

APPENDIX



Parental Involvement: Informing, Teaching and Learning

October 8, 2019

Cathy Lindenbaum
Robert Acerra
Lynette Howard
Rose Acerra

Our History and
Mission

EveryChild. OneVoice.

*“To make every
child’s potential a
reality by engaging
and empowering
families and
communities to
advocate for all
children.”*

National Standards for Family-School Partnerships



Our Role in Family Engagement

Family engagement has been at the heart of PTA since when we were founded in 1897

The Challenge:

- Parents know that they play an important role in their child's success but time is factor.
- Traditional family engagement practices don't always meet the needs of each and every family
- Parents don't feel treated as equal partners in ensuring their child's success.

The PTA Solution:

Transformative Family Engagement

Transformative family engagement is a shared effort of families, schools and community leaders to advance programs, practices and policies that empower every parent to make their child's potential a reality.

The four I's of Transformative Family Engagement used as our Guiding Principles

Individualized
Meeting the unique
needs of every family
and child.

Integrated
Connecting and
aligning with the
educational system.

Inclusive
Embracing and
valuing diverse
perspectives.

Impactful
Empowering families
to support their
child's success.

What's next?:

Collaboration

Raise awareness about family engagement among PTA members and other parent leaders by engaging our parents*, teachers and community members to work as collaboratively as possible.

Empower parent* groups across the state to be leaders in transformative family engagement efforts through grant and recognition opportunities, as well as connections to other leading family engagement organizations

Influence family engagement decisions and resources by contributing to a community wide agenda on how the parent* voice shapes family engagement programs, practices, and policies with our decision makers.

***Parents (grandparents, foster parents and other caregivers)**

New Jersey PTA

Advocates for All
Children

New Jersey PTA
8 Quakerbridge Plaza, Suite F
Mercerville, NJ 08619
609-587-0100

Cathy Lindenbaum, President
clindenbaum@njpta.org

Robert Acerra, President-Elect
r.acerra@njpta.org

Lynette Howard, Vice President of Advocacy
lhoward@njpta.org

Rose Acerra, Federal Legislative Chairman
racerra@njpta.org

Testimony: *10/8/2019 10:00:00 AM*

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools Tuesday, October 8, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. on
Parental Involvement Informing Teaching and Learning.
Committee Room 16, 4th Floor, State House Annex

- Assemblywoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee on Public Schools.
- Thank you for having me here to give testimony today
- My name is Rebekah Novemsky, and I represent the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities.
- I am also a parent of 21 year old young man with developmental disabilities.
- The Council is authorized by the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, and by New Jersey State statutes
- The Council “in but not of” the New Jersey Department of Human Services.
- Many public and private agencies support the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities.
- The Council provides a platform for these agencies, together with citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), family member/caregivers, and advocates, to develop a coordinated social policy.
- To this end, the Council commissions research on policy issues and funds model programs.

- The Council also funds projects to inform citizens with I/DD, family members, caregivers, decision-makers, legislators, and the general public about developmental disabilities.
- I will share with you this morning, some of the key issues our constituents face.
- They include: Emergency planning for students with disabilities, and transition services for students needing adult services.

School Emergency Planning for Students with Disabilities

- All students with disabilities should be full participants in school emergency planning including evacuation and drills.
- While most schools have a comprehensive plan and carry out drills for emergency situations, few have an effective comprehensive plan to address the complex, individualized needs of students with disabilities.
- And because there are no national models for addressing the needs of students with disabilities in school crisis preparedness, most schools are not fully prepared to support students with I/DD including sensory disabilities, medical and mobility disabilities, behavioral disabilities, and other unique challenges when there is an emergency situation.
- As a result, the Council prepared proposed legislation requiring school districts to discuss and document the emergency planning, response and evacuation needs of each student with a disability and/or special health care need.
- This should ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in schoolwide and building-based emergency response, including full

mitigation, practice drills, staff training, and an evaluation process to identify obstacles.

- This proposed legislation will require a student with disabilities' Individual Education Program (IEP), Section 504 Plan and/or Individual Health Plan (IHPs) to provide additional documentation.
- They will be required to document that the student's unique mobility, sensory, medical, social, communication, emotional, regulatory and decision-making needs in the event of a school emergency, evacuation or drill have been discussed and considered.
- Plans must also indicate whether the student can fully and safely participate in school-wide safety and evacuation drills *without* the use of supplementary supports, modifications, accommodations, or services.
- It is impossible for students to experience full participation and inclusion when their safety is in jeopardy. But for many children and teens with disabilities in New Jersey schools, that is the case.
- I am asking for your support in this critical issue.

Transition Services for those students who will need adult supports and services

- Students who need to remain in school until they are 21 years old must not be pushed to graduate at 18.
- Real planning needs to involve the student and the student's family. There needs to be visioning for the life course. Family involvement in this planning will inform instruction which will prepare the student for a full and meaningful life fully integrated in the community.
- Segregated settings will not serve us well. Family members will be involved long after educational entitlement. Early investment in special education and related services will serve to reduce the dependence on supports

- Family members like myself are the most important member of the IEP planning team and must be recognized and included as such.

Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

- Historically New Jersey has been more advanced than most other states in the country in recognizing the effectiveness of transition services for students with disabilities who are required to include transition plans in their IEPs after they have turned 14.
- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 allows a student with a disability, either with an IEP or a 504 Plan, to be eligible to receive **Pre-ETS**, regardless of whether they have applied for or are eligible for VR services.
- The student must be enrolled in educational programs, including post-secondary programs, non-traditional or alternative secondary education programs (e.g. home schooling), and other recognized educational programs such as those offered through the juvenile justice system. The maximum age of such a student is 24.
- Under WIOA, such students are also eligible to apply for full VR cases.
- According to NJ Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), there were approximately **76,000** students with IEPs under IDEA in New Jersey. (OSEP does not track students with 504 Plan unless the students have accommodation plans for state testing in place).
- WIOA requires each state VR agency to spend a minimum of 15% of Federal allotment to each VR agency on 5 required and 8 authorized Pre-ETS services. For New Jersey, **15%** of Federal allotment to DVRS, to be

spent on Pre-ETS, amounts to approximately **\$8 million** per year.

- WIOA requires that states develop inter-agency agreements among State Educational Agency (SEA), Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), and VR agency.
- The agreements should coordinate and assign financial, programmatic, and information dissemination responsibilities of each agency.
- It is critical that funding streams from respective agencies be effectively used without duplication and to achieve maximum outcomes for students, including those with significant support needs, to transition to **post-secondary education, vocational education, continuing and adult education, competitive integrated employment, adult services, independent living, and community participation.**
- Unfortunately, the Memo of Understanding (MOU) among OSEP, DVRS, and CBVI has yet to be executed. It still needs the signatures of the Commissioners of Human Services and Education.
- In its audit of DVRS this summer, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) included in its findings the absence of the MOU to be an item of concern.
- Without the MOU in place, \$8 million in spending by VR on Pre-ETS plus spending of LEAs and SEA cannot be effectively coordinated to enable students with disabilities reach their transition goals.
- We urge the Legislature to assume an oversight role on tracking services received and the outcomes of Pre-ETS and transition services to ensure effective utilization of public funding to achieve maximum post-school outcomes.

- Effective oversight will help New Jersey students with disabilities to reap the full benefits of one of the most promising WIOA initiatives.
- With early and more intensive interventions of Pre-ETS and transition services, it is crucial that families, educators, VR counselors must **assume competence** in students.
- For students to be successful, all parties must work **collaboratively** to develop transition plans which encompass **high expectations** on students, with adequate and flexible supports, reflecting interests, attributes, and needs of the students.
- Spending on transition and Pre-ETS will return high yields to the state while helping students with disabilities launch promising career pathways.

Special Education Parent Advisory Councils

- In closing, we ask for your support in ensuring that the Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (SEPACs) in underserved areas be supported and enhanced
- The (SEPACs) are great vehicles for parent involvement.
- In order to be successful, they must be family led in cooperation with school district personnel.
- Thank you for your attention to these important very important matters.

###

Recommendations for the Joint Committee on Public Schools Increasing Meaningful Parent Engagement in Schools

To the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

Submitted by: Kaleena Berryman, Executive Director
Abbott Leadership Institute, Rutgers University – Newark

Thank you to the Joint Committee on the Public Schools for providing time for this very important conversation on parental involvement in teaching and learning in New Jersey.

For the past seventeen years, the Abbott Leadership Institute (ALI), housed at Rutgers University Newark, has developed informed and effective education advocacy for Newark Public Schools by introducing parents, students, educators, and stakeholders to education policy and practice, and strategies for meaningful family engagement in schools. I have served as Director for a little over a year, and as a staff member and student of ALI since 2006.

At ALI, through classes mostly held on the Rutgers Newark campus, we provide parents with the knowledge, skills, confidence, and support to serve as leaders in the education of their children – to understand the way school systems work, to research and ask questions, and to hold educators at each level accountable for providing a high-quality education for all children, not just their own. This is especially important in high poverty districts like Newark - where schools are struggling to prepare students to meet state academic standards, education reform plans change frequently, turnover in school leadership is constant, and schools are historically underfunded and under resourced.

At ALI, we believe that parental involvement, in communities like Newark, is not enough. We believe that parent empowerment, which includes parents as engaged thought partners, decision makers, and leaders within schools - should be the goal. The challenge is that most schools do not have a culture that welcomes parent voice. In fact, as we send our parent leaders into Newark schools, they quickly learn that most schools do not operate in a way that promotes even meaningful parental involvement, as required by the federal Title I program and Every Student Succeeds Act.

In Newark, parents have had to fight for a seat at the table. Parents who attempted to provide advice for how schools can better engage parents were often ignored and ostracized. Parents have observed the ways in which some schools are unwelcoming and unsupportive of parent advocacy. Parents looking to develop parent organizations have on many occasions received little support from school administration. And parents who advocated for changes in school leadership, or against cuts to programs or ever-changing reform strategies, or who brought attention to educational inequities within the district were often labeled as antagonistic. ALI has, over the years, built the capacity of parents to overcome these obstacles through the power of information and organizing, and has provided a meeting place at Rutgers Newark where parent advocates can share strategies, support one another, and achieve wins for children.

These obstacles to meaningful parent engagement in schools is not specific to Newark.

When I became a mother seven years ago, I immediately had to put my ALI advocacy skills into practice, as my son was born 16 weeks premature. I understood that for him to survive I could not simply be involved in his care during the five months he was in the NICU, but I had to be engaged in every part of his health plan and empowered with information to have a voice in decision making. I had to learn complicated medical terms and the rationale behind every decision made by doctors. The odds for his survival were greatly stacked against him, and the doctors and nurses said that it was my research, presence, and high expectations that led to his survival.

When I attempted to employ this same approach to his education, I found that his school, a public school in Jersey City for children with severe medical and intellectual disabilities, did not have a parent organization, school leadership council, or even a governance body for shared decision making. In fact, the only communication that happened were notices about decisions already made, or requests for my involvement in school fundraisers or trips. This year, when parents received notices that the program as we knew it would end in June of 2020, we were appalled that no meeting was held with parents to discuss the decision. It was not until the roof collapsed, delaying the start of school, and the Mayor and national news media responded to a letter the newly formed PTSA sent to school leaders and legislators, that the plan to end the program was pulled.

Parents should not have to involve the Mayor and media to be heard about the education of their children.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires schools to engage parents of public and private school students in the development, implementation, and annual review of school programs for Title I students. This is not happening in most schools as we believe, the law intended. It is also required that "schools engage parents in regular, 2-way communication that is meaningful and pertains to academic learning and other school activities". This is also not happening as the law intended.

This is because there is no clear definition of or standards for meaningful and effective parent engagement in schools. There is a lack of professional development in meaningful parent engagement, and no requirements or in-depth monitoring process for reporting parent engagement strategies, other than meeting attendance sheets. There is currently no evaluation for how schools and districts build the capacity for parental involvement as described in Title I Section 1118.

Title I funds are not being used in many schools, in ways that empower parents to meaningfully engage. When we speak with parents across the city, we find that schools do not offer meetings at varying times of the day, and do not provide support such as childcare or alternative options for participation. Anfal Jenkins, President of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council Newark, adds that "meetings where parents are expected to participate must thoughtfully anticipate and accommodate diverse families who often include children of varying ages, and children with disabilities."

In Newark, Superintendent Roger Leon, our first superintendent under local control, has developed and implemented plans to improve parent engagement in Newark Public Schools, with many of the ideas coming from parent recommendations. Parents, students, and community were involved in the strategic planning process through a series of meetings. The Superintendent has prioritized the requirement that all schools must have a functioning parent organization and school leadership council. School leaders hired by the district have been interviewed by parent committees. The district will also develop a parent advisory council. These plans are a step in the right direction, and a shift has begun in district culture as it relates to parent engagement. However, any improvements made can be quickly eliminated if the district undergoes a change in leadership, as they are not required by the state.

It is the recommendation of the Abbott Leadership Institute, that the Joint Committee on the Public Schools develop standards and provide incentives for schools and school districts to operate, according to the ALI framework for parent participation in schools, at the level that engages parents as partners in all decision making, and equips them with the knowledge necessary to support their children's academic achievement. In the words of Viva White, a Newark parent whose son attends Belmont Runyon Elementary school, "parents must be at the table with equal input regarding the daily activities that happen in the school building from academics to after-school programming and other aspects such as community events." In addition, schools must be encouraged, taught to and held accountable for implementing strategies and best practices that change the culture around parent engagement in teaching and learning to one that is welcoming, respectful, eager, and inclusive. We offer recommendations for what the state can do, to ensure that schools are moving in the right direction.

20x

Recommendations

1. ***Develop a Parent/Caregiver Engagement in Education Task Force, to clearly define “meaningful parent engagement” and develop statewide standards and best practices for meaningful parent engagement in and with schools and school districts. That definition should include the engagement of parents as partners and decision makers with schools.*** Ensure that the task force is made up of a diverse group of parent and community voices. Design with the task force, areas for professional development that will aide districts, school leaders, and school staff in the implementation of these standards. Develop evaluation tools and a monitoring system to ensure standards and best practices are implemented effectively and benefiting parent participation.
2. ***Develop legislation that requires, or an incentive program that encourages, school districts to build the capacity of parents to meaningfully engage with schools*** by (1) involving parents in the development of trainings to improve teaching and learning effectiveness, (2) covering costs for transportation and child care for parents to attend meetings, (3) providing training to enhance parent capacity, (4) training parents to develop other parents, (5) arranging school meetings at a variety of times, (6) adopting models of best practice and (7) establishing a district wide parent council, all currently optional under Title 1.
3. ***Develop legislation that requires all schools funded by public dollars to have a fully functioning parent organization and school leadership council*** which includes parents; require reporting on the ways in which schools utilize parent organizations bi-yearly with a focus on parent capacity building and engagement in decision making.
4. Implement the ***Statewide Family Engagement Center in New Jersey***, with the input of the task force, to help school districts better support schools and educators to engage parents, and parents to engage with educators. According to the ESSA, Statewide Family and Engagement Centers are intended to provide support to school districts to effectively implement and enhance family engagement policies and initiatives.
5. ***Require school districts to review all district job descriptions for parent liaisons or school staff responsible for parent engagement, and principals***, to ensure that the responsibilities as related to parent engagement are in alignment with standards developed by the task force.
6. ***Require school districts to involve parents in the development of the district wide parental engagement policy*** through public meetings and include parents in the evaluation at the school level of the policy's implementation.
7. ***Provide grant opportunities for professional development in meaningful parent engagement***; create incentives for teacher and principal certification programs to develop educator expertise in meaningful parent engagement.

These recommendations will result in the development of standards that allow the state and local school districts to ensure that parent engagement is treated as an important component to improving student academic achievement. The Abbott Leadership Institute and Rutgers University Newark are committed to participating in the exploration of these recommendations. In the very end, this will improve educational outcomes for children by holding schools accountable for effectively utilizing the expertise that parents have to offer, and parents, the power to have a say in their child's education.

Submitted by:

21x

Kaleena Berryman

Executive Director, Abbott Leadership Institute

kaleenab@rutgers.edu

973.353.3560



How Parental Engagement informs Teaching and Learning. October 2019

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to speak.

Paterson Education Fund's mission is to stimulate community action for change in Paterson Public Schools so that every child achieves high standards.

Several years ago, we realized that this cannot be done unless parents are engaged in meaningful ways. As our children's first teachers, beginning at birth, parents have the primary responsibility of making sure their children gain the foundational skills that prepare them for school. As the child matures, the parents' roles change yet remain critical. In our work at PEF, we define these roles in three categories, to support – making sure all their needs are met, to monitor – watch over and guide the children and to advocate – speak up for them as needed.

Our Right Question Project workshop is based on a strategy we learned from the Right Question Project Institute and was developed by parents in Lawrence Massachusetts. It's a strategy that helps parents build relationships with teachers and administrators by asking questions. The two primary questions are "What is my child learning?" and "What does my child need to learn?" By exploring these questions, parents learn how to support, monitor and advocate for their children's education.

Effective parental is more than one-way communication by sending home flyers and giving information at occasional meetings. Meaningful engagement gives parents and caregivers the tools they need to help them help their children. It also means that we effectively use whatever assets parents bring to the table. In order to do this, schools must see parents as real partners with something to offer. Schools must recognize that parents bring assets to the table.

At PEF, our most dedicated volunteers are the parents of the children we serve. Parents are the most passionate advocates because they are fighting for their own children's futures. Passionate determination goes a long way when you're fighting for systemic change.

A great example of how parent engagement can affect teaching and learning is seen in the Community Schools strategies. The Paterson Public Schools' Full Service Community Schools model is the ultimate expression of the, "it takes a village" philosophy – by removing many of the barriers that can keep students from achieving academically, this initiative takes a comprehensive approach to improving the lives of our students and their families. After-school programs and activities, adult education, social services, and health clinics are all available at school. The school-based health centers provide vision, dental, mental health, and pediatric services at little or no cost to the community. The schools become a community hub, with the wellbeing of the child at the center.

Full service community schools are focused around the philosophy that student achievement will improve greatly if children are healthy, happy, and supported. Seven schools are currently implementing the strategies. (FSCS Theory of Change Chart attached) We have seen improvements

in culture and climate, attendance, discipline and student performance at these schools.

We are also beginning to implement Sustainable community Schools. The attached overview was produced by the Journey for Justice Alliance. Sustainable Community Schools are evidence-based school improvement models that offer whole-child education strategies by engaging the community in designing and implementing six key pillars: curriculum, teacher support, wrap-around services, student centered school climate, parent and community engagement and school leadership. There is a movement by several national Education leaders, including J4J, NEA and AFT, to implement sustainable community schools strategy in 20,000 schools. With your commitment and support, NJ can be a leader in this movement.

Parent engagement and in fact, parent initiative and determination has positively affected several policies in Paterson. These include our new discipline policy which is based on the Dignity in Schools Campaign's Model Code to end the school-to-prison pipeline by keeping students in school. The code incorporates the use of preventive strategies such as Positive Behaviors in Schools (PBIS) and Restorative Justices which helps students build relationships and prevent, acknowledge and repair harm.

Our Breakfast After the Bell program was initiated by parents, piloted in one school then gradually implemented districtwide. It was met with major resistance at first but thanks to the parents' persistence and the collaboration of several community partners, PPS is now feeding every child breakfast and lunch.

Similarly, our attendance and promotions policies were revisited when parents and community members published data gathered from the School Progress Reports and demanded change. They didn't stop at the demand. Parents and community members sat at the table with school administrators, teachers and other staff to develop the new policies. Similar collaborative work was used in the development of our Long-Range Facilities Plan and Every Student Succeeds Plan. Parent voice has affected the rewriting of curriculum and we hope it will continue to do so.

As a part of our Paterson Reads initiative, we convened focus groups to hear from parents regarding the barriers that lead to chronic absenteeism. The notes from these conversations were used to inform Attendance Works (the nation's leading experts on reducing chronic absenteeism) as they developed their preschool toolkit.

We believe that if the community, especially parents, is part of creating a positive vision for our schools, holds itself accountable for student outcomes, and is engaged in identifying and implementing solutions, then high expectations become a part of the community culture and kids will soar academically and socially.

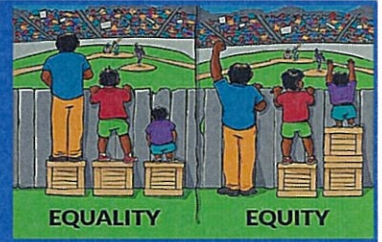
PEF Contact Information: Rosie Grant, Executive Director

rosieg@paterson-education.org (973) 881-8914

24x



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



WHAT IS EDUCATION?

The JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE ALLIANCE (J4J) defines education as "inspiration and information that prepares people for successful adulthood and to positively impact society."

WHAT IS EQUITY?

Equity can be defined as providing what is needed to remedy defects in access to justice, resources and opportunity.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (SCS)

Sustainable Community Schools are an evidence-based school improvement model that offers whole-child education strategies as does full service community schools; and engages the school community in the process of designing and implementing six key pillars to school success (curriculum, teacher supports, wrap-around services, student-centered school climate, parent and community engagement and inclusive school leadership).

THE LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

The leadership committee should be comprised of parents, community leaders, educators, students and a representative of school administration. The leadership committee hires the resource coordinator and insures that the school community is fully engaged in planning of the SCS. They usually meet monthly to provide oversight for the SCS, insuring that the vision and goals of the school are implemented.

RESOURCE COORDINATOR

The resource coordinator manages the day to day operations of the SCS. They are part of the school leadership team and facilitates school community input, monthly leadership team meetings, securing programs and activities requested by the constituents.

LEAD COMMUNITY PARTNER

In order to be a SCS the school must identify a lead community partner, which should be a reputable community-based organization or agency that collaborates with the school to bring the vision to life. The community partner brings local knowledge, history, relationships with people and institutions to the work in order to ground the SCS in the culture and needs of the people directly impacted.

FLIP OVER TO LEARN ABOUT THE 6 PILLARS!

(1) ENGAGING, CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND CHALLENGING CURRICULA

Students must have equitable selection of course offerings in the arts, world languages, mathematics, literacy, culturally relevant and responsive curricula and practices, honors and advanced placement (AP) courses. Central are services for English Language Learners (ELL), special education students and educational needs of parents and community members. The school community is engaged in the visioning and appropriate methods for implementing curricula; such as peer-to-peer and project based learning. Curricula must be informed and enhanced by community resources.

(2) HIGH QUALITY TEACHING, NOT HIGH STAKES TESTING

Resources are invested into evidence-based teacher supports such as: 1)educators having a voice in professional development that is high quality, relevant and consistent, 2) veteran educators available to mentor newer teachers, 3)equity in the racial demographics of the teaching cadre and 4)trained teacher aides in every class. Tests are used to assess student needs as opposed to punishment.

(3) WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS FOR EVERY CHILD

Health care, eye care, trauma counseling, speech therapists and other social and emotional services that remove obstacles to student success. Wrap-around supports include "opportunities for inspiration" such as drama clubs, debate teams, science clubs, culture clubs; supports **must** be culturally relevant and responsive.

(4) STUDENT CENTERED SCHOOL CLIMATE

Rooted in positive discipline practices such as restorative justice. Social and emotional learning supports are stressed so students grow while being held accountable for their actions. Suspensions and harsh punishments are eliminated or greatly reduced. Student leadership development programs are encouraged so students to learn how to effectively problem solve and address issues in their community that impact their ability to be educated.

(5) AUTHENTIC PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Schools are community institutions. Authentic parent and community engagement requires a belief system where community is viewed as partners and assets, not aggravations and tools to be manipulated. This approach is rooted in the belief that community wisdom in harmony with academic expertise lead to sustainable school improvement.

(6) INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

As the instructional leader, the principal of a sustainable community school must not operate the institution as a kingdom but a space for collaborative leadership. They insure that the SCS Resource Coordinator is part of the leadership team and they actively participate on the SCS Leadership Team. The SCS school leader must consistently provide an inclusive culture for input from the school community.



PARENTAL INPUT

on TEACHING and LEARNING for the PURPOSE of ACCESS and EQUITY

BY: MARCELLA SIMADIRIS M. Ed.



THIS PARENT'S BACKGROUND & EDUCATION

BACHELORS OF SCIENCE IN
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH
MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

MASTERS OF EDUCATION IN
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
WITH A CONCENTRATION ON
ETHICS, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY PORTLAND,
OR

TEACHER OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND HEALTH
PATERSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SEPTEMBER 2000- PRESENT

THIS PARENT'S CHILDREN





THIS PARENT'S UNIQUE VANTAGE POINT

Being of european descent and having children of african descent while teaching in an urban school district provides one with a very unique vantage point on the world of equity in education. This perspective has evolved through the years as life experiences and happenings changed me and the way others think about me. I remember my very first year teaching, one of my colleagues called a mutual student the n word in a private conversation we were having. I couldn't believe what I had heard and had no idea what to do, so I made mentioned of my black children with the hopes that it would be known that I did not entertain racism. Looking back, I knew I should have had a much deeper discussion with my colleague but during that time, I was not capable. Even though I did not know how to approach the situation, I knew this was going to be something my children were going to have to contend with as they made their way through school.



THIS PARENT'S EFFORTS AT ENGAGEMENT

Spaces in which I provided testimony include;

- ESSA Accountability Focus Groups
- New Jersey Assembly Budget Committee Meeting
- New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) Board Meetings
- New Jersey Joint Committee on Public Schools
- NJDOE Online Assessment Collaborative
- New Jersey Senate Budget Committee Meeting
- New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) Board
- School Development Authority (SDA) Board Meetings
- Various Local Board of Education Meetings



THIS PARENT'S EFFORTS AT ACTION

Spaces in which I have served;

- People's Organization for Progress
- Montclair Cares About Schools
- Montclair Civil Rights Commission
- National Education Association Representative Assembly
- New Jersey's Education Association
- Strength 2 Stand UP



THIS PARENT'S BARRIERS

SENATOR RICE MADE COMMENTS ON THE NEED FOR FORTITUDE IN ADDRESSING ISSUES AT WORKSITES ON ALL LEVELS TO AID IN EQUITY AND ACCESS AT A COMMITTEE MEETING LAST SPRING, I SIT HERE NOT ONLY AS AN EDUCATOR WHO SHOWED FORTITUDE AND SUFFERED WHEN SPEAKING UP BUT AS A PARENT. JUST LIKE TEACHERS FACE TERMINATION, PARENTS FACE CRIMINALIZATION. THE ROLE THE STUDENT EQUITY ADVOCATE POSITION, SECURED BY THE MONTCLAIR CHAPTER OF THE INDEPENDENT BLACK PARENT ASSOCIATION (NIBPA), HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE LEVEL OF INPUT AS A PARENT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE ON BEHALF OF MY BLACK CHILDREN. IT IS GRASS ROOT ORGANIZATIONS, WHO ARE UNBOUGHT, LIKE THE MONTCLAIR NIBPA THAT ARE PIVOTAL IN SECURING ACCESS. I ATTRIBUTE THE FIRST BLACK SUPERINTENDENT AND THE MULTIPLE EQUITY POSITIONS THAT HAVE BEEN CREATED FOR THE MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO THIS ORGANIZATION'S WORK.

NOW THAT I HAVE SPOKEN THEIR NAME TO YOU ALL...PLEASE LOOK OUT FOR THEM

(201) 293-6154

MontclairNIBPA@gmail.com



THIS PARENT'S CONCLUSION

HAVING YOUR VOICE HEARD FOR ANYONE CAN BE DIFFICULT BUT FOR PARENTS ADVOCATING FOR THEIR BLACK CHILDREN IT CAN BE DOUBLY DIFFICULT. THERE ARE YEARS OF UNLEARNING THAT ARE REQUIRED TO TRULY PROVIDE A FREE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN. WORKING WITH AND WITHIN A SYSTEM THAT DEPENDS ON A SPECIFIC POWER STRUCTURE CAN PREVENT PROGRESS, FOR THAT REASON ALONE I BELIEVE THE FOLLOWING NECESSARY;

- DEPARTMENTS OF EQUITY
- COUNTY AND STATE EQUITY ADVOCATES
- A SHIFT IN ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS
- REFER TO THE STATE'S PLAN TO MANAGE EQUITY
- RECEIVING AND RECORDING SYSTEM FOR EQUITY POSITIONS
- HEAVIER RELIANCE ON UNBOUGHT GRASSROOT ORGANIZATIONS



REFERENCES

- Mchawi, B. (producer). (2019) September 19th. Education At The Crossroads, Baba Zayid and Dr. Stephanie Harris (guest). NY NY, WBAI Archives.
- Sforza, D., Tienken, C. H., & Kim, E. (2016). A comparison of higher-order thinking between the common core state standards and the 2009 New Jersey content standards in high school. AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice, 12(4), 5+. Retrieved from <http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com.cupdx.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=conu&v=2.1&t=r&id=GALE%7CA443060426&asid=c30559af3b42c5d89837eea81163b154>
- Simadiris, M. (2017). Numbers for Proving Not Punishing: An Authentic Attempt at Equity, Concordia, Portland OR.



New Jersey School Boards Association

413 West State Street • Trenton, NJ 08618 • Telephone: 609.695.7600 • Toll-Free: 888.88NJSBA • Fax: 609.695.0413

Testimony on Parental Involvement
Joint Committee on the Public Schools
October 8, 2019

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), a federation of all of the state's local school districts believes that parental involvement is an important component of every local district's educational process.

NJSBA's Positions and Policies on Education document, which forms the basis of the Association's advocacy efforts, includes specific language in support of parental involvement. We believe that:

- Children learn more when their parents are involved in their education.
- Local boards of education and school staff should value parental participation and encourage the active participation of parents in the schools and the decision making process of the school district.

The NJSBA believes that partnerships with parents should be forged through a policy of inclusion that establishes two-way communication between the school district and the family. Training to teach parents about how the school system works, how to effectively communicate about their children and school issues, and how to develop a home environment conducive to study, and how to help with homework, are also important components of parental involvement.

Additionally, the NJSBA further believes

- Schools should be made accessible to parents and members of the community;
- Opportunities for communication among staff, parents and/or guardians, and the general public should be encouraged;
- School-related policies and procedures, data and other information should be provided;
- Parents and/or guardians should have an opportunity to contribute to the development of policies and programs;
- Parents and/or guardians and citizens should be provided meaningful participation, within reasonable parameters, at all regular public board meetings.

37x

QSAC regulations also address parental involvement:

Operations Indicator #7

The school district implements a process to ensure the school safety/school climate team in each school, with support from the CSA: (1) reviews and takes action to strengthen school climate policies; (2) educates the community, including students, teachers, staff, and parents, to prevent HIB; (3) provides professional development opportunities that address effective practices of successful school climate programs or approaches; and (4) completes the HIB self-assessment. The CSA submits to the Department the statement of assurance and the district board of education approval date for the HIB self-assessment for each school in the school district by September 30. (N.J.S.A. 18A:17-46 and 18A:37-14 through 18 and N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.7)

Operations Indicator #15

Safety and security plans, procedures, and mechanisms are annually reviewed and revised in consultation with law enforcement, health, social service, and emergency management agencies and other community members, including parents. The CSA has verified in writing that the process has occurred. (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-5.1)

Finally, the NJSBA believes that ongoing dialogue between parents and their school board is a critical aspect of a high performing school district.

**Testimony of
Michael Cohan, Director
Professional Development & Instructional Issues
New Jersey Education Association
to the
Joint Committee on Public Schools
October 8, 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning on a topic of importance to the success of all students in New Jersey's public schools. Parental involvement in schools, and, the committee's specific topic of interest – parental involvement in teaching and learning, is something widely sought after by all educators, and often unevenly found in some schools.

What does good parental involvement in school look like? The strongest evidence of parental involvement that yields benefits for both families and schools involves:

- Goal setting – with children – and fostering achievement of those goals
- Parents paying attention to student learning and growth to ensure their kids are on track
- Strong relationships between teachers and families with regular contact about students' progress
- Parents engaged in advocacy for improvements to school facilities and programs through participation at meetings of local boards of education and with state and federal government entities.

There are many documented benefits of good parental involvement. Many studies, including work done at Johns Hopkins University, the American Psychological Association, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have shown that high levels of parental involvement improve student achievement & learning, grows parents' confidence in their children's education, and also can yield higher grades, lower absenteeism, better social skills, and improved behavior among students.

How does this involvement lead to student success? The CDC has found that strong connections at school can help young people feel more connected to the adults in their lives resulting in the benefits noted a moment ago. They also found that students who feel connected to school have

positive health outcomes such as a lower likelihood of alcohol or tobacco use, fewer incidents of gun violence, less frequent sexual intercourse as adolescents, and are far less likely to have emotional issues that lead to such adverse outcomes like eating disorders or suicide.

While the benefits of parental involvement are well-documented, so are many barriers to effective participation by parents in their children's education:

The immediacy of modern communications often means that parents don't want to take the time to visit schools. They favor the use of digital tools – which *can* be important for quick communication between the school and home, but students miss out when parents don't offer their time and presence. The demands of work schedules, transportation, cultural and language barriers, and even adverse personal experiences with school cause some parents to avoid contact with their child's school despite the benefits that would come from their involvement and connection.

There is also ample evidence that involvement is insufficient – the true goal should be engagement of parents in the school community. What's the difference? When there is engagement, parents and teachers SHARE responsibility for student outcomes. When schools and teachers involve parents in meetings and events and parents volunteer support at home and at school, there is a deeper commitment to the common goals set for children and their learning. In fact, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act focuses on stakeholder engagement: and clearly parents are important stakeholders!

There are many effective strategies to increase parent engagement:

- Teacher contact information should be provided to parents early in the year to help them to feel comfortable reaching out;
- Opportunities for parents to connect with school should be identified, such as volunteer shifts, class activities, and parent-teacher collaborative committees;
- There should be frequent discussions about classroom AND parents' goals and expectations;

- Both schools and parents should commit to frequent contact and interaction via multiple platforms (ie: email, social media, websites, newsletters) so parents are up to date on what's happening at school; and,
- A school focus on the common challenges and barriers faced by parents who want to be engaged will help to break down those barriers.

In short, parental involvement and engagement is a partnership: parents and teachers working together focused on kids' welfare. As I learned early in my career, parents are their children's first teachers, and our partnership with them is both logical and natural. We should never forget that reality.

Selected Research

American Psychological Association. *Parent Engagement in Schools*. Retrieved from apa.org: <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/parental-engagement/default.aspx>

Blackboard (2016). *How K-12 Schools Are Meeting the Expectations of Parents for Digital Communications*. Retrieved from cdn2.hubspot.net:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health*. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Dearing, E., Kreider, H., Simpkins, S., & Weiss, H. B. (2006). *Family involvement in school and low-income children's literacy performance: Longitudinal associations between and within families*. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 653-664.

Epstein J, Sheldon S. Present and accounted for: improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research* 2002;95(5):308-318.

Epstein, J.L., & Sheldon, S.B. (2004) *Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism*. *School Community Journal*, 14, pp 39-56.

Fan X, Chen M. Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review* 2001;13(1):1-22.

Ferlazzo, J. (2011, May). *Involvement or Engagement?* ASCD, pp. 10-14

Hawkins JD, Catalano RF, Kosterman R, Abbott R, Hill KG. Preventing adolescent health-risk behaviors by strengthening protection during childhood. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 1999;153:226-234.

Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). *Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement*. *Developmental psychology*, 45(3), 740-63.

PTA, N. (2000). *Building Successful Partnerships: A Guide for Developing Parent and Family Involvement Programs*. (pp. 11-12). Bloomington, Indiana: National PTA, National Education Service.

Resnick MD, Bearman PS, Blum RW, Bauman KE, Harris KM, Jones J, et al. Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 1997;278(10):823–832.

8 October 2019

Joint Committee on the Public Schools
Parent Engagement

Thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to speak. As a long-time education parent advocate, I have had both personal and professional experiences that were both exemplary and not.

School climate and culture greatly influence how parent engagement, and student engagement, for that matter, occur and to what degree their input is utilized. It takes a concerted, on-going effort to engage parents. We so often hear that parents are not interested in participating. Or that a district tried one event and no one showed up. The presumption being that there was no interest. I promise. Parents are interested.

Parent engagement means meeting parents where they are. This takes time, and likely more than one type of approach. We can look at best practices of successful community schools to see how parents can and should be seen as partners in their children's schools.

One particular area I would like to discuss is engaging parents of children with disabilities. Specifically, the creation and organization of Special Education Parent Advisory Groups (SEPAGs). The state statute requires all districts to have a SEPAG. Specifically:

NJAC 6A:14-1.2(h): Each district board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.

It sounds simple enough. However, in practice, you will find that SEPAGs, their management, participation, effectiveness, and even their existence vary widely across the state. About seven years ago, a special ed dad and I were curious about how many districts had up and running SEPAGs across the state. In our own district, we were running into great roadblocks by the superintendent and board of education. There had been no SEPAG in that district until I started one that year.

What we found was that about a third of districts in the state had some form of a SEPAG. Of those, less than half were run by parents. In many of those districts the SEPAG was simply an annual meeting where information was imparted TO parents and nothing else. Clearly, that is not the stated intent of the law.

Julie Borst
Executive Director
Save Our Schools NJ Community Organizing
julieborst@saveourschoolsnj.org

In 2017, SPAN Parent Advocacy Network and the NJ Department of Education (NJDOE) created a handbook to help districts and parents start and maintain healthy SEPAGs. NJDOE sent a blast to districts in June of 2017 which included a link to the work. That link is currently broken, but handbook can be found by doing an internet search for it.

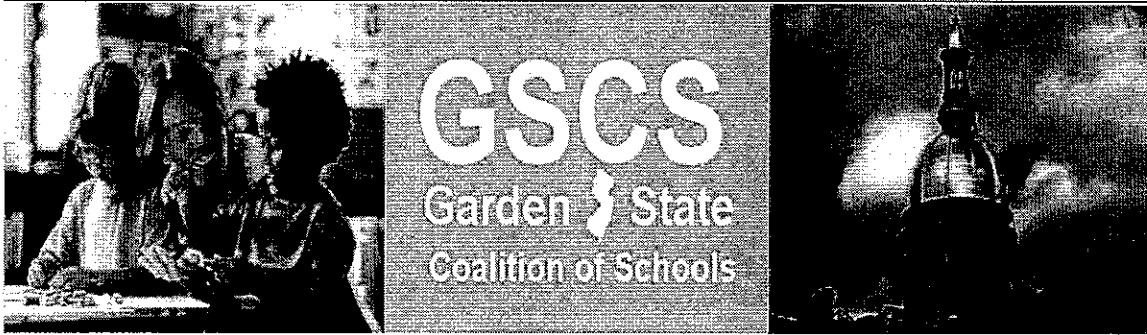
On its website, SPAN keeps a list of known SEPAGs by county. They also have a list of independent special education parent groups. The one I started, and has since been disbanded, is still listed. Just a cursory look at my county, Bergen, the majority of SEPAGs have an administrator or someone from the Child Study Team listed as the main contact. Some listings even include a link to the local district's website. In my local K-8, the last update of the SEPAG is from the 2015-16 school year. My local regional high school lists the Director of Special Education as the main contact. The SEPAG there consists of an annual meeting to hear someone speak on a random topic.

As a parent advocate, I have to wonder why NJDOE has not been more interested in insisting districts be compliant with this law. SPAN has a mandate to help them help districts and parents start SEPAGs. We know that students do better in schools where there is open and honest communication and engagement with parents.

As a matter of policy, it may be time to take a look at the one-sentence that was meant to give parents a framework to advise local boards of education on their practices that work or don't work. We seem to have had limited success with such a broad and open mandate.

As always, thank you to this Committee for continuing to bring important topics to light. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Julie Borst
Executive Director
Save Our Schools NJ Community Organizing



Quality Public Education for All New Jersey Students

160 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

gscschools@gmail.com

609-394-2828 (office) 732- 618 5755 (cell)

www.gscschools.org

**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
HEARING ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS
OCTOBER 8, 2019**

Thank you Senator Rice, Assemblywoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee for the opportunity to submit this testimony on the important topic of parental involvement in schools.

Successful schools and school districts stand on a firm foundation of parental involvement. From the time a child enters pre-K or kindergarten, the involved parent forms a partnership with the school, building relationships with teachers and administrators, attending school functions when possible, and reading school communications. That parent also contributes feedback and constructive criticism when necessary. Building relationships through involvement takes an investment of time and effort, but that investment pays off handsomely. Involved parents celebrate when the school and district succeed and help sustain schools in hard times.

Positive involvement is an integral part of a healthy school climate. It raises individual and collective student achievement and strengthens the school community as a whole.

Enlightened school leaders welcome parent participation and listen to parent voices.

But there are times when parental involvement can have the opposite effect, increasing stress on students and staff. This happens most often when parents live vicariously through their children, “hovering” over them, micro-managing their school experiences, and taking up the school staff’s time and energy with a persistent stream of highly specific demands, requirements, and criticism. This kind of negative involvement burdens everyone, including the children it is intended to help.

There are times when each of us has to advocate with school staff for his or her own child, and some children face more bumps in the educational road than others. Navigating those occasional bumps, whether they are learning or discipline-related, is not the same as “helicopter parenting.”

Parents who practice positive involvement approach school issues constructively, offering solutions, rather than making demands. They do not fixate exclusively on their own children, but focus on improving school communities.

Anyone involved with education knows that students and those who care for them every day face higher levels of stress than ever before. This stress shows in increased anxiety, anger and depression among students. It causes burn-out among school staff and a decline in school climate. Parents who bring anger and controlling behavior into schools contribute to the problem of school-related stress, not the solution.

Fortunately negative involvement is the exception, not the rule. Most parents want the best outcomes—for their own students and the schools that they attend. Even in these security

conscious times, school officials must make sure that their doors and their hearts are open to parental involvement. It is the lifeblood of school communities.

ADDITIONAL APPENDIX MATERIALS
SUBMITTED TO THE
JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
for the
October 8, 2019 Meeting

Submitted by Cathy Lindenbaum, Robert Acerra, Lynette Howard, and Rose Acerra, New Jersey Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA):

The Center for Family Engagement, “Parental Involvement: Informing, Teaching and Learning,” © 2019 PTA.