



Reimagining Family Engagement as a Driver of Student and School Outcomes

Prodeo Academy | Unlocking Home-School Partnership Focused on Student Learning

In the 2023-24 school year, Learning Heroes, in partnership with Prodeo Academy and Great MN Schools launched a pilot funded by the Cambiar Thrive Grant to provide professional learning for teachers, staff, and school leaders on family engagement as an instructional strategy to unlock student learning.

Who is Great MN Schools?

Great MN Schools works to ensure that every child in Minneapolis has the opportunity to receive the education that allows them to learn, grow, and thrive. Working alongside schools, community organizations, and parents, they advance effective solutions that create conditions for more great schools to thrive.

Who is Prodeo Academy?

Prodeo Academy is a charter network serving 1,000 students in the Twin Cities, MN.

Students are:

- ★ 90% students of color
- ★ 90% qualify for free or reduced lunch
- ★ 36% are English Language Learners

Who is Learning Heroes?

Learning Heroes is a national organization accelerating home-school partnerships grounded in trust and centered on student learning to advance student achievement, school success, and thriving communities.

Pilot Objectives

- ★ Shift leader and teacher mindsets and practices to build relationships with families anchored in trust and focused on student learning.
- ★ Prioritize candid conversations and improve data sharing practices, helping families better understand their child's progress in reading and math.
- ★ Families and teachers co-create and implement student learning "action plans" as part of strengthening family conferences.

Results

- ★ School leaders experimenting with new strategies to engage families as academic partners.
- ★ More families recognizing their child is not on grade level.
- ★ After family conferences, more families reporting they have a plan with their child's teacher to support learning at home.
- ★ Majority of families reporting they will support learning over the summer.

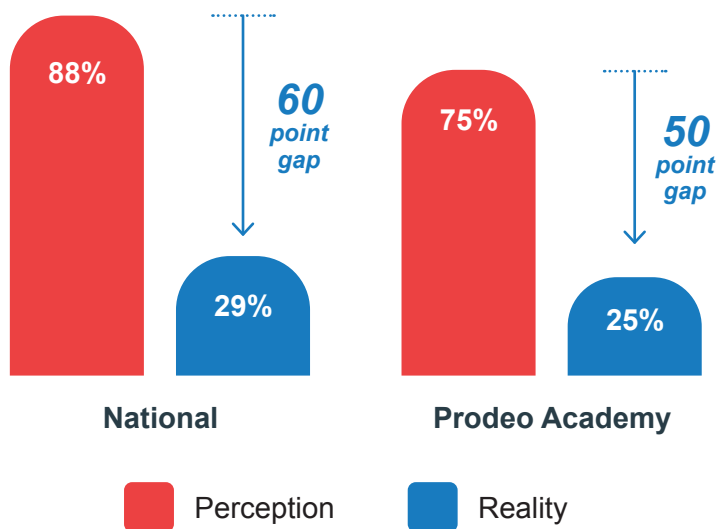
Why aren't schools engaging families around academics?

School leaders can't afford to miss any opportunities for academic growth. So why aren't more schools engaging families as academic partners? Research shows most educators haven't received training on family engagement and therefore don't have a picture of what effective partnership looks like. And often, even well-meaning educators can have deficit-based mindsets about families which hinders partnership. We saw this at Prodeo Academy, where one principal shared *"I previously felt like my teachers and I had to hold all of the learning so as not to burden our students' families, but this [the Family Engagement Leadership Institute] made me challenge my mindset about families and push against this deficit mindset among teachers."*



Family Perception of Students on Grade Level vs. Reality

Nationally, there's a 60-percentage point gap between how many families believe their child is on grade level and how many students actually are. Prodeo Academy had a similar gap – before the pilot, there was a 50-point difference between perceptions of students' grade-level progress and reality.



"I exceeded several of my strategic goals this year, such as the number of students meeting MAP growth targets and surpassing student retention goals. While there were other variables, I believe this was in part because of our increased focus on family engagement."

- Principal Steven Ward

"Just be real with us, we can handle it."

- Prodeo Academy parent



What happens when schools engage families in academics?

The pilot focused on improving family conferences through more effective data sharing and co-creating learning plans with families, as well as building capacity among educators and shifting mindsets about families.

School leader capacity building:

- ★ Participation in Learning Heroes' [Family Engagement Leadership Institute](#) including whole cohort sessions and 1:1 coaching.
- ★ Guidance on 'safe to fail' experiments aligned to Prodeo's new strategic plan supporting school leaders to take action.
- ★ Teacher PD that models centering parent voices, such as family listening panels, was effective in shifting educator mindsets.

"Data sharing has been one of the most prevalent changes – before, teachers didn't know how to share it with parents or made assumptions about what they wanted to know or could understand. Now they have data available at conferences and when families ask about it."

- Prodeo Academy principal

Teacher professional learning:

- ★ Shifting mindsets to view families as partners in supporting their students' academic success.
- ★ Strengthening family conferences and improving data sharing with families, including navigating candid conversations. This included a customized [Parent-Teacher Planning Tool](#), which helped start conferences by listening to parents, sharing various data (including MAP Growth scores and grade-level work samples), and then co-creating an action plan to support key skills.
- ★ Practical support on how to maximize existing, local family-facing-resources, such as the [MN Grade Level Guides](#).

"I used to think I needed to be nice [at parent-teacher conferences]. Now I think I can be honest."

- Prodeo Academy teacher

Families Experienced:

- ★ A clearer understanding of their child's performance and more meaningful opportunities to support it:
 - ★ A 15-point increase in families accurately understanding their child's math performance after their parent-teacher conference.
 - ★ A Family Data Night to break down academic data in more detail.
- ★ More tools and skills to take action and support their child's academic success:
 - ★ 65% of families reported leaving parent-teacher conferences with a plan to support learning at home.
 - ★ The majority of families reported they would support their child's skills in reading and writing (75%) and math (59%).
 - ★ Access to a new "Give Me Five" tool, which helps (Pre-K-1) families understand 5 key grade-level skills and how to support them at home. The tool was created by Liz Ferguson, a Prodeo Academy principal as part of this pilot.

Family Data Night:

In February 2024, Principal Steven Ward hosted a family data night for 3rd grade families to better explain NWEA/MAP growth data — what it meant, why it is valuable, and most importantly, what families could do with it. Prodeo plans to continue to get feedback from parents to expand these data sharing meetings to more grades and campuses over time.

"Conferences were very specific this year about where [my students] were and what they were doing, and how I could help at home. I could look at specific assignments and know what they're supposed to know."

- Prodeo Academy parent

Inspiring Others to Reimagine Family Engagement

In one year, Prodeo Academy made exciting progress toward a renewed focus on family engagement in support of its strategic plan goals. As part of that work, they made promising gains among families in understanding their children's academic progress and interest in supporting learning at home. At the end of the pilot, Learning Heroes and Great MN Schools held an event to showcase Prodeo Academy's success. Prodeo leaders shared their experiences and inspired other schools around the power of family engagement as a strategy to improve student and school outcomes. As a result, eight Twin Cities schools have joined a learning cohort in 2024-25 to unlock the potential of family engagement in their school community. They, too, are already taking action to strengthen home-school partnership in service of student outcomes.



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