

Family involvement: What does the research say?

HGSE's Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)

Cumulative evidence from several decades of research points to several benefits of family involvement for children's learning, including helping children get ready to enter school, promoting their school success, and preparing youth for college. Read the first in a series of research briefs examining family involvement across the developmental continuum, focused on family involvement in early childhood.

Summary

Family involvement can help children get ready to enter school. In the early childhood years, family involvement is clearly related to children's literacy outcomes. For example, one study revealed that children whose parents read to them at home recognize letters of the alphabet sooner than those whose parents do not, and children whose parents teach them at home recognize letters of the alphabet sooner than those whose parents do not.

Family involvement can promote elementary school children's success. For school-age children, family involvement is also important. Children in grades K–3 whose parents participate in school activities tend to have high-quality work habits and task orientation compared to children whose parents do not participate. Moreover, parents who provide support with homework have children who tend to perform better in the classroom.

Family involvement can help prepare youth for college. Family involvement matters in middle and high school—and beyond. Adolescents whose parents monitor their academic and social activities have lower rates of delinquency and higher rates of social competence and academic growth. In addition, youth whose parents are familiar with college preparation requirements and are engaged in the application process are most likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

Family involvement can benefit all children, especially those less likely to succeed in school. Family involvement has been shown to benefit children from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds. For example, low-income African American children whose families maintained high rates of parent participation in elementary school are more likely to complete high school. Latino youth who are academically high achieving have parents who provide encouragement and emphasize the value of education as a way out of poverty.

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