

**A Call to Commitment:**

**Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning**

U.S. Department of Education  
and  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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## INTRODUCTION

There is overwhelming evidence that a parent's involvement in a child's education makes a very positive difference. In the past, often an unstated assumption was made that "parent involvement" meant "mothers' involvement." New research shows that the involvement of both mother *and* father is important. Given this finding, together with the lack of previous work on expanding fathers' involvement, this report describes new opportunities in this area.

Research has shown that fathers, no matter what their income or cultural background, can play a critical role in their children's education. When fathers are involved, their children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact.

At the U.S. Department of Education, we are working to make sure that the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education recognizes and includes fathers as well as mothers. Our colleagues at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are also working for fuller recognition and inclusion of fathers in all of their programs, policies and research.

We know that promoting fathers' involvement depends greatly on the knowledge, attitudes and skills of the teachers, administrators, childcare providers and social support staff who work with families every day. We also know that many of these professionals have not been exposed to the latest research and practices regarding fathers' involvement.

On October 28, 1999, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jointly convened a national satellite teleconference to begin offering educators and other providers of services to children the ideas, strategies and tools they need to successfully involve fathers in children's learning, including readiness to learn at home, at school and in the community. The activities of both agencies were part of a broader government-wide effort in response to President Clinton's Executive Memorandum on Fatherhood issued in June 1995. These efforts also reflect Vice President Gore's long-standing leadership for involving fathers in their children's lives, beginning with a Family Reunion Conference on this topic in 1994.

This publication is designed to inform, promote, and celebrate fathers' increased participation in children's learning. We have seen a growth in programs to support fathers in becoming actively involved in their children's learning at school, at early childhood development centers, at childcare centers and throughout the community. The question is, How can we increase this momentum based upon what we have learned and accomplished?

Section I of this report provides the research context for the topic of fathers' involvement. It describes research on the benefits of family involvement and includes a discussion of

how fathers' involvement in learning contributes to student educational success. Current research tells us about the kind and scope of fathers' involvement in education for fathers who are part of two-parent families or single-parent families, or are nonresident fathers. The section concludes with a discussion of the primary barriers to family involvement in children's education—all of which contribute to fathers' isolation from their children's learning.

Section II provides a discussion of strategies for improving and extending fathers' involvement in their children's education, whether they are resident or nonresident dads. There is agreement that responsibility for parents' (generally) and fathers' (specifically) involvement in children's education must also be shared by schools and educators, as well as by early childhood development centers and the larger community. The many recommendations made to educators, childcare providers and other community partners for supporting parent involvement in children's learning include some special tips for recruiting fathers' participation.

Section III provides examples of programs that involve fathers in children's learning and their practices. The comprehensive list of organizational and Internet resources in the appendices extends the reader's access to additional information, strategies and programs related to family and fathers' support of their children's learning. Particular resources that support family involvement in education that are available from the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services are also in the appendices. References cited in this publication follow the appendices.

Finally, a fact sheet on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education and a form the reader may fill out to receive more information about family involvement complete the publication.