



Harvard Family Research Project
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Family Involvement Interventions: Shining the Spotlight on Evaluation

American Educational Research Association
April 10, 2007

On April 10, 2007, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) organized a panel symposium that featured discussion regarding the evaluation of family involvement interventions.

This symposium built on events organized by HFRP at two prior AERA meetings. In 2005, a panel of experts discussed the current state and future direction of research and evaluation of family involvement in education, while a follow-up symposium in 2006 focused on several of those identified priorities. Specifically, the 2006 symposium featured emerging family education involvement research studies that used cutting edge methodologies and examined impact on student academic achievement.¹

The 2007 symposium was held at the AERA meeting in Chicago and organized by HFRP. Heather Weiss chaired the session. Panelists included Pat Davenport (FAST), Chad Nye (University of Central Florida), Dana Petersen (SRI), Margaret Caspe (HFRP), and James Rodriguez (San Diego State University).

Below are key findings for the family involvement evaluation field that emerged from two main questions presented to the group.

What new lessons have we learned in recent years about the effectiveness of family involvement interventions? What best practices can we distill from the evaluation knowledge base?

- Parent involvement outside of school produces substantial dividends from relatively small resource investments; positive effects on student achievement can be achieved in 6–28 weeks.
- Family involvement programs can improve child behavior and academic outcomes. Best practices demonstrate respect for families, address institutional racism, and develop parent leadership.
- Family-strengthening interventions impact both parenting processes and child outcomes. Successful programs promote parent–child bonding, focus on recruitment, and prepare staff to work with families.
- Programs that tailor strategies to specific qualities of parents are likely to be successful as are interventions that target the attitudes and behaviors of school staff.
- Family involvement programs must conceptualize parental involvement constructs and outcomes that are contextually and culturally sensitive, appropriate, and relevant.

¹ Information on the 2005 and 2006 symposia is available at:
www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/conference/

How can we use the current knowledge base to inform policy and practice? Going forward, on what should family involvement evaluations focus in order to better inform future federal investments?

- Fund evaluations that include allocations for both formative and summative components.
- Train school professionals in evidence-based practices.
- Establish replication studies and use parent feedback and data to improve processes.
- Invest in large-scale experimental evaluations of developmental and comprehensive approaches to family involvement.
- Strengthen national clearinghouses that draw attention to effective family involvement processes.
- Develop cost-effectiveness analyses of family involvement.
- Invest in evaluations that uncover the effectiveness of parent involvement in diverse communities.

We at HFRP are eager to hear your ideas and suggestions on these ideas—including promising trends in research, evaluation, practice, and policies for family involvement; insights about strengths and innovation in the field today; recommendations and priorities for evaluation and research moving forward; examples of innovative or well-designed family involvement evaluations and cutting-edge family involvement work at the state and district level.

Please email us at fine@gse.harvard.edu to share your feedback and to find out about future opportunities for discussion of this topic.