

Engaging Fathers and Other Male Role Models in Education

Addressing Critical Issues

Disclaimer

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. The contents of this practitioner brief were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Engaging Fathers and Other Male Role Models in Education

Children with positive father figures and male role models are more likely to achieve in school.

As we seek to gain a better understanding of our dynamic school cultures, it is important to understand how demographic shifts in family trends affect our school communities. Among these demographic shifts is the rise of single parent families. According to the 2010 Census, out of the 75 million children (ages 0-17) in the U.S., 19.5 million children are being raised in single family homes. Of those, 2.25 million children are being raised by single fathers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This statistic is even more pronounced for African American and Latino children. In 2010, 50% of African American children lived in single-mother families, while about 26% of Latino children did so. The percentages, however, of 3.8% of Caucasian, 3.6% African American, and 2.7% Latino children living in single-father families are similar across racial groups. Though the percentage of children living only with their fathers is small, the total percentages still account for 7.5 million children. Thus, the data indicate a need for positive father figures and male role models.

Several factors have led to the increase in single father families: an explosion in the divorce rate, the introduction of no-fault divorce laws, lessening of cultural preference of females as the sole nurturers by courts, an increase in joint-

custody arrangements, greater father request for sole custody, and a greater desire by women to pursue careers (Ingram, 2006). As the social norms regarding custody and child-raising allow more fathers to be nurturers, schools must adapt to these realities too.

What are the benefits to engaging fathers and other positive male role models in education? Children who have fathers or male father figures involved in their education are more likely to: get better grades; have better verbal and problem solving skills; do better on achievement tests; demonstrate a higher tolerance for stress and frustration; are more likely to have positive peer relationships (Allen & Daly, 2007); are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities; and, have fewer discipline problems (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although the benefits to father/male engagement in education are great, there are still social barriers to father involvement in schools such as: unsympathetic work situations that limit fathers' abilities to volunteer in school or leave work when children become ill; professional, social, and personal pressure to provide for the family's economic security; lack of awareness or sensitivity in school staff to address father as principal nurturer; stereotypical expectations that

Collaborative Inquiry, Cultural Proficiency, and Racially Diverse Learners

mothers are responsible for matters relating to children, including education; and other parents' views on father involvement in schooling (Lu, Jones et al., 2010; Pruett, et al., 2009).

Schools can find ways, however, to connect with fathers and invite other positive male role models into the education of their children.

Some commonly used strategies for father engagement in schools are: communicating directly to fathers, making men visible (by hiring male staff or recruiting male volunteers/PTA members), encouraging fathers to be involved in specific ways (field trips, advisory boards, etc.), holding father/male-child events throughout the

year, and starting father/male-child clubs (i.e., reading, robotics, mentoring, athletic, chess, etc.). In addition, schools can serve as networks of support to single-father and single-mother families by providing opportunities for community based organizations and family service providers to share their resources and expertise with parents (such as information about gender specific adolescent development, counseling services, support groups, etc.). By getting to know students, their families, and communities, schools can help to promote healthy child development and strengthen families in and out of school.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- [WATCH D.O.G.S.](#) (Dads of Great Students) is a program of the National Center for Fathering focusing on prevention of violence in schools by using the positive influence of fathers and father-figures to provide an unobtrusive presence in the schools, and to be a positive role-model for students.
- [All Pro Dad](#), founded by Tony Dungy, is a program of Family First, an organization dedicated to strengthening the family. All Pro Dad programs include: A one-hour monthly breakfast held before school where fathers/male role models and their kids can meet, have fun, and discuss family topics. Materials for All Pro Dad's Days are free of charge to local organizers. These materials include videos, father/child discussion cards, door prizes, meeting instructions, brochures, posters, and promotional flyers.
- [Real Men Cook/Real Men Charities Inc.](#) began in Chicago in 1989 as a way to change the perception of African American fathers by holding annual Father's Day food sampling, entertainment, and fund-raising family celebrations. Real Men Cook has generated over \$1 million in ticket sales proceeds to nonprofits, is a national Father's Day event in 15 cities, and is credited with changing the way Father's Day is celebrated. Real Men Cook encourages recognition of biological dads and father figures and encourages family and community involvement.
- [National Fatherhood Initiative \(NFI\)](#) aims to help children succeed by getting dads involved. NFI's school-based programming helps schools and PTAs involve dads and increase membership with innovative programs and resources, such as:
 - Dadventures™: Fun, hands-on activities that dads and kids can do together.
 - Double Duty Dads™: A unique mentoring program that can help PTAs recruit members and volunteers.
 - Dad E-mail™: A weekly e-mail just for dads with relevant hints, tips, and advice.[fatherhood.org](#)
- [National Compadres Network](#) is based on the principles of "El Hombre Noble" (the Honorable Man), the network's goals are to strengthen, rebalance, and redevelop the traditional Latino extended family

Collaborative Inquiry, Cultural Proficiency, and Racially Diverse Learners

system by encouraging and supporting the positive involvement of males in families and the community.

- [The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse \(NRFC\)](#) seeks to provide, facilitate, and disseminate current research, proven and innovative strategies that will encourage and strengthen fathers and families, and provider's capacity to promote a healthy family.

PUBLICATIONS

- Baskill, Jane. *Getting Dads on Board: Fostering Literacy Partnerships for Successful Student Learning*. Ontario: Pembroke Publishers, 2009.
- Cabrera, Natasha, and Catherine S. Tamis-Lemonada. *Handbook of Father Involvement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, Second Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2012. www.teachingforchange.org. Web. 31 May 2012.
- Carlson, M. McLanham, S., Brooks-Gunn, J. "Coparenting and Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Young Children After a Nonmarital Birth." *Demography*, Vol 45, No. 2, 2008, pp.461-488.
- Olsen, G. & Fuller, M. Home and School Relations: Teachers and Parents Working Together (4th ed). Pearson: NY, 2012.
- McBride, B., Dyer, J., et al. "The Differential Impact of Early Father and Mother Involvement on Later Student Achievement." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 101, No. 2, 2009, pp. 498-508.
- National PTA. "Men Working." *A How-To Guide on Promoting Father Involvement* (2007).
- www.pta.org. Web. 31 May 2012. <www.pta.org/Father_Involvement_How_To_Guide.pdf> Umbarger, G.T., V.P. Turbiville, and A.C. Guthrie. "Fathers' involvement in programs for young children." *Young Children* 55.4 (2000): 74-79. Print.

REFERENCES

- Allen, Sarah, and Kerry Daly. "The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of Evidence." *Father Involvement Research Alliance* (May 2007): 1-4. www.fira.ca/. Web. 31 May 2012. <http://www.fira.ca/cms/documents/29/Effects_of_Father_Involvement.pdf>.
- Ingram, Patreese D. "Diversity in People: Single-Father Families." *Diverse Issues* 7.1 (2006): 2-8. *Diversity Education*. Web. 31 May 2012. <<http://diversityeducation.cas.psu.edu/>>.
- Lu, M., Jones, L., et al. "Where is the F in MCH? Father Involvement in African American Families." *Ethnicity & Disease*. Vol 20, Winter 2010, pp. 49-61.
- Pruet, M., Cowan, C., et al. "Lessons Learned from the Supporting Father Involvement Study: A Cross-Cultural Preventive Intervention for Low-Income Families with Young Children." *Journal of Social Science Research*. Vol 35, Issue 2, 2009, pp. 163-179
- U.S. Census Bureau. "Family Structure and Children's Living Arrangements." www.census.gov. U.S. Census Bureau, 2011. Web. 31 May 2012. <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>>.
- U.S. Department of Education. "The Context: What Research Tells Us." *A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning* (June 2000): 1-7. www.ed.gov. Web. 31 May 2012. <<http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/parents/calltocommit/intro.html>>.