

Jami-Beth Knapp, Family Engagement Coordinator New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers

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Chairman Parsons, Workgroup Chairs and Commission Members, my name is Jami-Beth Knapp. I am the Family Engagement Coordinator for the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, commonly referred to as PTA. Our organization represents more than 320,000 volunteers across New York State with a mission devoted solely to advocating in the best interest of all children.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Education Reform Commission. While you are gathering community input on many areas effecting quality education and student achievement, I will be directing my testimony on the vital importance of Family Engagement and its impact on Student Outcomes. Collaboration among schools, communities, families, higher education and private sector providers offers the greatest promise for the future: a future that best serves out children, our families, our community and our economy.

Family engagement and involvement goes beyond the parent-teacher conference and beyond asking parents to check homework. Successful education must be a collaborative effort. Teachers should not be solely responsible for satisfying parent and

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State demands. Engaging parents, families and communities in the education process supports student achievement. Families must be welcomed into the school community. Schools and parents must learn to communicate effectively to bridge the barriers to learning that are present.

All parents have dreams for their students. Parents want their students and their schools to be successful. They are seeking to work with the school; they need guidance. Engaging families in understanding what is required of the student during the day benefits both the follow through in support at home and the importance of attendance. Parents and community members often offer an untapped expertise in real world skills that could support and benefit classroom instruction while making the connection between school and life.

For the past 4 years, I have worked with parents and schools, in both urban and suburban districts. Teachers and administrators express that they want parents and families to be more involved with their child's education, but when pressed to define what that entails they have no clear definition. Families are likewise looking for ways to support their students. With the rapid changes in educational expectations and school structures, parents are uninformed and overwhelmed at how to assist. Through programs that involve both families and teachers, that barrier to communications and expectations can be significantly reduced. Once families are able to understand what is being expected at the school they are better able to provide support at home and in the community. This improves attendance and home support for the school. Families are able to advocate for their children and for the school.

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Involving families and community members in the decision making at the school level empowers and connects parents to what they otherwise tend to view as decisions that are imposed upon them. Input from the most invested stakeholders, families and communities, leads students to have a better attitude towards education because those adults around them have a better attitude.

One of the greatest untapped resources available to schools is the impact that parents, families and communities have on student success. Research has repeatedly shown that the number one indicator of student success is family engagement. Research out of the Harvard Family Research Project has identified standards to help facilitate the development of parent and family involvement practices and activities.

National PTA Standards for Family School Partnerships are based on this research and are available for implementation. These standards stress that successful implementation can be achieved through pre-service training for teachers and principals, as well as through continued professional growth activities.