



Harvard Family Research Project  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

## Research Findings on Family Engagement in Out-of-School Time Programs

Presented at the Community Schools National Forum  
March 11, 2005

**Many after school programs lack a family involvement component.** A review of 100 afterschool program evaluations found that only 27 mentioned family involvement. Furthermore, most of the programs interacted with families through a top-down, problem-based approach, not recognizing families' assets or creating a collaborative environment (James & Partee, 2003).

**After school programs face challenges in involving families.** Program coordinators of several 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers reported that parents' busy work schedules, linguistic differences, and lack of program funds inhibit family involvement (Weiss & Brigham, 2003).

**After school programs can use a variety of strategies to involve families.** Based on several program evaluations, after school programs' family involvement strategies include (a) communicating program mission, goals, and strategies, (b) employing staff to work with families, (c) providing services and activities to support families, (d) creating links between the program, schools, and families, and (e) including families in advisory and advocacy positions (Harris & Wimer, 2004; James & Partee, 2003).

**Programs with a designated family involvement staff member accomplish more in engaging families.** The study of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers found that programs with a designated family involvement staff member were more likely to encourage families' support in students' learning, offer services and classes to families, and have families contributing to program governance and leadership (Weiss & Brigham, 2003).

**Family involvement in after school programs leads to family involvement in schooling.** A collection of program evaluations finds that family involvement in after school programs is associated with improved parent-child relationships, greater involvement in school events and affairs, and increased family assistance with children's homework (Harris & Wimer, 2004).

**Family involvement adds value to after school programs.** Engaging families can contribute to improved program implementation. One evaluation of the Virtual Y program in New York City found that communicating with families is associated with improved program outcomes (Harris & Wimer, 2004).

**After school programs' family involvement efforts can be measured in several ways.** Performance measures can be categorized as measures of effort and measures of effect. Measures of effort evaluate program strategies and activities used to engage families. These measures may look at the types and frequency of family involvement activities, the rate of family participation, and how often program staff communicate with families. Measures of effect are the changes that result from family involvement strategies and activities. These measures include family participation in the child's education and school, improvement in the relationships between children and parents, program success in developing relationships with families, and program improvement influenced by family involvement (Caspe, Traub, & Little, 2002; Harris & Wimer, 2004).

## References

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## About Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)

Founded in 1983 by Dr. Heather Weiss, HFRP conducts research about programs and policies that serve children and families throughout the United States. By publishing and disseminating its research widely, HFRP plays a vital role in examining and encouraging programs and policies that enable families and communities to help children reach their potential.