



SCHOOLSTATUS AND THE EPSTEIN MODEL OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

When you consider a student's academic achievement, it becomes readily evident that no one person alone contributes to success. This idea is at the core of Joyce Epstein's theory of parent involvement. Specifically, students are most successful when parents, educators, and community endeavor together to support learning and development (Epstein, 1995).

These three contexts - home, school, and community - intersect, through communication, to influence students' character, mindset, and chances for success in what Epstein termed Overlapping Spheres of Influence. Epstein challenges us to consider the power of the collective to develop opportunities for children and adolescents to succeed. Her theory contends that, "the greater the overlap of the family, school, and community spheres, the stronger the partnership and greater the likelihood of improved student outcomes" (Latunde, 2017, p. 258).

Epstein's model outlines six different types of involvement to fully integrate this overlap for student achievement:

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| 1) Parenting | 2) Communicating |
| 3) Volunteering | 4) Learning at home |
| 5) Decision-making | 6) Collaborating with the community |

Epstein's model is the most recognized and most tested theory of parent involvement associated with student success. We pride ourselves at SchoolStatus on following best practices while striving to reset the status quo. We recognize that you have standards for communicating with parents, and it's our ambition to deliver the best-in-class, research-backed communication tool on the market. So, how do we, SchoolStatus, stack up to the Epstein model? The following section defines Epstein's six types of parent involvement and enumerates how we adhere to best practices.

EPSTEIN'S 6 TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parenting

Engagement focused on parenting involves helping families structure their home environment to support children as students. Under this framework, parents are supported with information about age- and grade-appropriate learning environments, health practices, and nutrition requirements. This information should be made available in a variety of forms to promote accessibility. In other words, information sharing should not require a campus on-site visit or an in-person workshop.

One challenge associated with this type of involvement is ensuring that families are able to connect with educators and share information “about culture, background, children’s talents and needs” (Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools). Accessibility is a key feature of our communication tools. SchoolStatus aims to remove barriers to communication, and make 1:1 communication as seamless as possible. To that end, teachers and parents can call or text directly, straight to parents’ phones, without burdening parents to download an app or sign up through a portal.

Communicating

Engagement focused on communicating involves helping parents understand school policies, programs, reforms, transitions, and progress. Under this framework, parents are supported with information, for example, about their child’s transition from middle school to high school (e.g., course load requirements, unique scheduling compared to prior years, or dual-enrollment / college credit). Epstein emphasizes that clear communication is critical, and encourages the use of language translators to accommodate non-native speakers. Additionally, she emphasizes the importance of two-way channels of communication from home-to-school and school-to-home.

Jensen and Minke (2017) explain that “there should be a bidirectional flow of information and shared responsibility for [student] outcomes” (p. 170). SchoolStatus was designed to make communicating and connecting faster and easier, and we understand that meaningful relationships can thrive only when communication is two-way. We also understand that it’s unrealistic to assume all schools have the capacity to hire translators to oversee all inbound and outbound communication.

We put translation tools at parents' and teachers' fingertips. We accommodate over 100 languages with our translation tool, so educators and families can communicate in the language of their preference, further increasing accessibility for all families.

Volunteering

Engagement focused on volunteering involves recruiting parents for organizational help and support. This type of involvement is most effective when volunteer work is well organized to include training and matching based on volunteer skills and program needs. Epstein's model defines volunteering broadly, and explains that "anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time" is a volunteer (Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools). She stresses that recruitment efforts should cast a wide net, and that all families should be invited to share their talents and time; not just those that can provide support during the school day at the school building.

SchoolStatus' Broadcast Messaging feature is designed to send up to 300 messages at one time. This tool is ideal for communicating important information to a large group of people at one time. A teacher can send a Broadcast Message to his entire classroom's caregivers to announce upcoming volunteer opportunities or a coach can notify her entire volleyball team's parents of the need to support transportation for an upcoming match. Translation services work with Broadcast Messages, too; texts are received in the language of the recipient's preference, helping educators reach families they might otherwise shy away from recruiting due to language barriers. With broadcasts, all responses come back to the teacher/coach/administrator as an individual (1:1) text message. This model offers efficiency for educators, who may need to send the same message to multiple parents; yet, simultaneously, facilitates personal connections the moment a parent responds. We believe this model helps build trust and foster meaningful relationships, tying right back to Epstein's parenting and communicating types of involvement.

Learning at Home

Learning at home acknowledges the importance of children and parents communicating about values, educational aspirations, and connections between academic life and everyday life. Involving families and their children in decisions about academic and career goals, and discussing school subjects together is a critical aspect of learning at home. Epstein suggests coordinating and overlapping homework activities for those students who have multiple teachers.

Studies indicate that this type of involvement, often referred to as academic socialization, is a significant factor in the academic success of middle school and high school students (Jensen & Minke, 2017).

A key benefit of using SchoolStatus to communicate with families is that we record and transcribe all conversations. This feature allows teachers and administrators to see all of the communication that is, or is not, happening on behalf of a student. Additionally, current teachers have access to all of a student's academic records, not just those records associated with his or her classroom. These features help educators see the whole student, allowing them to better coordinate their efforts to facilitate meaningful conversations with parents.

Decision-Making

Central to Epstein's theory is the idea that "families, schools, and communities engage in cooperative action in order to achieve their mutual interests" (Bilton, Jackson, & Hymer, 2017, p. 233). Involvement through decision-making emphasizes the process of developing partnerships. Consensus decision-making, in particular, validates the opinions, concerns, and ideas that caregivers have regarding critical school policies and programs, and enhances caregivers' investment in both pedagogical and policy decisions (Stefanski, Valli, & Jacobson, 2016).

Ferlazzo (2011), English teacher and author, challenges educators "to listen to the wisdom that parents have gained" while rearing their children and "to learn about their hopes and dreams for their children and discuss how the school can work with them to make those dreams a reality" (p. 12). He elaborates that we often think of power as a limited resource, with one person having more and the other less. However, he argues, sharing decision-making with families so that they become "leaders in education improvement efforts [increases their power]. As a result, the whole pie gets bigger, and more possibilities are created" (p. 14).

Our communication tools were developed because we at SchoolStatus understand that meaningful relationships are at the heart of shared decision-making. We strive to facilitate these relationships throughout our product. This is one reason, as mentioned earlier, parents' responses to Broadcast Messages initiate a one-to-one conversation with teachers.

We believe this approach leads to increased trust; when parents respond, they are likely most concerned with how the contents of the original message impacts their child, specifically. We want that connection to happen as seamlessly as possible, without compromising privacy. We believe that meaningful communication is student-specific, that it is born out of trust, and that this is the primary way to align home and school for student success.

Collaborating With the Community

Community refers to anyone who is interested in and affected by the quality of education in a region. Epstein's model highlights the fact that we are all impacted by the quality of education in our communities, whether or not we have children of our own. Ultimately, students will become colleagues, neighbors, and innovators of the future. It behooves each and every one of us to invest in all students' education.

Epstein's model implores educators to "identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development" (Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools). Henderson and Mapp's (2002) annual synthesis of evidence supporting student achievement stated that key ways to facilitate positive changes for students via family and community partnerships include: "develop the capacity of school staff to work with families" and to "focus efforts to engage families and community members on developing trusting and respectful relationships" (p. 8).

We strive to help educators, at minimum, see the entirety of communication taking place on behalf of an individual student, classroom, school, and district. Engagement metrics allow educators to see first-hand how much communication is taking place, as well as when the communication occurs and through which method (i.e., call, email, or text). Our recording and transcribing features facilitate professionalism and respect, and provide a single source of truth for reference. The ability to monitor conversations through recordings and transcriptions enables administrators and other teachers to view the quality of conversations taking place, and course correct when disrespect or unprofessionalism is observed. Moreover, administrators can see the percentage of total students' parents contacted, as well as the percentage of teachers who are engaging with families. These features help paint a clear picture of how effectively their school community is engaging with families.

CONCLUSION

Epstein outlined six different types of involvement to support student success, based on her theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. At the heart of her theory is the idea that the home, school, and community intersect and overlap to influence children. Students realize the most success the more these spheres overlap, and coalesce around a common mission. SchoolStatus developed advanced communication tools with these spheres in mind, and with the goal of facilitating meaningful conversations and relationships between parents and educators. We believe this is the best way to support educators and families as they move toward that common mission. We believe our communication suite provides the best-in-class features to make communication seamless, accessible, and dynamic.



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Dr. Joy Smithson has been working with School District leadership in her role as Data Scientist at SchoolStatus, for nearly six years.

With a Master of Science in Research Psychology and a PhD in Communication Studies, Dr. Smithson partners with our district customers to custom tailor reports and analytics that can track custom student cohorts, understand aggregate behaviors and academic insight, and identify student, classroom, campus and district-wide trends.

When she's not crunching numbers and making sense of data, Dr. Joy loves running, hiking, and spending time with her family.

ABOUT SCHOOLSTATUS

SchoolStatus is the only data analytics company that turns analysis into action. Through powerful reporting tools, automatic integrations, and customizable data points, educators easily identify students most in need of engagement. Then using the communication tools built right into the platform, instantly connect with guardians through calls, texts, or emails to reach families where they are. We focus on the data, so educators can focus on education. Contact us at schoolstatus.com, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter @schoolstatusapp

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