



Catalyst for Change:
Cultivating Family Engagement in Education

one green
apple

ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS

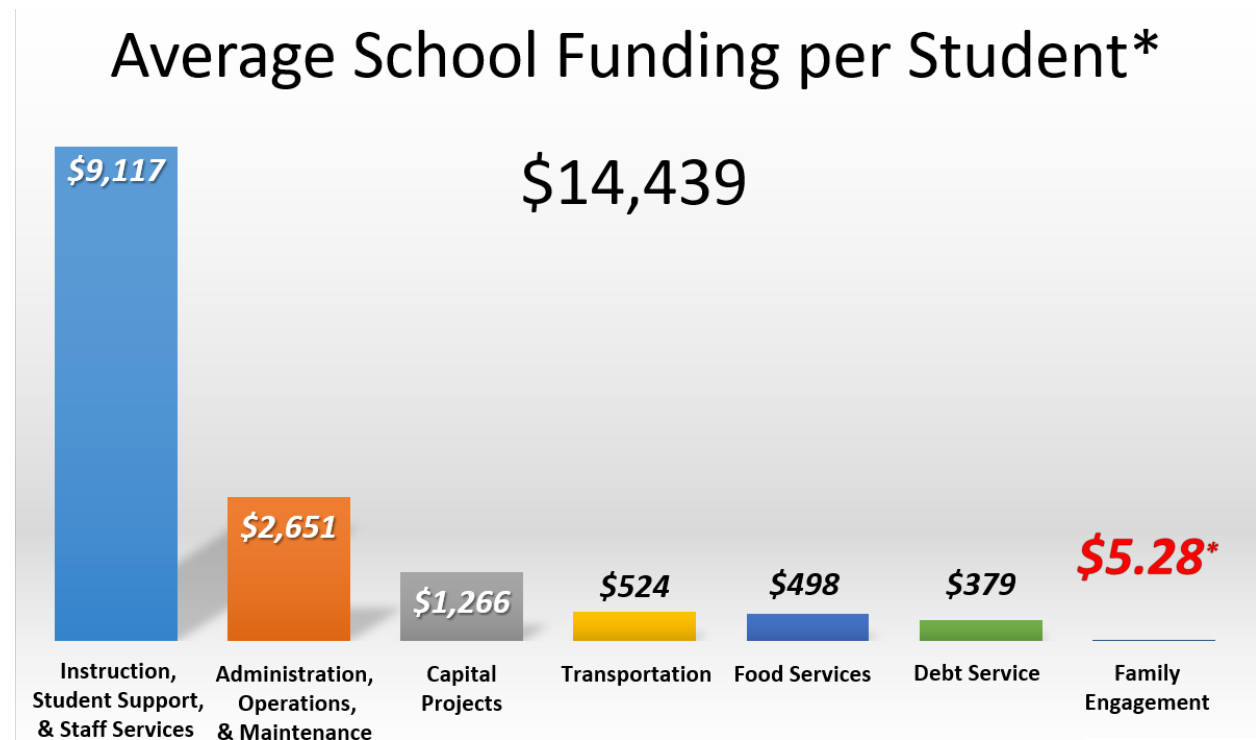
Catalyst for Change: Cultivating Family Engagement in Education

Family Engagement: An Opportunity for Positive Intervention

Teachers and education administrators work every day to advance student achievement for the benefit of every child and, consequently, for our nation as a whole. Of the many factors that impact achievement, increasing effective family engagement is consistently cited as an important opportunity to provide positive intervention in improving schools.

Teacher and school effectiveness is compromised without effective parental engagement and support. Research shows that improving family/school/teacher engagement is a crucial factor in improving student outcomes of all types (academic, social, etc.) Yet despite the strong body of current research, most districts have not made the investment in family engagement strategies that work.

If you ask any teacher or administrator, they will tell you the value of positive parental interactions on student outcomes. These outcomes are contingent on addressing the needs of all parents, especially those of the at-risk child. A major challenge to strengthening the family-school partnership is the lack of funding for solutions, in part, because the effects of family engagement on student performance has not been quantifiable. Without that quantification, financial support is limited in relationship to other funding priorities. As such, family engagement in American education has become a non-performing asset.



* From the National Center for Education Statistics

* From survey of school districts & Title 1

Of the approximately \$14,400 annual cost spent in K-12 American public education, less than \$10 is spent in support of family engagement. The consequence? Many schools and districts that want to build and nurture parent partnerships lack the appropriate funding to do so as well as the right tools to measure success.

It is with this knowledge that One Green Apple set out to provide a technology platform that 1) supports research-based family engagement strategies, 2) easily enables communications between teachers and parents from all socio-economic groups, 3) quantifies those interactions 4) protects student data, and 5) provides an economically viable solution for schools and districts.

Re-engaging Families: Current Research and Recommendations

Current research on effective family engagement strategies outlines recommendations for parents, teachers, and administrators at the school and district levels. Recommendations, including those described below, can positively affect student performance.

Families

Parents, and/or those in place of parents, provide the basic building block for family engagement. Activities that foster improved student performance include:

- **Stressing and maintaining the importance of education.**
- **Having expectations that challenge a child.**
- **Setting goals.**
- **Monitoring progress and holding the student accountable.**
- **Supporting learning at home.**

Teachers

Studies have shown that students made greater and more consistent gains when teachers were ‘especially active’ in outreach to parents. When teachers involved low-achieving students’ parents early on, students could resolve their learning difficulties before they multiplied. The responsibility for building these partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders, i.e., the teachers.

Activities that foster improved family engagement include:

- **Initial home visits** – meeting the parents on their turf, not waiting for them to come to the school.
- **Inviting parents as partners in their child’s education** – this starts the relationship on a positive, respectful note. One Green Apple has developed a Parent Teacher Partnership methodology that outlines steps to achieve this goal.
- **Understanding parent expectations** – learning what the parents expect of their child and guiding the efforts to achieve these expectations.
- **Preparing meaningful communication**- making sure the dialogue is meaningful and more personal than announcements sent home with the student.
- **Monitoring and analyzing family engagement levels**- making sure the family does not drift into “auto-pilot”, and that a healthy and consistent level of their engagement is evident in the class.

School and District

Teachers and families need support and guidance from the school and district to be successful.

Recommended activities and resources include:

- **Focus on school improvement instead of procedural compliance** – Family Engagement is more than filing the proper paperwork necessary for Title 1 funding. It involves measuring outcomes from focused activities and commitment.
- **Make student and school data accessible and meaningful to families** - Posting grades on a parent portal is only the first step. If parents cannot access or understand these systems, new user-friendly methods are needed to reach the parents of the at-risk child.
- **Provide training and supports for both educators and families** – Teachers need to learn family engagement techniques and protocols; families need support and positive reinforcement.
- **Integrate family engagement standards and measures into educator evaluation systems** – Examples include the Component 4c of the Danielson Framework: Communicating with Families.
- **Create staff positions dedicated to family engagement** – Family engagement involves an increased but worthwhile workload. Professional development, measurement, and analysis require additional resources.

The Cost of a Family Engagement Strategy

Currently most schools and districts do not provide this level of support for family engagement. Although a large body of research validates these strategies, there is little research correlating the cost of these additional resources with a definitive benefit in financial terms. Andrew J. Houtenville and Karen Smith Conway suggested that schools would have to spend over \$1,000 more per pupil (in 2003 dollars) to achieve the same gains in student achievement that an involved parent brings. Without substantive proof, funding is lacking.

A study estimating the resources and funds needed to implement the aforementioned strategies on a large scale found these costs to be unaffordable. Using conventional methods, these activities and required additional resources would increase district costs approximately \$1,200 *per student*. In a 15,000-student district, these expenditures would approach \$18,000,000 annually. The required funding cannot be easily found by reviewing budgets or state and federal programs; substantive support would no doubt require an increase in education taxes.

Over time, as teachers are trained on proper family engagement strategies and protocols, these costs would be reduced; however, they would remain a significant budget item. There would also be a change in teacher responsibilities; increased family engagement would require either longer hours or more teachers and assistants.

The prohibitive costs associated with these traditional methods create a need to facilitate family engagement in schools and districts throughout the country, of every size and in every locale.

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 mandates that districts put into place new requirements concerning family engagement, starting in the 2017-18 school year. These additional requirements include:

- A school district may receive funds under Title I only if it conducts outreach **to all parents** and family members
- It must **demonstrably build school capacity for involvement** by effectively engaging parents and family members in education
- It must support **regular two-way, meaningful communication** between family members and school staff, and, to the extent practicable, **in a language that family members can understand**.
- The district must educate teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, principals and other school leaders, and other staff:
 - In the value and utility of parents' contributions,
 - In how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners,
 - In how to implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school.
- In carrying out the Title I parent and family engagement requirements, districts and schools shall provide opportunities for the informed participation of parents and family members (including those who have limited English proficiency, those with disabilities, and those with migratory children), including **providing information and school reports in a format**, and, to the extent practicable, in a language **such parents understand**.

ESSA further dictates that each district shall reserve at least 1 percent of its Title I allocation to assist schools to carry out the parent and family engagement activities. This comes out to an average of \$12 per year per student. How can districts accomplish these requirements within these constraints? Based on the previous analysis, the mandated parent engagement funding is still woefully low, despite its value towards student success.

OPUSSM: The Online Parent Understanding System

Addressing the ecosystem; providing a single point of contact for parents. . .

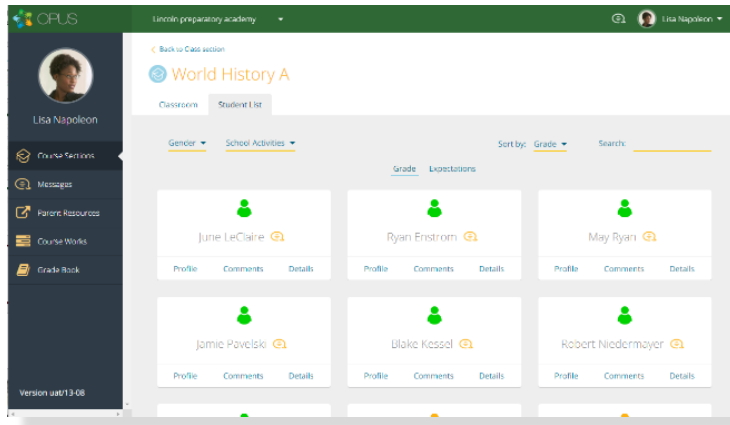
Responding to this need, One Green Apple LLC envisioned a solution to provide educators and families with easy-to-use tools that exchange critical information and improve understanding for parents – a solution that addresses the entire family engagement ecosystem, eases the burden of communication for educators and parents, and validates the importance of parent teacher partnerships.



OPUSSM, a scalable, highly visual, interactive platform, works with existing modes of communication, and interfaces with legacy information systems. It measures the interactions critical to engagement and provides new, insightful metrics that are easily accessed. The “paper trail” improves professional development, protection, and research transparency.

The OPUSSM platform is based on sound family engagement research and strategies and provides much of the effective methods of family engagement outlined previously. Its simplicity makes it an ideal tool for both the busy parent and those who experience other social or economic barriers to engagement, including language differences. It incorporates many features that alleviate extra effort for teachers, while increasing their effectiveness. OPUSSM provides efficiency and transparency for administrators, providing new insights towards teacher performance.

As a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) technology solution, One Green Apple's OPUSSM can dramatically reduce the cost of family engagement by providing the communications, management, and measurement tools minimizing the resources schools and districts need to provide in support of effective family engagement strategies.

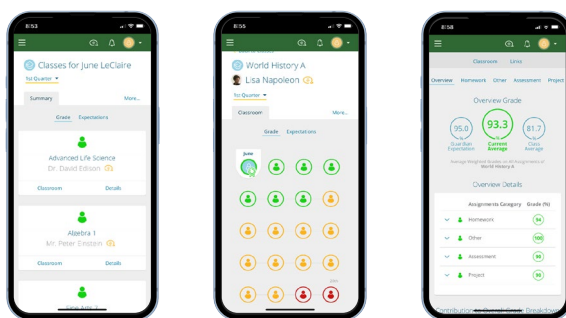


Through highly visual classroom metaphors, OPUSSM enables easy-to-use dynamic analysis of class rank, grading, demographic information, and parent expectations.

One-on-One Messaging initiates a continuous virtual parent-teacher conference that starts Day 1 of the school year and is conducted in the family's native language using dynamic translation.

Perhaps its most important aspect is the dramatic reduction in the cost for effective family engagement. Current pricing ranges from \$12 - \$20 per student, reducing the cost of family engagement management by **over 99 percent**. At these levels, funding family engagement becomes achievable, and sustainable change can be accomplished.

OPUSSM provides new innovative metrics for analysis and action and is the basis for larger management systems providing transparency from the classroom through district and state levels. OPUSSM has received strong support from major research organizations, all levels of the education ecosystem, and across a range of stakeholders from the classroom to state capitals.



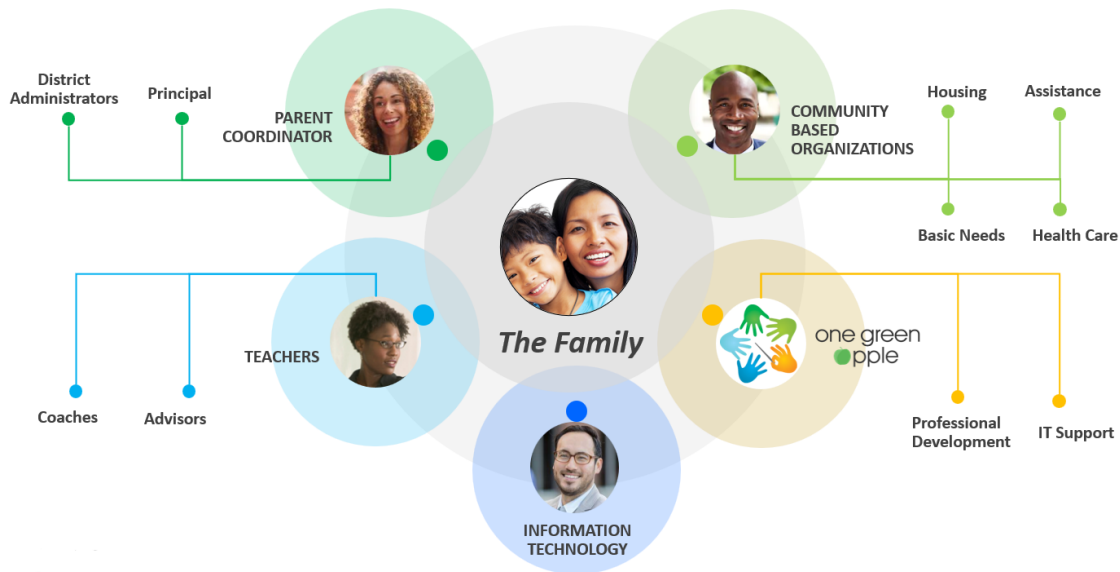
OPUSSM provides complete parent functionality on the handheld device of choice and more in-depth analysis to satisfy the needs of all families.

By leveraging user-friendly graphics, coupled with in-depth analysis, we increase a parent's capacity to understand their child's performance and development.

*Parent Views on a Smartphone:
Informed Dialogue is the basis for Collaboration*

OPUS Family Engagement Support Structure

Online Parent Understanding System



The Ecosystem of Family Engagement

Many engagement strategies focus solely on the communication from teacher to parent; this focus misses many of the underlying issues identified by research that need to be addressed. Teacher communication is an integral part of the Parent Teacher Partnership, but it is only a part of the relationship. In fact, a school's or district's approach to family engagement consists of additional resources beyond the teacher.

Family engagement is supported by multiple constituents within the community. Many people touch a student's life, including her advisor, guidance counselor, coaches, even her homeroom teacher. Each of these roles offer an opportunity to strengthen the safety net for a child when her family support structure is minimal or nonexistent.

The parent coordinator, or the person fulfilling that role, may act as a liaison and a source of professional development for teachers and families. They can be empowered to monitor and manage the unified strategy within the school or district. Parent coordinators can act as an intermediary for principals and administration to implement guidelines, analyze data and refine strategy.

Many issues that affect a student's performance lie outside the purview of the district. Community based organizations can be a resource to provide basic needs including housing, health care, and other assistance. The parent coordinator is in a unique position to coordinate these efforts.

With clearly defined protocols and role responsibilities, metrics can be developed to evaluate teacher, school, and district performance correlating family engagement to student outcomes. OPUSSM is designed with this ecosystem in mind, offering a platform for district-wide family engagement management and strategy.

Sustainable Change Through Market-Driven Initiatives

As competition for national, state, and local funding increases, philanthropic organizations are exploring and supporting creative solutions that achieve results in education.

The vision behind One Green Apple's products is to meet market needs effectively, efficiently, and completely. With that in mind, we intentionally designed our solutions to have broad appeal to our nation's diverse socio-economic groups, providing a channel for all schools and all families (including those that were previously silent) – to be actively engaged in meaningful conversations.

Our scalable solution will reduce the per-student basis cost to enable true systemic change that benefits all students while at the same time supporting educators. We view OPUSSM as the mechanism that will help to fortify family engagement, and with effective family engagement, we will be helping to advance other initiatives critical to student success such as closing the achievement gap, increasing graduation rates, and readying students for college and career, to name a few.

One Green Apple is a market-driven organization that balances social impact with fiscal responsibility. It is our desire to create an inclusive, collaborative environment with forward-thinking philanthropic organizations, because it is our belief that together we can make a greater impact on developing effective school-family partnerships.

Philanthropy: Transforming Family Engagement in Education... *Together*

Aligning philanthropic opportunities to strategic funding initiatives.

A philanthropic organization can partner with One Green Apple in several ways to deliver a cost-effective approach to family engagement. This commitment could include several of the following concepts, and we are open to other opportunities that might best support or be aligned to strategic funding initiatives.

Sponsoring Pilot Programs

Help schools experience OPUSSM by funding them directly or through OGA. The investment for a 500-student school for a full year would be under \$10,000. Administrators can utilize results from the pilots to help secure district budget allocations for the following year. Funding multiple schools within a district would further substantiate the program's value and help to garner additional financial support from the district.

Including its Use with Existing Initiatives

OPUSSM provides the ability to develop key metrics validating ongoing initiatives and efforts currently sponsored by the foundation. Metrics are key for sustainability and data-driven decision making, and One Green Apple offers flexible solutions to help philanthropic organizations measure and quantify impact.

Funding a Study

Subsidizing the cost of an independent study by either a research group or local university is a vital way for a philanthropic organization to help One Green Apple provide evidence of the program's impact. Results from the study would not only yield insights to help further develop OPUSSM but would also reinforce the promise and potential of large-scale implementations.

Research and Investment

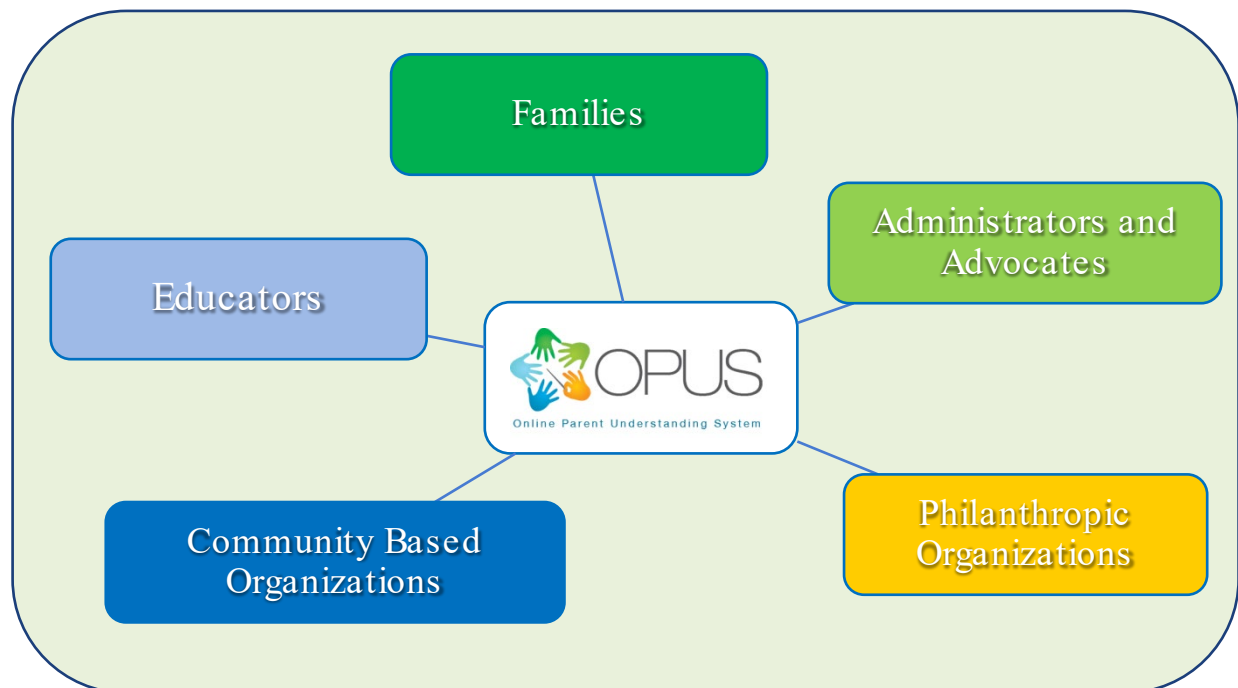
A foundation could consider funding further research conducted by One Green Apple; it may invest in the company, potentially increasing its impact through a more integrated market-driven initiative.

Next Steps

Today there is a new opportunity surrounding family engagement.

From the smallest towns to the largest urban areas and everywhere in between, activities to seed family engagement are taking place. To implement those strategies and quantify what works best, stakeholders needed a connector that did not exist... until now.

One Green Apple's OPUSSM technology platform offers a unique engine to help educators build meaningful relationships with parents; to provide parents with easy-to-use and easy-to-understand tools for supporting their children's academic progress, and to assist administrators, advocates, and the philanthropic organizations that support them, in their ability to enhance school effectiveness.



Along with forward-thinking individuals and organizations, One Green Apple seeks to ensure that the family engagement strategies that make a positive difference in the lives of students can be brought to scale. A demonstrated need, research-based strategies, and desire for effective change is a well-established beginning, and OPUSSM can help schools and districts achieve more. But to go far, as an ancient proverb suggests, we must “go together.”

If you would like to bring OPUSSM to your school or schools or if you would like to see OPUS utilized in schools you support, contact us today.

Let’s work together to bring OPUSSM to schools and families and cultivate change.

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