

The Parent-Involvement Disconnect Revisited

On this page about 18 months ago, in “Do You Have a Parent Involvement Disconnect?” I wrote about the startling differences revealed by a Parent Institute national survey comparing what educators and parents thought parents should do at home to help their children learn. I asked readers to consider whether a similar parent-involvement disconnect might exist at their schools.

The survey asked both parents and education leaders to select from a list of 25 options the most important things parents can do at home to help their children do better in school. The options included a variety of important home activities. Here are some of the most significant disparities we found between educators’ priorities and those of the responding parents:

Survey Option	Educator Rank	Parent Rank
Read to your child every day and have your child read to you.	1	15
Employ firm, fair, and consistent discipline at home.	4	11
Talk about school every day and make sure your child knows you think school is important.	6	14
Make sure your child is required to live with the consequences of his or her actions.	9	17
Talk to your child and pay attention to what your child says to you.	10	1
Help your child develop homework routines.	13	2

How, I wondered, could parents and educators have such different opinions about the importance of reading at home with children? Or discipline? Or homework? I wasn’t alone in my concern. Hundreds of readers requested the free survey to use at their schools. Some found they were in sync with parents; others weren’t even close.

Does Your School Have a Parent-Involvement Disconnect?

If you think your parents may not share the priorities of you and your staff, now is a good time to find out—and to do



something about it. Here are a several suggestions:

- First, make sure that you and your staff agree on three to five priorities you believe are the *very most important* things parents should do with their children at home. Your school must speak with one voice and every staff member should be involved in deciding your school’s priorities for parents. Make it an agenda item for your staff meeting and consider

asking your entire staff to take our free survey (*see box*). Use survey results to identify priorities.

- Once you have your list of priorities, be sure your parents know about them. Promote them at every opportunity.

- Develop with your staff “talking points” like these that everyone can emphasize in communicating with parents:

Priority	Talking Points
Reading to and with children at home	“Reading is the foundation for learning at school.” “Reading is a skill that gets better with practice.” “Parents are the most important reading models for children.”
Firm, fair, and consistent discipline	“The key to good discipline is to be firm, fair and consistent.” “Pick your discipline style, then stick with it.”
Talking with children about school	“Talking with children about school every day sends the message that you think school is very important.”
Children taking responsibility for their actions	“When we allow children to avoid responsibility for their actions, we deny them the opportunity to learn important lessons for success in school, and in life.”

Decades of research and years of experience prove the importance of parent involvement in helping children learn. Today’s pressure on schools to produce adequate yearly progress makes it more important than ever to “be on the same page” and work as a team. Now is the time to act. ■

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like a free copy of our newly updated survey instrument, *Most Important Things Parents Can Do at Home to Help Their Children Do Better in School*, e-mail your request to jhw@parent-institute.com. Put “New Free Survey” on the subject line.

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