

RENAISSANCE®

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Renaissance Home Connect®: Connecting Parents & Extending Practice



What is Renaissance Home Connect®?

Renaissance Home Connect® improves the school-to-home connection by allowing parents and students to login to a website to view progress and current assignments in Renaissance Accelerated Reader®, Renaissance Accelerated Math®, and Renaissance MathFacts in a Flash®. Parents and students can view performance on reading quizzes and math tests, monitor progress toward goals, and see the student's online bookshelf displaying book covers of recently read books. Students can also practice math assignments in Accelerated Math or MathFacts in a Flash using Renaissance Home Connect, and have the assignments immediately scored at home. Access to online results and assignments promotes discussion between parent and child, which in turn motivates students.

Besides viewing the website, parents, grandparents, or other caregivers can stay on top of student progress by receiving an email after each Reading Practice or Vocabulary Practice quiz is taken in Accelerated Reader, after each Accelerated Math test, and after each Math Facts in a Flash level has been completed. Renaissance Home Connect extends student practice time, and keeps parents closely involved with their child's education.

Why is Renaissance Home Connect important?

When the seminal report *A New Wave of Evidence* was released in 1994, the authors began the report with the words "the evidence is now beyond dispute." Research found that when families are involved, students do better in school, from early childhood through high school (Henderson & Berla, 1994). In the 2002 edition, *A New Wave of Evidence*, the authors again completed a meta-analysis of the mounting research covering parental involvement and summarized it as follows:

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p. 7)

Research continued to find positive and significant relationships between family involvement and student achievement—and "this relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This comprehensive report found that when parents are involved, students are more likely to

- Earn higher grades
- Score better on standardized tests
- Attend school regularly
- Have better attitudes towards school, and increased motivation and self-esteem
- Pass courses, earn more credits, and be promoted
- Graduate high school
- Continue their education past high school

Thus, it is often cited that for the past 30 years, research addressing the impact of parental involvement has been unequivocal: Children do better academically and socially when their parents are involved in their education. Success for these students is behavioral as well as academic—and regardless of family income, and racial or cultural background (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.).

In fact, research shows that family involvement is a better predictor of student achievement than

socioeconomic status. Another meta-analysis of more than 100 studies found that home environment, specifically, was a stronger predictor of academic achievement than family income (White, 1982).

High school graduation rates—often considered the litmus test of a successful education and many students' ultimate goal—are significantly affected by parental involvement. When *Education Week* released *Diplomas Count 2007*, their annual ranking of state graduation rates, Utah had the highest graduation rate in the nation. And of the 50 largest school districts in the United States, Jordan School District in Utah had the highest graduation rate. An article (Madsen, 2007) about Utah's success reported "parent involvement is highly appreciated and credited for helping Utah schools succeed" and quoted Jordan School District as saying, "If a parent is involved, a student will do well."

In a 2004 study from San Diego State University, researchers evaluating the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) found the parent involvement program had a significant and positive effect on graduation rates and college participation (Vidano & Sahafi, 2004). The program assists low-income, minority, immigrant parents on the importance and appropriateness of becoming involved in education. Children of parents who participated in the PIQE program had a 93% graduation rate. In addition, 79% of those students were college-bound, significantly higher than the San Diego County average of 52% college-bound graduates.

Who benefits from Renaissance Home Connect?

Renaissance Home Connect creates a direct link between school and a student's parents, and research has shown students of all backgrounds benefit when parents are involved in their education. This holds true for all racial, ethnic, and economic groups. Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded that while all children benefit when parents are involved—regardless of family income— children in high-poverty schools have the most to gain when families get involved. This is, in part, because when parents are involved, as the Northwest Regional Educational Lab (n.d.) reports, "the effects of poverty and lack of formal education are reduced" (p. 54).

Research also shows students of all ages and in all grades benefit from family involvement. A recent meta-analysis focusing on the impact of parental involvement on urban secondary students found there is a significant effect on high school students when parents are involved. William Jeynes conducted the analysis and reviewed 52 studies finding that parental involvement, whether minority students or white students, positively affected all of the academic variables included in the study (Jeynes, 2007). Similarly, in 2005, Jeynes found a significant relationship between parental involvement and student achievement at the elementary school level. This was true for students of all races, all grades, and both genders.

Research shows that involved, engaged parents not only help students succeed, but also their teachers, schools and districts.

According to the 2005 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, an annual survey conducted for nearly 25 years, new teachers are especially in need of parent involvement. Teachers in the survey reported that parental involvement is a greater challenge than acquiring sufficient classroom supplies, maintaining classroom order and discipline, preparing students for testing, and getting professional guidance and support (Harris Interactive, 2005). Elementary and secondary teachers alike revealed their greatest challenge is communicating with and involving parents. Of the new teachers included in the survey, less than half were satisfied with their relationship with parents. Similarly, only half of principals in the survey reported satisfaction with parent collaborations.

And schools themselves improve when parents are involved (Lewis & Henderson, 1997). As former Education Secretary Rod Paige stated, “schools can’t improve without the help of parents” (*USA Today*, 2002). In a long-term study for the U.S. Department of Education Planning & Evaluation Service, Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) found that schools implementing standards-based reform are more likely to see positive results in test scores when teachers are in regular contact with parents.

District-wide reforms were also found to be more effective if they engage families. The report *A New Wave of Evidence* found that high-quality programs and school reform efforts are more effective if they engage families and concluded that engaging families “should be considered an essential part of any strategy to narrow the achievement gap between middle-class white students and low-income students and students of color” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The analysis found the key trait common to high-performing schools is significant family and community involvement. These schools all built on the idea of partnerships in which power and responsibility were shared among schools and families. This concept can also be found in federal education laws.

NCLB and parental involvement

A parent is a child's first and most important teacher, which is why the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) recognizes parents' vital role in education. NCLB has sent a strong message that results matter and that parents deserve more information and options. – Secretary Spellings, U.S. Department of Education

The federal government is so convinced of the importance of parental involvement that it has been written into the federal education law. Parental involvement, in fact, is one of the four tenets of the NCLB mandate. The NCLB act of 2001 was the largest federal commitment ever made to improving education, and increased parent engagement is linked to this funding. NCLB requires schools and districts to develop a parental involvement policy with parents and approved by parents, elicit parental input on school improvement plans, and spend no less than one percent of Title I funds on parental support programs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

The parental involvement provision in NCLB stresses shared accountability between schools and parents. The U.S. Department of Education (2004) brief, “Parental Involvement Guidance,” details the requirements of the law and provides a working definition of parental involvement:

“The statute defines parental involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning...ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; that parents are full partners in their child's education.”

The importance of parents is echoed by the U.S. Department of Education website; one of the four main sections is devoted to parents <http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml>. The site provides parents with resources, tips, and helpful information to help involve them in their children’s education.

Strategies for connecting families

Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education continue to study the impact families have on a child’s educational achievement. Families, according to the Harvard Family Research Project, include more people than parent and child. They can include grandparents, siblings, guardians, foster parents, and even nannies. They have termed family involvement in a child’s education *complementary learning*—a way of providing students with multiple opportunities to learn and grow— at home, in school, and in the community. As such, complementary learning is a systemic approach integrating school and non-school supports for children (Harvard Family Research Project,

n.d.). Renaissance Home Connect offers one of the key variables in any complementary learning system: opportunities for family engagement.

Recent research out of the Harvard Family Research Project (2007) found “a large body of research supports the importance of family involvement in the middle and high school years” despite the fact that parental involvement during these years tends to decline.

While research is conclusive that parents are critical to student achievement, difficulties can arise when communicating with families. Many parents have demanding work schedules, language barriers, cultural preferences, or misconceptions that prevent them from approaching teachers or discussing the details of their child’s education. Research has found that miscommunications can “arise from different cultural perspectives on parent-teacher involvement and on how students learn...feelings of intimidation based on limited educational experience, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. school system” (Golan & Petersen, 2002). Yet reaching these families is critical because “children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution” (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Fortunately, electronic communications, especially when coupled with reports in the home language, ease many of these burdens. WestEd’s 2007 publication for the U.S. Department of Education, *Engaging Parents in Education*, recommends using technology to communicate with parents. Technology reduces the burden of travel costs, provides for immediate dissemination of information, and can be flexible enough to allow for personalization of fluid and/or changing data.

Studies show that when parental outreach is linked to student learning—rather than school involvement in general—there is a greater effect on achievement. In *A New Wave of Evidence* Henderson and Mapp (2002) recommend giving parents detailed and personalized information on student progress in specific areas for the most effective parental connection. This approach keeps the focus on student achievement instead of donations to the school, fundraising efforts, or other areas in which many parents cannot contribute. The report also recommends that parents and teachers work collaboratively to discuss a child’s development of specific knowledge and skills.

Providing access through Renaissance Home Connect and emailing parents is an efficient and effective way to reach families. For parents who may not visit their child’s school as often as they may have in primary school, Renaissance Home Connect offers a convenient parent-teacher connection. Parents and other caregivers can log on to the website from any computer with an internet connection—at home, work, or the library—anytime because it’s accessible 24/7. For parents who work non-traditional shifts, this is an important feature that allows them to stay connected to their child’s progress, even at 2 a.m.

Creating a dialogue

Renaissance Home Connect doesn’t require a face-to-face conversation between parent and teacher. Many parents report not having the time for this level of interaction, but reading email and monitoring their child’s progress via Renaissance Home Connect now only takes a moment.

Renaissance Home Connect encourages and facilitates child-parent-teacher interactions. Providing quiz results and updates on student progress with this tool allows parents, students, and teachers to all “speak the same language” when discussing student achievement.

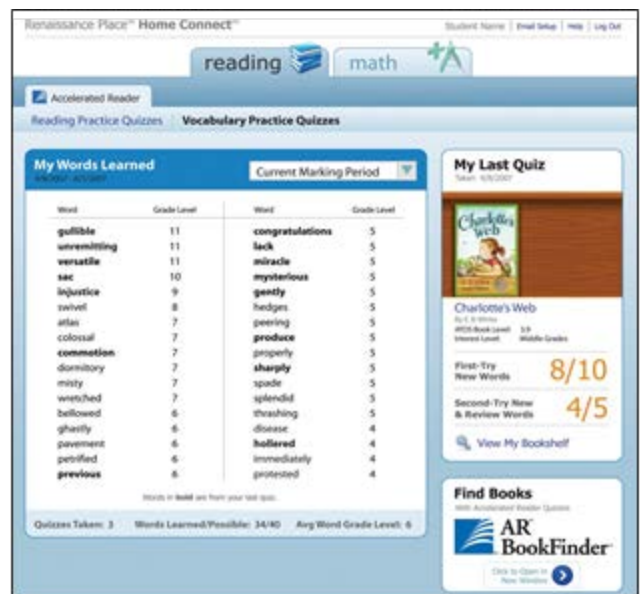
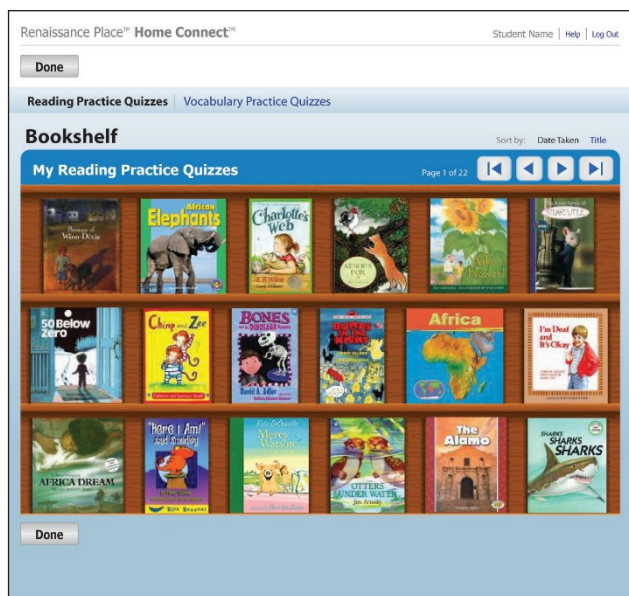
Creating a dialogue between parent and teacher is key to overcoming some of the barriers between effective parent-teacher communications. It is important that both parties use and understand the same terms and

expectations. For example, when parents receive regular reports displaying their child's average percent correct, vocabulary words learned, and the student's reading level, they will be well versed in the goals set for their child within the Accelerated Reader program. Being able to use the same terminology as teachers when discussing their child's reading and math work empowers parents and lets teachers pinpoint areas needing attention.

Renaissance Home Connect with Accelerated Reader

Parents can receive email notification when their child finishes a book and takes an AR quiz. The optional emails will include the student's most recent quiz results. In Renaissance Home Connect, parents and students can view student progress toward reading goals, including books read, reading level of books, percent correct on comprehension quizzes, and vocabulary words learned.

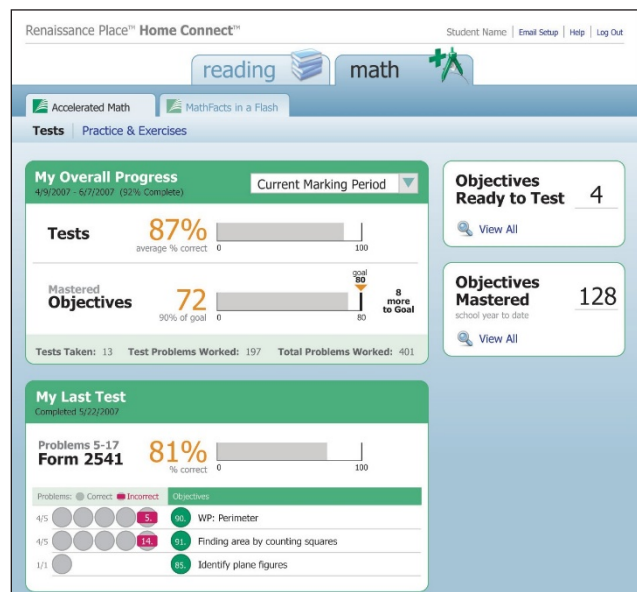
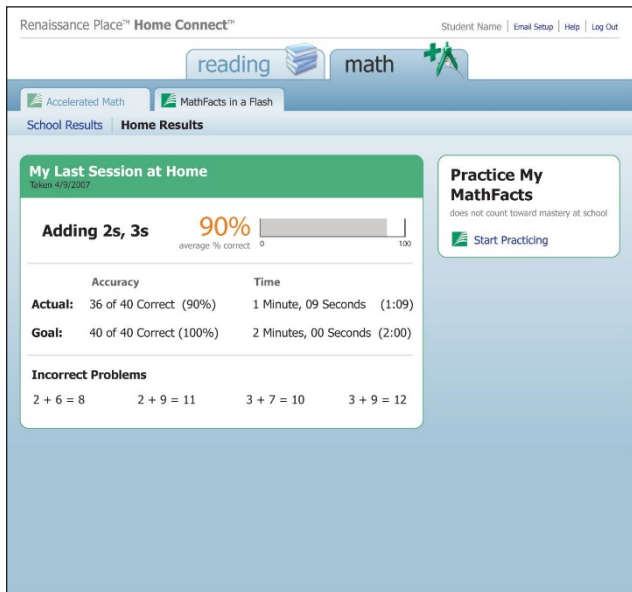
Families can easily access AR BookFinder online and locate the next title for their child to read. AR BookFinder (www.arbookfind.com) is a free and open database that can be searched by author, subject, reading level, or by award-winning titles.



Renaissance Home Connect with Accelerated Math and MathFacts In a Flash

Renaissance Home Connect will show results of recent practice and tests in Accelerated Math, as well as overall percent correct, and total objectives mastered towards student goals. Accelerated Math practice assignments can be printed out and scored at home. Parents can also receive email notification when their child completes a math test. This optional email function will automatically notify families when math tests are scored, and both parents and students will be able to review the number of Accelerated Math objectives mastered.

If students use MathFacts in a Flash, they will be able to practice or test at any level (regardless of assigned level at school) when using Renaissance Home Connect. Families can view results of the work completed at school or at home. And parents can receive an email each time their child completes a new level in MathFacts in a Flash.



Summary

The education community is clear on parental involvement: Academic performance increases when families are involved with a student's education. Research has consistently shown that involved parents positively affect student learning and achievement more than any other factor. Parent involvement has a positive effect on all students, regardless of age, race, gender, or income. It is therefore critical to engage families in each child's education.

Renaissance Home Connect is an efficient and effective tool connecting families and schools. It allows parents and teachers to track student progress, review quiz results, and have a platform to discuss individual student achievement in reading and math. Renaissance Home Connect also allows students to select books to read, and work and score math problems, thereby extending practice into the home. Parents can also receive emails whenever their child completes a reading quiz or math test. In short, Renaissance Home Connect makes it effortless for families to become more involved in their child's education—a proven method to boost student achievement.

Because the research is clear—that close regular communication between parents and teachers leads to greater student achievement—the practice of “regular two-way communication” is included in the federal education law. As a major tenet of NCLB, the potential of family involvement has never been greater. The law specifies parental involvement provisions that schools and districts must observe, such as expanding opportunities for parents to play active roles in student education. Districts are legally required to invest substantial thought and planning into strategies that include families in their school improvement plans. In offering Renaissance Home Connect, districts can bridge the gap between school and home, and can extend student practice into the home.

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