Why is parent involvement important?

The **two psychological beliefs** identified in the model are **parental role construction** for involvement and **parents' sense of self-efficacy** for helping their children succeed in school.

- **Role construction** is parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's schooling. In essence, it is their job description.

- **Self-efficacy** for helping their children succeed in school refers to parents' beliefs about whether or not their involvement is likely to have a positive influence on their children's education. Just as student self-efficacy influences students' academically related behaviors, parents' sense of self-efficacy shapes what parents do.

Parents' perceptions of invitations to be involved

Contextual motivators of involvement take three forms:

- **General invitations from the school.** Does the school feel welcoming? Do all school staff members (including front office staff, custodians, etc.) greet parents warmly?

- **Specific teacher invitations,** such as teacher requests for supporting learning at home or attending a parent-teacher conference.

- **Specific invitations from the child.** Invitations from the child can be explicit—"I need help," "I just don't understand this," "I hate school!" They can also be implied. The child might be struggling with homework or procrastinating to get a school project done.

Life context variables

- **Parents' understanding of their own skills and knowledge** influences their thinking about the kinds of involvement activities they take on. When students' or teachers' requests for involvement fit parents' beliefs about their skills and abilities, they are more likely to act; however, if parents believe their skills or knowledge are inadequate, they may be reluctant to take action.

- **Parents' perceptions of the time and energy** they have available for involvement influence their decisions about involvement. Parents may be constrained by long work hours, varied family obligations and the reality that opportunities to become involved in many educationally-related activities are scheduled for the school's convenience.

- **Family culture may play a significant role** in parents' ideas about the ways they can and should be involved in supporting their childs' learning. For example, even when schools are inviting, families whose cultures have traditionally suggested that parents should play a limited role in students' formal schooling may stay "on the side lines". Conversely, families whose cultures expect regular and direct family engagement may offer considerably more active engagement than their students' schools expect.

Overcoming barriers to parent involvement
Teacher efficacy for working with parents

What is teacher efficacy for working with parents?

<u>*Self-efficacy*</u> is a term originally defined by psychologist Albert Bandura as the belief in one's ability to perform a task well. Like *The Little Engine That Could* ("I think I can. I think I can."), it's all about a feeling of confidence and persistence that says, "I won't give up. I know I can make this work."

- <u>*Teacher efficacy for working with parents*</u> is an individual teacher's beliefs about a personal ability to work effectively and well with parents.

- **Most teacher preparation programs offer information and skills** essential to <u>*efficacy **for teaching***</u>, but most do not offer notable information or skills focused on developing *teacher efficacy **for working with parents.***

- **Bandura points out that a person's sense of efficacy** for working well in <u>*any*</u> given domain comes from <u>four sources</u>:

  1. **Personal experiences of success in the area.** For example:

     "That was a good parent-teacher conference! I planned well, listened well, and we talked specifically about Jose's current learning progress and made plans for next steps."

     Success breeds success. Experiencing personal success builds confidence.

  2. **Vicarious experiences of success in the area.** For example:

     "I sat in on my favorite colleague's conference with Sabrina's parents. He did a great job and I learned some things I'm going to use, too."

     We learn from others' successes—as well as from their failures!

  3. **Verbal persuasion from others.** For example:

     "My principal tells me I'm working well with parents, and she gave me a great idea for talking with Ramon's dad tomorrow."

     Praise and positive feedback from others builds confidence.

  4. **Emotional arousal about the issue or task.** For example:

     "I know families' active support of students' learning can make such a positive difference. I really need to think about how to help Kenya's mom understand how important her positive expectations for Kenya's learning are."

     Feelings (positive and negative) about an issue serve as stimuli for developing effective strategies for success.

Success leads to confidence, commitment and persistence. We can do it!

What is Ms. Harrison's parent involvement—from her perspective?

Ms. Harrison's daughter Quenisha is active and lively, and—to hear her proudly-smiling mother tell it—an intensely sociable first grader. Often shaking her head with laughter, Ms. Harrison refers several times to Quenisha's sociability as a strong, but sometimes problematic, characteristic. Overall, however, she seems immensely proud of her daughter, a first grader, and is focused intently on her educational success.

For some time, she has acted in several ways to guide her daughter's active style and help her learn. For example, "*A lot of times, I'll give her things to do. She found these activity books [in the store] … so I leafed through this book and I saw these activities progressed in difficulty for her. [I decided] it would be very good. So I started being able to enhance her, by giving her certain activities in the book. Like we'd … unscramble words—[and] she's getting better at these things!*" At home in the evenings, 'Nisha "*loves to watch the Discovery shows, Nature,*" and Ms. Harrison says she will "*write on the bottom of her progress report the suggestions that I would come up with, or she would help me come up with. And then … the next week, I would write back 'Did the suggestion help?' or the teacher will respond [to me]. A couple of them,*" she said, "*she didn't want to instigate at that time.*"
If she could interact with the teacher and the school more, she says, "*I think it [would] enhance me. I think it would give me a better understanding of the school environment itself, what the teachers are like, their methods of teaching. It would really help me a lot.*" It would, she continues, "*give me a better understanding of what her teacher does, how often she changes it, what she changes it to, also how much instruction she gives.*" Such interaction, she believes, would "*probably [also] help Mrs. Duncan … if she knew me better, knew me, the person, the mother, what type of mother I am; my beliefs as afar as education, the extent I'm will to go in order to help my daughter, in order to enhance her learning situation. I think it would probably give [her] a better insight as to how to help her.*"