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Parent Engagement: Crucial Element of Successful Schools

by Daniela Yu and Tim Hodges

Story Highlights

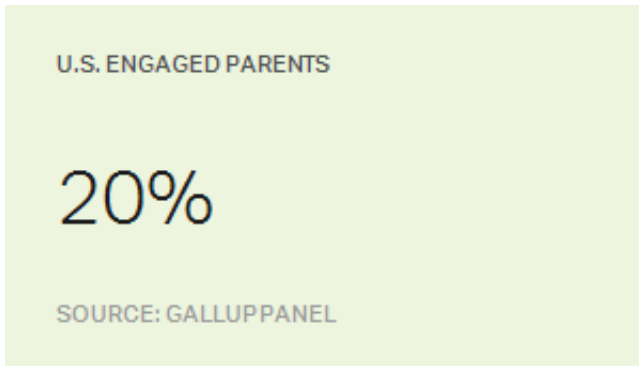
- Parent engagement is more than involvement and participation
 - One in five parents are fully engaged with their kids' schools
 - Key drivers help schools tap potential to engage parents
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As U.S. students begin another school year, conversations and even heated debates revolve around school quality and definitions of student success.

But the narrative is changing. The [47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#) found that student engagement and hope are more important measures of school effectiveness than test scores.

And here's another key ingredient to school success: parents themselves. More specifically, parent engagement.

Parents can be involved in their child's education in many ways, including reading to their child, setting expectations for their child's success and participating in school activities and conferences. More than 70 studies have explored the relationship between [parent involvement and increased student achievement](#), and this research suggests that parent involvement is good. But Gallup has found that parent engagement, which goes far beyond involvement and participation, could have an even more significant impact.



The science of parent engagement builds on Gallup's extensive work with customer engagement. Far more than satisfaction, engagement encompasses a customer's emotional or psychological attachment to a brand, product or company. Similarly, parent engagement extends beyond "participation" or "involvement" to encompass a proactive, interactive relationship with the school that the parent's child attends.

Engaged parents do more than participate in school or classroom-related activities, such as attending a parent-teacher conference or asking their child about their day at school. Engaged parents experience a strong feeling of pride for the school and serve as the school's advocate when discussing it with friends and neighbors. In short, engaged parents have an emotional relationship with their child's school.

Measuring Parent Engagement

Gallup's approach to measuring and managing parent engagement is based on the science of behavioral economics, which theorizes that people's decisions are far more influenced by emotional than by rational factors. For customers of any service or industry, feelings are facts -- which means that most of their decisions are made from the heart rather than from the head.

Gallup's measure of parent engagement builds on customer engagement and behavioral economic principles to get to the heart of a parent's emotional connection with his or her child's school. Three key items help measure their engagement:

1. My child's school always delivers on what they promise.
2. I feel proud to be a parent at my child's school.

3. My child's school is perfect for my child.

Based on parents' answers to these three key questions, Gallup categorizes parents into three distinct groups:

- **Fully engaged** parents are emotionally attached and rationally loyal to their child's school. They are strong ambassadors of the school, and they'll go above and beyond to promote and support the school.
- **Indifferent** parents are emotionally and rationally neutral. While not necessarily negative about the school, they lack the positive energy that is found with fully engaged parents.
- **Actively disengaged** parents are emotionally detached from their child's school. When given a choice, they would be more likely to send their child to another school. If changing schools is not an option, they may voice their negativity about the school to others.

To better understand current levels of parent engagement, Gallup conducted a major study with a nationally representative sample of 3,356 parents across the United States. The study found that 23% of parents strongly agreed they participated in classroom and school activities and 41% strongly agreed their child's school provides a variety of ways for parents to become involved.

However, simply providing opportunities for participation and involvement doesn't necessarily lead to engagement. Only 20% of parents in the study were fully engaged with their child's school. Another 57% of parents in the study were indifferent, and 23% of parents were actively disengaged with the school their child attends.

In comparison, Gallup's recent research with customers in industries such as banking, insurance and healthcare finds between 30% and 40% of customers are fully engaged.

Though it may be discouraging that such a low percentage of parents are fully engaged, parent engagement is not fixed; instead, it is something that school leaders can intentionally measure and improve over time. New Gallup research points to several key drivers of parent engagement, suggesting specific actions school leaders can take to improve their relationships with parents.

Parents are looking for strong school leadership, high academic standards, a positive school culture, personalized education for their child and opportunities to contribute to the school's success. This research suggests that there is untapped potential in engaging parents as a strategy to achieve excellence in schools.

Survey Methods

Results are based on a Gallup Panel Web study completed by 3,356 national adults, aged 18 and older, with at least one child in a U.S. public school. The survey was conducted May 26-June 10, 2015. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults who are selected using random-digit-dial (RDD) phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Address-based sampling methods are also used to recruit panel members. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel and members are not given incentives for participating. For results based on this sample, one can say that the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 1.7 percentage points, at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error are higher for subsamples. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

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