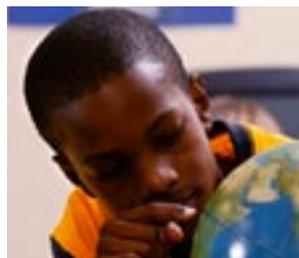
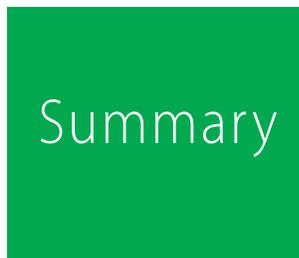




Parent involvement strategies in urban middle and high schools in the Northeast and Islands Region



Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education



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Summary

April 2009

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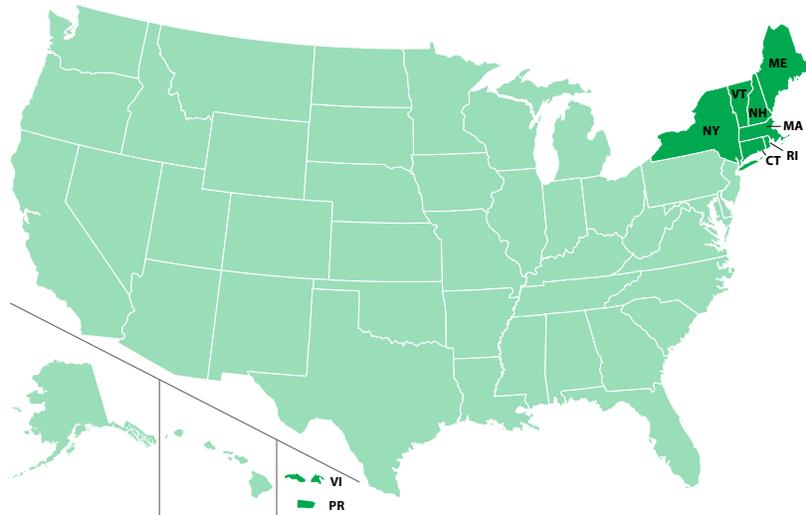
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This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Parent involvement strategies in urban middle and high schools in the Northeast and Islands Region

This report summarizes efforts to develop and pilot test a protocol for collecting information about parent involvement policies, practices, and programs being implemented at the middle and high school levels. The protocol can be used to expand documentation of strategies selected, adapted, and sustained in future years.

Education leaders in the Northeast and Islands Region have indicated the need to identify strategies for engaging parents of adolescents in their child's education and in school governance and improvement. To address this need, this project developed and piloted a protocol that asks the following questions:

- Which strategies are middle and high schools using to engage parents and sustain their involvement, which parent involvement goals do these strategies target, and how are local efforts monitored?
- Which parent involvement strategies have been evaluated, and what evidence is there of their effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes for schools, students, and parents?
- Are district strategies consistent with the requirements and guidance of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and with research that “meets the highest professional

and technical standards” (U.S. Department of Education 2002)?

The study reviewed the literature on parent involvement practices and programs to inform development of a protocol for collecting and organizing data on practices and programs. The review included studies that met screening criteria for the timeframe (1997–2008), intervention strategy (parent involvement policies, practices, and programs), sample (parents of students in grades 6–12), and outcome. Practices and programs encompassed efforts to encourage parent involvement with students at home and school. Relevant outcomes included parent involvement, with or without linkages to student outcomes.

The search yielded information on a diverse set of discrete practices and a small number of well articulated programs, but there had been little rigorous evaluation of these practices and programs. Evidence was also lacking on whether they increase parent engagement or contribute directly to intended student outcomes, such as improved academic performance, graduation, or enrollment in postsecondary education.

A typology of parent involvement practices was created based on the literature review. Information on practices was categorized as either general information exchange or

information exchange on individual student performance, special events, volunteer opportunities, parent education, professional development for faculty and staff, home-school coordination and outreach to traditionally hard to reach parents, or parent resource centers. Programs were summarized by their goals, populations reached, content, outcomes, and evidence of effectiveness.

Although some of the programs have been evaluated and some have been widely disseminated, evidence is insufficient to make causal statements about their effectiveness. And no evaluation study of the programs meets the evidence standards for experimental or quasi-experimental study design detailed in *What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards for Reviewing Studies* (U.S. Department of Education 2008).

The literature review provided a context for understanding the information that was then collected from nine urban districts in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York. The project focused on districts where engagement is especially challenging—districts that serve large proportions of racial/ethnic minority families and families living in poverty. Each Northeast and Islands state education commissioner’s office selected one district in the state; a second district in each state was selected at random. A ninth district was selected to round out the diversity of populations served. Interviews on parental involvement policies were conducted with an average of five to six informants from state education agencies, selected districts, and schools. Data from interviews were supplemented with information from public records, including searches of state, district, and school web sites.

The nine pilot districts implemented multiple practices that were supported by state and district policies and were consistent with NCLB and Title I provisions. In general, these practices were not organized into formal programs or articulated in ways that would support rigorous evaluation and identification of “what works.”

Across the pilot districts only a handful of identified programs had at least one of the following characteristics:

- Parent involvement in children’s education and academic achievement as a primary goal.
- Articulated objectives, with specific activities to meet these objectives.
- Sufficient descriptions of activities to support replication.
- Ongoing and coordinated implementation of one or more strategies.

Further, the programs did not necessarily target parent populations that have been difficult to engage or whose children may be at higher academic risk (Appleseed 2006; Vaden-Kiernan and McManus 2005).

Evidence from the evaluation of parent involvement practices and programs is minimal. Beyond fulfilling requirements for monitoring and reporting on program parents, few of the programs in the pilot districts had conducted quasi-experimental or experimental studies or had such studies under way. The evidence on what works is limited, and the evaluations that do exist are frequently

constrained by weak designs (Desforges 2003; Jeynes 2007; Mattingly et al. 2002). This reflects, in part, the lack of resources that have been devoted to the evaluation of practices or programs beyond elementary school and the cost of field trials.

The findings from the literature review and pilot study highlight the need for:

- Fully articulated programs that can be rigorously evaluated to determine what works.
- Systematic data collection on parent involvement programs to promote shared learning and to identify policies, practices,

and programs that may merit further evaluation.

- Rigorous study designs that overcome the limitations of existing evaluations of parent involvement strategies and provide evidence of what works in middle and high schools. Such studies enable schools to target their resources to programs that promote student academic success and narrow the achievement gap in districts that serve large proportions of students from low-income households, racial/ethnic minority students, and students from recent immigrant families.

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