



## Why Did It Take a Pandemic for Parent Engagement and Support to Improve?

By Educator Barnes – March 25, 2020

The foundation of a successful school is the relationship between parents and teachers. When this relationship is solid, there is an increased possibility of student success. Unfortunately, too many teachers and administrators have shared that parent engagement is an area of improvement. Initiatives are created, efforts are made, but at some point, school staff count their losses and move on even if continuing the efforts may mean that student outcomes

could improve. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and parent engagement, involvement, and support became serious and a top priority.

School staff had to quickly adapt to this unprecedented situation of e-learning which cannot work without parent partnership. School staff is going into overdrive to make this successful. Today, one of my son's teachers reached out to ask these four questions:

1. *Do you have internet access in your home?*
2. *Do you have the devices you need in order for your child to be able to complete online assignments? (Tablet, laptop, computer...)*
3. *Have you been able to access the Canvas program?*
4. *Do you have any additional needs that the district or the community could possibly help you with?*

The teachers I supervise were asked to contact all parents to ask similar questions. Then, I thought about the fact that many schools, even urban schools and Title I schools that serve a high population of students who receive free and reduced lunch, have been using some electronic programs that require internet already this school year. Why is it only now that we care if students can access them at home? Why is it now that we have figured out how to provide families technology? Would it not have benefited students to have access to these programs at home earlier in the school year?

I always try hard to assume the best of parents. If parents aren't involved in their children's education maybe there are other needs that are preventing parents to participate in their children's education. Now, communities are banding together to help families out. School staff and community members are making sure children can still eat while schools are closed. Some school districts are giving food to any family even if the family does not qualify for free and reduced lunch. There are counselors making phone calls to help parents who are suddenly out of work. Why weren't efforts being made at this level before the coronavirus pandemic?

Teachers and other school staff are calling, emailing, sending messages through school apps to reach families. Some teachers have even gone to their students' homes. I applaud these efforts, but will they continue at this level when we return to school? The same energy and effort that we are putting forth right now is the same energy and effort we need when school resumes.