Chapter 4  
What is Family Involvement?

When the term parent or family involvement is used, different individuals may think of very different activities and characteristics that define the involvement of parents in education programs and schools.

**Perspectives of Family involvement**

Schools and programs have chosen to address the issue of parent involvement in a variety of ways, ranging from a low level to a high level of parent involvement. Schools and programs with a low level of parent involvement allow parents to take part in activities that do not challenge the expertise of a teacher or the decision-making power of the school. Schools with a high level of parent involvement provide opportunities for parents to make their presence known, particularly in the educational setting by parent visits, observations, or visits to volunteer assistance of many kids; here parents perceived as a source of help.

Four categories of parent involvement have been identified by the Home and School Institute in Washington, D.C.

1. Home-school communication-newsletter, telephone calls, informal notes, and conferences  
2. Parent education-parent workshops, home visits, written materials, libraries and videotapes  
3. Public relations-having the goal of providing consistent, positive contact with the school and its programs.  
4. Volunteerism-soliciting support for children school activities, or the administration with tasks performed at school, home, or in the workplace.

**Parenting:** Here schools help families with parenting and child-rearing skills, child development knowledge, and creating home conditions that support children at each grade level.

**Communicating:** The school involves parents by communicating about school programs and student progress.

**Volunteering:** Schools work to improve recruiting, training and schedules to involve families as volunteers.

**Learning at Home:** Schools involve families with the children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities.

**Decision making:** Schools include families as participants in school decisions and governance through PTA, advisory councils, committees.

**Collaborating with the community:** schools coordinate services and resources for families and the school with business, agencies, and other groups.

**A Brief History of Family Involvement** An interest in the involvement of parents in early childhood education is not new. Parents were involved in some of the first preschool education movements in America in the earliest decades of this century. Parent cooperatives usually provide opportunities to participate in the life of the school, from defining the philosophy and practices to contributing to the care and maintenance of the facility.
Programs for the disadvantaged, including Head Start and other intervention programs, appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. Parents were involved in most of the programs.

**Enabling, Strengthening**
Just as there are more than one philosophy and model of parent involvement, there are also more than one set of circumstances that motivate the involvement. At least three separate forces have brought home and school together.

1. One influence on parent involvement has been the research on education and child development that underscores the interdependence of parent, child and community agencies in providing for optimal development of children.
2. A second set of motives is through force of mandate, enunciated by various laws and funding arrangements, that parents play a part in the education of their children.
3. A third influence is community concern and efforts, encouraging parental involvement as a means of both improving the school and strengthening the family, thus eliminating some problems of concern to the community.

4. **Mandated Parent Involvement**
When the powers that control funding mandate family involvement as a program requirement, there is no longer any debate about whether to have parent participation.

- **Head Start**
From the beginning, Head Start was required to have “maximum feasible participation” of the families served. In its policy manual Head Start has specified performance standing for four areas of parent involvement:
  1. Decision making about direction and operation of the program via membership on the Policy Council.
  2. Participation in classrooms as volunteers, with the possibility of moving up a career ladder as paid employees.
  3. Parents activities planned by the parents themselves.
  4. Working with their own children, along with the center staff.

- **TITLE I**
More recent federal initiatives authorize funds as part of Chapter I of Title I. Called Even Start, the family-centered education program funds local efforts to improve the educational opportunities for the nation’s children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified family-centered literacy program. (See page 141)

- **Education of children with Disabilities**
Parent involvement in plans to provide services for children with special needs was mandated first by PL-94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This law requires parents’ participation in planning with professionals to develop an individualized education program (IEP) for their children.
Parents of guardians are included in a multidisciplinary team that develops an individualized family service plan (IFSP), including a statement of the family’s strengths and needs in maximizing the development of the infant of toddler with disabilities.

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004 (PL108-446) included provisions to align special education with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, such as requiring parents to monitor whether the IEP was in line with state standards for achievement. Families are required to be involved with all aspects of planning for the education of their children with special needs.

- **Child Care and Development Block Grants**
  The Child Care and Development Block Grants are a historic, freestanding, federal child care programs—the first ever—culminating almost 20 years of efforts following President Nixon’s veto of child care legislature in 1971. The legislation lays the foundation for a national system of safe and affordable child care.
  The bill preserves, the rights of parents in the system by stating that nothing in the bill should be applied to “infringe upon or usurp the moral and legal rights and responsibilities of parents.”

- **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale**
  Program administrators, credentialing evaluators, and teachers wanting to identify areas of strength, and need for improvement in an early child program use the 43 items of the rating scale. The specific indicators identified under this item delineate practices that may be rated from inadequate to excellent.

- **Goals 2000**
  In 1990 the first national educational goals were formulated as a result of an Education Summit Conference called by President George Bush and passed into law under President Bill Clinton as Goals 2000: educate America Act of 1994. Goal one states, “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.” Parents are specifically mentioned in one of the three objectives to meet this first goal: “Every parent in the United States will be a child’s first teacher and devote time each day helping his or her preschool child learn.” (page 145).

- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation**
  The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as No Child Left Behind, was signed into law 2002 (PL 107-10)
  There are four main goals behind the law:
  - Stronger accountability for result measured by student achievement test scores, with corrective actions to be taken as needed.
  - More freedom for state and communities to use federal education funds.
  - Encouraging the use of proven education methods to improve student learning and achievement
  - More choices for parents.
In addition to these family rights, the law makes clear statements about requirements for parent involvement. The requirements include statements on pp 146-147.

**Recommendations of Professional Organizations**

- **NAEYC Accreditation**
  The National Association for the Education of Young Children has developed standards to accredit high-quality programs for young children. Among the program standards, partnerships with families are included as a necessary component. Program Standard 7 says, “The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child’s family to foster children’s development in all settings (See pages 148-151).

  **Rationale** Young children’s learning and development are integrally connected to their families.

- **Code of Ethics**
  The Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment, approved by NAEYC’s Governing Board in 1989 and revised in 2005, includes a section of ethical responsibilities to families, articulating 9 ideals and 15 specific principals governing actions. The ideals are found on page 151-153.

- **NAEYC Standards for Professional Preparation**
  In 2001, NAEYC published core standards for initial teacher licensure programs, followed in 2003 by similar core standards for associate degree preparation of teachers. Of the five standards, the second is *Building Family and Community Relationships*. This requires education to enhance experiences so that students:

  1. Know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children’s families and communities.

  2. Use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families and to involve all families in their children’s development and learning.

- **NASBE Report**
  The report Right from the Start, issued in 1991 by the Early Childhood Task Force of the National Association of State Boards of Education, focuses attention on involving parents in the school system from the beginning.

- **National Parent-Teachers Association Standards for Parent/Family Involvement**
  In a statement published in 1997, the National Parent-teachers Association published six national standards seen as essential for any school or programs involving parents. These are:

  - Regular, two-way, meaningful communication between home and school.
  - Promotion and support of parenting skills.
  - Active parent participation in student learning.
  - Parents as welcome volunteer partners in schools.
  - Parents as full partners in school decisions that affect children and families.
  - Outreach to the community for resources to strengthen school (PTA, 1997).

  It has long been recognized in American society that parents have the primary responsibility for deciding what is in their children’s best interest “education, nurture, and
supervision of their children.” The increasing official attention to policies involving family matters may lead to more specific mandates regarding parent involvement.

**Community concern for family support**
The changing demographics of American society that have created changes in the lives of families have focused attention on parents’ needs. Families who today may be more isolated, more stressed, and perhaps poorer than ever before need all the help they can get. Family resources and support programs have appeared all over the country, offering services to parents that may include parenting education, adult education and job training, emotional support and varieties of child care services.

Not all families need exactly the same kind of support, so family resource and support programs are individualized, flexible and adaptive.

**State-Funded Family Support Programs**
- The Parents as Teachers program in Missouri
- Kentucky’s Parent Child Educational program.

**Individual Community Efforts**
- New York has Giant Step
- Family Focus in the Chicago area
- AVANCE Family Support and Education Program in San Antonio, Texas

There are three main reasons to consider ways to involve families in their children’s care and education:
1. Research on family involvement as an optimal factor in child development and learning.
2. Mandates for government and professional associations.
3. Community concern and collaborations for family support programs.