



2017

PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

FAST  Families & Schools
TOGETHER[®]



Principal Survey Overview

In the Fall of 2016, Families & Schools Together, Inc. surveyed education leaders—principals and administrators—to learn more about parent engagement efforts at their schools. We embarked on this project after recognizing that the perspectives of school leaders were vital to include in parent engagement research or resources.

We knew from our work delivering family engagement programming across the country and around the world that school leaders possess unique and invaluable viewpoints about creating effective partnerships with families. We thought it was vital to hear perspectives directly from school leaders. School leaders select and direct initiatives, seek and secure funding and community support, build consensus and construct a vision with students, families and staff. Moreover, they often lead collaborative processes to plan for their school's current and future priorities and to create

school improvement plans. School leaders can serve as a critical bridge between school and community and are a vital point of contact for families.

More than 1,400 principals, vice principals and head teachers completed the survey. Students at their schools were in kindergarten through grade 12 and schools ranged in size with 58% of schools having 400 students or fewer and 42% having 400 or more students. More than half of respondents (65%) led public schools, one quarter led private schools, and the remaining leaders were from charter, virtual or other schools. 44% of school leaders reported that more than half of their students qualified for free/reduced price meals. Many respondents were relatively new to their current position; about 59% had been in their current role for five years or fewer.

School leaders prioritized family engagement and realized the impact it could have on their students' education;

the vast majority reported that engagement had increased since they began their position at the school. However, school leaders reported facing similar obstacles and challenges to engaging families. For example, time was a challenge for many families because of work schedules and competing priorities. School leaders also reported limited resources to fund family engagement initiatives. Staff for family engagement was scarce, and many school leaders reported having no paid staff person or partnership with a community-based organization to support efforts and initiatives to work with families.

For more than 25 years, Families & Schools Together has recognized the importance of family engagement. Our evidence-based family engagement program FAST® was developed with the knowledge that as family units are strengthened and connected to one another and to their children's schools, children and families thrive.

What's next? Families & Schools Together hopes that these survey results are a springboard for additional conversations, sharing, and collaborative learning. We hope that this is the first step in an ongoing conversation about how to build strong relationships among families, schools, and communities at all of our schools.

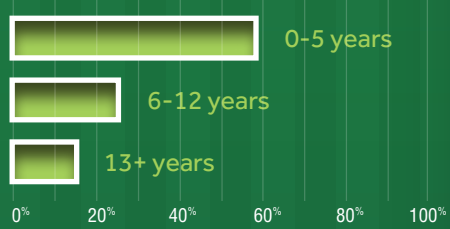
We also invite you to subscribe to the Families & Schools Together blog to continue reading about the latest research and best practices surrounding parent engagement!

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL

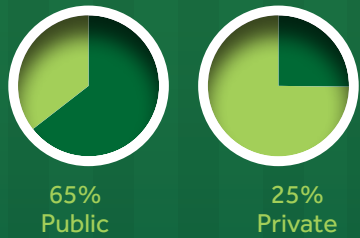
Who participated in the survey?

- Principal
- Headmaster
- Administrator
- Director
- High School Principal
- Elementary School Principal
- Superintendent
- Associate Principal
- Teacher
- Program Director
- Program Coordinator

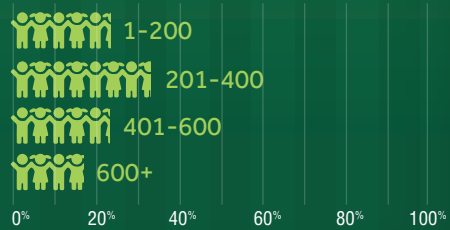
How many years have you been in your current role?



Is your school...



Approximate student population in your school



Family Engagement as a Priority at the School Level



School Leaders Know the Power of Engaging Families

Engaging parents and families in their children's education continued to be a key part of federal education legislation with the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Henderson, 2016). Decades of research has documented the importance and positive impact of families' involvement in students' education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Not surprisingly, family engagement is a priority for school leaders too. School leaders know that engaging families in students' learning is so vitally important that they put it high on their priority list and often include it in their plans for school improvement.

- Almost 70% of school leaders ranked family engagement as a high or very high priority for their school this year (4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale).
- Two-thirds of school leaders reported that family engagement was part of their current school improvement plan.
- 37% of school leaders said that they had a written school level family engagement plan while 53% said they did not. 9% reported that there was a written family engagement plan but only at the district level.

SECTION 2: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AS A PRIORITY

Is family engagement a part of your current school improvement plan (or the equivalent)?



74%
Yes



16%
No

Has family engagement become a higher priority at your school?

56%

answered it has always been a priority

“Research shows the more involved parents are in a child’s education, the more successful a child will be.”

“We know the importance of family involvement and want to find ways to involve families in their students’ lives.”

Family Engagement: New Focus or Long-Time Priority?

With renewed interest in family engagement at the policy level, we were interested to learn about when family engagement became a priority for school leaders. Did they always see it as a top priority or was it more recently rising to the top of their list? Some school leaders reported that family engagement had become a higher priority recently; however, many school leaders reported that at their school, family engagement was a focus of their work all along.

- More than half of school leaders reported that family engagement always been a priority at their school while 38% report that it has become a higher priority within the last one-to-three year time span.
- Among school leaders who reported that family engagement had recently become a higher priority at their school, reasons for this new focus varied. Some responses for the new or renewed focus were: new administration or staffing at the school, recognition that parent engagement is tied to improved academic performance, a desire to improve school culture, requirement of funding or grants, and an awareness that traditional methods of parent engagement were reaching some but not all families.

What’s more, school leaders reported that levels of family engagement had changed during their tenure at their current school. 88% of school leaders reported that family engagement had increased while they had been at their current school.

“We accept not just students at our school but their families. We realize that parents and students will believe in our school and buy in to the program if they are involved as a family. In turn, they will tell others, and our enrollment will increase.”

Family Engagement Programming

“Reading workshops and family math nights, home learning packets and Saturday academies, parent-run study centers and career portfolio nights can all help students do better in school. Studies show that families of students from preschool through high school are eager for this kind of information and will use it when they get home.” (Henderson, 2007, p.81)

Engagement Programming and Initiatives

School leaders reported a wide range of offerings to families at their schools, but far and away the most commonly reported engagement programming was the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Four-fifths of school leaders reported that the PTA/PTO was a family engagement program/initiative at their school.

Following the PTA/PTO, the most commonly reported engagement initiative was family nights hosted at the school (e.g., literacy and/or math nights). Generally, family nights can be annual, bi-annual or quarterly events where parents and families are invited to the school to see what their child is learning in math or reading or engage in fun educational activities. Family nights could include practice games, strategies that parents can use at home to support their child’s learning. School leaders also shared other kinds of programming and initiatives that occurred at their schools. On the opposite page are the percentages of school leaders reporting each of eight different kinds of family engagement programming/initiatives that we asked about.

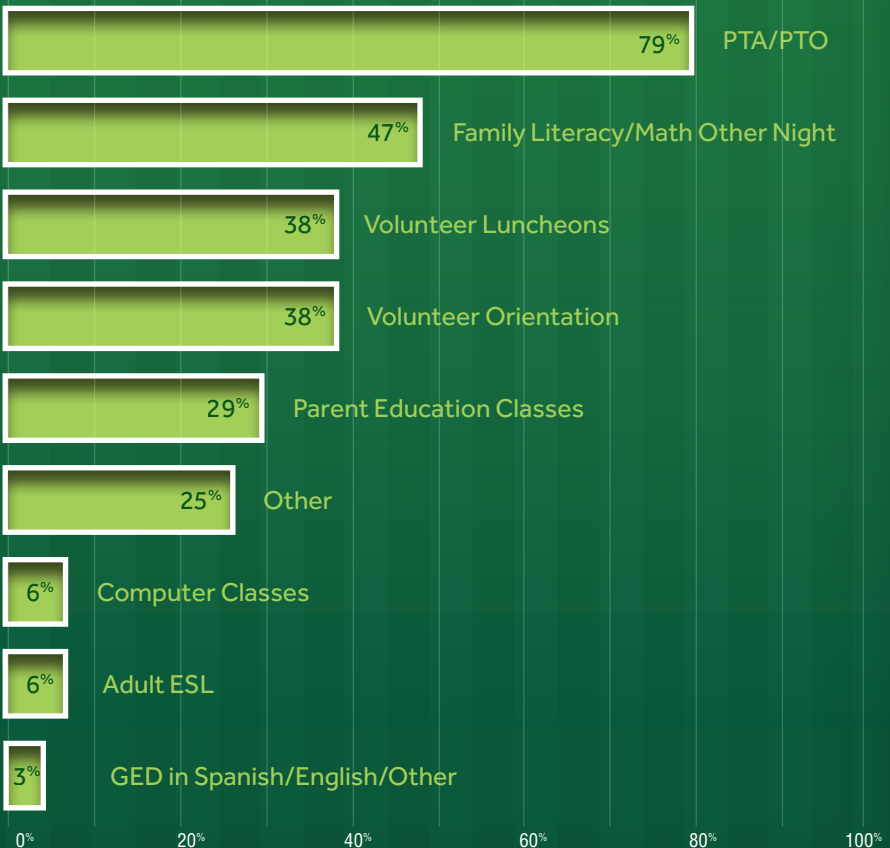
25% of school leaders reported that they had “other” kinds of family engagement programming/initiatives at their schools. Those included:

- Parent and family volunteer activities, such as reading to elementary students or attending field trips
- Parent advisory committee and school improvement council
- Opportunities to spend time with school leader, such as coffee with the principal and principal forums
- Family dinners and meetings for specific groups, such as fathers and grandparents
- Home visits
- Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT)
- Open houses and new family orientation
- Career center and GED classes
- Events tied to faith, such as Bible study and preparation for sacraments
- Booster clubs



SECTION 3: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING & LEADERSHIP

What family engagement programming/classes do you currently offer to families at your school?

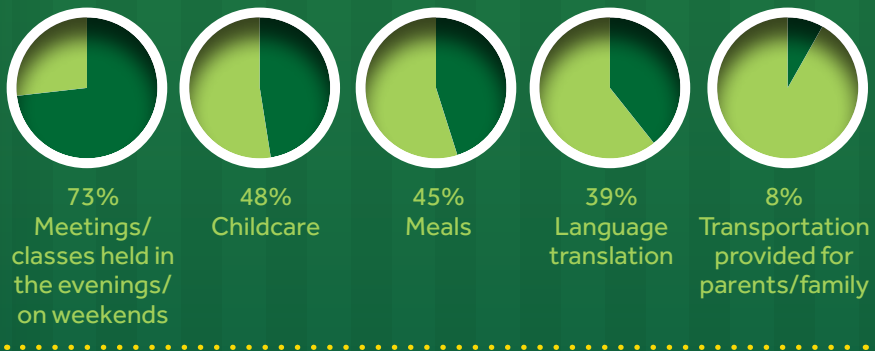


Overcoming Barriers

Research has found that logistical and practical challenges can stand in the way of parents attending events or being involved in typical or expected ways at school, even when they highly value being involved and want to support their children's learning (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). For example, parents may not have dependable or available transportation to get to school or may lack childcare for siblings. The challenge of making a meal for the entire family on the same evening as the school event may prevent families from making it to school. Additionally, parents who work hourly (as opposed to salaried jobs) may have inflexible work schedules and may not be paid when they miss work. School events that are scheduled without taking parents' work schedules into account can be a major barrier to involvement.

School leaders shared some of the ways that their schools were working to help overcome barriers and build family engagement at their school. Almost two-thirds of school leaders reported that their school held meetings or classes on evenings or weekends. Following are the percentages of different kinds of supports provided for families to attend classes or events at their school.

Are any of the following provided at your school as supports for families to attend classes and/or events at your school?



School leaders also shared some of the factors that they thought may keep families/parents from getting involved at their school. They cited busy work schedules, competing priorities, transportation issues, different cultural expectations, language barriers, lack of family involvement once students are in middle and high school, and past negative experiences with the educational system.

Parent Leadership

Parent leadership is often listed as a priority for districts and may be a key requirement of state or federal grants. Even when not required, there are a multitude of benefits to having parent leaders as advocates, partners, fundraisers, and volunteers at the school level. But, leadership roles are not always easy to fill. Parents—just like school staff—face challenging schedules, competing priorities, and hold many responsibilities at home and at work. School leaders were close to equally divided on whether or not they found it easy to recruit family members to serve in leadership roles.

43% of school leaders said it was easy to find family members to serve in leadership roles while fifty-seven percent said it was not easy.

People work and are tired when they come home. They have obligations to cook dinner and get kids ready for bed.

“Systemic barriers: teachers can’t be compelled to meet at night for working parents (though many do!), parents don’t know how to navigate the system, language can be a barrier, families living in poverty don’t have resources to participate in for-pay programs, parents who did not have positive school experiences feel intimidated or frustrated by the system.”

Is it easy to find family members to serve in leadership roles?



43%
Yes

57%
No

What is the most important factor that keeps families/parents from getting more involved at your school?

- Time
- Lack of interest
- Daytime jobs and time
- Both parents working
- Transportation
- Feeling welcome
- Work and family commitments



Home Visits

In some schools or districts, teachers, social workers and/or family engagement coordinators conduct home visits. Home visits can focus on building relationships, sharing hopes and dreams, and also may include updates about academic progress and learning. Home visits can be a powerful engagement effort across age groups that originated in public health nursing and early childhood education (Finello, 2012). Over the past few years, renewed focus has been placed on the potential benefits of home visits with families of students of all ages.

- More than one-third (35%) of school leaders said that their school staff currently conduct home visits.
- 65% of school leaders reported that their staff do not currently conduct home visits.

SECTION 4: AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Does staff at your school currently conduct home visits?



Is any of your family engagement programming done in partnership with a community agency or partner?



Programming Support

Staff to Support Family Engagement Efforts

Working to build strong connections and two-way communication, conduct outreach, organize events and form relationships with families takes time and resources. Sometimes schools have a dedicated staff member, for example a Parent Coordinator or Family Liaison, to help with this work. There may be staff at the district level or shared among schools. Other times, work is absorbed by existing staff or outreach and engagement is primarily done by teachers.

- 56% of school leaders said they have a staff or team to support family engagement efforts and to work with families at their school while 44% reported that they did not have dedicated staff to do this work at their school

School leaders also shared that at some schools, staff for family engagement initiatives needed specific capacities and that these roles could be difficult to fill. When schools served diverse populations of families, well-equipped staff and appropriate resources were more difficult to find and yet vital to making initiatives successful.



Does your school have a family engagement staff/team to support efforts and initiatives to work with families?



45%
Yes

56%
No

“Funding is not as hard as finding staffing for those roles.”

“It is hard to find the funds for materials, child care, and meals in order to attract more family involvement.”

"Our district has no funds other than a small amount of Title 1 funds to use. Our staff and our PTA really bear the majority of the costs."

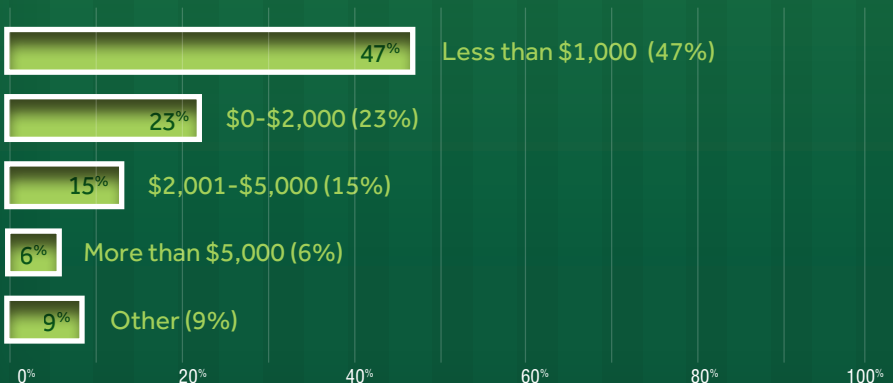
Funds to Support Family Engagement Efforts

Family engagement has been, and continues to be, included in federal education legislation. For example, according to the new Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) for districts receiving Title I funds, "a school district may receive funds under this part only if it conducts outreach to all parents and family members; implements programs, activities, and procedures to involve parents and family members in Title I programs, and plans and implements such programs, activities, and procedures with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children" (Henderson, 2016). Family engagement is a priority for many school leaders but funding for family engagement initiatives at the school level is still difficult to come by. There are few comprehensive resources to help school leaders locate funding opportunities intended for family engagement programming. Notwithstanding research that backs the impact of engaging families as well as the policy-level focus, many schools have relatively minimal funds for their family engagement programming.

- 47% of school leaders reported an average budget of \$1,000 or less for family engagement programming.
- 70% of school leaders reported that their average budget for family engagement programming is less than \$2,000.

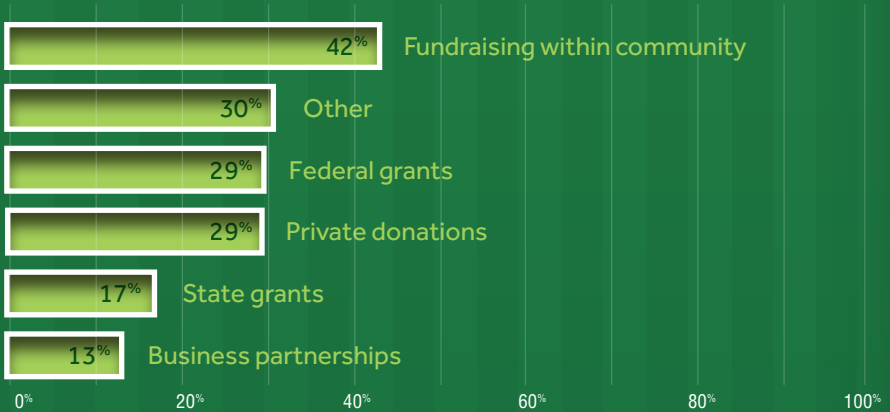
SECTION 5: FUNDING

What is your average budget for family engagement programming?



The most common source of funding for family engagement initiatives was fundraising within the community. 42% of school leaders reported that fundraising within the community was their major source of funding for family/community engagement work. Other sources of funding were reported by school leaders as follows:

What are the major sources of funding for your family/ community engagement work?



30% of school leaders said that they had other sources of funding for their family engagement initiatives. Among school leaders who reported other sources of funding, the most common sources were as follows:

- Tuition and fees
- Parent-teacher association/organization
- School fundraisers and donations from parents, volunteers and teachers
- Funding from school or district budget
- Donations from local non-profits, such as faith organizations, United Way and YMCA

When funding availability is a challenge, school leaders have to be creative, resourceful, and tireless when seeking funding for family engagement programming. Still, funding for family engagement initiatives and programming remains a very real and consistent challenge. School leaders reported many challenges in seeking funding for family engagement programs and initiatives at their schools. The most common challenges that school leaders reported were: restrictions in grants about how the funds can be used, time to research funding options, high-poverty communities with few resources, stretched school budgets, and competing fundraising needs.

School leaders also shared that staffing and allocating adequate staff time and energy for family engagement initiatives (time to do it all) was a challenge as existing staff were often taking on multiple roles at the school. While this is not directly related to funding, staffing overall at the school level was a factor in available capacity to do family engagement work.

Evaluating Effectiveness

When engaging families is a part of a school's improvement plan or district level priorities or if it is funded and a funder has specific evaluation requirements, it is always important to evaluate the impacts of efforts to build effective partnerships with families for ongoing learning. For some schools, it may be even more pressing to quantify the impact of family engagement work. Evaluation approaches varied widely across schools and districts and depended on what kind of engagement initiative was being implemented. Evaluations were both informal and formal and several leaders reported utilizing digital tools to support gathering parent feedback about initiatives.

59% of school leaders said that they evaluate the effectiveness of their current family engagement initiatives. The most common ways that schools are evaluating the effectiveness of their family engagement programming are:

- Taking attendance at events and PTO meetings
- Surveying parents and teachers after each event and at the end of the year
- Collecting informal observations from parents, staff and PTO members
- Measuring participation on social media

SECTION 6: EVALUATION

Has family engagement at your school increased or decreased while you have been at the school?



88%
Increased



12%
Decreased

Do you evaluate the effectiveness of your current family engagement initiatives?



59%
Yes



41%
No

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your current family engagement initiatives?

- Just ask
- Feedback or surveys at family events
- Exit surveys
- Attendance sheets
- Monitor participation levels
- Record amount of parent volunteer time logged
- Reflection and discussion sessions
- Word of mouth
- Social media interaction/interest
- Conduct bi-annual focus groups of parents for feedback



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2801 International Lane, Suite 212 | Madison, Wisconsin 53704

www.familiesandschools.org | Toll free 888-629-2481 | answers@familiesandschools.org

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