

Family-School-Community Engagement: Building a Growth Mindset

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Abstract : Family-school-community engagement enhances family-school-community well-being, collective confidence, and school climate. While it is often referred to as a positive thing in the literature for families, schools, and communities, it does not come without its struggles. While there are numerous things families, schools, and communities do each and every day to enhance engagement, it is often difficult to find our way to true belonging and engagement. Working our way surface level barriers is easy; we can provide childcare, transportation, resources, and refreshments. We can even change the environment so that families will feel welcome, valued, and respected. But there are often mindsets and perspectives buried deep below the surface, most often grounded in societal, familial, and political norms, expectations, pressures, and narratives. This work requires ongoing energy, commitment, and engagement of all stakeholders, including families, schools, and communities. Each and every day, we need to take a reflective and introspective stance at what is said and done and how it supports the overall goal of family-school-community engagement. And whatever we must occur within a paradigm of care in addition to one of critical thinking and social justice. Families, and those working with families, must not simply accept all that is given, but should instead ask these types of questions: a) How, and by whom, are the current philosophies and practices of family-school engagement interrogated? b) How might digging below surface level meanings support understanding of what is being said and done? c) How can we move toward meaningful and authentic engagement that balances knowledge and power between family, school, district, community (local and global), and government? This type of work requires conscious attention and intentional decision-making at all levels bringing us one step closer to authentic and meaningful partnerships. Strategies useful to building a growth mindset include: a) interrogating and exploring consistencies and inconsistencies by looking at what is done and what is not done through multiple perspectives; b) recognizing that enhancing family-engagement and changing mindsets take place at the micro-level (e.g., family and school), but also require active engagement and awareness at the macro-level (e.g., community agencies, district school boards, government); c) taking action as an advocate or activist. Negative narratives about families, schools, and communities should not be maintained, but instead critical and courageous conversations in and out of school should be initiated and sustained; and d) maintaining consistency, simplicity, and steady progress. All involved in engagement need to be aware of the struggles, but keep them in check with the many successes. Change may not be observed on a day-to-day basis or even immediately, but stepping back and looking from the outside in, might change the view. Working toward a growth mindset will produce better results than a fixed mindset, and this takes time.

Keywords : family engagement, family-school-community engagement, parent engagement, parent involvement

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