

For immediate release

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Four Myths of Parent Involvement in Schools

August 4, 2003—Austin, Texas—Not all parent involvement activities are created equal. The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has combed through research to learn how parents can help improve their children’s achievement. Based on this research, SEDL responds to four misconceptions of parent involvement in schools. “The Center focuses on finding and sharing research-based information people need to design initiatives and take action to make connections among schools, families, and communities,” says Catherine Jordan, director of the Center.

Myth #1: As a parent, the best way to get involved in my child’s education is by joining the local parents’ organization.

Parents who are dues-paying members of their children’s school PTA are supporting the oldest and largest child advocacy organization in the United States. But being a member alone doesn’t ensure effective involvement in a child’s learning. To support achievement, research suggests the most effective parental involvement focuses on learning activities—reading to children, letting them figure prices at the grocery store or setting aside time and space to do homework and projects. There are benefits in joining an organization like the PTA or PTO, such as the opportunity to share experiences and information with other parents and access to PTA resources. Just the same, parents can provide the support needed at home for their children to be successful in school without joining a local parent organization.

Myth #2: The teacher is the sole expert in educating a child, so a parent should never question a teacher or staff on school-related issues.

Teachers and parents or family caregivers play different roles in a child’s education. And a good relationship between a teacher and a parent, based on mutual respect and trust, benefits students. At times, parents may need to ask a teacher or school staff member for clarification about a specific issue or information. Parents should contact their children’s teachers or other school staff when they have questions about their children’s education. Most school staff

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members begin to see parents as partners when they know they will ask questions when information is unclear.

Myth #3: The influence of parent involvement on school achievement depends on the parents' income, level of education, and employment status.

A large body of research confirms that family involvement in children's school experiences has a positive effect on children's attitudes toward achievement in school, regardless of how much money parents have or how many years of school they completed. More important is the parents' attitude toward learning. Working parents may not have much time to be involved at their children's schools, but they can show how much they value education and take an active interest in what their children are learning.

Myth #4: The key actors in parent involvement are the teacher, parents or family, and the student.

Meaningful and successful parent involvement is not limited to partnerships between parents and teachers. Parents and family caregivers should think of the following educators and decision makers as participants in their children's educations—teachers, the principal, the school board, the superintendent, and public officials. Parents can influence school board members and public officials by participating in meetings, voting, and engaging in discussions of education matters and child advocacy issues.

SEDL is an Austin-based nonprofit corporation that operates research, development, and dissemination programs focused on improving school performance; strengthening reading, language, mathematics, and science education; integrating technology into teaching and learning; involving family and community in student learning; connecting disability research to practice; and informing policy development through research.