



REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Family and Community Engagement, Rural
September 2018

Question:

What are successful strategies for family engagement in rural schools?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about family engagement in rural schools. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on family engagement in rural schools. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Garcia, M. E., Frunzi, K., Dean, C. B., Flores, N., & Miller, K. B. (2016). *Toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. Part 1 retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569110>; Part 2 retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569111>; Part 3 retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569112>; Part 4 retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569113>. Full toolkit retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4509>

From the full toolkit abstract: “The Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and Community as Partners in Education provides resources for school staff to build relationships with families and community members and to support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students’ ongoing learning and development. Originally developed for the Guam Alliance for Family and Community Engagement in Education, the Toolkit is based on information from a variety of sources that address engagement in diverse communities. As a result, the Toolkit is applicable in a variety of contexts—and wherever school staff are interested in enhancing engagement of families and community members. The Toolkit is divided into four parts, and each includes a series of activities that can be used with family and community members, as well as other diverse cross-stakeholder groups. The Toolkit offers an integrated approach that helps school staff understand how their own cultural experiences and backgrounds influence their beliefs and assumptions about families and community members, and consequently influences their efforts to engage others in support of student learning. It also addresses how to build a cultural bridge through cross-cultural communication and how to use strategies that build trust between families, community members, and schools. In addition, the Toolkit helps school staff understand how to use two-way communication with families to gather and share data about student interests, progress, and outcomes.”

Ginsberg, M. B. (2012). Invaluable allies: Partnering with parents for student success.

Educational Horizons, 90(3), 16–22. Abstract retrieved from

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ986726>; full text available at

http://www.wafamilyengagement.org/system_files/library/92.pdf

From the abstract: “Parents—whether they’re biological parents, legal guardians, grandparents, or other family members who are primary caregivers—can be the most critical partners teachers have in their students’ academic journeys. How can teachers build effective relationships that help students to succeed? This article provides ideas and methods that can help teachers and parents work together as invaluable allies who nurture student motivation and learning. As an educator and a parent who has lived in rural, small town, suburban, and urban communities across the United States, [the author is] confident that in all communities, parents, primary caregivers, and educators are concerned and competent people who want to effectively help young people thrive.”

Lin, S., Isernhagen, J., Scherz, S., & Denner, P. R. (2014). Rural educator perceptions of parent involvement in public schools: Perspectives from three states. *Rural Educator*, 36(1), 40–56. Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Shu_Yuan_Lin2/publication/317007917_Rural_Educator_Perceptions_of_parental_Involvement_in_Public_Schools_Perspectives_from_Three_States/links/591e0c2c45851540595d9476/Rural-Educator-Perceptions-of-parental-Involvement-in-Public-Schools-Perspectives-from-Three-States.pdf

From the abstract: “Rural educators in three states were surveyed regarding their perceptions of parental involvement in their schools. Significant indicators impacting student success included the expectation of parents and their attitudes toward education.

Two strategies used to incorporate varying cultures and languages into the school community were creating a welcoming and open climate for parents and using parents' home languages to communicate key information. The greatest challenge to involvement in their children's education was parents' work schedules. Educators participating in this study rated their schools' level of success in engaging parents as somewhat successful."

Robinson, D. V., & Volpe, L. (2015). Navigating the parent involvement terrain—The engagement of high poverty parents in a rural school district. *Journal of Family Diversity in Education*, 1(4), 66–85. Retrieved from <http://www.familydiversityeducation.com/index.php/fdec/article/viewFile/64/64>

From the abstract: "This research explored parents' perceptions of engagement experiences in the school life of their children. This qualitative study included a multi-site exploration of parents at two elementary public schools in an Appalachian school district. Participants for this inquiry included 16 high poverty parents for the individual and focus group interviews. Parents were identified as high poverty based on their child's eligibility for free and reduced lunches under the U.S. National School Lunch Program. Interview protocols were designed to examine themes of school culture and climate, educational policy, and parental involvement. The research team collected interview transcripts from conversations with parents at the studied school sites. In examining data from the transcripts, several prominent themes emerged as findings. These findings included the fact that a) parents were motivated to be involved in schools; b) parents grappled with constraints limiting their time to be engaged in schools; and c) issues emerged suggesting that there were attitudes of in-group marginalization amongst parents in the schools. Recommendations are provided for educational leaders, teachers, and other school district personnel."

Semke, C. A., & Sheridan, S. M. (2012). Family-school connections in rural educational settings: A systematic review of the empirical literature. *School Community Journal*, 22(1), 21–47. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ974684>

From the abstract: "Parental participation and cooperation in children's educational experiences is positively related to important student outcomes. It is becoming increasingly evident that context is a significant factor in understanding academic achievement, and the setting in which a child, family, and school is situated is among the salient contexts influencing performance. Although the family-school partnership research literature has increased over recent decades, it has been conducted primarily in urban and suburban settings. The goals of this paper are to (a) review the empirical literature on family involvement and family-school partnerships in rural schools, (b) provide a synthesis of the state of the science, and (c) point to a research agenda in this area. Eighteen studies were identified that met the criteria for this review. A critique of the research methods and analytical approaches is provided, along with a call for more research on the topic of family-school partnerships in rural settings, including rigorous and systematic studies pertaining to the effects of family-school involvement and partnerships in rural schools."

Sheridan, S. M., Holmes, S. R., Coutts, M. J., Smith, T. E., Kunz, G. M., & Witte, A. L. (2013). *CBC in rural schools: Preliminary results of a randomized trial (CYFS Working Paper 2013-1)*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED565481>

From the abstract: “Children who exhibit disruptive behavior often do so across multiple settings (e.g., home and school) and are vulnerable to many negative outcomes, including low achievement scores and academic grades, high school dropout, and increased school suspensions. Family-school partnership interventions, which are grounded in ecological theory, are highly correlated with many positive outcomes for students, families, and teachers. Experimental studies with families as collaborators have been found to improve students’ behavioral functioning and decrease disruptive behaviors. There is a lack of empirical research on family-school connections in rural settings, hindering the ability to understand the impact of family-school partnerships on rural schools, families, and students. Rural parents interact with their children and teachers regarding school less often than parents in other geographic areas. Conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC) may address barriers and create meaningful partnerships between rural parents and teachers. CBC is a structured indirect form of support in which teachers and parents work together to promote adaptive behaviors and decrease disruptive behaviors. The following questions were researched for this report: (1) What are the preliminary effects of CBC in rural communities on behavioral and social-emotional outcomes of students with or at risk of developing behavioral disorders?; and (2) What are the preliminary effects of CBC in rural communities on parent and teacher practices, relationships, engagement, and beliefs about family-school partnerships? Ninety kindergarten through 3rd grade students and their parents (n = 90) and teachers (n = 54) from 20 schools in Midwestern rural areas participated in this research. Participating students were identified by teachers as having disruptive behavior concerns. Within each CBC-assigned classroom, a consultant met with a teacher and parents of 1 to 3 students for CBC meetings via a 4-stage process operationalized by semi-structured conjoint interviews. Results suggest promising effects of CBC for teachers, parents, and students in rural settings.”

Witte, A. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2011). *Family engagement in rural schools (R²Ed Working Paper No. 2011-2)*. Lincoln, NE: National Center for Research on Rural Education. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED540271>

From the abstract: “The importance of family-school partnerships for student success is unequivocal. Given the limited resources evident in many rural communities, family-school partnerships can be especially beneficial for students in rural schools. Decades of research has documented the positive effects of parent participation in children’s academic endeavors for diverse populations (for reviews see Fan & Chen, 2001; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005) and research investigating family-school partnerships specifically in rural communities yields similar results. For example, in a study of high-performing, high-needs rural schools, supportive relationships with families were among the most important factors for rural school success (Barley & Beesley, 2007). This paper presents a list of family-school

partnership action principles for state education agencies, local education agencies, and schools.”

Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult

Ask A REL Mid-Atlantic at Mathematica Policy Research. (2018). *What does recent research and/or studies on strategies for family engagement say?* Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/askarel_30.asp

Ask A REL West at WestEd. (2015). *Research on parent liaisons*. Retrieved from https://relwest.wested.org/system/documents/pdfs/434/original/REL_West_Memo_Parent_Liaisons_09_2015.pdf?1442858633

Additional Organizations to Consult

Family Engagement: Resource Roundup, Edutopia: <https://www.edutopia.org/home-school-connections-resources>

From the website: “Explore tips, strategies, and resources to help improve the connection from home to school and expand parent involvement.”

The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, SEDL: <https://www.sedl.org/connections/>

From the website: “The Center links people with research-based information and resources that they can use to effectively connect schools, families, and communities. It emphasizes connections that directly impact student achievement in reading and mathematics, as well as connections that contribute to the students’ overall success in school and in life. The Center reviewed emerging findings and research to develop an online database, annual conferences and annual reports to help advance procedural knowledge and to link research findings to practice.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- (Parent* OR “parent engagement” OR “parent-school partnership” OR “parent involvement”) AND school* AND rural AND (strateg* OR program OR event OR method OR approach)
- (Family OR “family engagement” OR “family-school partnership” OR “family involvement”) AND school* AND rural AND (strateg* OR program OR event OR method OR approach)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last ten years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Search priorities of reference sources: Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on September 17, 2018. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.