effects of parental engagement in the early years, a report completed by the DCSF (2008) in the United Kingdom (UK) identifies that parental involvement with children at an early age is associated with better outcomes. Based on their research, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) state that it is the parental engagement in learning activities in the home that is most closely associated with better cognitive attainment in the early years. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research found that parent-child activities, such as reading with the child, playing with letters and numbers, teaching songs and nursery rhymes, painting and drawing, and regular library visits are linked with better outcomes for children aged 3 to 7 years old (DCSF 2008).

With regard to middle school students, a study by Bowen and Wooley (2007) reveals that middle school students who reported supportive adults in their lives also reported higher levels of psychological and behaviour engagement with their schooling. Building on parental engagement in middle schools, Epstein (2001) cites the results of a study completed by Belenardo measuring (using surveys) how middle schools promote a sense of community, suggesting that

---

<sup>1</sup> Henderson and Mapp (2002) refer to the term “family engagement”; however, for the purpose of this report, the term has been changed to “parental engagement.”

“a sense of community needs more than good feelings and grows from a sense of purpose, including strong school leadership and productive family involvement” (p. 4).

Moving further into adolescence, research using survey data from the National Child Development Study (2008) in the UK explored the effect of parental engagement on achievement at sixteen in the subjects of English and Mathematics. The study found that very high parental interest is associated with better exam results compared to children whose parents show little or no interest. Epstein (2008) reports that educators know that successful students have parents who stay informed; however, in the middle schools and secondary schools, teachers say that they tend to connect with parents when students are in trouble. Epstein further notes that parents want more and better information to guide their children through the middle and high school years.

Across studies, a key parental engagement practice associated with increased achievement is identified as learning at-home activities. Epstein, who directs the National Network of Partnership Schools, is quoted saying, “the greatest impact on student achievement is well designed at-home activities” (as cited in Jones, 2001, p. 37). Interactive homework allows students to show, share, and demonstrate what they have learned in their class with their parents (Jones, 2001). A study from Johns Hopkins University identifies effective implementation of practices that encourage families to support their child(ren)’s learning at home are associated with higher percentages of students who scored at or above proficiency on standardized mathematics achievement tests (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

However, a report published by the DCSF (2008) states that there “is mixed evidence about whether or not parental involvement in homework effects pupils’ achievement at school” (p. 7). One study cited in the same report explored the effects of different types of parental involvement in homework and found that different forms of support (e.g., support for children’s autonomy) are associated with higher test scores, whereas others (e.g., direct involvement) are associated with lower test scores.

In addition to helping children with their homework, parents can help by creating effective learning environments for their child(ren) (Harris & Goodall, 2007). International studies have found that children can have distinct preferences for different learning environments and it may be useful to base students’ learning environments on their individual learning styles (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

Desforges and Abouchar (2003, p. 4-5) reviewed over 100 sources and identified that research consistently shows:

- “Parental involvement is positively influenced by the child’s level of attainment (i.e., the higher the level of attainment, the more parents get involved);
- In the primary age range, the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups; and
- The most important finding from the review is that parental involvement in the form of ‘at-home good parenting’ has a significant positive effect on children’s achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation.”

The review further identifies practices related to parental involvement in the form of ‘good parenting’ which include: the provision of a secure and stable environment; intellectual stimulation; parent-child discussion; good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003).

Research findings summarized by Harris and Goodall (2007) correspond with Desforges and Abouchar (2003) in stating that the impact of parental involvement arises from parental values and educational aspirations that are continuously exhibited through parental enthusiasm and positive parenting. Additional research completed by The Youth News Team (Leadership For Student Activities, 2006) in Lexington, KY, identifies that 69% of students with a grade of B-plus or higher reported having parents who regularly help them select classes.

It should be noted that while the effect of parental involvement and engagement are significant, student success is not dependent on one factor (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Chen, 2001; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002). Henderson and Mapp (2002) identify some other factors as being: high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, alignment of instruction and assessment, effective leadership, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, focused professional learning, and high levels of parent and community involvement. They conclude that it takes much more than engaged [and involved] parents to produce high student achievement.

Finally, research found that parental involvement and engagement are maximized when parents are helped to develop skills associated with effective parenting, leadership, governance and decision making. Studies show that parents benefit from learning about strategies for assisting their child(ren)'s education at home, as well as learning how to take on instructional and support roles in the school (Harris & Goodall 2007).

While literature informs us of the importance of parental involvement and engagement as well as the gains associated with it; it is important to note some of the concerns behind these claims. Mattingley, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar, (2002) analyzed 41 studies that evaluated Kindergarten to Grade 12 parent involvement programs in order to assess claims that these programs were an effective means of improving student learning. The evaluations found little empirical support to the claim that parental involvement programs are effective in increasing student achievement. The study points out that evaluation design and data collection techniques were not adequately rigorous to provide convincing evidence. Their analysis also revealed additional concerns, which include:

- failure to report information;
- a lack of control group;
- reliance on highly subjective indicators; and
- inattention to demographic and socio-economic family characteristic.

In light of their review, Mattingley et al. (2002) conclude that there is no substantial evidence to indicate a causal relationship between interventions designed to increase parent involvement and improvements in student learning. This does not imply that the evaluated programs were ineffective, but it cautions that the evidence of their success does not justify the claims made about parental involvement.

Although Mattingley et al. (2002) do outline cautions to consider when interpreting the impacts of parental involvement and engagement on student achievement, the majority of the literature describes the positive impacts that parental involvement and engagement has on overall student success.

## **Barriers and Mediating Factors on Parental Engagement**

Through an extensive review of the literature, Harris and Goodall (2007) identify that a major factor mediating parental involvement is parental socio-economic status (SES), indexed by occupational class or parental education levels, specifically that of mothers. Sacker et al. (2002)

show that low SES had a negative impact on parental involvement due to material deprivation (i.e., learning materials at home) and attitudes and behaviours to education.

Supporting this claim, Desforges and Abouchar (2003) note that the research consistently showed that the extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity.

To succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds, key practices were identified by Harris and Goodall (2007). These practices focus on (1) building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members; and (2) recognizing, respecting, and addressing families' needs, as well as class and cultural difference. They also suggest that if a sustainable difference is to be made for all children, including those from low SES backgrounds, an acknowledgement of the differences among groups of parents and strategies which reflect these differences must be identified.

Apart from SES, Project Appleseed ([www.projectappleseed.org](http://www.projectappleseed.org), n.d.), an initiative in the United States which seeks to increase the nation's family involvement capacity, identifies nine barriers to parental involvement and engagement. They include:

- lack of teacher time;
- teachers' misperceptions of parents' abilities;
- lack of understanding of parents' communication styles;
- limited family resources, such as transportation and child care;
- parents' lack of comfort at the school;
- tension in relationships between parents and teachers;
- mobility;
- lack of vested interest; and
- difficulties of involvement in the upper grades.

## Strategies for Promoting Parental Involvement and Engagement

Much contemporary research on parental involvement and engagement in the United States and Canada has drawn on the work of Joyce Epstein<sup>2</sup>. Epstein developed a framework detailing six types of parental involvement<sup>3</sup>. Each type includes many different practices of partnership. “Each type is likely to lead to different results for students, parents, teaching practice, and school climate; therefore, schools must select the appropriate foci which will help achieve the goal of increased student success” (Epstein, & Associates, 2008, p. 40). The six types of parental engagement are:

- 1) Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students;
- 2) Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress;
- 3) Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support in the classroom;
- 4) Learning at Home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;
- 5) Decision-making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives;
- 6) Collaborating with Community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Until recently, studies on parental involvement have not differentiated between the different types of involvement. “This new evolution in research on school, family, and community partnerships is important for increasing knowledge on how different types of involvement may affect children’s learning and development” (Epstein et al., 2008, pg 41).

---

<sup>2</sup> Resources outlining parental engagement strategies are extensive and beyond the scope of this review. This review focuses on Joyce Epstein’s framework as it corresponds with the direction of the Board.

<sup>3</sup> According to Epstein, this framework is not based on the empirical evidence of what parents actually do in the name of supporting their children. Rather, it is based on reflection about the general sort of things parents could or might do.

Epstein et al. (2008, Handouts, p. 105) also outlines steps to creating and implementing effective partnerships. The steps are as follows:

- 1) “Create an Action Team for Partnerships;
- 2) Obtain funds and official support;
- 3) Provide training to all members of the Action Team for Partnerships;
- 4) Identify starting points—present strengths and weaknesses;
- 5) Write a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships;
- 6) Apply the framework of six types of involvement to activities linked to school improvement goals;
- 7) Enlist staff, parents, students, and the community to help conduct activities;
- 8) Evaluate the quality and outreach of partnership activities and results;
- 9) Conduct an annual celebration to report progress to all participants; and
- 10) Continue working toward a comprehensive, ongoing, goal-oriented program of partnerships.”

For consideration before implementation, Henderson and Mapp (2002) explain how schools can initiate school, family, and community partnerships. “Programs that successfully connect families and community involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs” (p. 43). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) developed a theoretical model which explains why parents are involved in their child(ren)’s schooling. The model has three constructs:

- 1) Personal construction of the parental role (i.e., what parents believe they are supposed to do in relation to their child(ren)’s education).
- 2) Personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school (i.e., whether parents believe and are confident in their ability to be helpful to their child(ren)).
- 3) Factors influencing parents’ decisions about their involvement (i.e., do parents perceive that the child and the school want and are interested in their involvement as well as general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement).

Once parents decide to become involved with the school, parents' choices about how they become involved are shaped by their:

- perception of their own skills, interest, and abilities;
- experiences of other demands on time and energy; and
- experiences of specific suggestions and invitations for involvement from children, teachers, and schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2002).

All these dynamics should be taken into consideration before planning and during the implementation of parental involvement and engagement strategies. Epstein (2008) indicates that the best effects tend to be obtained when parental involvement is integrated fully into the school improvement plan and when an 'action team' has responsibility for the delivery of the plan.

## **FAMILY LEARNING**

Tying in closely with the framework of the parent academy model is family learning. Family learning broadly refers to approaches which engage parents and children jointly in learning. Learning activities can take place in school, at home, or any other environment where both child(ren) and family member(s) are engaged in a learning activity together. A study completed by the Connecticut State Department of Education (2004) identifies that "virtually all parents, regardless of income, believe parent involvement and family learning activities are very important in helping children and families succeed" (p. 1).

### **Family Literacy**

An important component of family learning is family literacy. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (2004) describes the term family literacy as being the use of literacy within family networks, and education programmes which help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. The Agency further defines the family literacy approach as:

- supporting the learning that happens in the home and in the communities;
- breaking down barriers between learning in different contexts;
- giving vital support to parents whose own education has been limited for various reasons; and
- developing both children's and adults' literacy learning.

On its website, The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) states that Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, an example of Family Literacy, helps prepare children for starting school and encourages families to be a part of their child(ren)'s learning by:

- “Helping children build essential literacy and numeracy skills through stories, music, reading and playing;
- Encouraging families to engage in their children's learning;
- Offering a book-lending library in different languages so parents can read to their children in their first language;
- Familiarizing children and families with school routines;
- Giving children and families the chance to spend time with other families; and
- Linking families with appropriate community resources for special needs, health and other related services.”

As of 2009, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has over 75 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLC) located in high density, culturally diverse neighbourhoods across the city of Toronto. The centres introduce parents to an integrated early learning environment, build home-school relations, and prepare children for school entry. These programs are geared towards parents with infant children to 6 years of age. Parents who attend receive information about child development, community resources, and how they can support their child(ren)'s learning.

Two TDSB research reports completed by Yau (2005 & 2009) identify the short and long-term impacts that PFLC have on parents. They include:

- parents are familiarized with the school system. For example, parents felt comfortable and welcomed coming to school, positive about being involved with their child(ren)'s education, and thought their child(ren) would have an easier time starting school;
- parents had increased knowledge about how to extend this learning into their home;
- parents found the PFLC staff are particularly helpful in educating and offering them valuable information on positive involvement in their child(ren)'s growth and education;
- PFLCs provide a place for parents to build social networks and to mingle with other community members; and
- through PFLCs, the early start and the parenting skills acquired by the parents/caregivers gave high risk neighbourhood children immediate as well as long-

term and broader benefits, including better academic performance in literacy, lower absenteeism, and positive schooling experience.

Yau (2005) also notes that the school readiness level of PFLC children in Inner City schools<sup>4</sup> was much higher than their peers in the neighbourhood (as measured by the Early Development Instrument).

A UK evaluation of family literacy and numeracy programs which examined student achievement before and after the programs found significant improvement in the reading and writing of parents and children. This improvement was sustained nine months later. Similar improvements were also found for numeracy. Communication between parents and children improved and parents reported having increased confidence assisting their child(ren) at home (DCSF, 2008).

Another UK research study completed for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) notes that two-thirds of the Family Literary Centres studied were identified as successful. Parents felt they had a greater understanding of child development and learning, improved skills in literacy, numeracy and parenting skills, and increased confidence in school contacts. For children, success was evident in accelerated development in early oral and literacy skills, positive attitudinal and behaviour changes, and enhanced confidence (OFSTED, 2000).

## **Adult Learning**

Thomas, Skage, and Jackson (1997) comment that family literacy programs have been able to successfully recruit and retain adults because the model recognizes and respects the roles and responsibilities that adults have undertaken as parents. Many adults in these programs find self-confidence and direction.

When implementing programs and developing activities which target parents/adults, instructors must remember that adults learn differently than children. Westover (2009) identifies important characteristics of adult learning which should be taken into account when creating such programs:

- Learning is a process.
- For optimum transfer of learning, the learner must be actively involved in the learning experience.

---

<sup>4</sup> Inner City schools are identified by the Board as schools with a large concentration of students living in poverty.

- Each learner must be responsible for his or her own learning.
- The learning process has an emotional as well as intellectual component.
- Adults learn by doing.
- Problems and examples must be realistic and relevant to the learners.
- Adults relate their learning to what they already know.
- An informal environment works best.

## **THE PARENT ACADEMY**

The parent academy integrates the effective components identified in the research literature on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning, and adult learning.

As stated throughout the first portion of this review, aside from the cautions expressed by Mattingly et al. (2002), research by Caplan (2000) shows that family involvement is a powerful predictor of high student achievement. Students attain higher educational success when schools and families work together to motivate, socialize, and educate students. Henderson and Beria (1995) conclude that the most accurate predictor of student achievement in school is the family's ability to (a) create a home environment for learning, (b) have high expectations, and (c) become involved in their child(ren)'s education. Similarly, Samples (2009) quotes Epstein saying that "If teachers want parents to feel confident that they can help teachers and administrators, they must organize and conduct workshops for parents on how to help" (Epstein, 1986, p. 31).

Further research also shows that numerous barriers to parental involvement exist for both schools and families. Some barriers are created by limited resources, while others originate from the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of families and school staff (Liontos, 1992). Therefore, programs serving parents and families must reflect awareness of and sensitivity to the diversity in the community. Not only are programs called upon to serve culturally diverse populations but also to offer the structure and support for families that are continually changing. Today's trend in the parental involvement movement is moving parent and community involvement strategies from the traditional bake sale to new approaches like the parent academy model.

## **The Miami-Dade Parent Academy**

It is not surprising that there is not much literature on the topic of the parent academy because of its lack of widespread use as a parental involvement and engagement model. The most available literature is from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS), which initiated the first large scale Parent Academy in 2005. Therefore, the following review is a summary of the MDCPS experience based on materials retrieved from its own website and the two interim reports conducted by Sally Shay (2006) and Tarek Chebbi (2008) during the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years.

According to Shay (2006), the aim of MDCPS Parent Academy is to optimize students' educational experiences through the support and involvement of the adults in their lives. The Academy has been characterized as an institute of higher learning to help parents/caregivers become more effective players in their children's education. Its focus is on providing parents/caregivers with the tools they need to engage in each of Epstein's six areas of parental involvement. At its core is a smorgasbord of workshops, classes, and extended courses targeted at parents, caregivers, and family members of students and prospective students, as well as others in the community concerned about the welfare of children. The goals of The Parent Academy (Shay 2006, p. 2-3) are:

- “To educate parents on how to become “active partners” by providing them with resources that will enhance their ability to assist in their child's achievement and success;
- To strengthen the family unit through various courses, workshops and conferences;
- To unite families, schools, and communities toward the common goal of educational achievement of children; and
- To inform parents of their rights, responsibilities, and the educational opportunities available to them.”

Two years after the creation of the Academy in 2005, both Shay (2006) and Chebbi (2008) reported in their evaluations that the goals of The Parent Academy in its first and second year of implementation were met and that there is enough evidence from stakeholders testimonies that The Parent Academy had, and continues to have, an impact on parents' attitudes, expectations, and behaviours that make a difference in their child(ren)'s education.

## Service Delivery Model

According to the MDCPS Parent Academy website, Miami-Dade County has the second-largest Hispanic population in the United States and has the eighth-largest percentage of African-Americans in Florida. In 2001 Miami-Dade County had the highest percentage of children living in poverty in Florida, slightly under 30%. Considering this demographical challenge, The Parent Academy identified that their programs should reflect awareness of and sensitivity to their diverse communities. “Not only are programs called upon to serve culturally diverse populations but also offer the structure and support for families that are continually changing... Germane to the new thought process is the focus on honing low-income families’ power and political skills to hold schools accountable for results” (MDCPS Parent Academy website).

Serving as the medium for developing a vibrant, engaged, and educated parent community, the events offered by the Academy vary in content, sponsorship, and duration (Shay, 2006).

According to its first interim report, three tiers of activities were planned with regard to content:

- Core courses (Tier 1) represent “classes on how parents can help their children succeed in school” (Shay, 2006, p.3). These classes include but are not limited to basic orientations to the school system and its operations, subject area classes, homework help, guidance and behavioral discipline, how to work with exceptional student education (ESE) students, how to prepare your child for school, how to prepare homes for learning, how to access information, and how to have a good parent/teacher conference. Generally speaking, core courses are focused on the child;
- Growth courses (Tier 2) generally “focus on the adult, for their own growth and self-awareness as parents and individuals to increase their capacity for meaningful involvement in their children’s education” (Shay, 2006, p.3). Examples are classes on family budgeting, public speaking, family discipline, how to prepare a resume, employability skills, writing and effective communications, how to effectively deal with adolescence issues, anger management, and how to communicate effectively with your child’s school; and
- Certification courses (Tier 3) are “classes offered for parents who wish to enter the workforce, change field or advance professionally. These classes include opportunities to earn office employee certification, paraprofessional certification, vocational certification, or a General Educational Development certificate (GED)” (Shay, 2006, p.3).

In its first two implementation years, 400 to 500 events were scheduled each year at over 80 sites throughout the district including schools and other district locations, public libraries, local government facilities, college/university campuses, business facilities, and non-profit community organization's facilities. These events were offered in three different languages (English, Spanish, and Creole) with supportive services which were designed to encourage participation and overcome some of the known barriers to parental involvement. Supportive services include transportation to Academy events, child care, and a scholarship fund to defray any cost to participants.

Parent Academy events vary with regard to sponsorship. Many of the events are designed specifically for the Academy and are presented by the district personnel. Others, mainly growth and certification courses, are part of the district's Adult and Career Technical and Education program. Some events are sponsored by Academy partners, and are often conducted by the partner's personnel and held at the partner's location. Included in these are the Academy Signature Classes, which are designed specifically around specialized topics and for specific communities; a Lecture Series featuring well known speakers; and a Lunch and Learn Series, 'brown bag' of events for individuals who work in or near a partner's facility. In its first two years over 28,000 parents and caregivers attended courses/events offered by the Academy.

### **Partnerships, Marketing, and Funding of the Academy**

According to Shay (2006), partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and governmental agencies form a critical element of The Parent Academy. In keeping with the philosophy that 'it takes a village to raise a child,' such partnerships extend the boundaries of the school property to encompass surrounding neighbourhoods. They serve to draw the community into school life and extend the school into the lives of the students and their families. Partnerships serve many functions, including sponsorships of events, provision of sites/facilities, donation of resources (cash, materials, and in-kind services), and fostering relationships between the district and other community organizations. Partners vary considerably in their level of involvement, from hosting one-time-only events to fully-developed partnerships which serve as a model as the Academy expands.

In his recently published book, *Only Connect, The Way to Save our Schools*, Dr. Rudolph F. Crew, the Superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools who championed The Parent Academy, summarizes the importance of the partnerships:

The Parent Academy partners with higher education academicians, K-12 practitioners, actively engaged parents, and the public and private sectors. The Parent Academy will offer Miami-Dade parents the opportunity to enjoy an academic collegiate environment and learn how to help their children succeed. Partnering with higher education, the goal is to have buildings, facilities, and resources harnessed to open college classrooms to parents all across this county. Parents have a rich menu of opportunities, which include basics on how to help their child, to their own life skills classes, such as How to Write a Resume for a New Job. The Parent Academy will also host credit-awarding accelerated coursework for parents who want to earn their degrees (Crew, 2007, p. 167).

The Academy has included a market strategy in its planning to launch the program, to promote services for parents and members of the community, and to recruit partners. Such marketing efforts drew national attention. The Academy and the district's Office of Public Relations were awarded the National School Public Relations Gold Medallion for their efforts during the 2005-2006 school year. Shay (2006, p. 29) notes that the communication channels used to inform the community about the Academy included:

- "Press releases and media coverage
- Newspaper and Yellow Pages ads
- Public service announcements on public radio, Spanish- and Creole-language radio stations
- Announcements through email distribution lists
- District automated telephone calling systems to parents
- Flyer distributed across the community (for example, libraries, early childhood centres, places of business, medical providers, and churches)
- Staffed booths at public events (for example, Miami-Dade County Fair, International Food Festival, Hip-Hop Health Fair, walk-a-thons)
- Presentations at community meetings (for example, United Way, Family Central)
- Other events (for example, principals' meetings, community involvement specialists meetings)."

Funds for the Academy were advanced by the district in Year 1, with the expectation that outside funds would be generated through an aggressive fundraising campaign in the

community. In all, a total of \$1,683,630 in cash and in-kind donations were received for the implementation of the Academy in Year 1, well over the projected cost of \$1,000,000 to operate the program (Shay, 2006).

### **Program Evaluation of the Academy**

The key focus of the evaluation of the Academy was on the implementation of various components. The first interim evaluation of the impact of the Academy on the participants and their child(ren) was appraised through the participant survey and principal survey. Shay (2006) notes that in Year 1 almost twice the number of participants attended Academy events than had been projected and the attendees were representative of the demographics of students in the district. Attendees indicated that they felt the Academy offerings helped them to understand the school district, to support their child(ren)'s education, and may help to improve family relationships and career aspirations. In addition, the majority of the principals indicated that the Academy was partly responsible for changes in parent attendance at school events, home/school communications, parent advocacy, and expectations for their children; and in student attendance, conduct, and achievement (Shay 2006).

The more recent, second interim evaluation focused on eliciting the perceptions of the participants about The Parent Academy program. The school administrators interviewed indicated that The Parent Academy model is very different from other programs, because it is more structured and comprehensive. The Academy treats parents as learners and offers them courses, workshops, and assistance aimed at making them partners with the school not just consumers of the services offered by the school. Furthermore, the principals and assistant principals who participated in the interviews thought that the parents who attended the events offered by The Parent Academy were satisfied (Chebbi, 2008).

The evaluation also indicated that presenters were knowledgeable and the topics were helpful to empower parents and build a better home-school partnership. Specifically, the school administrators noted that the Academy offerings serve to help parents understand the school district and support their child(ren)'s education, and may help them improve their family relationships and quality of life. In addition, a majority of the principals indicated that they attribute changes in parent attendance at school events to The Parent Academy (Chebbi, 2008).

It should be noted that the impact of The Parent Academy on student achievement and engagement was not directly evaluated due to the inability to link The Parent Academy participation data with the student database. As such, evidence of the impact on students is limited

to survey responses. Also, the two evaluation reports were conducted by the district's own Office of Program Evaluation.

### **Other Examples of Parent Academies**

Very little empirical evidence exists on the effectiveness of the parent academy model except for the Miami-Dade experience; however, this literature search turned-up numerous anecdotal success stories. These anecdotes are from similar parent academy models, however, on a much smaller scale. The common benefits claimed by the academies are:

- Stronger connection between the schools and their communities;
- Decrease in community violence;
- Rise in students' achievement on standardized test;
- Break down of barriers between communities; and
- Increased attendance at school events.

Similar to the MDCSB, parent academy courses/events offered to parents which encompassed topics related to child development. In two instances the parent academies offered courses for personal development specific to the parents (e.g., resume writing skills, language courses, and computer courses). In the implementation of the courses/events, parent academies tended to draw on resources from the community (i.e., Public Health, Public Transit) and in most cases, were free of charge. As possible incentives to participate, many parent academies provided food and refreshments, child-care for younger children, and transportation.

The overwhelming difference among the various parent academies is the structure of the actual parent academy itself. The parent academy service delivery models show substantial variation among school districts/boards. In some instances, the parent academy is not a board/district wide initiative and is more localized at the school level. Some examples of specific models used include:

- A variety of workshops, classes, and extended courses;
- A one-day conference;
- Evening workshops;
- Educational series, lectures, short workshops, informal presentations throughout the year;
- A guest speaker from the community; and

- Sessions which support parent leaders in their volunteer positions within the schools

Refer to Appendix A for brief descriptions of additional examples of parent academy service models.

## **SUMMARY**

This review is in response to a Board request to examine recent literature and research regarding the implementation and effectiveness of parent academies. It describes the value of and barriers to parental involvement and engagement in education in exploring the need for a parent academy as a more comprehensive and sophisticated model for parent and community engagement in schools.

### **Parent Involvement and Engagement**

To provide context, the first portion of the report detailed review findings on the broader topic of parental involvement and parental engagement. Consistent research findings revealed that when schools, families, and communities work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.

The research does not dispute that both parental involvement and engagement are important to student success. The goal of raising achievement can only be fulfilled if parents are both involved in schools and engaged in learning. Evidence indicates that the two have a significant effect on achievement from the early years into adolescence and even into adulthood.

Across studies, a key parental engagement practice associated with increased achievement is identified as learning at-home activities. Interactive homework allows students to show, share, and demonstrate what they have learned in their class with their parents. Research shows effective implementation of practices such as creating effective learning environments that encourages families to support their child(ren)'s learning at home are associated with higher student test scores. It should also be noted that while the effects of parental involvement and engagement are significant, student success is not dependant on one factor. Other factors, such as high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, alignment of instruction and assessment, effective leadership, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, also play critical roles in student achievement.

Through the literature, one major factor mediating parental involvement is parental socio-economic status (SES), indexed by occupational class or parental education levels, specifically

mothers. Research consistently showed that the extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity. To succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds, key practices were identified as building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members; and recognizing, respecting, and addressing families' needs, as well as class and cultural difference.

Much contemporary research on parental involvement and engagement has drawn on the work of Joyce Epstein. Developing a framework detailing six types of parental involvement in Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning At Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community, Epstein indicates that the best effects tend to be obtained when parental involvement is integrated fully into the school improvement plan and when an 'action team' has responsibility for the delivery of the plan.

Tying in closely with the framework of the parent academy model is family learning. Family learning activities can take place in school, at home, or any other environment where both child(ren) and family member(s) are engaged in a learning activity together. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) research shows that the TDSB Parenting and Literacy Centres helped parents become more familiar with the school system and feel more comfortable being involved with their child(ren)'s education. The school readiness level, of parenting centre children in Inner City schools, was much higher than their peers in the neighborhood. Other studies analyzing the impact of family literacy and numeracy programs indicate similar positive impacts on student achievement. When implementing programs and developing activities which target parents/adults, instructors must remember that adults learn differently than children.

## **The Parent Academy**

Integrating together the effective components identified by the research literature on parental involvement, parental engagement, family and adult learning, a 'new' model of parent and community engagement, The Parent Academy, was first implemented on a large scale in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Although meaningful parent involvement and engagement is a powerful predictor of high student achievement, numerous barriers to parent involvement and engagement exist for both schools and families. Programs serving parents and families must reflect awareness of and sensitivity to the diversity in the society. Not only are programs called upon to serve culturally diverse

populations but also to offer the structure and support for families that are continually changing. As there is not much literature available, the review specific to parent academies was limited to the Miami-Dade experience.

To optimize students' educational experiences through the support and involvement of the adults in their lives, the Academy has been characterized as an institute of higher learning to help parents/caregivers become more effective players in their child(ren)'s education. Its focus is on providing parents/caregivers with the tools they need to engage in each of the six areas of parental involvement. At its core is a smorgasbord of workshops, classes, and extended courses targeted at parents, caregivers, and family members of students and prospective students, as well as others in the community concerned about the welfare of children.

Serving as the catalyst for developing a vibrant, involved, and educated parent citizenry, the events offered by the Academy vary in content, sponsorship, and duration. According to its first interim report, three tiers of activities were planned with regard to content: Core courses (Tier 1) represent classes on how parents can help their child(ren) succeed in school. Growth courses (Tier 2) generally focus on the adult for their own growth and self-awareness as parents and individuals to increase their capacity for meaningful involvement in their child(ren)'s education. Certification courses (Tier 3) are offered to parents who wish to enter the workforce, change field, or advance professionally.

In its first two implementation years, 400 to 500 events were scheduled each year at over 80 sites throughout the district including schools and other district locations, public libraries, local government facilities, college/university campuses, business facilities, and non-profit community organization's facilities. These events were offered in three different languages with supportive services which were designed to encourage participation and overcome some of the known barriers to parental involvement. Support services include transportation to Academy events, child care, and a scholarship fund to defray any cost to participants.

The Parent Academy events differ with regard to sponsorship. According to its first interim report, partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and governmental agencies form a critical element of The Parent Academy. Partnerships serve many functions, including sponsorships of events, provision of sites/facilities, donation of resources (cash, materials, and in-kind services), and fostering relationships between the district and other community organizations. Partners vary considerably in their level of involvement, from hosting one-time-only events to fully-developed partnerships which serve as a model as the Academy expands.

The Academy has included a market strategy in its planning to launch the program, to promote services for parents and members of the community, and to recruit partners. Such marketing efforts on behalf of the Academy drew national attention and brought more than 1.5 times of external funds than the operation funds advanced by the district in Year 1. Nearly twice the number of participants attended Academy events than had been projected in Year 1, and the attendees were representative of the demographics of students in the district.

Participants indicated that they felt the programs offered by the Academy helped them to understand the school district, to support their child's education, and may help to improve family relationships and career aspirations. In addition, the majority of the principals indicated that the Academy was responsible, at least in part, for changes in parent attendance at school events, home/school communications, parent advocacy and expectations for their child(ren), and in student attendance, conduct, and achievement.

After the creation of The Parent Academy in 2005, it was reported in the two interim reports that the goals of The Parent Academy in its first and second year implementation were met and that there is enough evidence from stakeholders testimonies that The Parent Academy had and continues to have an impact on parents' attitudes, expectations, and behaviours that make a difference in their child(ren)'s education.

In summary, this review presents findings about the important roles of parental involvement and parental engagement on student learning, at school and at home. Mainly from the experience of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, this review also describes how parent academies can be used as a model of implementing strategies for parental involvement and engagement. As there are many factors that contribute to student success, it is hoped that this review can serve as a platform for discussion on the strategies of prompting and sustaining parental involvement and engagement within the TDSB school communities.

## REFERENCES

- Bowen G., & Woolley E. (2007). In the context of risk: Supportive adults and the school engagement of middle school students. *Family Relations*, 56(1), 92-104.
- Caplan, J.G. (2000). *Building strong family-school partnerships to support high student achievement. The informed educator series*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.
- Chebbi, T. (2007). *The parent academy in Miami-Dade PS second interim rpt: 2006-07*. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/evaluations.htm>
- Cole-Henderson, B. (2000). Organizational characteristics of schools that successfully serve low-income Urban African American Students. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 5, 77–91.
- Connecticut Family Learning Initiative. (2004). *Listening to families: The family learning outreach study*. Connecticut: Connecticut State Department of Education.
- Crew, Dr. R. (2007). *Only connect: The way to save our schools*. New York: Sarah Chrichton Books.
- Department for Children Schools, and Families (2008). *The impact of parental involvement on children's education*. United Kingdom.  
Retrieved October 2009, from <http://www.familyandparenting.org/parentalEngagement>
- Desforges, C., & Abouchar A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support, and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. Nottingham: Department of Education and Skills.
- Epstein J. (2008, February). Improving family and community involvement in secondary schools. *The Educational Digest*, 73 (6), 9-12.
- Epstein J. (2001, October). Introduction to the special section: New directions for school, family, and community partnerships in middle and high school. *National Association of Secondary Principals*, 85 (627), 3-6.
- Epstein, J. & Associates. (2008). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. California: Crown Press.
- Family and Parenting Institute. (2009). *Parental engagement*. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://www.familyandparenting.org/parentalEngagement>
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1-22.

- Garcia D., & Hasson D. (2001). Implementing family and literacy program for linguistically and culturally diverse populations: Key Elements to Consider. *The School Community Journal*, 11(1), 113- 137.
- Grolnick, W.S., Benjet, C., Kurowski, C.O., & Apostoleris, N.H. (1997). Predictors of parental involvement in children's schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 538–548.
- Harris A. & Goodall Dr. J. (2007). *Engaging parents in raising achievement do parents know they matter?* United Kingdom: University of Warwick.
- Henderson, A. T., & Berla, N. (1995). *The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.
- Henderson, T., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Texas: The National Centre for Family and Community Connections.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 3–42.
- Jones, R. (2001, November). Involving parents is a whole new game. *Education Digest*, 67(3), 36-37.
- Liontos, L. (1992). *At-risk families & schools*. University of Oregon: Clearing House.
- Masten, A.S., & Coatsworth, J.D. (1998). The development of competence in favourable and unfavourable environments: Lessons from research on successful children. *American Psychologist*, 53, 205–220.
- Mattingley, D.J., Prislin, R., McKenzie, T.L., Rodriguez, J.L., & Kayzar, B. (2002) Evaluating evaluations: The case of parent involvement programmes. *Review of Educational Research*, 72 (4), 549-576.
- Melhuish, E., Sylva, C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2001). *Social behavioural and cognitive development at 3-4 years in relation to family background. The effective provision of pre-school education, EPPE project* (Technical paper 7). London: The Institute of Education.
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (n.d). *The research*. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/research.htm>
- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). (2004). *Working together. Approaches to family literacy*. Dublin: NALA.
- National Parent Teacher Association. (2009). *Parent involvement*. Retrieved October 2009, from [http://www.pta.org/topic\\_parent\\_involvement.asp#](http://www.pta.org/topic_parent_involvement.asp#)
- OFSTED. (2000). *Family learning: A survey of current practice*. London: OFSTED.

- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Involving parents in the school*. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/pflc.html>
- O'Reilly, J., & Yau, M. (2007). *2006 student census grades 7-12 : System overview*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board.
- O'Reilly J., & Yau, M. (2009). *2008 parent census kindergarten-grade 6 : System overview and detailed findings*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board.
- People for Education. (2009). *Parents in partnership*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Ministry of Education. . Retrieved October 2009, from <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/min-ed/parentengagement-2pager>
- Reynolds, A.J. (1998). Resilience among black urban youth: Prevalence, intervention effects, and mechanisms of influence. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 68, 84–99.
- Sacker, A., Schoon, I., & Bartley, M. (2002). Social inequality in educational achievement and psychological adjustment throughout childhood: magnitude and mechanisms. *Social Science and Medicine*, 55, 863-880.
- Shay, S. (2006). *The parent academy in Miami-Dade PS first interim rpt: 2005-06*. Retrieved October 2009, from <http://theparentacademy.dadeschools.net/evaluations.htm>
- Sheldon, S., & Epstein, J. (2005, April/May). Involvement counts: family and community partnerships and mathematics achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 98(4), 196-206.
- Sheridan, S.M., & Gutkin, T.B. (2000). The ecology of school psychology: examining and changing our paradigm for the 21st century. *School Psychology Review*, 29, 485–501.
- Sinay, E. (2009). *Academic resilience: Students beating the odds*. Toronto, ON: Toronto District School Board.
- Sinay E. (2009). *The effects of student, school, and family characteristics on literacy achievement of the grade six students in the TDSB (Working Paper)*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board.
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1999) *The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: Technical paper 2; Characteristics of the EPPE project sample at entry to the study*. London: University of London, Institute of Education.
- Taylor, L.C., Hinton, I.D., & Wilson, M.N. (1995). Parental influences on academic performance in African-American students. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 4, 293–302.

Thomas A., Skage S., & Jackson R. (Ed.). (1997). *Family connections*. Welland, Ontario, Canada: Soleil publishing Inc.

Yau, M. (2005). *Family and parenting literacy centres*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board

Yau, M. (2009). *Parenting and family literacy centres: Making a difference beyond early school readiness*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Toronto District School Board

Youth News Team. (2006, January). Student achievement and parental support. *Leadership for Student Activities*, 34(5), 41.

Westover, J.H., (2009). Lifelong learning: effective adult learning strategies and implementation for working professionals. *The International Journal of Learning*. 16(1), 435-443.

## OTHER EXAMPLES OF PARENT ACADEMIES

### **Douglas County, Colorado, United States**

The Douglas County Parent University offers two dozen classes each spring and fall, for parents of newborn aged children through to young adults. The intent of The Parent University, through a variety of class offerings, is to encourage, support, and inform parents so they can take a more active role in their children's learning, ultimately resulting in increased student engagement in the classroom. Involving parents in training allows teachers and parents to establish a common understanding that can help them work together more effectively.

All the courses in the Parent University are developed with the advice of parents, administrators, and teachers. All families in the district receive a program booklet. Parents register for specific classes and qualified instructors deliver the courses.

Courses are offered over time at different locations. Examples of past classes are:

- Early childhood language development
- Surviving the teenage years
- Motivating reluctant learners to succeed in school
- Pay less than the college sticker price
- Recommended places and activities with kids

### **LaGrange Area Department of Special Education, Illinois, United States**

The Parent Academy is a series of free informal presentations designed specifically for parents of children attending the member districts. Example sessions are:

- Promoting early literacy in your home
- The IEP
- When mommy & daddy need a time out
- Planning for your child's future
- Staying sane while parenting your special needs child
- Sexuality and the child with special needs
- Visual structure in your home
- Flush your troubles away

### **Naperville Community, Illinois, United States**

The Parent Academy is a day of workshops designed to share effective positive parenting strategies for children in preschool through high school. Attendees hear a keynote speaker, choose two workshops presented by local child and adolescent development experts, and chat informally with presenters and pick up information from a variety of community social service agencies regarding the health and well-being of children, youth, and families.

### **New York City, New York, United States**

The Family Engagement and Advocacy (OFEA) at New York offers sessions on a variety of topics to support parents who volunteer in their schools. Sessions include:

- Ensuring success for your child's elementary school experience
- Ensuring success for the first year of middle school
- Overview of School Leadership Team
- Record Keeping
- Roles & Responsibilities of the PA/PTA

### **OHIO Department of Education, Ohio, United States**

Parent Academies are free two-hour workshops for parents on topics that will help them support their child's learning and development. School districts, parent organizations and community groups can schedule trained facilitators through the Ohio Department of Education to conduct workshops that meet district and parent needs.

### **Savannah-Chatham, Georgia, United States**

The Savannah-Chatham Parent University is a community collaborative that supports families. This initiative encourages parent involvement and participation in the education of school community's children and youth. The objectives of Savannah-Chatham are:

- Maximize student learning by creating a strong bridge between the community and the school;
- Enable "parents" to teach each other;
- Train "informed parents" to work together with schools to create paths for student success;
- Provide support, guidance, and nurturing to assure the realization of family success.

The University offers three Saturday sessions and satellite sessions throughout the year. Some of the topics include:

- Choosing The Best - How to talk to your child about sexual abstinence
- Testing, Testing, 1, 2, 3, - Helping your child prepare to pass standardized tests
- Raising a Reader - Learn tips to help your child develop reading skills
- Emotional Intelligence - Developing power over your emotions
- COM: Computer Operating (in) Minutes
- Coping With The Loss Of A Loved One
- Knowing The Responsibility Level Of Your Child

### **Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Ontario, Canada**

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) is in its pilot year of Focus 4 Families, a Parent Academy inspired by the Miami-Dade model. Its goal is to create learning opportunities that will engage, empower, and educate families in the HWDSB. The Pilot will launch a four part family empowerment series of workshops that will take place in four different areas of the city on four different nights (First Monday, Second Tuesday, etc.)

All courses will be free and dinner will be provided for free. Bus tickets will be available for families upon request. Community Partners, such as The Family Literacy Centres, Today's Family, YWCA, Hamilton Public Library, and Public Health, have been engaged around program delivery.



## TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Using data from the Parent Survey, 2007-08, the table below outlines trends specific to parental involvement and parental engagement at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

2007-2008 Parent Survey: Students Kindergarten – Grade 6	
	TDSB
<b>How often do you feel welcome in your child's school?</b>	
All the time/Often	87%
Sometimes	10%
Rarely/Never	2%
Not sure	1%
<b>How often do you speak with your child's teachers?</b>	
All the time/Often	41%
Sometimes	45%
Rarely/Never	14%
Not sure	0%
<b>How often do you attend parent-teacher interviews?</b>	
All the time/Often	38%
Sometimes	35%
Rarely Never	25%
Not sure	1%
<b>How often do you volunteer at this school?</b>	
All the time/Often	15%
Sometimes	22%
Rarely/Never	60%
Not sure	3%
<b>How often does your child receive help with homework outside of school if needed?</b>	
All the time/Often	51%
Sometimes	22%
Rarely/Never	23%
Not sure	4%
<b>What do you want your child to do after high school:</b>	
Attend community college	6%
Attend university	87%
Go directly to work	0%
Take an apprenticeship before going to work	1%
Not sure	4%
Other	2%



## TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD STUDENT CENSUS RESULTS

Using data from the Student Census, 2005-06, the table below outlines trends specific to parental involvement and parental engagement at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

2005-2006 Student Census - Students Gr. 7 to 12		
	Gr.7-8	Gr. 9-12
<b>After school, who usually helps you with your homework:</b>		
Parents or Caregivers	53%	30%
Teachers	13%	10%
Brothers or Sisters	26%	18%
Free tutor(s) offered in my school or community	2%	2%
Other family members	9%	5%
Paid tutor(s)	5%	7%
Friend(s)	27%	32%
People in the community	1%	1%
No one	15%	27%
I do not need help with my homework	16%	20%
<b>Outside of school, who usually gives you advice about schooling:</b>		
Parents or caregivers	75%	71%
Grandparent(s)	16%	13%
Brother(s)/Sister(s)	28%	29%
Other family members Friends	26%	27%
Friends	35%	47%
People in the community	5%	9%
No one	4%	5%
I do not need advice about school	6%	7%
<b>Do your parents or caregivers:</b>		
<b>Expect you to succeed in school</b>		
All the time/Often	96%	95%
Sometimes	2%	3%
Rarely/Never	1%	1%
Not sure	1%	1%
<b>Help you to set goals and make plans</b>		
All the time/Often	74%	63%
Sometimes	14%	19%
Rarely/Never	9%	16%
Not sure	3%	2%
<b>Talk to you about your schoolwork</b>		
All the time/Often	72%	62%
Sometimes	17%	22%
Rarely/Never	10%	15%
Not sure	1%	1%

**2005-2006 Student Census - Students Gr. 7 to 12, Continued**

	<b>Gr.7-8</b>	<b>Gr. 9-12</b>
<b>Talk to you about your relationships and problems</b>		
All the time/Often	44%	35%
Sometimes	20%	23%
Rarely/Never	31%	39%
Not sure	5%	3%
<b>Communicate with your teachers</b>		
All the time/Often	25%	17%
Sometimes	23%	20%
Rarely/Never	44%	57%
Not sure	8%	5%
<b>Attend parent teacher interviews</b>		
All the time/Often	64%	38%
Sometimes	17%	21%
Rarely/Never	14%	38%
Not sure	4%	3%
<b>Attend meetings and events at school</b>		
All the time/Often	34%	17%
Sometimes	25%	19%
Rarely/Never	36%	60%
Not sure	5%	5%
<b>Volunteer at the school</b>		
All the time/Often	9%	5%
Sometimes	12%	6%
Rarely/Never	69%	81%
Not sure	10%	7%
<b>How often do you feel comfortable discussing personal problems with:</b>		
Your parents or caregivers.		
All the time/Often	65%	55%
Sometimes	16%	23%
Rarely/Never	19%	22%
<b>What do your parents or caregivers expect you to do immediately after high school:</b>		
An apprenticeship	1%	1%
Attend college	16%	15%
Attend university	57%	67%
Work (instead of post-secondary education)	2%	1%
Not Sure	23%	13%
<b>Who helps you decide on your future career or occupation:</b>		
Teacher(s)	17%	20%
Guidance Counsellor(s)	7%	13%
Other counsellors (e.g., youth counsellors)	1%	2%
Parents or caregivers	67%	62%
Other family members	25%	25%
Friends	23%	30%
No one is helping me	21%	23%

