



Connecting **HOME & SCHOOL**
Parent Guide



Proving the Power of Family Engagement



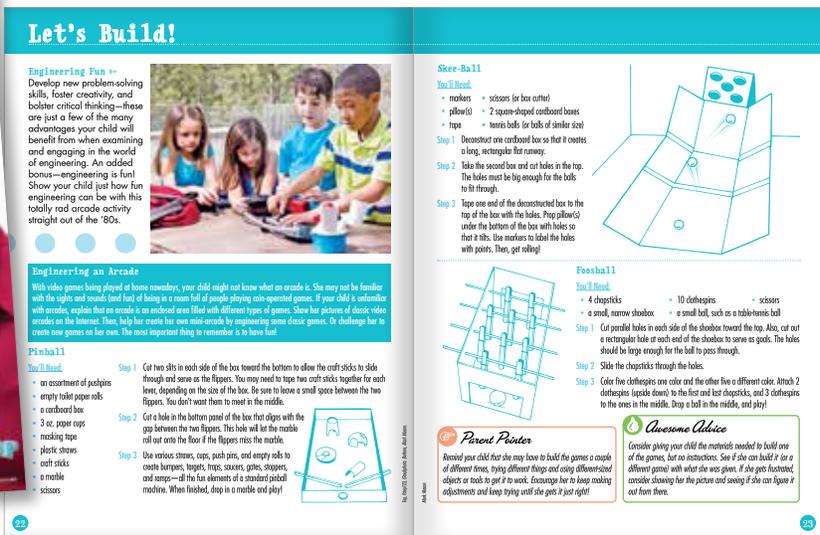
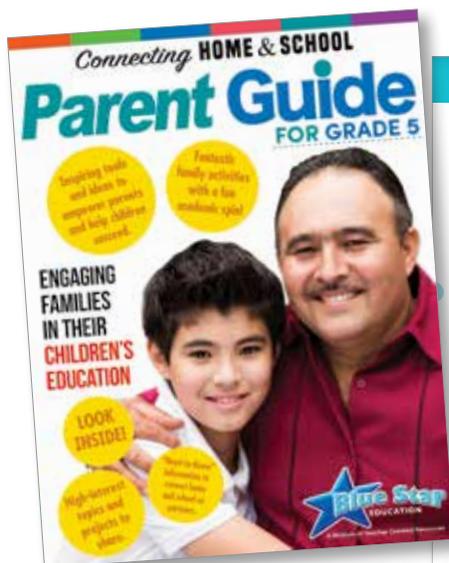
Introduction

Family engagement was originally defined by the National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) as a “shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and which families are committed to actively support their children’s learning and development” (National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement, 2010).

Parent engagement continues to be a buzzword today, albeit an often controversial one. It is an often-debated topic among parents, social scientists, and politicians (Jeynes, 2022). Tension frequently rises when students struggle academically and schools and families are pitted against each other. However, the ultimate goal of a strong home-school connection is simply ensuring that all students are given the chance to succeed in school with constructive and collaborative support from their families and their teachers. This holistic approach to learning is beneficial for everyone involved. It places students, teachers, families, and communities all on the same team.

Multiple studies prove that a solid school-family partnership is ideal for student success. Students earn higher grades, have positive attitudes toward school, and are more likely to enroll in college when their families are active participants in their education. Moreover, students from “diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when families and school staff join forces to bridge the gap between home and school cultures” (Henderson et al., 2007). According to research analyzed in 2022, “the most remarkable finding regarding the effects of the parental expectations component of parental involvement is its consistency across almost all variables. The results are consistent across age, race, gender, academic measure, and scholastic subject” (Jeynes, 2022). The data verifies that having engaged and supportive parents and families consistently correlates to student success. Nonetheless, many schools still struggle to create meaningful partnerships with parents and lack the tools to promote continued learning at home.

Blue Star Education’s award-winning *Connecting Home & School Parent Guides* are the perfect tools for building the bridge between school and home life. These 40-page, full-color guides are tailored to grade-level needs (PreK through high school) and are aligned to learning standards. They support a wide range of topics, including both academic and life skills, and contain practical advice and engaging activities that families can do together in the moments that make up everyday life. Also available in Spanish, these guides will empower families to feel confident in their ability to help their students achieve academic success.





The Evolution of Parent Engagement

Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. Long before children enter a classroom, families teach values, beliefs, academics, life lessons, and social skills. This role doesn't need to diminish once a child starts school. When family members are unified and engaged in learning, children arrive at school well prepared and ready to succeed (Stark, 2010). Ideally, this engagement begins in kindergarten and continues consistently through the high school years.

But what exactly does "parent engagement" mean? In the past, parents were encouraged to be *involved*. Volunteering in the classroom, participating in fundraisers, and even joining the PTA are all great ways for parents to engage with their child's school. While these things are wonderfully supportive of the school, they offer little in terms of raising a student's academic performance. Parents who attend a school's bake sale aren't any better equipped to assist their child's academic achievements than the parents who skipped the event because they couldn't get the time off work. In contrast, true parent engagement goes deeper. These parents are educational partners working with teachers to support classroom learning. They are co-educators and collaborators. They have access to academic standards and goals and understand how to reinforce those skills at home. "Moving beyond parent involvement to family engagement meant that the responsibility to 'involve' is not only placed on the parents. Schools must also actively reach out to children's primary caregivers, who may not necessarily be parents, to jointly support children's learning and development in ways most effective yet comfortable for families" (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

In 2014, the United States Department of Education presented the Dual-Capacity Framework, which stated that schools needed to build the skills and knowledge of both staff and families in order to create an effective partnership. It promoted a "cradle to career" relationship to move beyond typical one-time parent involvement events and into a process of support that grows and changes alongside the student (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). To support this vision, schools are encouraged to develop programs and policies that strengthen this school-home connection. Communication between schools and families should be regular, positive, and open. However, this is often easier said than done.

The Post-Pandemic Learning Environment

The need for a strong school-and-home partnership became glaringly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Practically overnight, parents found themselves navigating digital platforms and teaching academics without any formal training. With no alternatives during mandated distance learning, parents rose to the challenge, “often acting as secondary instructors and providing oversight of their child’s academic progress and wellbeing” (Proff et al., 2025). Parents had to instantly juggle all of their roles together in one space all at the same time. They “served as digital classroom managers who organized schedules, assisted with assignments/projects, and participated in online chat groups” (Budhrani, 2021). Parents repurposed living spaces to create makeshift classrooms and study areas.

Despite its disruptive impact, the pandemic became a turning point, prompting constructive shifts in how we approach education. One of the most significant was the opportunity it gave schools to find new and more meaningful ways to connect with families. With learning taking place at home, it became essential for parents to communicate with teachers. Furthermore, previous research had shown that parental involvement decreases as students enter middle school and high school (Hurley et al., 2017). However, this trend actually reversed during the pandemic. Parents of students across all age groups were actively engaged to meet the demands of online learning (Proff et al., 2025).

Technology emerged as a critical force in fostering collaboration between schools and families during the pandemic. With in-person meetings restricted, alternative methods of communication such as texting apps and video calls rapidly gained traction. Digital technology created a new avenue for collaboration. Some parents felt more involved and informed during distance learning than they did when the schools were open. As parents had more access and insight into their child’s curriculum during the pandemic, they were also able to see what was missing. They noticed an absence of physical education, arts, music, and life skills. Families began to supplement curriculum with “physical activities (e.g., morning exercise routines; online yoga, Zumba, Taekwondo videos on YouTube), arts and crafts, home chores (e.g., folding laundry; watering the plants), cooking or baking” (Budhrani, 2021).

The pandemic revealed that families are eager to support learning; they just need the right tools and clear communication to do so. Today, schools and educators are attempting to use what they learned during distance learning to create lasting strategies for parent engagement.





Best Practices for Parent Engagement

How do schools and families build a strong partnership? It starts with keeping parents informed. When parents understand what their child is learning at school, they are better equipped to support that learning at home. All parents want their children to succeed in school, and “all families, no matter what their income, race, education, language, or culture, can make an important contribution to their child’s learning” (Henderson et al., 2007). Data collected in focus groups about parent engagement offered additional insight into their struggle—parents *wanted* to be more engaged, but they did not know what they needed to do. Families need clear guidelines or steps other than simple requests such as “make sure your child reads every night and studies math facts.” Parents who participated in the focus group stated that they wanted more “school to home activities” full of tools and best practices (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

Most parents went to school at a time when classrooms had desks in neat rows and teachers taught by lecturing at the chalkboard. Modern classrooms look very different. In contrast, today’s classrooms have evolved to reflect more collaborative, student-centered approaches to learning. Students will often work in small groups, use technology, and participate in hands-on, inquiry-based activities. The curriculum has also evolved and is now carefully structured and implemented to align with state standards and promote higher-order thinking. With the rise of new pedagogical methods (such as “balanced literacy”) and modern educational terminology (such as “text-to-text connections”), there is often a disconnect between home and school. “How are parents supposed to know what these terms mean?” (Henderson et al., 2007). When parents are uninvolved, there is usually an underlying cause—they may feel unsupported or unwelcomed by school staff, they may have encountered technological or language barriers, they may lack confidence in their own academic abilities, or they don’t have means of transportation or the free time to attend school events or parent meetings.

Today, the ideal family-school partnership is characterized by shared power and mutual respect. In this ideal partnership, families are included and involved in meaningful decision-making processes, and their input is readily requested. School activities and events are intentionally and thoughtfully connected to what students are learning in the classroom, diverse family structures and cultures are acknowledged and celebrated, and school staff prioritize direct, personal communication with families. When families feel welcome and valued by their schools, they are more likely to be active and enthusiastic participants in their school communities. However, this engagement is undermined when schools unintentionally send the wrong message to parents. For example, by offering “parenting” classes, parents may perceive such efforts as implying that they are inadequate in their parenting practices. (Henderson et al., 2007). Rather than suggesting how families should parent, schools can build more significant connections by offering practical, considerate guidance that helps support a child’s academic success. When families are equipped with useful information and feel respected as partners, they are more likely to be engaged and maintain a positive view of their child’s school.



Providing families with copies of *Connecting Home & School Parent Guides* is a simple way to help parents feel empowered to be collaborators in their child’s education. These comprehensive and information guides offer tips, advice, and activities aligned to standards that all family members can follow. For example, most fourth graders learn about state history, so the fourth-grade parent guide is full of supplemental activities such as designing a new state license plate, stamp, flag, and seal. It offers a colorful state map for families to study together and suggestions for how to host a state-themed dinner party. There are tech tips for families who like to go online, including suggestions for using Google Earth to “fly over” and research their state or creating an online state-themed photo album. All the activities are easy to follow and are designed to supplement curriculum. Additionally, the guides emphasize that homes and communities are rich with educational opportunities, reinforcing the idea that meaningful learning can extend beyond classroom walls.



Conclusion

Family engagement is widely recognized as a key factor in student academic achievement. Research consistently indicates that when students, educators, and families engage in purposeful and productive communication and collaboration, everyone benefits. Engagement is different from one-time parent involvement in school events. Parents are to be supportive partners in their child's education, and schools must provide the necessary tools to help them succeed in that role.

Blue Star Education's *Connecting Home & School Parent Guides* received the 2024 Parent Picks Award and the Book Excellence Award in recognition of creating a resource that fostered strong home and school partnerships. These resources equip parents accessible tools and valuable insight to reinforce academic development within the walls of their own home. Students will love the hands-on activities and games, and parents will learn how to support standards-based curriculum in real-world ways. The most effective educational environments are ones where teachers and parents work as teammates to ensure that every student has the support they need to become successful lifelong learners.

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