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## FACT SHEET

# U-46 Encourages Kindergarten Families to Get Involved

*August 2016, U-46 Department of School & Community Relations*

What U-46 parents and other experts are saying about family engagement

**"Research clearly shows that when parents are engaged with their children's learning and with the school, they do better in terms of academics and attendance and show stronger social and emotional skills."**

Pamela Epley, Associate Clinical Professor, Erikson Institute

**"The kids have to learn. The teachers teach them. But the parents, we are the ones who know each child's full potential."**

Katerine Alvarez, U-46 Parent, Hispanic Parent Leadership Institute graduate

**"If anything is affecting my children's school, I want to be aware of it, be involved and let my opinion be heard."**

Nadia Garrett, U-46 Parent, African American Parent Leadership Institute graduate

**"It's not just involvement in terms of volunteering or going on a field trip. Often the involvement is just communication."**

Kara Myers, Professional Learning Specialist, National Association for the Education of Young Children

As kindergarteners settle into the routine of riding school buses and spending full days in school learning, parents may want to think about how they will be involved during and outside of the school day. With a primary goal of "Academic Success for All," U-46 relies on a strong partnership between schools and families. The District provides a range of parent involvement opportunities, as do schools and classroom teachers. Being aware of these opportunities and the importance of taking advantage of them is critical.

"Research clearly shows that when parents are engaged with their children's learning and with the school, they do better in terms of academics and attendance and show stronger social and emotional skills," said Pamela Epley, associate clinical professor at the Erikson Institute, a graduate school for child development in Chicago.

Parents who have limited time because of work and other commitments should not be

discouraged. For parent involvement to have an impact, it does not have to include volunteering in classrooms or attending school or district meetings. Epley says the work parents do at home can be equally important.

“When parents talk to their children about school projects or how they spent their day, that is a form of engagement,” Epley said. “When parents help their children learn to regulate their behavior or better express themselves, that is, too — even if it’s not happening in a school.”

Nadia Garrett’s twin 7-year-old daughters just entered second grade at Hilltop Elementary School. Garrett is an active member of the school’s Parent-Teacher Organization and she credits this involvement with helping her get to know the principal, stay up-to-date on what is happening at the school and prepare for upcoming events.

“If anything is affecting my children’s school, I want to be aware of it, be involved and let my opinion be heard,” Garrett said.

Garrett is also a part of the African American Parent Leadership Institute (AAPLI), a two-year training program aimed at increasing parental involvement, improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps in the District. AAPLI participants attend monthly Saturday sessions to learn about programs and services offered in U-46, meet U-46 leadership, build leadership skills and increase their involvement in the District.

The Hispanic Parent Leadership Institute (HPLI) is a parallel program aimed at engaging the District’s Latino community. Katerine Alvarez, a mother of four girls ranging in age from 7 to 16, is a graduate of the HPLI. Now she is a facilitator of a nine-session bilingual training for elementary school parents called Parents Leading And Navigating Success (PLANS). The initiative encourages parents to begin thinking early on about preparing students for college and career.

Alvarez says teachers are more likely to work with children who have involved parents because they know their efforts will be reinforced at home. She has found school isn’t just about kids and teachers.

“The kids have to learn,” Alvarez said. “The teachers teach them, but the parents — we are the ones who know each child’s full potential. We’re there to support the kids and communicate with the teachers about how we can work together to help the child develop.”

That communication piece is key. Parents and teachers alike should spend the beginning of the school year getting to know how the other most prefers to communicate. Whether it is by text message, phone call, email or written note, developing a process early ensures problems can be resolved quickly throughout the year.

When it comes to deciding how else to get involved, U-46 parents and guardians can consider many options. Schools offer their own Parent University events throughout the year, and early childhood sites as well as outside agencies and partners host Parent Cafes to discuss parenting strategies. Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) or Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) typically meet monthly. At the District level, the Citizens' Advisory Council, Bilingual Parent Advisory Council, African-American Advisory Council and the Parent Group Network aim to offer parents a voice and a window into District operations.

A program designed specifically for immigrant parents called Navigating the American Education System highlights the expectations and inner workings of schools in the U.S. A program known in Spanish as "Plazas Comunitarias" provides education and information specifically for Spanish-speaking members of the community.

Visit our parents [webpage](#) on the School District U-46 website to learn more about all the ways U-46 families can get involved.

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