The key to success, experts stress, is for both families and educators to develop ways to generate more family and community involvement.

Some ideas for parents include:
- Volunteer to read in your child’s classroom.
- Volunteer to help teachers organize their classrooms before the school year, during breaks or at the end of the year.
- Chaperone a field trip.
- Serve as a translator during school-family meetings.

Some ideas for administrators and teachers include:
- Make family engagement part of the core instructional strategy.
- Establish a monthly breakfast or lunch between parents and school faculty.
- Host a school-family event off the school campus.
- Host family movie, reading and game nights.
- Invite local business owners, older adults and others who may not have children to the school for events and activities.
- Identify tasks that can be done by working parents before or after the school day such as organizing supplies.
The Illinois Parent Teacher Association promotes “Three for Me,” a National PTA program that encourages families and community members to pledge three hours a year volunteering on school-related work in or outside the school building. National program results have shown that parents generally spend at least three times the goal – or nine hours per year – once they make the commitment. Volunteer work can take place in or outside of school. For more information on the program, visit the Illinois PTA site at http://www.pta.org/three_for_me.asp.

“Good family involvement requires schools working as partners to identify a variety of opportunities for family members in the community to engage in,” says Debra Strauss, President of the Illinois PTA. “Research shows that family involvement positively impacts student success regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or education level because they’re focused on their children and that attention reaps positive results.”

There is widespread consensus that family engagement is a critical ingredient for success from birth to career and offers an economic benefit. A 2009 Harvard Family Research Project report noted that schools would have to spend $1,000 more per pupil to reap the same gain in achievement that an involved parent brings.

An additional valuable resource for families and educators to strengthen school communities is http://www.illinoisparents.org.