

Family, School, and Community Connections Symposium:
New Directions for Research, Practice, and Evaluation
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Effective Family and Community Connections with School Programs: Challenges at the Middle and High School, Opening the Next Level of Involvement

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Arnold Fege of the Public Education Network and Kris Kaiser Olson of Parents for Public Schools provide participants with unique perspectives on the challenges schools face in involving parents and the community at the secondary education levels. As students grow older, contact between family and school declines, middle and high schools see a decrease in volunteerism, and parents tend to experience fewer involvement opportunities. From NCLB and Head Start to 21st Century Schools and Drop Out Prevention programs, and from parental advocacy and transition to shared decision-making and the constructive engagement of parents, Fege and Olson offer a brief overview of the major federal policies on parent involvement and discuss six major elements of involvement that middle and high schools need to consider as they take parent involvement to the different level. These six elements include: 1) School district/school commitment & leadership; 2) Transition from elementary to middle and high school; 3) Effective communications; 4) Shared decision-making; 5) Relationship and trust building; and 6) Staff expertise. Fege and Olson's presentation also focuses on the kinds of barriers to involvement on which schools should focus their attention, including the lack of connection made between involvement and achievement, differing teacher/parent expectations, lack of principal/teacher expertise and a non-welcoming school climate. Contact between family and school declines: in number and in the positive nature of the contacts drops dramatically at transition to middle grades. Volunteerism drops. Fewer involvement opportunities. More of a "hands-off" attitude from school. More focus on subject matter. Increased bureaucracy.