



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: A KEY STRATEGY AT EARL BOYLES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Why did Earl Boyles choose to develop a family engagement strategy?

A large body of research has demonstrated the critical link between involved parents and successful children. This research led Principal Guynes to conclude that to effectively support the achievement of all students, Earl Boyles needed to build real and strong relationships with families. Thus began the process of creating a school culture that valued families as equal partners in student success, as well as building systems to effectively involve families in school governance and student learning.

How did meaningful family engagement begin at Earl Boyles and how can I get started?

The first step is to work on creating a welcoming environment for families. To do so, it is essential to invite families into a space where they can safely express their interests and concerns, and then respond to these in a timely and sensitive manner. At Earl Boyles, this meant partnering with MFS-SUN to host culturally-specific parent gatherings. The hopes and needs that emerged from these conversations were then addressed by the school leadership. For example, when Spanish-speaking parents expressed a desire to volunteer in the school but an inability to complete the volunteer application in English, Principal Guynes worked with the school district to translate the application. Such examples of inviting and responsive leadership gradually created a strong sense among families that they were welcome and respected as a fundamental part of the school environment.

What have been the results?

With the help of multiple community partners, Earl Boyles is demonstrating how a public school can harness the full potential of families in support of the academic and life success of children, starting at birth. In a spring 2013 survey of parents, for example, 91 percent of parents described the school as a welcoming place. Overall student attendance at Earl Boyles was the best of any elementary school in the district, with preschool attendance reaching 97 percent. Preschool parents in particular reported high levels of daily reading to their children and involvement in school activities, as well as a strong interest in becoming parent leaders. Parents United, the Earl Boyles parent group, is a space where parents interested in developing their leadership capacity can do so within the school.

Partnerships

One of the strongest lessons learned in the process of engaging families at Earl Boyles has been the importance of partnerships. Schools that successfully engage families are schools that partner effectively with community members, agencies, and other organizations. The following are the crucial partners in the family engagement strategy at Earl Boyles:

- David Douglas School District
- Multnomah County SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods)
- Metropolitan Family Service (MFS)
- Mt. Hood Community College (Parents as Teachers, Head Start, Child Care Resource and Referral)
- Multnomah Early Childhood Program (MECP)
- Children's Institute
- Oregon Food Bank

Family Engagement Resources:

- Harvard Family Research Project (hfrp.org/family-involvement)
- National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family)
- Flamboyant Foundation (<http://flamboyantfoundation.org/>)

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