

# Parents Need Differentiated School Engagement, Study Finds

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By [Sarah D. Sparks](#) on April 18, 2013 7:18 PM

Not every parent is going to bake great cupcakes for the school bake sale, or have time to help a teacher set up a science experiment, or even have the numeracy skills to help his 8th grader with algebra homework. That doesn't mean these parents can't be meaningfully involved in their child's education, according to a new report from Kansas City, Mo. public schools.

The report, "[Ready, Willing, and Able?](#)" comes from the New York City-based nonprofit Public Agenda, which interviewed more than 1,500 parents of students in five counties in the Kansas City area about what they knew about education in general and their children's schools, how they prefer to communicate with educators, and what they hope to contribute.

Analysts identified three main types of parents, each of which a school must address to have a successful family-involvement program:

- *Help seekers*: Roughly 19 percent of parents are most concerned with finding out their own children's academic progress and learning how they can help their students improve. These parents are more likely than other types to be worried about the school's quality, but also the least likely to feel comfortable advocating to change policies or practices in the school. They were less than half as likely to approach the administration or volunteer for a committee to make changes to school policies. The majority say they don't know how and don't have time to do more than they already are doing to be involved in school.
- *School helpers*: This 27 percent of parents is the closest to the traditional picture of the "PTA mom and dad." Nearly three out of four of them have already volunteered at the school in the past year, and they are most likely of all parents to trust the school officials. According to the study, these parents are open to "traditional" school involvement such as hall monitoring or fundraising, but less comfortable with contributing to school policies.

- *Potential transformers*: Finally, 31 percent of parents said they were interested in and ready to be more involved in shaping how the schools operate. They are more likely to be aware of how their own school and district stack up to others in terms of academic performance and teacher qualifications, and they are also more likely than other parents to know what classes and skills their children need to be prepared for college. However, only between a quarter and a third of these parents have actually been asked to get more involved.

The remaining parents did not fall easily into any one group, but still shared some views of each group on various issues.

The report urged administrators to consider differentiating parent involvement programs to meet the differing needs of their parent community.

**View the full report at [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2013/04/parents\\_need\\_differentiated\\_sc.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2013/04/parents_need_differentiated_sc.html).**