

Engaging Every Family: 5 Simple Principles



About Steve

Leader, teacher, author and entrepreneur Dr. Steve Constantino has a long and distinguished career in leadership and bringing innovation to educational and business organizations. Steve has held numerous leadership positions at all levels of organizations, including being the CEO of his own start-up and presently as a school district superintendent.

Family engagement in their child’s education has a significant ‘return on investment’ on their academic achievement. When we expend time, energy, and other resources, people hope to gain something in return. The most critical component of family engagement is *empowering* parents and leveraging their *efficacy*, one’s *belief* in their ability to produce meaningful outcomes. When trying to change someone’s behavior, it is important to change their beliefs and attitudes first, in order to sustain long lasting relationships and results, versus just a spike in parent volunteers for the month.

“ The degree to which families are empowered to be involved in the educational and academic lives of their children
and
 the degree to which schools and school districts support necessary *relationships* to sustain the efficacy of parents in shaping their own child’s academic future.”

The first, and most *influential* teachers of children are their families. We should look at Dr. Constantino’s five principles as a circular logic model, something that shows an organic *process* because it never really ends. It is important to understand family engagement as a

process versus an isolated event or series of events because it positions parents in a primary, rather than supportive role in their child’s education and learning.

- Logic Model
- Engagement as Process
- Organic



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A Culture That Engages Every Family

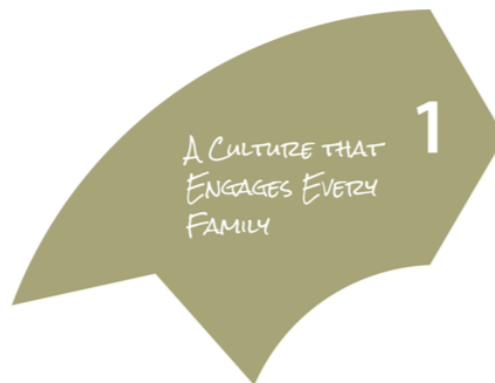


“ We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose education is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this.
Whether we do this or not must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. ”

The beliefs, values, assumptions, attitudes, and actions of the people within an organization make up its culture. The first step in this process is ensuring that we have a culture that engages every family. This involves engaging beyond those that are already engaged, and making extra efforts to reach out to the parents of the kids that need a little more help.

The “power of the belief system” that Dr. Constantino refers to is essential because initiatives lose

momentum when the culture doesn't truly accept or believe in the new idea. It is really in believing that every family can be and want to be engaged that will really get the ball moving on making it a reality.



- Beliefs
- Values
- Assumptions
- Attitudes
- Actions

Culture does not fall from the sky

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Communicate and Build Relationships

This is the “lowest hanging fruit,” says Dr. Constantino.

You need to communicate to have a relationship.

Traditionally, schools have been more successful at one-way communication, meaning sending information home, but it is more important to have a two-way communication system in place that opens up an avenue which allows parents to communicate back.



- 2-Way Communication
- Welcoming Environment
- Relationships Build Trust



Having a two-way communication system in place is only part of it. The other is creating a welcoming environment that invites parents to communicate back. Dr. Constantino says, “a welcoming environment in schools is essential in bridging the gap with families who don’t feel as though they can engage with us.” It starts with creating a welcoming experience when parents arrive at the school. Relationships are built on trust and that is not something schools can legislate – the only way to gain trust is to earn it.

Going back to the idea of leveraging the efficacy of parents, it is crucial to specify how their involvement directly results in a better outcome for their child.

As Dr. Constantino says, “families will engage with things that they find meaningful and relevant to them.” Connecting engagement to specific achievements, big or small, drastically breaks down any barriers whether it be language, socio-economic disadvantages, etc., and makes parents more eager to be involved.

- Leverages Efficacy
- Connects Engagement to Learning
- Invisible Engagement



Most people measure parent engagement by things we can see. However, the most meaningful engagement happens in places that we often can't see physically, like on car rides home or during dinner – Dr. Constantino refers to this as “*invisible engagement*.” Schools should not only inform parents of what has already happened, but let them know about upcoming topics to discuss with their child. This way, the child feels as though their parents care about their education.

Try asking these questions to learn about your child's school experiences:

Parent – Student Questions

- What new thing did you learn during [Reading/Math/Writing/Science] time today? How did you learn it?
- What is something that you learned today that you didn't know yesterday?
- What struggles did you have today and how did you overcome them?
- Why did you choose the book you are reading? Tell me your feelings about the story so far.
- What skill did you practice and learn in math today? How do you plan to get better?
- What is something you learned today that you think you will need in your future career?
- Teach me something. Pretend you are the teacher and I am you. Teach me something you learned today.

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- School Improvement Planning
- Policies, Procedures and Practices
- Every Family Has a Voice

The main concern here is family participation in school improvement projects and their role in the decision making process. Of course, it is not feasible to involve every single parent in every decision, but it is about “upholding a value statement that says every family has a voice, and that they have a vehicle to make their opinion known,” according to

Dr. Constantino. It is up to families to exercise that voice, but it is important that they have the right to do so and that their opinions will be considered. Also, it involves making procedures, policies, and practices more family oriented. If school improvement planning is more convenient for families, they may be more inclined to participate.

5

ENGAGE THE
GREATER
COMMUNITY

- Conceptualized Engagement
- Asset Mapping
- Engagement Supporting Learning

It is one thing to want community engagement, but another to specifically know what that looks like. Before we turn to the community to ask for their help or support, we need to *conceptualize engagement*, especially with people and businesses that are really busy. Asset mapping is a way of looking at all assets in the community that are not money, and acts as a good starting point in conceptualizing engagement. Ultimately, the purpose is to directly tie community engagement to improvements in student learning.



Piecing The Circle Together

Every parent wants to see their kid succeed and be a part of their success. Parent engagement is a constant and ongoing process, and each step ultimately aims to leverage family efficacy in producing direct and meaningful outcomes in their child's academic learning. These 5 simple principles aim to provide a pathway towards engaging and empowering every family. It starts by believing that each family, regardless of any barriers they may face can positively impact the results of their child's learning.



Thank you again to Dr. Steve Constantino for sharing your knowledge and experience with ParentSquare. Learn more and contact Dr. Constantino at <http://drsteveconstantino.com/>

About ParentSquare

ParentSquare is a simple, collaborative platform for school-to-home communication that facilitates parental engagement in children's education. Designed specifically to help preK-12 educators. ParentSquare reaches and engages every parent with automated email, text and app alerts, language translation, and 24/7 access. Powerful metrics on parent engagement help school administrators take well-informed steps to improving parental involvement. Learn more at www.parentsquare.com.