

# Strengthening Parent-Teacher Partnerships

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## Abstract

The main purpose of my action research project was to begin to create what my school has been lacking around parent teacher partnership since I began teaching there 13 years ago. With my school, Cedar Heights, shifting to a middle school structure this school year, I saw it as a great opportunity to use my role as a teacher leader to create a solid system for parent/teacher partnership, one that includes both parent and teacher input. There were three areas of focus in my study; teacher professional knowledge in their work with parents, parent involvement which included volunteering in the classroom, and the creation of a school-wide structure that can be continued in the future. Data for my study was collected through pre- and post surveys, exit slips and informal data. My findings are that teachers showed a willingness to increase their understanding of and use of parent involvement, parent involvement must encompass a wide range of strategies in order to get an equal representation of a diverse population and there are vital components such as shared understanding of parent-teacher partnership and administration support of a school wide system that allow for positive teacher-parent partnerships. My study was just the start of the system of structure that needs to be put in place for our school to get parent-teacher partnership where it needs to be and my next steps as a teacher leader includes continuing to build awareness around the importance of parent-teacher partnerships and figuring out how to build in support for teachers which includes professional development and coaching around parent involvement.

## Relevance

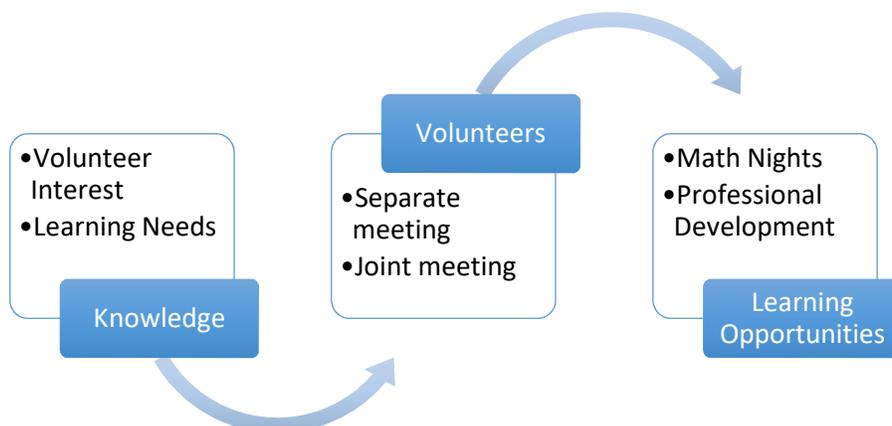
Teachers and parents must be partners in education. There is an abundance of evidence that shows why this type of partnership is beneficial for all students, including better grades, higher scores on standardized tests, increased motivation, more regular attendance, improved behavior, and positive attitude towards homework and school in general (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2016). It is important to note that parent-teacher partnership is seen as a critical factor in a student's education at all grade levels (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2005). Although this is true, what is concerning is that research by Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems also shows that this partnership declines substantially as children move from elementary to a secondary school setting.

## Research Questions

*RQ1:* In what ways can I use my role as a teacher leader to impact teachers' confidence around enhancing parent involvement through parent-teacher partnerships?

*RQ2:* In what ways can I use my role as teacher leader to promote parent involvement and impact parents' ability to support their students academically?

*RQ3:* In what ways can our building create and sustain a system of structures and supports to allow for parent involvement, specifically through positive parent-teacher partnerships?



## Methods

- **Surveys**
  - Parent Survey (pre and post)
  - Teacher Survey – Parent Involvement (pre and post)
  - Teacher Professional Development
  - Parent Volunteer Information
  - Teacher Volunteer Information
- **Exit Slips**
- **Informal observations**

## Findings

RQ1: Teachers show a willingness to increase their understanding of and use of parent involvement.

- The skills that Cedar Heights' teachers have for working with parents both in terms of partnership and involvement varies.
- Anxiety around having parent volunteers, and not having a clear sense of what "counts" as volunteering, impacts teacher's commitment.
- Professional development around effective teacher-parent partnerships is seen as important to teachers, but not a top priority given so many other pressing needs.

RQ2: Parent involvement must encompass a wide range of strategies in order to get an equal representation of a diverse population.

- Parent involvement is not a "one-time deal" but instead a continuous recruitment process.
- To meet the needs of parents there needs to be multiple avenues through which they can become involved.
- Parents that volunteer in the classroom have common characteristics which raises equity issues.
- The reasons parents get involved vary but are consistent with our school's beliefs and research.

RQ3: There are vital components of a school wide system that allows positive teacher-parent partnerships.

- Parents and teachers need to have a shared understanding of what this partnership looks like.
- Parents and teachers must know how the system of parent-teacher partnerships works, which includes who to communicate with when it comes to parent involvement.
- The system will not work without commitment and support from administrators.

## Implications

### **Next steps for my school:**

- Start the process of recruiting parent volunteers in the classroom before school even starts.
- Continue to figure out different ways for parents to be involved – particularly, our low socio-economic families.
- Continuing the use of classified support as a parent volunteer coordinator.

### **Next steps as a teacher leader:**

- Continue to raise awareness around the importance of parent involvement in my school.
- Find ways to fit in professional development around parent involvement.

## References

Bogenschneider, K., & Johnson, C. (2016). Family involvement in education: How important is it? What can legislators do? Retrieved from <http://www.cybermanual.com/family-involvement-in-education-how-important-is-it-what-can-legislators-do-pdf.html?page=7>

Gonzalez-DeHass, A.R. & Willems, P.P. (2005). Examining the underutilization of parent involvement in the schools. *The School Community Journal*. 1-16. Retrieved from <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss03/Gonzalez-DeHass%20&%20Willems.pdf>