Family Engagement
By Kari Pendray, Parent and Education Support Coordinator with ECEAP
Kari.Pendray@co.snohomish.wa.us

Raising a child is not an easy task. We may have social, cultural and family differences in the way we raise children. Even so, I can honestly say that every parent I talk to wants the same thing – we all want the very best for our children. So, what is the best formula for helping children and youth be successful in school and life? The solution may be closer to home than you think. It’s really about how parents, family and community engage children in learning.

Here is a story about my journey learning how to engage as a parent with schools and community. When we had our first child thirteen years ago, I worried every day about how we would raise him. Will he have good friends? Will he be influenced to make good choices? Will he graduate and go to college? In the beginning, I did not know one thing about raising a child. I was fortunate to be a stay at home mom during the most critical early years of brain development, when 80-90% of a child’s brain is hard wired for learning. I started reading and attending classes so I could learn more about child and human development.

By the time our son was 3 ½, we added a new member into our family – a baby girl. Both children were able to experience preschool in and out of the home. I gained knowledge on how to expand their learning, such as reading, writing, math and science at home. During this time, I also joined the PTSA and signed up to be a Legislative Chair and led school Science Fairs. I learned how to advocate for my children and decided to put these skills to the test with their teachers. Together, were able to find ways to support both children at home and school. Afterwards, I was invited to be on the Student Improvement Team and the Arlington Council for Education to provide input on school planning from a parent/community member viewpoint.

Since then, I’ve gone back to work. I still volunteer in my children’s school so I can assist students and teachers who need extra support. There are so many needs. It takes more than a village – it takes a whole community.

Over the last few decades, costs have risen and budgets have been cut. Schools are not able to do everything on their own. Times have changed. Children, families, schools and communities have more needs. In effort to keep children safe, healthy, supported, engaged and challenged; parents, schools and community members are being called to work together to fully support our youth. Family Engagement is a necessary part of life for every child. I noticed that it has helped my children engage in education at a high level. Children are smart. They realize that learning is embedded in our family, school and community values. If we all stand together to engage in our schools, our children will succeed in our communities. For me, I’ve learned, “what you pay attention to, grows.” The more I focus on my children’s education, the more
they grow. I’ve also learned that “parent, family, and community engagement is critical to student success.” We all need to invest in our youth.

There are a variety of ways to engage in schools, including:

- PTA/PTSA/Booster Club
- Classroom helper
- Book fairs
- Tutoring
- Room parent
- Lunch buddy
- WATCH D.O.G.S.
- Parents on Campus
- Recess volunteer
- Classroom speaker
- Music/drama productions
- Committee advisor
- Senior project panel member
- Field trip chaperone
- Preparing materials for projects
- Curriculum Adoption Committee
- Advisory Council for Education

At the same time, schools can collaborate with parents at all ages to remove barriers to help parents navigate resources and information. The National Parent Teacher Student Association has a Parent Engagement framework called, First Steps at [www.ptsa.org](http://www.ptsa.org) to learn more.

**For Families:**

1. Parents are a child’s first teacher. Encourage, talk, and engage your child in learning at all ages; and continuously assess their needs – social, emotional, physical and academic
2. Partner: with teachers, school counselors and/or principals about your ideas
3. Collaborate: identify realistic goals that tie into learning objectives
4. Take collective action: parents, teachers and students working together on student goals
5. Measure results: follow up, and communicate feedback together as a team
6. Volunteer: give back to schools and community organizations and we will all flourish, together

*Kari Pendray is an Education and Family Support Coordinator with Snohomish County ECEAP. She also has her own coaching and consulting business, Momentum Consulting Services, LLC, offering support with parenting, life and career development. She serves as Advisory Council Chair for the Arlington Community Resource Center, and is a member of the PTSA. For more information, please contact Kari Pendray at 425-444-4964.*