

# PROMOTING PARENT ENGAGEMENT: Improving Student Health and Academic Achievement

## Information for Teachers and Other School Staff

Engaging parents in their children's school lives is essential to supporting children's success in the classroom and their overall health and well-being. Parent engagement in schools is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents. Studies have shown that parent engagement in schools can promote positive education and health behaviors among children and adolescents. School efforts to promote learning and health among students have been shown to be more successful when parents are involved. This fact sheet provides guidance for teachers and other school staff to increase parent engagement in school health.

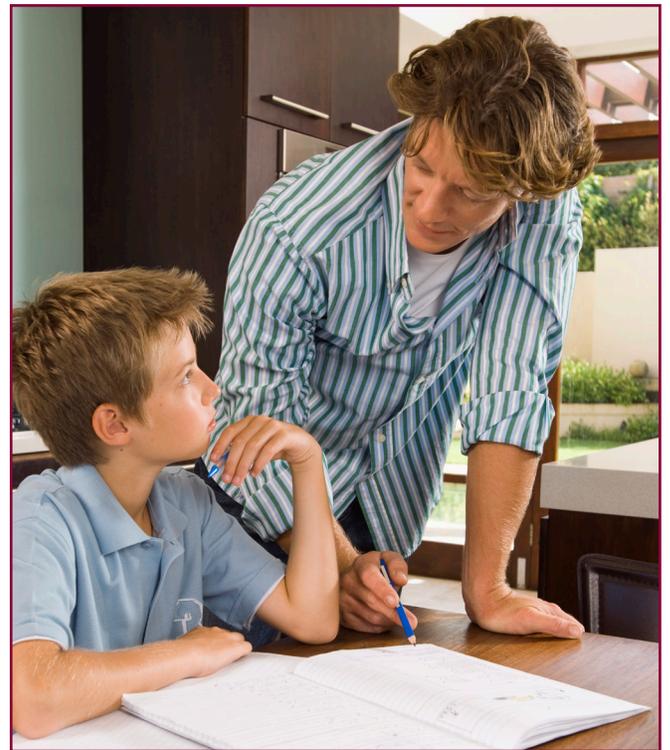
### Why is it important for parents to be engaged in their child's school?

Parent engagement in schools contributes to students' health and learning. Studies have shown that students who have parents engaged in their school lives are more likely to have

- Higher grades and test scores.
- Better student behavior.
- Enhanced social skills.

In addition, students who have parents engaged in their school lives are less likely to

- Smoke cigarettes.
- Drink alcohol.
- Become pregnant.
- Be physically inactive.
- Be emotionally distressed.



### What actions can you take to increase parent engagement in school health?

*Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health* ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/AdolescentHealth/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/AdolescentHealth/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf)) describes strategies for increasing parent engagement in school health. To increase parent engagement in school health, schools must 1) make a positive **connection** with parents; 2) provide a variety of activities and frequent opportunities to fully **engage** parents; and 3) work with parents to **sustain** their engagement by addressing the common challenges to getting and keeping them engaged. The chart on pages 2 and 3 outlines strategies and presents selected actions that teachers and school staff can take to improve parent engagement in school health.

# Strategies and Sample Actions Teachers and Other School Staff Can Take to Increase Parent Engagement in School Health\*

## Strategy 1 Make a positive connection with parents.

1

- Ensure the school has a clear vision for parent engagement that includes engaging parents in school health activities.
- Ensure that school staff members have the ability to connect with parents and support parent engagement in school health activities.
- Ask parents about their needs and interests regarding the health of their children and ways they would like to be involved in the school's health activities, services, and programs.
- Have a well-planned program for parent engagement in the school.

## Strategy 2 Provide a variety of opportunities to engage parents in school health activities.†

2

### *Sub-strategy 1 — Provide parenting support.*

- Provide parents with seminars, workshops, and information on health topics that relate directly to lessons taught in health education and physical education classes.
- Establish a parent resource center focused on child and adolescent health and other important family issues.
- Hold school-sponsored, health-related activities in settings where parent attendance is already high, such as in the neighborhood, at work, at community events, or at faith-based institutions.

### *Sub-strategy 2 — Communicate with parents.*

- Use a variety of written communication methods, such as flyers, memos, banners, signs, door hangers, newsletters, report cards, progress reports, post cards, letters, monthly calendars of events, Web sites and Web boards, text messaging, and e-mail messages to communicate with parents about health-related topics and issues.
- Use a variety of verbal and face-to-face communication methods, such as phone calls to home, automated phone system messages, parent-teacher conferences, meetings, school events, radio station announcements, local access television, television public service announcements (PSAs), conversations at school, and regular parent seminars to communicate with parents about health topics and issues.
- Translate health-related materials into different languages, or identify health materials already available in languages spoken by parents in the school community. Provide bilingual interpreters to assist non-English-speaking families at school health events, and provide sign language interpreters for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.

### *Sub-strategy 3 — Provide a variety of volunteer opportunities.*

- Encourage parents to serve as mentors, tutors, coaching assistants, monitors, and chaperones for school health activities.
- Invite parent volunteers to lead lunch-time walks, weekend games, and after-school exercise programs in dance, cheerleading, karate, aerobics, yoga, and other activities that show their skills and talents.
- Involve parents in helping write health-related grants for the school.

**Strategy  
2**

**Provide a variety of opportunities to engage parents in school health activities.<sup>†</sup> (continued)**

*Sub-strategy 4 — Support learning at home.*

- Train teachers to develop family-based education strategies that involve parents in discussions about health topics with their children (e.g., homework assignments that involve parent participation) and health promotion projects in the community.
- Encourage students to teach their parents about health and safety behaviors they learn in school (e.g., the importance of hand washing and of using seat belts and helmets).
- Ask parents to engage their children in health-related learning experiences, such as cooking dinner, shopping for healthy foods, and reading labels on over-the-counter medicines.

*Sub-strategy 5 — Encourage parents to be part of decision making in schools.*

- Involve students, parents, and community members in helping the school make decisions that improve the health and well-being of students through parent organizations—such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), school health councils, school action teams, and other school groups and organizations.
- Involve parents in choosing health and physical education curricula with the help of tools such as the *Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool* (HECAT) ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/hecat](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/hecat)) and the *Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool* (PECAT) ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/pecat](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/pecat)).
- Give parents opportunities to be involved in developing or reviewing school health and safety policies, such as policies pertaining to alcohol, drug, and tobacco use prevention; injury and violence prevention; foods and beverages allowed at school parties; frequency of class celebrations involving unhealthy foods; and non-food rewards. Refer to CDC's *School Health Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide* (SHI) ([www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHI](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHI)).

*Sub-strategy 6 — Collaborate with the community.*

- Invite community partners who provide health services for students or parents to school or parent meetings to talk about their services, mission, partners, and ways they can collaborate with the school and students' families.
- Collaborate with community partners to provide health services at school that meet the needs of students and their families (e.g., dental services, immunizations, health screenings, substance abuse treatment).
- Link family members to school and community programs that promote health and safety, such as booster seat loaner programs, conflict resolution training, and mental health services.

**Strategy  
3**

**Work with parents to sustain parent engagement in school health.**

- Be part of a dedicated team or committee that oversees parent engagement.
- Identify challenges that keep parents from being connected and engaged in school health activities.
- Work with parents to tailor school events and activities to address those challenges.

\* Additional examples are provided in *Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health*.

<sup>†</sup> Epstein, J. L. et al. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

## What should you consider when planning for action to improve parent engagement in school health?

A team effort is needed to improve parent engagement in school health activities. Your team should involve those in the school and individuals, groups, and organizations outside the school. Your team needs to be committed and involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating actions that can improve students' health and education outcomes.

Some actions will require minor changes in the ways that the school works — and can be done quickly and easily. Other actions might require more time, money, or administrative changes. Schools and school districts should determine which actions are most feasible and appropriate, based on the needs of the school and available resources.

### Resources

#### Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health

[www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/adolescenthealth/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/adolescenthealth/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf)

#### Healthy Youth

[www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth)

#### Student Health and Academic Achievement

[www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/index.htm)

#### Coalition for Community Schools

[www.communityschools.org](http://www.communityschools.org)

#### FindYouthInfo.gov

[www.findyouthinfo.gov](http://www.findyouthinfo.gov)

#### Harvard Family Research Project

[www.hfrp.org/publications-resources](http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources)

#### National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

[www.ncpie.org/](http://www.ncpie.org/)

#### National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

[www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

#### National Parent Teacher Association

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

#### Parental Information and Resource Centers

[www.nationalpirc.org](http://www.nationalpirc.org)



*For more information contact:*

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

*1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333*

*Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)*

*TTY: 1-888-232-6348*

*E-mail: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)*

*[www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth)*