

Good afternoon and many thanks to Majority and Minority Chairmen Eichelberger and Dinniman and the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee for focusing on family engagement in today's hearing.

Through my work as Director of the Pennsylvania Governor's Institute for Parental Involvement, Director of Family and Community Engagement at The School District of Philadelphia and several other community engagement initiatives, I have learned that family engagement means different things to different people.

For the busy, working, single parent, engagement may mean providing a good breakfast and seeing that children get to school on time. On the other hand, school teachers and administrators may think that family engagement is measured by the number of times a parent or caregiver is seen at school. Communication is the key to understanding the different viewpoints.

Educators must be mindful that there are several barriers to getting and keeping families engaged in their children's academic success. Today, our schools have children from more diverse families, cultures, and experiences than ever before. Most parents*, regardless of their background, want the best for their children. Schools must understand their role in making families feel welcomed and valued. Some family members are overwhelmed by life's challenges and may need assistance from the school... One parent may need the school to contact them with encouraging news about their child's progress; another parent may need the school to make referrals for resources in the community, and yet, another parent may need and appreciate a place to sit down, have a cup of coffee, and interact with other adults.

Families need to have meaningful, positive relationships with schools for productive partnership practices to develop. Families are the schools' "customers" and more opportunities for professional development must be offered to educators, district and school-based staff to help them become more "customer-friendly." Families need to be receive professional development, also. How many of you really understand the data in the PA School Performance Profile? Well, many families do not, but that should not silence their voice when it comes to making decisions about the education of their children!

Families and schools play an important role in raising students' self-esteem, reducing truancy, and disproving the stereotype that poor, rural and urban students cannot and/or will not become academic achievers. When our schools hire staff, who are willing to raise the level of expectation for all students, develop constructive relationships with families and communities and begin to think "outside of the box" for solutions; our students, our families, our schools, and our communities will benefit.

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PARENT POWER (What Will You Do With Yours?)

June 2, 2017

*The term parent refers to any adult assisting in caring for the child's basic and educational needs.