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More than 40 years of education research proves that when families and community members are involved in the work of educating children, those children succeed. They receive better grades, have fewer discipline problems, choose harder courses, graduate, and continue their educations at higher rates. Volumes are written about how important families are to children's achievement, and schools and teachers often try creative and interesting methods of reaching out to families.

Family involvement in school can become a challenging topic for educators, especially when faced with requirements to involve families in several ways, without the time, resources, or training to do so. Families sometimes also feel that the school puts up barriers to their involvement. These challenges combine to create situations where family involvement is not used to its fullest potential as a student achievement and school improvement strategy.

Fall is a great time for schools, families, and communities to come together and realize this potential. That's why the Minnesota Parent Center-MN PIRC sponsors Parent Involvement Month in October and provides special resources and activities for families and schools at PACER.org/MPC
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So many things happen in the fall: first days of school, parent information nights, adequate yearly progress (AYP) results, PTA/PTO meetings, parent-teacher conferences, fall sports, and more. Each interaction between schools and families provides an opportunity for schools to engage families in the educational process, and for families to help plan for their child's best education.

For example, envision a parent-teacher conference where the teacher asks the family to talk about their dreams for their child. If that family wants their middle-schooler to attend college, what is the plan to make that happen? This kind of conversation can start the year off right: the teacher can help keep the student on track and will know that the family cares about education and has high expectations for their child.

With this foundation, it will be easier for families and teachers to work together to address problems that may arise during the year. In general, involving families in education is less about the number of parents at an event, and more about a process of building relationships and supporting families' and educators' roles in children's lives.

Now is the time for families and community members to provide extra educational support: the school can't do it alone. They need you to expect the best, both from your child and from your school. Attend conferences and share with the teacher what you will do to help, what your child needs to succeed, and that you support their efforts. If you receive an invitation to volunteer, participate in a homework assignment, or join a school improvement team, give it a try! Your involvement makes a difference, and your children notice that you make education a priority.

Schools – keep on reaching out, but remember, most family involvement does not take place at school. Build a relationship, communicate clearly, honestly, and regularly, and expect the best from your students and their families.

At the Minnesota Parent Center-MN PIRC, we’ll also do our best to help by providing free resources for Minnesota parents and schools, along with special activities and free downloads during Minnesota Parent Involvement Month. To learn more, please visit PACER.org/MPC or call (952) 838-9000; toll free, (800) 537-2237.

For the good of our children, we can all rise to the occasion, together.