



Harvard Family Research Project  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

## Research Brief

# Family Involvement Makes a Difference in School Success

## Family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age.

The evidence is clear: Family involvement helps children get ready to enter school, promotes their school success, and prepares youth for college. This Research Brief presents findings from HFRP's ongoing, in-depth review of research and evaluated programs that link family involvement in children's education to student outcomes. The research sources for this brief as well as other related resources can be found at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/policy](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/policy).

## Family involvement helps children get ready to enter school.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- Children whose parents read to them at home recognize letters of the alphabet and write their names sooner than those whose parents do not.
- Children whose parents teach them how to write words are able to identify letters and connect them to speech sounds.
- Children whose mothers use complex sentences in their everyday conversations achieve high scores on literacy-related tasks in kindergarten.

### EVALUATED PROGRAM:

#### **Raising a Reader**

Raising a Reader is a program that provides books for children from birth through age 5 and encourages parents to read to their children every day. When parents establish a reading routine with their children, they provide more family bonding time and an opportunity for their children's vocabulary and preliteracy skills to grow. Six independent evaluations show that Raising a Reader improves reading behavior and kindergarten readiness, especially for low-income, non-English speaking families. Begun in California, Raising a Reader has spread to 24 U.S. states and three countries.

## Family involvement promotes elementary school children's success.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- Children in grades K–3 whose parents participate in school activities have high quality work habits and task orientation.
- Children whose parents provide support with homework perform better in the classroom.
- Children whose parents explain educational tasks are more likely to participate in class, seek help from the teacher when needed, and monitor their own work.

### EVALUATED PROGRAM:

#### **Families and Schools Together (FAST)**

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a program designed to build relationships within families and between families and schools to address childhood problems such as school failure, violence, and delinquency. Five experimental studies found that the program made a positive impact on elementary students' health, social skills, behavior, and academic competence and on parents' parenting skills. Begun in Wisconsin, the FAST program is now implemented nationally in 45 U.S. states and internationally in five countries.

## Family involvement prepares youth for college.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- Adolescents whose parents monitor their academic and social activities have lower rates of delinquency and higher rates of social competence and academic growth.
- Youth whose parents are familiar with college preparation requirements and are engaged in the application process are most likely to graduate high school and attend college.
- Youth whose parents have high academic expectations and who offer consistent encouragement for college have positive student outcomes.

### EVALUATED PROGRAM:

#### Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)

PIQE's 9-week training course for parents has successfully reduced high school drop out rates and college participation for Latino youth living in California. Specifically, the children of parents who graduated from PIQE in one region of California achieved a high school graduation rate of 93%, compared to the national high school graduation rate for Latinos of 53%. Moreover, nearly 80% of the Latino youth whose parents participated in PIQE enrolled in college. This surpasses the national average for college enrollment in the general population of 62%. PIQE is expanding to Texas and Arizona.

## Family involvement supports all children, especially those less likely to succeed in school.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- Low-income African American children whose families maintained high rates of parent participation in elementary school are more likely to complete high school.
- Low-income African American children with mothers involved in their education showed more self-control in unruly and disorganized classrooms than children whose parents did not provide supportive relationships at home.
- Latino youth who are academically high achieving have parents who provide encouragement and emphasize the value of education as a way out of poverty.

### EVALUATED PROGRAM:

#### Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC)

The CPC program served low-income preschoolers through third graders and promoted parent involvement through home visits, classroom volunteer opportunities, workshops and courses, and parent-teacher meetings. Low-income children who participated in CPC were more prepared for kindergarten and less likely to be referred to special education. They also tested higher in eighth grade reading, were more likely to finish high school, and had lower rates of grade retention. Family involvement in the CPC program during the early years was associated with greater parent involvement in the elementary school years, which in turn was related with positive student outcomes in high school.

## About HFRP

The Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education delivers research evidence and information to a national audience of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Through the dissemination of research, HFRP has helped shape effective educational policies and practices for disadvantaged children and youth for over 20 years.

## Contact HFRP

HFRP is located at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, 3 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. Call us at (617) 495-9108, or visit us on the web at [www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org).

## The HFRP concept of Complementary Learning

HFRP is guided by our concept of *complementary learning*, based on the conviction that for children and youth to be successful from birth through adolescence, there must be an array of linked learning supports around them. See [www.complementarylearning.org](http://www.complementarylearning.org) for resources on two elements of complementary learning: the linkage between families and schools and the linkage between out-of-school time programs and schools.