

# Engaging Families of African American Learners

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*Addressing Critical Issues*

## Disclaimer

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## Engaging Families of African American Learners

*"The diverse and challenging needs of today's children far outstrip the ability of any one institution to meet them. Yet one of the richest resources for understanding a child's....learning experiences--the parent--is quite often the most frequent one overlooked."*

A PATH TO FOLLOW: LEARNING TO LISTEN TO PARENTS  
DR. PATRICIA A. EDWARDS

In the context of 21st century educational practice, African American learners are continuously called upon 'to beat all odds' to successfully achieve and perform in a global, technology- mediated community, nation, and world. The nature of this challenge is both immediate and far reaching, giving more meaning than ever to the ancient African Proverb *"It takes a village to raise a child."* With this in mind, it has become increasingly critical for schools and school communities to become aware of the full scope of what it takes to fully reach out to African American parents and family members. By building school classrooms and school climates in which parents and families are integrally and constructively involved as participating partners in their children's education the likelihood of academic success increases for every child.

Beyond the traditional 'Back to School Night,' quarterly report card, parent conference, or discipline referral conference, today's school communities must intentionally cultivate outreach approaches that engage African American parents and families at all grade and developmental levels on an on-going basis. Essential questions to be answered in this regard include: (1) How does the school make it a practice to bridge racial, class, and cultural differences? (2) What extra efforts are made to recruit and welcome families of all backgrounds? (3) What opportunities does the school provide for parents and families to offer their insights about the school climate? (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007). Such progressive approaches require raised levels of awareness within school communities about the scope of cultural and institutional factors that impact

## Collaborative Inquiry, Cultural Proficiency, and Racially Diverse Learners

teaching and learning (Lindsey, Robins & Terrell, 2009). Concurrently, it is critical to provide opportunities to establish and sustain mutual

understanding among parents, families, and schools about culturally responsive and socially just practices.

### PROMISING PRACTICES

- [Black Parent Initiative, Portland County Public Schools](#)
- [Black Star Project](#) – preschool through college student educational services and parent support
- [Boosting Parent Engagement in Majority African American High Schools](#)
- [Center for Family Research University of Georgia](#)
- [Farmington African American Parent Network](#)
- [Hayward High School: African American Parent Advisory Committee](#)
- [Minneapolis Public Schools to Celebrate National African American Parent Involvement Day](#)
- [National Council for Educating Black Children-Parent University Curriculum](#)
- [Practice Guide for Working with African American Families in the Child Welfare System](#)
- [The San Diego Voice and Viewpoint](#) - San Diego Unified School District; Project Ujima - Parent Outreach and Engagement Department Program

### PUBLICATIONS

- Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L., Johnson, V.R., Davies D.D. (2007) *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, The New Press.
- Lindsay, R.B., Robins, K.N., Terrell, R.D. (2009). *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*. Thousand Oakes, California, Corwin Press