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ABSTRACT

This policy document, directed to school board members, superintendents, and principals, makes recommendations on developing school partnerships with families and communities; discusses the benefits of school partnerships for children, families, schools, teachers, and community agencies; and identifies basic principles underlying successful partnerships. Six types of family-community-school partnerships are described, including basic obligations of families; basic obligations of school for communication; involvement at school; involvement in learning activities at home; involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy; and collaboration and exchange with community organizations. The bulk of the document discusses the following recommendations for helping schools develop collaborative partnerships: (1) adopt clear written policies on school-family-community collaboration and back up the policies with direct support; (2) align personnel policies with the district's commitment to collaboration; (3) prepare school staff and parents to work collaboratively; (4) involve family members as full partners with real decision-making responsibility; (5) develop agreements with social service and health agencies to provide services for students and their families; (6) use multiple approaches to school-family communication; (7) increase opportunities for students to learn at home and in the community; (8) set up parent/family centers in every elementary, middle, and high school; (9) expand parent choice within the public school system and provide good consumer information; and (10) create planning and problem-solving teams. Each recommendation is accompanied by a detailed rationale and examples of successful school practices. Includes a list of elements of a district partnership policy. (KDFB)

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Partnerships for Student Success

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2

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Why Partnerships?

School Board members and school administrators tell us that the main benefit of stronger ties with families and communities is increased academic achievement by students. Parent and community partnerships can help to boost academic achievement from preschool through high school. Involved parents and the community will be more likely to support the schools' reform efforts.

Partnerships for Student Success

What we have learned about policies to increase student achievement through school partnerships with families and communities

by DON DAVIES, CO-DIRECTOR
CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES,
SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

AN INVITATION

We invite every American school board, superintendent, and principal to act now to plan and implement a comprehensive program of family and community partnerships aimed at improving the academic achievement and social success of all of their students.

We have learned a great deal from our research and years of work in schools about why school partnerships with families and communities are important and how to make them work under various conditions. Different strategies and practices will affect different outcomes. But, if strategies for collaboration are well planned, aimed at appropriate goals, and well implemented, they can have many benefits.

Children's chances for success in school and life are likely to be improved. Their parents and other family members can also gain skills, knowledge, and confidence that will help them in rearing children, improving their economic condition, and being good citizens. When families are informed about how the teacher and the school are supporting the child's efforts to learn, family expectations for children's success goes up. Teachers and schools are also helped. When families see that teachers communicate frequently and positively with them, they give higher ratings to the teachers and the schools. Families are more likely to understand the goals of the teacher and the school and to be more supportive of proposed changes.

Who Benefits?

- ✓ Children
- ✓ Families
- ✓ Schools
- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ Community Agencies

School reform requires family and community support. Without such support, schools' efforts to set higher standards, restructure schedules, rules, and procedures, and introduce different curriculum or teaching methods are not likely to succeed. Families and community residents and agencies who see themselves as partners with the schools are more likely to support educators' efforts to gain increased financial support.

Community agencies and institutions also can benefit when they collaborate effectively with schools. They can reach more of their constituents, increase public support for their work, sometimes realize cost-savings, and gain access to school facilities and expertise. In some cases, school-based collaboration may be an opportunity to coordinate their services with other community organizations.

Research and experience supports the belief that partnerships between schools, families, and communities are a powerful tool to achieve better schools. But, such partnerships are not a substitute for good schools and effective teaching.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

- **Good partnerships can be formed in all kinds of schools, from preschool through high school.** They can work in all kinds of communities—urban, suburban, and rural—regardless of level of affluence or racial, ethnic, or religious composition.
- **Written policies at both the district and school level that set guidelines and requirements for collaboration make a difference.** So does what school boards, superintendents, and principals say and do in support.
- **Not all good partnerships look the same.** Successful partnerships exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that spawn them. Partnerships work best when they recognize differences among families, communities, cultures, states, and regions.

Despite the benefits, the lessons of research, and the widespread bipartisan acceptance of the idea of parent involvement and school-family-community collaboration, most American public schools and school systems have not yet acted to adopt and enforce clear policies for comprehensive programs of partnership. Collaboration is not yet the standard way of working in most schools. School reform efforts often continue to be launched without adequate community ownership. Many schools still keep parents and the community at arms length. We believe that the remaining years of this century are the time to "stop talking and start digging" to make school-family-community collaboration the rule rather than the exception. We draw from our research and work in the schools a few key principles and recommendations as guideposts for those who are ready to act.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Reciprocity

Successful partnerships are based on reciprocity. This principle means that all the key parts of the child's world—school, family, community—have both unique and overlapping responsibilities and authority for children's learning and development.

The family remains the primary institution within which children are nurtured, shaped, and readied for an independent role in life. Regardless of their size or composition, families have the primary obligation for the protection, health, and education of their own children. Families must be held accountable for meeting their obligations. But, they often need help. Although some are struggling more than others, nearly all of today's families at one time or another need support from the community and from the schools themselves.

The obligations of schools for the education and socialization of the community's young are obvious and central. Schools must be held accountable for meeting those obligations, but they cannot do their job alone. They need the help and support of families and of community agencies and institutions.

Communities have traditional obligations to provide a safe and orderly environment in which families and children can satisfy their basic needs and in which schools can thrive. The community—through its government, public and private agencies and employers—offers its citizens protection, work, and recreation as well as an environment in which a healthy civic culture can develop. The community, in all of its parts, must be held accountable by residents, taxpayers, and voters for meeting its obligations to children and their families. But, communities need the help of productive educational institutions and residents who contribute to the common good as democratic citizens.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

- ✓ Partnerships are possible.
- ✓ Policies make a difference.
- ✓ Successful partnerships are not all the same.

Reciprocity means clear relationships and mutual obligations between all the parts of the child's world. To put this concept into practice requires formal and informal structures and agreements. All the parts of the child's world need to accept their mutual and separate obligations.

Democratic Process

Developing effective partnerships requires attention to some of the essential elements of democratic process. These elements include recognizing different interests, respecting all participants regardless of color, religion, or educational status, and respecting minority viewpoints. In addition, conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and compromise are necessary aspects of democratic process.

Schools make a substantial contribution to the education of children and the community when they practice democratic principles in their day-to-day operations and in the ways they involve families and communities. Effective democratic decision-making includes all families and all sectors of the community, across lines of race, language, social class, income, and other factors that sometimes separate people.

A good place to start is for schools to bring together teachers and other educators with families, students, and community representatives to discuss and agree on mutually important goals for children, schools, and the community and then to make collaborative plans to achieve them.

Diverse Opportunities

Effective programs of school-family-community collaboration provide a menu of opportunities, geared to the diverse

needs of families and their children and to the particular conditions of each school and school district. What works best is a plan that is integrated with the other important objectives of the school.

Joyce Epstein, Co-Director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, has developed and tested six categories of partnership activities which have been useful to schools seeking to create comprehensive partnerships.

A comprehensive program of partnerships will include such elements as parent education and family support, family members and community members acting as volunteers in the school, home-school communication, strategies that foster children's learning at home and in community settings, decision-making and governance mechanisms, and myriad kinds of school-community exchanges.

Providing a menu of opportunities for partnership will help schools reach and involve even the most needy and overlooked families in the school's community.

help their own children at home by providing information on academic and other skills, with directions on how to monitor, discuss, and help with homework and practice and reinforce needed skills.

Type 5: Involvement in decision-making, governance and advocacy. Parents and others in the community participate in parent associations, advisory councils and policy boards, school site management teams, or other committees and community organizations. Parents also become activists in independent advocacy groups in the community. Schools assist family members to be leaders and representatives by training them in decision-making skills and by including parents as true, not token, contributors to school decisions, and by providing information to community advocacy groups so they may knowledgeably address issues of school improvement.

Type 6: Collaboration and exchange with community organizations. Schools collaborate with agencies, businesses, cultural organizations, and other groups to share responsibility for children's education and future success. Collaboration includes school programs that provide or coordinate child and family access to community and support services, such as before- and after-school care, health services, cultural events, and other programs. Schools also provide services, facilities, and expertise to the community.

The descriptions above were adapted from a typology developed by Joyce Epstein, 1992, *School and Family Partnerships*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Reciprocity among School, Family and Community
- ✓ Applying Democratic Process
- ✓ Providing Diverse Opportunities

TYPES OF FAMILY-COMMUNITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Type 1: Basic obligations of families. Schools help families meet their basic obligations for providing for children's health and safety, developing parenting skills and child-rearing approaches that prepare children for school and that maintain healthy child development across grades. Good examples of this type are family support and home visiting programs.

Type 2: Basic obligations of schools for communication. Schools are responsible for communicating with families about school programs and children's progress and for encouraging two-way communication between home and school. Communications include the notices, phone calls, visits, report cards, and conferences that many schools provide as well as more innovative ways to promote two-way home-school communication.

Type 3: Involvement at school. Parents and other volunteers assist educators and children in classrooms and other areas of the school in many different ways and also come to the school to support student performances and activities, including sports events.

Type 4: Involvement in learning activities at home. Teachers request and guide parents to monitor and assist their own children at home. Schools enable families to understand how to

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations which flow from research and experience will help schools beginning to develop a culture of collaboration. Such a culture should become "the way we do things around here" in a school and a school district, rather than a project, a series of events, or a funding requirement.

Projects and funding may come and go, but a school and school district culture can persist over time and have a positive influence on all who are involved. Changing "the way we do things around here" takes time, can't be mandated, but can be encouraged by example, incentives, recognition, rewards, and clear written policies.

A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

The Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School, a small racially and ethnically diverse school in Boston that integrates special needs children into regular classrooms, has—over a four-year period—developed a new culture of collaboration. Family members are involved in all aspects of the school's life. The principal and teachers, as a matter of course, reach out to community resources. Parent volunteers are trained to be "home visitors" who visit all families who are new to the school. The school's primary decision-making body consists of an equal number of parents and educators working on curriculum, personnel, and budget matters. Members are elected annually and meet monthly.

Contact: Bill Henderson, Principal, Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School, 1669 Dorchester Ave., Dorchester, MA 02122; phone: (617) 635-8725; fax: (617) 635-8728.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

Adopt clear written policies on school-family-community collaboration and back up the policies with direct support.

School districts should offer more than verbal support for school-family-community partnerships. Written district policies provide an institutionally and politically sanctioned framework for action at the school and community level.

Only a handful of the nation's 16,000 school districts actually have specific written policies about partnership. Clear, written policies at the school building level are also needed to support and extend district policies. Written policies are needed because school board members, superintendents, and principals change.

Having written policies is not enough, however. They must be enforced and backed up with financial support when it is needed and with direct on-site assistance to schools planning and carrying out partnership programs.

Most schools need hands-on help as they plan and put partnership programs into practice. They shouldn't have to start from scratch. Schools will benefit from knowing about successful models and practices in other schools, the results of research about what does and doesn't work, help with planning and successfully managing meetings, and identifying and obtaining funds from a variety of public and private sources. Some help can come from district staff. Many successful partnerships also include local colleges and universities in such capacities as evaluators or trainers.

Districts can also help schools by providing small amounts of discretionary money to use free from often complex and time consuming bureaucratic requirements.

School officials will have more success in encouraging schools

EXPLANATION OF KEY TERMS

Families: The individual(s) responsible for a child's care and upbringing. May include biological or non-biological parents, grandparents and other relatives, older siblings, and foster parents. We prefer this term to "parents" because it is more inclusive.

Partnerships: Formal or informal procedures or programs to promote closer connections between school and the families and communities they serve. We use partnerships instead of the traditional term, "parent involvement," to signal the inclusion of community agencies, organizations, and individuals in a three-way relationship with families and to indicate relationships where all parties have reciprocal rights and responsibilities.

Collaboration: In this paper we use the terms partnership and collaboration interchangeably.

to adopt partnership practices when they recognize the differences in leadership, culture, readiness, and capacity for change among schools in the same district. Some schools are front-runners and have already moved to adopt many of the recommendations in this report. They need encouragement, rewards, and recognition. Other schools are laggard and may be quite resistant. They require stronger incentives and intervention. In between will be many on the fence, where different mixes of "carrots and sticks" may be useful. Just as all districts should not be treated the same, neither should all schools within a district.

A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY AND BACK-UP SUPPORT IN SAN DIEGO

San Diego was one of the first big-city school districts to adopt a written parent involvement policy and to back it up with central office staff and local money. The San Diego policy states the School Board's commitment to a) involving parents as partners in school governance, including shared decision-making; b) establishing effective two-way home school communication; c) developing structures and strategies in each school to empower parents to participate actively in their children's education; d) providing district coordination and support, K-12; and e) using schools to connect students and families to community resources. Support activities include a home-school partnership

conference, a mobile parent resource center, and home learning calendars. In addition, the San Diego district has provided grants on a competitive basis to schools to develop new parent and community outreach strategies.

Contact: Jeana Preston, Parent Involvement Program, San Diego City Schools, Room 2121, 4100 Normal Street, San Diego, CA 92103; phone: (619) 293-8560; fax: (619) 293-8567.

RECIPROCITY IN ACTION IN TACOMA, WASHINGTON

The Tacoma School District has written policy statements which mandate involvement of "parents, families, advocates for children, and the community" to be fostered by every school. Through its personnel policies, expectations for family participation and accountability, special outreach efforts, and a complaint procedure, the district seeks to build a partnership between home, school, and community that will encourage high student achievement. For example, schools are asked to require school staff to be available to families for thirty minutes before and after school and to include strategies for family/community involvement in the school's required yearly "building plan," while families are expected to devote a minimum of twenty hours a year of volunteer service to the school and to monitor and sign-off on homework. The district provides central office staff to support the policy.

Contact: Gay Campbell, Director, Community Relations, Tacoma Public Schools; phone: (206) 596-1015; fax: (206) 596-2550.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Align personnel policies with the district's commitment to collaboration.

Policies and practices for selecting, evaluating, rewarding, and promoting school staff at both the district and school level should reflect a commitment to building partnerships with families and community agencies and institutions.

Involving family and community members in personnel actions such as interviewing teacher candidates and selecting a principal will help to assure that family and community perspectives and voices are considered. Respecting family needs and demands on teachers' time, regulations, or contract language should specify time for teachers and other staff to be available for meetings and conferences with family members.

A promising but seldom-tried way to support collaborative policies and at the same time influence schools of education is to establish a district policy to give hiring preference to teachers and

administrators who give evidence that they have been prepared through course work and/or experience to collaborate effectively with families and the community.

Districts should reward and recognize those who promote and exemplify collaboration through released time, professional development credits, mini-grants, and public praise and awards.

HIRING AND EVALUATING WITH COLLABORATION IN MIND

Addie Johnson, principal of the Robert W. Coleman Elementary School in Baltimore, is an innovative and energetic proponent of collaboration with families and community. Using an 18-month curriculum in her Parent Academy, she trains family members to support the work of the school and to reinforce classroom learning. She has installed a washer and dryer in the school to encourage family members to come into the building. When Ms. Johnson is assessing faculty and staff candidates, she won't support one unless he/she supports partnerships with parents. Further, evaluation of teachers and staff is done not only in traditional areas, but includes collaborative skills as well.

Contact: Addie Johnson, Principal, Robert W. Coleman Elementary School, 2400 Windsor Ave., Baltimore, MD 21216; phone: (410) 396-0764; fax: (410) 225-3035.

SCHOOL IN CAMBRIDGE SUPPORTS TEACHERS WHO COLLABORATE

Participatory decision-making has been in place since 1975 at the Graham and Parks Alternative Public School (K-8) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Steering Committee consists of five elected parents, five elected staff members, the paid parent coordinator, the principal, and two community members. Through a committee structure, this governing body engages in program and school evaluation and makes decisions on hiring, discipline, curriculum, funding, and building and grounds matters. The hiring committee gives significant weight to experience that a teaching candidate has had in collaboration with families and/or community.

Additionally, the school will hire substitutes and allow teachers to use their professional development days to plan or work in collaborative projects with families or community partners. Teachers are grouped on teams which meet from one to three times per week.

Contact: Leonard Solo, Principal, Graham & Parks Alternative Public School, 15 Upton Street, Cambridge, MA 02139; phone: (617) 349-6612; fax: (617) 349-6615.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Prepare school staff and parents to work collaboratively.

Administrators, teachers, families, and community members need to learn how to work together well. For most, this is unexplored territory. The skills required include talking and listening across cultural and educational boundaries, negotiating, strategic planning, interviewing, planning and chairing meetings, having productive parent-teacher conferences, and building consensus about the ends-and-means of education.

Each group approaches collaboration with some resistance: teachers may fear loss of status and criticism from parents; family members may remember negative experiences with schooling or be intimidated by status and specialized language of educators; and community agencies may view schools as aloof and having little connection to or understanding of their broader communities. All participants have time pressures. Specific training for collaboration can help to overcome these obstacles. For educators and social service providers, preparation for partnership should start with their pre-service training and continue on through their careers. In the case of teachers, we know that few universities prepare them well on this topic. The burden for training must fall to the building or district level. School district officials should be encouraged to express their concern about this gap in teacher preparation to schools of education and certification and accreditation agencies.

TRAINING FOR COLLABORATION

In 1987, when Clearview Elementary School, Herndon, Virginia, decided to take Fairfax County up on its offer to explore shared decision making, no one knew quite what the outcomes would be. In the eight years since, the school culture has been fundamentally altered. In the initial stage, the county offered monthly training and support sessions to staff and administrators to help them over the difficulties of the new approach. After two and a half years, parents were invited into the process. They also benefited from training for collaboration. In order to fully participate in decision making, family members are also offered workshops so they can be brought up to date on current educational issues and jargon. Today, the decision making body includes nearly equal numbers of educators and family members. Diverse parent representation is assured through election from geographic districts. Every spring, the school holds its "Spring Ponder" in which all members of the Clearview community join to review what has worked well and what hasn't and to make plans for the coming year.

Contact: Sheila Bertrand, Principal, Clearview School, 12635 Builders Road, Herndon, VA 22070; phone: (703) 318-8934, fax: (703) 318-8939. Karen Willoughby, Fairfax County Schools, Department of Instructional Services, 3705 Crest Drive, Annandale, VA 22003; phone: (703) 846-8600; fax: (703) 207-0257.

ON-SITE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Hawaii's State Department of Education funds the Parents Communication Network Centers, which are staffed by part-time parent facilitators at school sites. The parent facilitators, together with the school administration and faculty, develop a program of activities that meets the needs of the parents and students in that community. These activities may include educational seminars, training workshops, volunteer services, and school activities developed specifically for families, students, community members, teachers, and other school personnel. These parent facilitators are trained extensively in community building and are provided on-going support by a district facilitator and state team.

Contact: Cynthia Okazaki, 45-259 Waikula Rd., Room H-34, Kaneohe, HI 96744; phone: (808) 235-7747; fax: (808) 233-5689.

VIDEO RESOURCE: A TALE OF TWO PARTNERSHIPS

The Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning has prepared a 25-minute video which tells the stories of two schools—a high school and an elementary school—that have been developing partnerships with families and community agencies over the last five years. The stories, told by parents, teachers and administrators, illustrate some key Center research findings about partnerships.

Contact: Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Boston University, 605 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215; phone: (617) 353-3309; fax: (617) 353-8444.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Involve family members as full partners with real decision-making responsibility.

When schools and districts begin to see families as partners and not simply as clients, they will find ways to involve them in governance and decision-making processes, including decision-making about budgets, school programs, and personnel. Resistance will be encountered from some teachers or administrators. Nonetheless, officials in many districts are realizing the benefits of involving both families and teachers in more than token ways.

Shared governance requires a careful re-design of the decision-making structures traditionally used in schools and districts. Officials must make sure that new policies mean genuine responsibility for families, teachers, administrators, and students, as well as representatives of community agencies and institutions. The result can be a much stronger sense of "ownership" by all concerned about the schools and therefore stronger support for

them. Transferring many decisions from the central office to individual schools has been seen to open the way for greater family and community involvement.

Strong parent associations or parent-teacher associations can help provide family members a voice in adopting school policies, if they address school issues and participate in planning and restructuring efforts. In some schools these associations are serving as both school supporters and advocates for child and family interests.

District and school policies should be designed to encourage and strengthen these groups where they exist and to encourage family members to organize them where they are missing. Policies and practice should encourage parent associations to reach out aggressively to families that have not been involved before in their activities to assure that they are representative of the school's diverse constituencies.

BUILDING-LEVEL DECISION MAKING IN DENVER

All one hundred and ten of Denver's public schools have collaborative decision-making teams with building-level authority to make hiring, firing, and budget decisions. Family Resource Schools, a subset of the Denver system, represent a further commitment to parent partnerships by offering family training, education, and empowerment programs and providing a single point of entry for comprehensive services for families.

Contact: Bruce Atchison, Director, Family Resource Schools, Denver Public Schools, 900 Grant St., Denver, CO 80203; phone: (303) 764-3587; fax: (303) 839-8001.

DISTRICT-WIDE PARTNERSHIP

Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado has been an active partner in the County's Master Planning Initiative since its founding in 1993. The initiative brings together policy makers, elected leaders, social service providers, and citizens to set goals and direct resources to set and implement a prevention agenda for Jefferson County's children and families. Each year, the General Assembly, which consists of any county resident who wants to participate, assesses needs and sets a goal for the effort at its fall meeting. Superintendent Dr. Wayne Carle, along with eight other county leaders—representing social services, municipalities, and criminal justice—form the steering committee that commits and coordinates resources to reach the established goal. A Coordinating Committee then implements the steering committee's decisions, facilitating coordination and collaboration among the county's 70 public and private agencies. In addition to the Master Planning Initiative, every one of the 135 schools in the Jefferson County School District, as well as the central office itself, has a process that incorporates stakeholders in all major decisions that are made.

Contact: Cherie Lyons, Chair, Coordinating Committee, Master Planning Initiative, Jefferson County Public Schools, 1829 Denver West Drive, Bldg. 27, Suite 413, Golden, CO 80401; phone: (303) 982-6840; fax: (303) 982-6838.

FAMILIES AND TEACHERS SHARE POWER IN RICHMOND

At the Fairfield Court Elementary School in Richmond, Virginia, the School-wide Planning Council, composed of teachers, family members, and community representatives, meets regularly to decide on the school's annual plan, to monitor and evaluate progress on the plan, and to allocate the funds that are allotted to each school by the district. The school has a successful family support program, using parents trained as home visitors and trainers.

Contact: Carolyn Spurlock, Principal, Fairfield Court Elementary School, 2510 Phaup Street, Richmond, VA 23223; phone: (804) 780-4639; fax: (804) 780-4087.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Develop agreements with social service and health agencies to provide services for students and their families.

Because schools have enormous influence on and unique access to children, they are being called upon to take on more and broader responsibilities beyond their academic role. However, schools should not assume these responsibilities alone, but through partnerships with communities and families.

Schools benefit when comprehensive health and social services are offered to children and their families, since their educational mission cannot be fulfilled when children are sick, hungry, or emotionally disturbed, or when serious unmet health and social service needs interfere with families' ability to nurture and guide their children adequately.

The evidence is that good programs of school-linked services can help to increase student achievement, save money and reduce overlapping services, reach those children and families most in need, increase community support for the school, and help at-risk families develop the capacity to manage their own lives successfully.

School officials should take the lead to negotiate agreements with health and human service agencies for providing coordinated services located on or off school sites. A good local plan for school-linked services will reflect the needs of the families to be served and involve them in setting the agenda, deciding on priorities, and designing service programs.

Most services in low-income communities will include family support and parent education components. Home visiting is a mechanism often employed. Home visitors can assist families to gain access to needed social and health services, to become involved in school activities, and to support their own children's education at home.

SCHOOL BASED YOUTH SERVICES IN NEW JERSEY

One example of the School Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP), which is a statewide effort that places comprehensive services in or near secondary schools, is located in New Brunswick High School. The program provides mental and physical health services, teen parenting support, job placement services, and recreation in a comfortable, accessible environment. It is reported that the School Based program, which is open to all, has avoided having a negative stigma attached to it by creating an atmosphere where adolescents feel comfortable. This partnership between the University of Medicine and Dentistry (UMDNJ), New Brunswick Tomorrow (a community development corporation), and the New Brunswick Public Schools works collaboratively with local health clinics, hospitals, and businesses in order to provide these comprehensive health and social services.

Contact: Roberta Knowlton, CN 700, Trenton, NJ 08625; phone: (609) 292-7816; fax: (609) 984-7380.

"RAIN" MOTHERS CONNECT FAMILIES TO SERVICES

The RAIN (Referral and Information Network) program at the Feinberg-Fisher Elementary School in Miami Beach has organized families to remove barriers to access and obtain services by conducting home visits, making phone calls, and translating for new families who are uncomfortable asking questions or do not know where to get help for themselves and their children. The RAIN mothers help families, many of whom are from the Caribbean, find and gain access to social and health services available in the community. The RAIN program grew out of the Healthy Learners partnership between Florida International University, the Florida Department of Human Resources, Dade County Public Schools, and Legal Services with the purpose of creating a "full service" school.

Contact: Dr. Grace Nebb, Principal or Teresa Martiato, 1420 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33139; phone: (305) 674-7805; fax: (305) 674-8557 or (305) 534-3925.

INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION IN AN OHIO CENTER

The Barberton (Ohio) Public School District has joined forces with Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron, The University of Akron, Summit County Department of Human Services and the Akron-Summit County Department of Human Services, and the Akron-Summit Community Action Agency to provide comprehensive medical, educational, social, and mental health services to low-income families and children from birth to five years of age. Decker Family Development Center, which began operations in August of 1990, now has a total of 17 community agencies that bring their respective services to the "one stop shop" Center. The Center successfully applies the principles of comprehensiveness and of true collaboration.

Contact: Mary Frances Ahern, Decker Family Development Center, 633 Brady Rd., Barberton, OH 44203; phone: (216) 848-4264; fax: (216) 848-4226.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

Use multiple approaches to school-family communication.

The better families are informed about the schools and their own children's social and academic progress, the better they will be to able participate effectively. Access to information enables family members to support their children's learning and help the school to improve education for all children. The starting point for most schools should be assessing and improving traditional communication approaches: report cards, parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, open houses, inserts in local newspapers, and parent association meetings.

There are scores of other innovative ways to communicate that can work under different circumstances and for specified purposes: for example, a telephone with voice mail capacity in or near every classroom, automated telephone systems, three-way parent-teacher-student conferences, homework hotlines, home visitors, meetings and conferences that are away from the school in community settings, use of local access cable television, use of ethnic and other language radio stations and newspapers, home-teacher journals, and notices and hand-outs in markets, clinics, churches, mosques, and temples. In many districts, special attention must be given to communicating with people whose first language is not English, those without telephones, or those who are homeless.

ELEMENTS OF A DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP POLICY

The recommendations in this report suggest most of the elements that district leaders might consider as they move to draft and adopt written partnership policies. These elements include:

- *Statement of the District (or the school's) commitment to the partnership concept and reasons for supporting it. Commitment to providing on-site support and help from central office.*
- *Personnel policies to support partnership: staff selection, staff development, evaluation, promotion, expectation for the preparation of new teachers, contract time available for meeting with families, participation of family and community representatives in personnel decisions, rewards, and incentives.*
- *Requirement that every school develop a partnership plan, specifying some of the mechanisms that schools should consider: family/parent centers, home visiting, action research teams, mentoring programs.*
- *Authorization and encouragement of varied approaches to home-school communication, including conferences, newsletters, telephones in classrooms, automated telephone systems, use of community media and facilities, and messages in languages other than English.*
- *Encouragement of agreements with health and social service providers for school-linked service programs.*
- *Requirements and/or guidelines for district and school level planning, decision-making, and school governance mechanisms, including parent associations and school site councils.*
- *Authorization and encouragement for teachers to provide guidance and learning materials to aid families in supporting the learning of their own children at home and in the community.*
- *Encouragement and ground rules for agreements with community agencies and institutions for community learning opportunities for children and families, including community service by students.*
- *Encouragement of school-business partnerships, and guidelines for their development and implementation.*
- *Policies for adult and community education, and for use of school facilities for out-of-school-time programs.*
- *Policies to encourage parent choice: within schools, between schools, inter-district, charter or alternative schools. Provision for family/consumer information services.*

TELEPHONE SYSTEM CALLS OUT TO FAMILIES

The new telephone system at Washington Community Magnet School in Lynn, Massachusetts, not only takes calls for teachers by means of voice mail, but *makes* calls to families to notify them of changes in schedule, special events at the school, and other important news. The system was put to the test in September to notify parents that the first day of school would begin at an earlier time than in previous years. The message got through and students arrived at the new time. Calls can also be made to the school to check on homework assigned.

Contact: Jeff Barile, Principal, Washington Community Magnet School, 58 Blossom Street, Lynn, MA 01902; phone: (617) 477-7470.

HIGH TECH COMMUNICATION IN RURAL WISCONSIN

The Flambeau Schools in rural northwestern Wisconsin are developing a unique approach to family-school communication and innovative student assessment. Student portfolios which report student achievements during the year will be put on line for homes and families who will be encouraged to provide, via computer, information about student accomplishments and learning away from school.

Contact: Chuck Ericksen, Community Education Director, Flambeau School District, PO Box 86, Tony, WI 54563; phone: (715) 532-7760; fax: (715) 532-5405.

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR REFORM IN KENTUCKY

The Jefferson County Community Committee for School Reform is one of several chapters of the statewide Pritchard Committee that is aggressively seeking to provide the public with good and accurate information about Kentucky's extensive school reform program. The efforts are aimed at countering opposition to reform because of lack of information or inaccurate information about what the schools are trying to do. The Community Committee uses a speakers bureau to reach scores of meetings and organizations.

The committee also works with the school district to provide on-site assistance to several individual schools seeking to strengthen family participation in school-based decision-making, to improve communication between the school and families, to recruit volunteers to help the school, and to build support for the school's own reform plans.

Contact: Johnetta Marshall, 9614 Walnutwood Way, Jefferson Town, KY 40299; phone: (502) 267-8034; fax: (502) 266-8889.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

Increase opportunities for students to learn at home and in the community.

Learning does not stop at the schoolhouse door. Nearly all families want to increase their children's academic success, and many say that they need and welcome guidance from teachers on setting realistic expectations, monitoring and helping with homework, selecting appropriate books and learning materials, supporting the teacher's academic priorities, and using home learning materials. Teachers (or groups of teachers in a school or district) can develop their own learn-at-home materials for parents to use or they can use materials that have already been developed. Most parents respect the expertise of teachers and will respond to guidance from them about how to help their children learn out of school.

Schools can also encourage the community to set up homework and tutoring centers for children and teens and out-of-school-time programs with both recreational and academic options. Senior citizens and other community residents can be recruited to help students outside school hours either in the school or in other settings.

Schools and school districts can also take the initiative to promote increased access to community resources by proposing reduced fees at museums and cultural events, initiating family reading programs in libraries, increasing access to college and university facilities and courses, and proposing tutoring and mentoring programs to businesses and corporations.

PARENTS HELP STUDENTS LEARN AT HOME

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework in language arts, science/health, and math is a process that keeps families informed about and involved in their children's learning and progress in school. The TIPS materials are disseminated nationally to assist teachers to design interactive homework that matches their curricular objectives. TIPS manuals for teachers and packets of prototype homework activities are available in math (kindergarten to grade 5) and science (grade 3) in the elementary grades, and science, language arts, and basic math in the middle grades (6-8).

Homework is the student's responsibility. TIPS interactive activities require students to show, share, demonstrate, interview, gather reactions, and interact in other ways with their family members. Parents play supportive roles in discussing homework with their children. All TIPS activities include a section for home-to-school communication that enables parents to relay comments on whether they enjoyed the activities and whether they learned something about what the student is learning in class.

Contact: Joyce Epstein, Karen Salinas, or Vivian Jackson, or Publications, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218; phone: (410) 516-8800; fax: (410) 516-8890.

A MUSEUM-MAGNET SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

The Reginald F. Chavez Magnet Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mexico has been collaborating with The New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science for five years. The partnership has developed a number of programs that allow exchanges of resources and ideas, increase student participation in Museum programs, and open the museum to neighborhood residents and magnet school staff. One of the newest programs is *Proyecto Futuro*, a school-museum venture which provides evening sessions that feature hands-on family science learning activities and mini-kits which can be used at home.

Contact: Maddie Zeigler, Educational Development Specialist, The New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science, 1801 Mountain Road, NW, Albuquerque, NM 87104; phone: (505) 841-2857; fax: (505) 841-2866.

GOING TO SCHOOL AT THE ZOO

The Dr. Charles R. Drew Science Magnet in Buffalo, NY utilizes the resources of the local zoo and science museum for its students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Students in

the seventh and eighth grades have their classes at the zoo and learn, for example, skills in research and tour design. They give lecture demonstrations on animals to younger student groups.

Contact: Delcene A. West, Principal, Dr. Charles R. Drew Science Magnet, One Martin Luther King Parkway, Buffalo, NY 14211; phone: (716) 897-8050; fax: (716) 897-8049. Information is also available on the World Wide Web (<http://drew.buffalo.k12.ny.us/>).

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

Set up parent/family centers in every elementary, middle, and high school.

Family centers are a low-cost, easy-to-manage way to make schools more hospitable to families, to plan and carry out a wide variety of family and community partnership activities, and to encourage parent-to-parent and teacher-family communication. The centers serve as a linkage agent for schools, families, and communities.

A family center in the school is a symbol of the school's welcome to families and also a useful mechanism for planning and carrying out diverse partnership activities. They are being used across the country for many purposes: operating food banks; providing libraries with books, toys, and computer hardware and software; setting up clothing exchanges; providing ESL or GED classes for family members; and as an informal place for parents to meet with other parents and teachers.

These centers come in various forms. Some are as simple as a few tables in the library. Others may be more extensive and include comfortable chairs and sofas, a telephone, a refrigerator and a coffee pot, and tables for meetings and work. They have been set up in unused classrooms, a section of the auditorium, or even an old school bus with the seats removed.

Most centers have at least part-time staffing, usually a family member or community resident trained and paid for through Title I, district funds, or a grant from a foundation or a business partner.

"PARENT PRESENCE" IN SAN DIEGO

The Parent Center at the Memorial Academy, a predominantly Latino junior high school in San Diego, is operated collaboratively with the school's parent association. This center helps maintain a high level of family involvement in the school with a varied mix of activities. Family members gather in the center to plan programs of family support as well as activities to support students, teachers, and the instructional program. Center on Families researcher Vivian Johnson describes an effective and unusual program there, "Parent Presence," in which parents respond to occasional teacher requests to "sit in" on

classes experiencing disruptive student behavior. The presence of a parent gives the students the message that parents support the teachers. Most students get the message and respond positively.

Contact: Antonio Alfaro, Principal; Linda Taggmet, Chapter I Coordinator; or Mercedes Pacheco, Parent Room Coordinator, 2850 Logan Ave., San Diego, CA 92113; phone: (619) 525-7400; fax: (619) 238-2371.

MAKING PARENTS FEEL WELCOME IN THE LONE STAR STATE

The Parent Center at Hollibrook Accelerated Elementary in Houston, Texas is a "parents' space with a comfortable feel." The room is equipped with sofas, chairs and tables; there's a coffee pot, refrigerator, and microwave. The playpens, toys, and books are for the younger Hollibrook students-to-be whose parents are volunteering elsewhere in the building. ESL classes for parents are held here during the day and parents can also practice here for the computer literacy courses they take tuition-free at the local middle school. During the schoolwide reading period, the first half-hour of school, students benefit from being able to come to the center to read to their parents or other adults. Parents make graduation gowns for kindergartners using the sewing machines in the center.

Contact: Roy Ford, Principal, Hollibrook Accelerated Elementary School, 3602 Hollister, Houston, TX 77080; phone: (713) 329-6430; fax: (713) 329-6440.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

Expand parent choice within the public school system and provide good consumer information.

Choice within the public school system is one important way to give families more opportunities to make decisions about their children's education and to assume responsibility for it, without using public funds for private or religious schools.

Many states and districts offer opportunities for families to choose among programs within schools and among public schools. In some cases the new laws and policies authorize within-district and inter-district transfers as well as charter and magnet schools. These opportunities allow families and teachers to develop or to choose distinctive schools to meet diverse family, student, and teacher interests.

We recommend policies which will provide alternative approaches that increase choices within the public school system, including choices among teachers and programs within a single school, choices among existing schools, and charter, alternative, and magnet schools. These policies offer opportunities for teachers and parents interested in alternative approaches to learning. One approach to choice that has met success in some

districts is to break large schools into several small "houses" or separate small schools. These smaller schools facilitate closer connections between and among teachers, families, and the surrounding community.

Center on Families researcher Charles Glenn points to, the Massachusetts design as one which can overcome the inequality of access to information and readiness to make decisions that less affluent parents usually experience. Key elements of the system in some Massachusetts cities are: 1) universal choice with no attendance zones; 2) all pupils assigned through the choice process; and 3) an effective and aggressive parent information system. Over time, less affluent parents learn to be better consumers of information and choosers of schools.

A good consumer information plan will recognize that parents want to know about the school's track record in academic achievement, in providing a safe and orderly environment and a positive school climate, and in preparing students for the next level of education. They also often want to know about policies and resources which encourage family involvement, make available health and social services, and provide "out-of-school-time" programs for children.

CREATING A NEW CULTURE IN A SMALL HIGH SCHOOL OF CHOICE

An interesting example of creating smaller schools from large high schools to increase parent choice can be found in suburban Lacey, Washington. The New Century High School believes that "the single most important reason for our success is the sense of community we have created. Students whose families are involved in their education do better." The school seeks to involve families and the community in many different ways: volunteers in classrooms, the computer lab, and the library; a parent advisory committee; coffee hours for families; several business partnerships; a parent newsletter; and encouraging families to monitor student homework. School funds are used to hire a community coordinator.

Contact: Principal Gail Covington McBride, New Century High School, 8929 Martin Way, Lacey, WA 98501; phone: (360) 493-9621; fax: (360) 493-9615.

SUPPORTING INFORMED CHOICES

Parents need accurate and appropriate information so they can make the best choices for their children. Such information can come from the schools, but it can also come from other organizations who care about children. The East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC), in collaboration with the Public Education Association, publish an annual report on each middle school within School District 34 of the New York City Public Schools.

The report includes test scores, but goes beyond to information that helps families gauge the culture of the school, discussing such things as the school's physical environment, including restrooms and lunchroom, educational philosophy, teacher training, student behavior, and the accessibility of teachers and administrators. EBC also meets with parents monthly to teach them the skills needed to advocate for their children.

Contact: Sr. Kathy Maire, EBC, 287 Lott Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11212; phone: (718) 498-4095; fax: (718) 485-5537.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

Create planning and problem-solving teams.

District officials and principals should encourage schools to form and use action or action research teams as a way to improve working relationships between participants in a partnership and a means to gather information about school and community problems and then to help to solve these problems.

This approach has been tested by schools both in the United States and in several other countries through studies and projects sponsored by the Center on Families. In action research, the school forms a small team of volunteer teachers, family members, community representatives, and students, along with the principal, to assess school and community strengths and priorities or to investigate a troubling problem or issue.

The team talks to teachers, families, and community agencies and residents through various means including focus groups, interviews, and surveys. They analyze the results and decide on one or two priority objectives which can be addressed through family or community collaboration. The team works with others in the school or community to plan and carry out one or more interventions or projects aimed at the objective. The team then studies and evaluates what happens. Some examples of interventions in Center on Families projects were home visits, parent-teacher conferences, family centers, and mentoring programs.

One of the main results in some projects was that families and teachers learned to work together to solve problems that were meaningful to the children and families in that school and to communicate with and trust each other. It is also a process that invites participation of families in making decisions about their own children as well as the school as a whole.

To make this process work, it is usually helpful to have a skilled outside facilitator as well as an on-site coordinator. The facilitator can be a university professor or graduate student, or a staff member from a community organization or agency. The facilitator is responsible for coordinating and facilitating meetings, following up with staff and families, and bringing in outside resources. The process takes time, but our research shows that the results can be cost effective.

A PARENT-TEACHER TEAM IN THE APPALACHIAN FOOTHILLS

The action research project in the Atenville, West Virginia, Elementary School set out to study and improve communication between families and the school. The school reached out to the least connected families through a variety of means: a church-based parent center, a parent-to-parent phone chain, and home visits. The action team documented project results by compiling portfolios on children's progress and their family's involvement. Positive changes were noted in an increase in family and student expectations for student success and increased enrollments in summer support services.

Contact: Darlene Dalton, Principal, Atenville Elementary School, Rt. 2, Box 28, Harts, WV 25524; phone: (304) 855-3173.

ACTION TEAMS FOR SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Over 70 elementary, middle, and high schools have tested and helped to improve the design and work of Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships, developed by researcher Joyce Epstein and her colleagues. In each school, an Action Team for Partnerships guides the development and implementation of a comprehensive program of partnership, including activities for six major types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. The Action Team of at least six people (teachers, parents, administrators, counselors, students in the upper grades, and others) assesses present practices of partnership, creates a three-year outline, and writes a one-year detailed plan to strengthen partnerships with all families. To organize the work, each Action Team member serves as chair or co-chair of one of six subcommittees for each type of involvement. With the assistance of other teachers, parents, students, and community members, the Action Team selects and implements new or improved practices of partnership that meet the schools' needs, interests, and goals. Plans and progress are shared with the school council, parents, teachers, and students. The Action Team continues its work and each

year develops a one-year plan to improve and maintain its program of partnership. Elementary, middle, and high schools ready to take this approach may join a national network to receive guidelines and information about how to develop their own comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships.

Contacts: Facilitators helping Baltimore elementary and middle schools with the Action Team approach are Marsha Powell-Johnson and Paula Williams, at the Fund for Educational Excellence, 800 North Charles, Baltimore, MD 21201; phone: 410-685-8300.

For other information about Action Teams in elementary, middle, and high schools, contact Partnership-2000 Communications Director, Karen Salinas, Johns Hopkins University, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning/CRESPAR, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218; phone: 410-516-8818; fax: 410-516-8890.

GETTING STARTED

Leadership by school board members, superintendents, central office staff, and principals is the key to the kind of cultural change that can occur if all or most of these recommendations are followed.

Officials who want to promote collaboration should use their "bully pulpits" to provide moral, civic, and educational leadership. Partnership ideas need to be a part of the vision which school leaders project as they seek to make clear to school staff and the public the schools' proposed goals and standards.

We know that school leaders must be the ones who "reach out" to begin the process of collaboration. But, if they don't, family members and community representatives can and should take the initiative and urge the school officials along.

We have provided many short examples of successful practices in schools in many parts of the country to illustrate how these recommendations can really work. In the Policy Portfolio of which this report is a part there are longer descriptions of exemplary partnership programs. ■

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

- 1 Adopt and back up written policies for partnership.
- 2 Align personnel policies with District's commitment to partnership.
- 3 Prepare school staff and families to collaborate.
- 4 Involve family members as full partners with real decision-making responsibility.
- 5 Develop agreements with social service and health agencies to provide services to students and their families.
- 6 Use multiple approaches to communication.
- 7 Increase opportunities for students to learn at home and in the community.
- 8 Set up family/parent centers in every elementary, middle, and high school.
- 9 Expand parent choice within the public school system.
- 10 Create planning and problem-solving teams.



CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

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Individuals from the following organizations participated in focus groups and interviews on policy issues related to school-family-community partnerships during the development of this policy document.

Focus Group at Educational Commission of the States Annual Conference

Illinois State School Board
The Atlanta Committee for Public Education
Independence Institute, Parent Information Center,
Golden, Colorado
Arkansas Board of Education
Illinois Education Association
Jefferson County (Colorado) Public Schools

State of Missouri

Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and
Associate Commissioner
Superintendents of ten towns and cities

District of Columbia

Director, National Center for Parent Involvement in Education
and representatives from the national headquarters of National
Association of Elementary School Principals and Association for
Supervision and Curriculum Development
Representative of Education Writers Association
Local school volunteer coordinators

Jackson, Mississippi

Elementary and secondary school principals,
Jackson Public Schools

San Diego, California

Principals, central office officials and
district director of parent involvement

State of Massachusetts

Ipswich High School parents
Newburyport Elementary School parents
Blackstone Elementary School parents (Boston)
Boston elementary school principals
Selected directors of school-linked services projects in
local school districts

State of Washington

State House and Senate chairs of Education Committees
Staff members, State Department of Education
State symposium on Family-School Collaboration, including
65 principals, superintendents, parents, legislators, and
state agency staff

Additional Resource

Susan Lusi, Brown University
Senior Researcher, Annenberg Institute for School Reform,
Coalition of Essential Schools



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



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