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approach ensures the work of developing a partnership program is shared by many, which is important when time is limited but responsibilities are not (Sanders, 1996).

### continued development of school-family-community partnerships

Action Team members at Northshore and University Park High Schools state the action team approach to partnerships is the best way to ensure a comprehensive program of partnerships develops and grows. However, modifications are necessary in order for their Action Teams to be most effective. University Park High School's Action Team needs more members, especially family and community representatives. Team members agree adding members will increase their ability to carry out, monitor, and evaluate more partnership activities.

An ideal Action Team consists of 6-12 members. One member should serve as team chair, and the other members as chairs or co-chairs of committees for each type of involvement. Suggested members for a high school Action Team include the school principal, two or three teachers from different grade levels, two or three parents whose teens are at different grade levels, school counselors, school social workers, community representatives, and one or more students. Candace, a student at University Park, emphasizes the importance of student representation on the Action Team, "So that teachers and parents can get... [students'] views on things and on what is going on."

The Action Teams at University Park and Northshore also must determine the organizational structure that will function most effectively in large high schools organized into separate career

schools or academies. During their first year in the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, University Park's and Northshore's Action Teams decided to modify the basic Action-Team structure. Specifically, Action Teams at both schools independently decided each academy or career school should have an Action Team that plans and implements academy-specific partnership activities. Representatives from each academy's Action Team will sit on a schoolwide Action Team to share ideas and coordinate schoolwide activities.

Northshore's Action Team is in the process of determining who will represent each career school on the schoolwide Action Team, when and how often they will meet, and specific activities they will implement. Ms. Kennedy, the chair of the Action Team, is optimistic for the partnership program's continued improvement and growth. She believes the first year of attention to partnerships has helped the school reach a point of "readiness" to develop a more structured and comprehensive program. According to Ms. Kennedy, "I think that across the board we are at a different level for embracing everything. It can work."

## conclusion

Both University Park and Northshore High Schools have been developing programs of partnership for one year as members of the National Network of Partnership-2000 schools. They face challenges to involvement that center around the attitudes many parents and professional educators have toward school-family-community partnerships in high schools, limited time, and limited experience partnering with families and communities. Despite these challenges, the teachers, parents, administrators, and students interviewed maintain a strong belief in the importance of school-family-community partnerships to students' success in and beyond high school. This belief has fueled the schools' efforts to reach

out to families and communities in systematic ways.

Many of the partnership activities high school teachers and administrators in the study identify as important are very similar to the activities many elementary and middle schools implement. High school teachers and administrators need assistance with monitoring attendance as much as teachers and administrators in elemen-

tary and middle schools. Similarly, high school teachers and administrators need to communicate more regularly with families about students' performance and school programs. High schools also need families' input into school decisions as much as elementary and middle schools. Although the respondents recognize adolescents need more independence than children in the lower grades, they also recognize they need the guidance and support of

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*A report from the*

SCHOOL, FAMILY & COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY  
CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

# Building Family Partnerships That Last

**Belonging to a national network of schools has helped three Baltimore schools to involve families and communities in a variety of ways—from promoting learning at home to encouraging volunteers at school.**

Educators recognize the need for comprehensive, permanent programs of partnership with their families and communities. In Baltimore City alone, 49 schools are working with The National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools at Johns Hopkins University toward just such a goal. To learn how they are coming along, I interviewed administrators, teachers, and parents at six schools that have already achieved a great deal of success. The following are descriptions of school-family-community partnership activities at three of these schools.

## Ingredients for Success

The three schools attribute much of their success to (1) action teams, (2) a framework of six types of involvement (Epstein 1995, Epstein et al. 1996), and (3) the assistance of full-time project facilitators, who guide and support each school's action team. As members of Partnership-2000, each school first created an Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships, a committee of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members who work to cultivate and maintain strong connections between schools, families, and communities. Each member serves as chair or cochair of one of six committees, representing six types of involvement: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with the community



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**Partnerships can enhance students' learning and the ability of families to assist in that learning.**

(Epstein 1995). According to the schools, action teams ensure that work is distributed among many people, greatly reducing both an individual's workload and the possibility of burnout.

The schools featured in this article—Farring, James Mosher, and Cross Country Elementary Schools—illustrate how schools with differing populations and needs can experience similar success in building strong partnerships.

## Commitment to School and Home

Maree G. Farring Elementary School is located in a predominantly white, heavily industrialized area of Baltimore City. The school serves approximately 500 students in grades pre-K-5. More than 90 percent of the students are white, non-Hispanic. In 1995, about 58 percent of these students received free or reduced-price lunches, and about 15 percent received special education services. The school has a relatively high mobility rate, with approximately 12 percent of students entering the school and 24 percent leaving the school during the 1994-95 school year. I inter-

viewed the action team chair and a parent member.

Although Farring works on each of the six types of involvement mentioned previously, the teams there have focused on volunteering and learning at home. For the latter, the action team subcommittees on parenting, volunteering, and home learning combined their efforts to assist families in helping children with reading and math. During workshops, families receive survival kits containing rulers, crayons, scissors, and tape. Workshops also introduce families to TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork), an interactive homework process that increases the involvement of families in their children's schoolwork (Epstein and Salinas 1995). Information from the workshops is summarized in the school's monthly newsletter for families who cannot attend the school meetings.

Farring's action team has also focused on increasing the number of school volunteers, hoping more families will become familiar with the school's daily operation and curriculum and will share that knowledge and understanding with other families.

One challenge of running a volunteer program is providing all families with opportunities to help out, not just those who can come to the school. To the many parents who are employed during the school day, Farring offers opportunities to volunteer off-site. For example, one parent may make school buttons at home, while another might buy needed supplies for the school.

The action team documented the school's increase in volunteers through sign-in sheets. Parent volunteers sign



A volunteer at Cross Country Elementary School shares information and experiences.

their names and the times that they arrive and leave. In addition to tracking, sign-in sheets allow Farring to recognize and celebrate its parent volunteers.

The action team has been vital to the success of Farring's partnership program. According to the chairperson of the action team:

We try to share responsibility. I tell them, "This is a team and as a team, if one person on the team fails then all of us fail." I don't say I, I, I; it's we, we, we. We help each other. We have to.

Increased volunteerism has benefited faculty, students, and families at

Farring. A number of parents who started volunteering have also enrolled in the school's GED program, and a few have entered college—one is majoring in education. The parent member of the action team attributes these accomplishments to the increased self-confidence experienced by many volunteering parents.

Volunteerism has also improved communication between parents and teachers. The parents understand more of what teachers experience, and the teachers know that parents care and are willing to help. The action team chair notes that only after becoming involved in the partnership program

did she realize the importance of parental participation. She states: "Once upon a time, it was 'Keep parents Out.' Now, it's 'Come on In!'"

According to those I spoke with, the whole school has benefited from the Partnership program. All teachers are involved with one of the six action team subcommittees. The parent member of the action team notes that student reaction seems positive as well, and the team is planning a formal assessment of their opinions.

### **Pops on Patrol**

James Mosher Elementary School serves about 450 students in grades pre-K-5. About 99 percent of these students are African American. In 1995, about 78 percent of the students

Partnership-2000 Schools (see accompanying box), it has improved and expanded its program. According to the cochairs, ideas and work are now shared more equitably in the school, and the support of the project facilitator, as well as monthly "cluster" meetings with other nearby elementary and middle schools, provides more resources.

Mosher also uses the framework of six types of involvement. As a result, the school has many family and community activities that make it more pleasant, productive, and secure. For example, Mosher started a volunteer project called "Pops on Patrol," with six grandfathers and grandmothers patrolling the school every morning and afternoon. Two years later it's still

we get someone who cares about the well-being of each child."

The action team learned that reaching the families of all students takes commitment and hard work. One effective strategy has been home visits, made easier by Mosher's long history in the community. This means there is always someone available to help them contact a hard-to-reach parent. According to one action team cochair:

Even the younger guys that you see on the corner have gone through this building. When they see us coming, they say, "They're coming from the school, ya'll, quit your cursing and get out of the way." I've yet to have a bad response from knocking on a door.

The other cochair adds that, in some instances, home visits are absolutely necessary to communicate with families:

A little boy in one of our special ed classes was having problems. We couldn't contact the mother by phone, so I walked to their house. His mother just opened right up to us. She had just moved to the area. She knew her son was in special ed and was having some behavioral problems, but she really welcomed us and listened to what we had to say. She didn't have a phone, so a phone call wouldn't have done it for her. Now she's a parent volunteer.

The action team at Mosher has also coordinated special events to encourage fathers to become more involved at the school, such as father-son breakfasts and Man-to-Man workshops. The latter event is for *all* males—grandfathers, fathers, uncles, and others. The school invites guest speakers from the community and provides home-cooked food. Issues related to school and community involvement are discussed.

The action team is diligent about communicating with all families, not just those who come to the school. Accordingly, summary sheets of all

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## **"Family includes grandparents, aunts, babysitters, grandmothers' sisters, uncles, stepfathers—we don't stop until we get someone who cares about the well-being of each child."**

received free or reduced-price lunches, and about 10 percent received special education services. The mobility rate is lower than that of most Baltimore City elementary schools, with about 9 percent of students entering and about 15 percent withdrawing during the 1994-95 school year. I talked with the cochairs of the action team, both of whom are employed by the school as parent liaisons. We spoke in the school's bright, cheerful, and very active Parent Room.

As cochairs, the parent liaisons are essential members of the school's five-member action team. The action team also includes two teachers and the assistant principal. Mosher has always had active parental involvement, but since joining the National Network of

going strong.

The "Pops" wear hats and vests so that they can be easily identified, and their presence sends a strong message to the students about the importance of schooling, safety, and punctuality. The children love the project. When one volunteer was out with pneumonia, the students frequently came to the office to inquire about him and ask when he would be back.

The cochairs said grandparents were chosen because they serve as important examples for some of the younger parents, and they also tend to have more free time. One cochair of the action team states, "At James Mosher, family includes grandparents, aunts, babysitters, grandmothers' sisters, uncles, stepfathers—we don't stop until

school events are available in the school's Parent Room, and summaries also appear in the school's monthly newsletter, which includes a tear-off sheet on which parents can write comments or questions. The newsletter also contains a monthly lunch menu because parents want to know what their children were eating.

Even with considerable success, Mosher has faced challenges in developing its partnership program. The

focused on communications, following frequent complaints from parents. The team now produces a monthly newsletter that includes summaries of workshops, a calendar of school events, the cafeteria menu, and messages from the principal, the action team chair, and the PTA. The school hosts a contest called the "One Hundred Percent Club," encouraging children to take the newsletter home and to return the tear-off sheet with a

month for tracking purposes.

The action team also encourages volunteers to help out at home or in the community. These volunteers are included in the school's semiannual volunteer appreciation brunch, where they are given certificates and small gifts that are provided by Cross Country's business partner. This community partner also provides trophies for the boys' basketball team, items needed for fund-raisers, and materials for the Parent Room.

The action team started the Parent Room as a place where families can go to find information on child development and other issues of interest. Parents are encouraged to bring materials to share with other families. Cross Country makes its Parent Room as inviting as possible by maintaining an open-door policy. Once parents are at the school, however, the principal is likely to ask them to volunteer.

According to the action team chair, the ideas generated by the framework of six types of involvement, the school's commitment to developing strong partnerships, and the staff's dedication to keeping students the central focus of all activities are key to building an effective partnership program. The principal adds that a shared vision is essential and that the response to the school's program has been positive:

I've been here for three years, the first two as assistant principal and the last year as principal. In the past two years, there had been repeated complaints that the school was not communicating. I really got tired of it and vowed that no one would be able to say that they didn't know what was going on here. So our team sat down and designed the newsletter, and . . . the parents love it. It has really improved communication between the school and the community.

The Cross Country definition of

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## **The Parent Room is a place where families can find information on child development and other issues. Once parents are there, however, the principal is likely to ask them to volunteer.**

cochairs have found that working with people of different and sometimes conflicting personalities and attitudes has been one of the biggest challenges. However, they agree that if children remain the central focus of school-family-community partnerships, conflicts can be overcome through open and respectful communication.

### **100 Percent**

Cross Country Elementary School serves about 800 students in grades pre-K-5, with more than 90 percent of those students African American. In 1995, about 50 percent of these students received free or reduced-price lunches, and about 8 percent received special education services. The mobility rate is low, with about 5 percent entering and about 12 percent withdrawing during the 1994-95 school year. I spoke with the principal, who is a member of the school's action team, and the team's chair, a community volunteer.

This past year, the action team

parent's signature, question, or comment. Classes with 100 percent returns win pizza parties, are announced over the intercom, and are recognized in the next newsletter.

The school's overall tear-off return rate is up to 70 percent. The principal and action-team chair state that the tear-off return campaign initially met resistance from teachers, but with constant encouragement from the principal all teachers are now involved.

The action team also sends the school newsletter to community agencies and local politicians, the school superintendent, and others to inform the larger community about Cross Country's partnership efforts.

To encourage volunteerism at the school, Cross Country developed a Staff Volunteer Needs Form on which a teacher can write what help is needed. The volunteer takes the form and reports to the appropriate teacher, signing in on the teacher's volunteer sheet. The action team chair collects each teacher's sheet at the end of the



family does not stop at the mother or father. The school looks to guardians, grandparents, or whoever acts as family for the child. The principal and action team chair contend that since creating this atmosphere of trust at the school, the children are calmer, clearer about what is expected of them, and more excited about learning.

### **Making Partnerships Work**

My visits to schools in the Baltimore School-Family-Community Partnership Program, including the three schools featured here, have yielded a number of insights about how action teams are helping schools develop and maintain strong connections with their students' families and communities. The following 10 insights should be useful to other schools committed to establishing effective, comprehensive, and

permanent programs of school-family-community partnerships.

*1. Partnerships are a shared responsibility.* All three schools show how action teams, consisting of teachers, family members, administrators, and community members, can promote effective partnerships.

*2. Partnerships take time.* The schools featured here have been a part of the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools for only one year. They have made good starts, but have much work to do before partnerships are fully integrated in their schools.

However, other schools have shown that with time, institutionalization of school-family-community partnerships will occur (Sanders 1996).

*3. Partnerships reach out to all family members.* James Mosher and Cross Country have broad definitions of

family, helping to make partnerships work for all of their students.

*4. Partnerships improve incrementally.* Each school has begun to develop effective partnerships. To reach the families of all students, however, the schools must continue to engage in thoughtful planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement processes.

*5. Partnerships are important throughout the grades.* As each school expands its partnership program, it will address the special needs of children and families at each grade level. For example, these schools might implement practices to make the transition to kindergarten and to middle school smoother for students and families (Sanders 1996).

*6. Partnerships need students.* Each school shows how vitally important

## **An Invitation to Join the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools**

**Joyce L. Epstein**

Most educators want to build strong school-family-community partnerships, but have not yet reached this goal. Indeed, developing good connections of home, school, and community is an ongoing process that takes time, organization, and effort. But based on more than a decade of research and the work of many educators, parents, and students, we know it can be done.

Schools, districts, and state departments of education are invited to join the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools at Johns Hopkins University to obtain assistance in implementing permanent and positive programs of school-family-community partnerships by the year 2000. Partnership-2000 Schools will strengthen their programs using an action team approach and a framework of six major types of involvement (see accompanying article). Each school will tailor its plans and practices to the needs and interests of its students, parents, and teachers. District and state leaders will organize their leadership activities to assist all schools to develop comprehensive programs of partnerships.

Members of Partnership-2000 work with the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships for at least three years. There are no membership fees, but states, districts, and schools must meet a few requirements. The center provides all members of the network with a manual; certificate; optional annual training workshops at Johns Hopkins; a semiannual newsletter; phone, e-mail, and World Wide Web assistance; and research and evaluation activities. The Network offers opportunities for face-to-face and electronic interactions with the center staff and with other members.

The Network is open to all states, districts, intermediate units, and schools. It is not an "extra" program, but is a research-based component of any school improvement plan. Members may add creative elements to the required components to tailor and expand their programs. To obtain an invitation and membership forms, write to: Joyce L. Epstein, Director, National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. Or contact Karen Clark Salinas: (410)516-8818; fax: (410)516-8890.

students are to strong, comprehensive partnership programs. Not only are students responsible for such tasks as taking newsletters home and returning tear-off sheets to school, but they are the very reason for creating these partnerships.

7. *Partnerships include the community.* Cross Country and James Mosher use business partners and community connections to improve their schools.

8. *Partnerships include the hard-to-reach.* All three schools show that even the hardest-to-reach families (such as families with two working parents, or families without phones) can be reached with the right strategies.

9. *Partnerships link to the curriculum and student learning.* Farring's TIPS program, GED program,

**A number of parent volunteers have also enrolled in the school's GED program, and a few have entered college—one is majoring in education.**

and family learning survival kit show how partnerships can enhance students' learning and the ability of families to assist in that learning.

10. *Partnerships follow the six types of involvement.* Each school featured shows how important it is, when

attempting to develop strong connections with all families, to meet the challenges for successful implementation that accompany each type of involvement.

Baltimore's schools are part of The National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, open to schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing comprehensive, permanent programs of school-family-community partnerships. The work in Baltimore shows that, with the right ingredients and time, every school can develop programs of partnership that enable schools, families, and communities to better educate today's youth. ■

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# Advances in Family, Community, and School Partnerships

By Joyce L. Epstein



Joyce L. Epstein is Director of the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools in the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships and CRESPAR, and Principal Research Scientist at Johns Hopkins University. The research discussed in this article was supported by grants from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) (R117Q00031). The opinions

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Over the past decade, the field of school-family-community partnerships has been energized by activities in research, policy, and practice. In research, scholars from different disciplines are studying connections of schools and communities with families of various backgrounds and cultures and with students at different age and grade levels. In policy, Congress added a national educational goal in 1994 for school and family partnerships to the major federal legislation called Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Also, Title I regulations were revised and include mandates for specific family-school connections for states, districts, and schools to obtain and keep federal funds. Other federal, state, and local policies have been and are being developed that mandate or encourage partnership activities. In practice, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and others in communities are increasingly working together to meet various mandates and guidelines and, more importantly, to design their own programs and practices of partnership.

There are many reasons to develop good school, family, and community connections; among them: to improve school programs and school climate, to provide family services and support, to increase parents' skills and leadership in school matters, to connect families with others in the school and in the community, to help teachers with their work, to increase ownership and commitment to the school by the community. The main reason, however, for better communications and exchanges among schools, families, and community groups is to assist students at all grade levels to succeed in school and in life. Interestingly, the different purposes require different practices in comprehensive programs of partnership.

What do good programs of partnership look like? How can practices be designed and implemented effectively? What policies are needed to support these programs? What are the results of interactions of people in these three important contexts? These questions have challenged researchers in the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (the Center) along with many other researchers and educators in a growing, dynamic interdisciplinary and international field of study.

Studies conducted by the Center's researchers are adding new knowledge to the field about school, family, and community connections at various age and grade levels from birth through high school; in urban, suburban, and rural locations; and with families of various backgrounds and cultures. Studies offer new ideas about community connections with families and schools and how to improve policies for partnerships in states, districts, schools, communities, and families. The research is based on diverse methods including surveys, case studies, longitudinal data collections, field tests, evaluations, and program and policy development.

At its outset, the Center based its plans for research on a theory of "overlapping spheres of influence" and a framework of six major types of involvement. The theory and framework

provide a common vocabulary for researchers and educators to discuss, design, implement, and evaluate effective practices that link school, home, and community. The Center's studies for the past five years have confirmed, strengthened, and extended the theory and have added depth and examples to the framework. This article summarizes the overlapping spheres theory and the framework of six major types of involvement to provide a context for the other articles in this issue [of *New Schools, New Communities*]. It also summarizes a few of the many results of Center studies that should help elementary, middle, and high schools build better programs of partnership.

## A Useful Theory

Children learn and grow in three influential contexts — home, school, and community. Some schools conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, keeping the students' spheres of influence relatively separate from each other. Other schools conduct many high-quality communications and interactions to bring the spheres of influence closer together. Frequent interactions should provide students with common messages from the influential people in their lives about the importance of attending school, working hard, staying in school, and other crucial guidelines for success.

These assumptions were not part of earlier social theories that stressed that organizations are most effective if they have separate goals and unique missions. To explain results from our studies of school and family connections, a social organizational perspective was needed that asserted that the most effective families, schools, and communities had shared goals and missions concerning children's learning and development. The theory specifies external and internal structures and processes (see Center report by Epstein [1992]).

The external model of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that the three major contexts may be pulled together or apart by important forces (e.g., the background and practices of families, schools and communities, the developmental characteristics of students, the historical and policy contexts). These forces create conditions, space, opportunities, and incentives for

more or fewer shared activities in school, family, and community contexts. In this model, schools, families, and communities conduct some practices jointly (within the areas of overlap) to influence children's learning and development.

The internal model of the spheres of influence shows how complex and essential interpersonal relations and influence patterns occur between and among individuals at home, at school, and in the community. Social relationships occur at an institutional level (such as when a school invites all families to an event or sends the same communication to all families) and at an individual level (such as when a parent, teacher, and/or student meet in conference or talk by phone to discuss an individual student's progress or problem). Similar connections with community groups, agencies, and services can be represented and studied within the model.

Importantly, the internal structure locates the student at the center of school, family, and community partnerships because students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. Studies indicate that students often are the main source of information about school for their parents and are crucial for the success of school, family, and community partnerships.

## You Can "Hear" the Theory Every Day

In some schools, there still are educators who say, "If the family would just do its job, we could do our job." There still are families who say, "I raised this child, now it is your job to educate her." These words express conditions of "separate spheres of influence." By contrast, some educators say, "I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and the support of this community." Some parents say, "I really need to know what is happening in school in order to help my child." These phrases express conditions of overlapping spheres of influence.

You will find evidence of these concepts in daily conversations, news stories, and celebrations. In family-like schools (where overlap is high), educators care about students as children. A teacher may say, "I know when a student is having a bad day and how to help him along" or "We're like a family here." A

student slips and calls a teacher "Mom" or "Dad" and then laughs about the error. In school-like families, where parents care about children as students, a parent may say, "I make sure my child knows that homework comes first." A child may raise a hand to speak at the dinner table and then joke about acting as if he or she were in school. In communities that reach out to students, families, and schools, youngsters may say, "This program helped my schoolwork make sense!" Parents or educators may relate, "This community really supports its children."

Statements about school, family, and community partnerships improve on the term "parent involvement." Partnerships recognize the shared responsibilities for children within and across contexts. This change in vocabulary is important because the concept of partnerships places major responsibilities on schools to create permanent and equitable programs to inform and involve all families. Thus it is not parents' responsibility to figure out on their own how to become involved in their children's education.

## Extending the Theory

Studies conducted by researchers in the Center have enriched and extended the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. For example, it is necessary to alter earlier views that very young children are influenced in a fixed sequence by family and then by school and community. Syntheses of many studies indicate that infants, toddlers, and their families do not exist in isolation but rather are linked to informal and formal networks of neighborhoods, communities, and schools from the earliest years. Very young children's growth, development, learning, health, and other qualities are influenced simultaneously, not sequentially, by multiple contexts. See the Center reports by Young and Marx and by Morisset (April 1993).

The theory also is confirmed and enriched by Ames and her colleagues, who found that parents' and teachers' beliefs, motivations, and practices are forces that pull the spheres together or apart in the elementary grades. Research by Connors and Epstein (see August 1994 Center report) indicates that the theory also applies at the high school level. When high school educators work with students and families, they develop

age-appropriate programs or partnership that benefit high school students. Many other Center reports add to the understanding that all participants benefit when school, family, and community have a common mission and shared goals for student learning and development.

## Six Types of Involvement

The framework of six types of involvement, derived from data and from school programs, directs attention to the practices of partnership that fall within the areas of family-school-community overlap in the spheres of influence model. The typology helps educators locate where they are starting from in their present practices, plan more comprehensive programs, and monitor progress in school, family, and community connections. The framework also helps researchers locate questions and report results in ways that may inform and improve practice. Briefly, the six types set goals for school programs and guide the design or selection of useful practices:

◆ **Type 1 — Parenting:** Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools to understand families.

◆ **Type 2 — Communicating:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress with school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

◆ **Type 3 — Volunteering:** Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

◆ **Type 4 — Learning at home:** Involve families with their children in academic learning activities at home including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions.

◆ **Type 5 — Decision making:** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through PTA, committees, councils, and other parent organizations.

◆ **Type 6 — Collaborating with community:** Coordinate the work and resources of community businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Also, provide services to the community.

Each type of involvement can be fulfilled by many different practices of partnership. Each type has particular challenges that must be met to have a successful program that engages all families. Each type suggests needed redefinitions of some basic principles of involvement to succeed with today's families. And, finally, each type is likely to lead to different results for students, for parents, and for teaching practice and school climate. Although all schools may use the framework of six types as a guide, each school must tailor its choice of practices to meet the needs of its families and students at various grade levels.

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**... certain practices of family involvement are likely to influence students' skills and scores, whereas other practices are more likely to affect attitudes, attendance, classroom behavior, respect for family, and other important results for students.**

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## Understanding Results of Partnerships

Results of the Center's research and development activities converge to support several general principles: More parents become involved when schools establish good programs of partnership; schools can be assisted by thoughtful federal, state, district, and school leadership and policies to develop strong and responsive programs; communities possess resources to promote student social and intellectual development and family strengths; and students are more positive

about and do better in school if their parents are involved in their education at home and at school in various ways.

In addition to these general findings, Center studies are helping to correct the widespread misperception that any practice that involves families will raise children's achievement test scores. Studies by Center and other researchers show that certain practices of family involvement are likely to influence students' skills and scores, whereas other practices are more likely to affect attitudes, attendance, classroom behavior, respect for family, and other important results for students. Thus not all activities to involve families lead quickly or directly to student learning, better report card grades, or higher standardized test scores.

For example, workshops for parents on child development (Type 1) or family representatives on school councils and parent membership in the PTA (Type 5) are many steps away from influencing the improvement of student achieve-

ment test scores. By contrast, daily parent-child interactions on reading and writing (Type 4) may more quickly affect student reading skills, report card grades, and test scores if combined with good classroom teaching.

The six types of involvement also yield different benefits for parents and for teachers. For example, various activities might produce parent leadership in decision making (Type 5), confidence about parenting (Type 1), productive curricular-related interactions with children (Type 4), and social ties with other parents, the school, and the community.

## Setting a Research Agenda on the Types of Involvement

Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning studies have increased knowledge about each type of involvement, raising more questions that future studies should address. Here are a few questions that grow from the Center's work on each type of involvement:

◆ **Type 1 — Parenting:** How are workshop topics selected and conducted, and how is information disseminated, so that all families (not just those who can come to school) obtain the information they want? What are the short- and long-term effects for parents, students, and the schools of parental participation in workshops or information on parenting and child rearing across the grades? See any Center reports by Dolan and Haxby, Morisset, Connors, and Kagan and colleagues for attention to workshops and parent training activities.

◆ **Type 2 — Communicating:** How are report cards explained so that all families can understand them? How can families be helped to work with their children and teachers if they and the students believe that better grades are attainable? How can conferences be designed, scheduled, and conducted to increase the participation of parents who work outside the home? How are students included in parent-teacher or parent-student-teacher conferences? What are the results of these efforts on student attendance, behavior, attitudes, report card grades, achievement scores, goal setting, or other topics? How is information provided on school programs or course choices so that all families can understand and discuss the options and consequences of choices with their children? How do such discussions affect the patterns of choices that are made? See any Center

reports by Ames, Connors, Epstein, Davies, Burch, Palanski, Johnson, Glenn, and Saiganik for attention to communication strategies.

◆ **Type 3 — Volunteering and supporting school programs:** How are volunteers recruited, welcomed, trained, and evaluated? How are the skills and talents of volunteers identified and matched with the needs of teachers, students, and administrators? How do various volunteer programs and activities affect the following: student learning, attitudes, and behavior? teacher attitudes toward parents? parent attitudes and skills? other families? And other questions about the results of activities to organize volunteers or audiences to support the school, teachers, or children. See any Center reports by Davies and colleagues, Epstein, and Johnson for attention to volunteer programs and activities.

◆ **Type 4 — Learning activities at home:** In what forms can information about students' classwork and homework be offered to help families understand children's academic requirements? How can activities be designed to enable families to do the following: motivate their youngsters to do their homework? assist their children with their academic decisions? enable students to interact with their families about things they are learning? How does family involvement about academics affect students' attitudes, skills, and homework? And other questions about the results of student-family-community interactions about school, homework, and the future. See any Center reports by Ames, Connors, Davies and colleagues, and Epstein and materials for teachers by Epstein and colleagues (revised 1995) for attention to academic activities at home.

◆ **Type 5 — Decision making:** What are the most effective ways for all families to give information to and receive

information from parent leaders who represent them on councils and committees? How do family or community representatives on school-site councils, school improvement teams, or committees affect the decisions or plans that are made? And other questions about the results of family involvement in school leadership and decision making. See any Center reports by Davies and colleagues, Epstein, and Johnson for attention to families involved in decision-making roles in schools.

◆ **Type 6 — Connections with community:** What forms or approaches are most effective for sharing information with all families on community programs, services, and resources that may benefit them and their children? with what effects on students' work in school? How can schools, families, and students contribute to their communities? And other questions about the results of activities to involve the broader community with schools, families, and children. See any Center reports by Burch, Davies, Delago, Dolan, Morisset, Nettles, and Palanski for attention to issues concerning community connections with schools and families.

These are just a few of many questions about each type of involvement that need to be addressed to deepen knowledge about how particular practices of partnership affect students, families, schools, and communities.

*This list is drawn from J.L. Epstein, "Perspectives and Previews on Research and Policy for School, Family, and Community Partnerships," in Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes? edited by A. Booth and J. Dunn. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1995.*

The expected results for teachers include not only improved parent-teacher conferences or communications (Type 2) but also teachers' understanding of and respect for families (Type 1), new approaches to homework (Type 4), and connections with other teachers, families, and the community.

The new knowledge about results means that schools may purposely select practices for each of the six types to help

their teachers, parents, and students reach important goals. See any Center reports by Ames, Connors, Davies and colleagues, Dolan, Epstein, Glenn and colleagues, Johnson, Kagan and colleagues, Lee, Nettles, Morisset, and Saiganik for attention to one or more of the six types of family-school-community connections and their results.

Center studies have clarified some of the complex positive and negative link-

ages of involvement with student and parent attitudes and behaviors. For example, on average, teachers more often telephone or conference with parents of students who need extra help to improve their academics or behavior. Also, parents call or visit teachers or the school if they see their children struggling academically or if they are concerned about their children's attitudes or behavior. Several Center studies confirm

statistically that communications such as phone calls and conferences are negatively correlated with student achievement and behavior. More communications also are negatively linked to parents' ratings of schools, as parents report less satisfaction with schools when their children are in trouble or failing in school. These correlations should not be misinterpreted to mean that more communications create academic or behavioral problems. Rather, they illustrate that, presently, schools and families make contact mainly when students have academic or behavioral problems. Importantly, these negative correlations are not found when schools develop comprehensive programs of partnership that include positive phone calls, conferences, and other communications with all families, not just those whose children have academic or behavioral problems.

The Center's studies increase knowledge about the results of partnerships, but it will be important for researchers and educators to continue to probe deeply into the question: What are the results or consequences of particular types of involvement for families, for students, and for teaching practice at all levels of schooling? Additional longitudinal studies will be needed, for example, to determine whether, after receiving attention from home and school, students improve their attendance, behavior, and grades in school. We need to know: Which family-school-commu-

nity partnership practices and follow-up activities are most successful in helping students who have problems take more successful paths?

## Understanding Community Connections

In the past, researchers have used census data to classify communities based on education, income, race, or their economic or social characteristics. Center Studies have focused, instead, on the strengths of people, programs, and organizations within communities that may predict and explain the success of students. For example, see Nettie's reports on how adults in communities can share their skills and talents through coaching processes. Other researchers have studied how to maximize the skills and talents of parents, how to integrate services to families, and how schools, families, and other community groups can work together more effectively. See any Center reports by Burch, Connors, Davies, Dolan, Johnson, Kagan and associates, Morissey, and Palanki.

Other Center researchers have studied conditions and activities in diverse cultural communities, identifying similarities and differences within and across cultures in connections with their children's schools. See article by Bright (this issue) and any Center reports by Delgado, Hidalgo, Perry, Siu, and Swap. These studies identify resources and strengths in families and communities that would

be labeled "poor" or "disadvantaged" if only aggregated economic statistics or census type data were used to define them. For example, the Center studies suggest that resources within families and communities include rituals, traditional values, family dreams and aspirations, cultural norms for student behavior, racial identity development, practices that involve families in their children's education and schools, and formal and informal community organizations that support families. These strengths must be understood and mobilized by schools to fully develop responsive home-school-community partnerships.

Our studies indicate that research on communities should start from the inside out, with attention to the traditions and talents of families and other individuals and groups. Many more studies are needed on how to harness the strengths that are present in all communities to assist students, engage families, and improve schools. The Center's studies are expanding the definition of "community" in partnerships, but it will be important for researchers and educators to continue to probe deeply into the question: How can we better understand the design and effects of components of community in school, family, and community partnerships?

## Understanding Transitions

Center studies have contributed new information about family involvement at

## An Opportunity to Strengthen Partnerships

Collaborative work and thoughtful give-and-take by researchers, policy leaders, educators, and parents are responsible for the progress that has been made over the past decade in understanding and developing school, family, and community partnerships. Similar collaborations will be important for future progress.

To continue to build on the work of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning and to apply the results of research in practice, I have established a National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools. The goal of the network is to assist and to learn from state, district, and school leaders who are responsible

for helping elementary, middle, and high schools implement programs of school, family, and community partnerships by the year 2000. All Partnership-2000 schools will apply the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the framework of six types of involvement, and the Action Team for School, Family and Community Partnerships approach in their work. However, each school will tailor its program to meet the needs, interests, and goals of its teachers, students, families, and community. Johns Hopkins University researchers and staff will offer information and guidelines, newsletters, and optional training conferences to the Key Contacts in schools, districts, and states. There is no membership fee, but

there are requirements for adequate staff and budgets for at least three years to support the work needed to build strong partnerships.

For an invitation and membership forms for the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, send the name, position, address, and phone and fax numbers of the Key Contact for your school, district, or state to Joyce Epstein, Director, Partnership-2000 Schools, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning/CRESPAR, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218.



important points of transition from one grade level to the next, across school levels, and during transition periods such as summers. Several longitudinal studies have explored transitions and other topics of stability and change in home-school partnerships. Studies show, for example, that teachers at each grade level have different definitions and requirements for success, new forms of communication with families, activities that can help students and their families use summers effectively, and strategies to help students and their families make successful transitions from middle school to high school. See Center reports by Ames and colleagues (April 1995), Connors (February 1993), Epstein and Connors (August 1994), and Siu and Feldman (October 1995). In a forthcoming Center report, Lee found that when parents continue their involvement from middle school to high school, students report better attitudes, behaviors, report card grades, and attendance in high school.

Over the next few years, additional studies need to address the question: Which practices of partnership are most effective at important points of transition from one grade level to the next, across school levels, at other times when students change teachers or schools, or during transition periods such as summers and vacations?

Understanding results, community, and transitions in family-community-school partnerships are three of many broad themes that have been extended by our research. Other topics include the importance of students in partnerships and collaborative approaches that enable schools to develop their programs of partnership.

## Applying Research Results in Practice

Even as research continues to develop deeper knowledge about partnerships, educators are moving ahead with plans to improve their programs to involve families in children's education. From our own studies and work with many schools, districts, and states, and from new knowledge from Center studies, we have developed and tested an approach that integrates and applies the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and uses the framework of six types of

involvement to help schools establish and maintain a comprehensive program of partnership with families and communities.

Who will do the work to develop comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships? From educators and families in many schools, we have learned that, along with clear policies and strong support from state and district leaders and school principals, each school needs an Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships. An Action Team guides the development and implementation of a comprehensive program of partnership in each school including all six types of involvement. The Action Team also monitors all school, family, and community connections to identify and describe the school's "program" of partnership and to note progress in reaching all families. From the trials and errors, efforts, and insights of many schools in our research projects, we have identified five steps that any elementary, middle, or high school can take to develop stronger and more positive school-family-community connections.

1. *Create an Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships.* Teachers, parents, administrators, and others serve on the Action Team with responsibilities to assess present practices of partnership, organize new practices, implement selected activities, evaluate next needed steps, and continue to improve and coordinate practices for all six types of involvement. To organize the work, each Action Team member serves as chair or co-chair of one of six subcommittees for each type of involvement. Each is assisted in implementing and conducting activities by other teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members. The Action Team members may also serve on committees focused on school goals, drawing from the six types of involvement to assist in successfully meeting goals for school improvement.

2. *Obtain funds and other support for the Action Team and its work.* A modest budget is needed to support the work and expenses of each school's Action Team. Funds may come from federal, state, and local programs that mandate, request, or support family involvement such as Title I, Title II, Title VII, and Goals 2000. At

the very least, each school's Action Team requires a small stipend (e.g., at least \$1,000 per year) to plan, implement, and revise practices of partnership on all six types of involvement to help meet school goals.

3. *Identify each school's starting points on the six types of involvement.* Most schools already conduct some practices of partnership with some families some of the time. Using questionnaires, interviews, panels, focus groups, or other discussions (such as a series of principal's breakfasts for representative groups of teachers, parents, students, and others), the Action Team collects information about the school's present practices of partnership on the six types, which practices are presently working well, and what to add or improve to reach all families and to meet school goals.

4. *Set a three-year outline and a one-year detailed plan for action.* Based on ideas of what practices are present or needed, the Action Team develops a three-year outline for all six types of involvement. A detailed one-year plan shows how the subcommittee for each type of involvement will conduct its work each month over the school year. The plans indicate how responsibilities are delegated, how activities link to school goals, and how results will be evaluated. The outline and plans are shared with the school council, parents, teachers, and students.

5. *Continue planning and working toward good partnerships.* The Action Team schedules an annual presentation of its work and a celebration of progress so that all teachers, families, and students know about the work that is done each year to strengthen partnerships. Each year, the Action Team updates the school's three-year outline and develops a new one-year detailed plan for the following year's work. Even if the Action Team adds or improves one activity each year for each of the six types of involvement, it will make eighteen improvements over three years in the development of a comprehensive and coordinated program of school-family-community partnerships. □



CENTER ON FAMILIES,  
COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS  
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# Publications

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***This Publications List and Order Form is organized by research project. Items may be ordered singly, or as a set or package at a discounted price.***

**Johns Hopkins University**

**FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

CFC04	<i>Family Education and Training: Obstacles, Opportunities, and Outcomes for Low-income Mothers</i> S. L. Kagan, P. Neville, L. Landesman, F. Marx, P. Neville, S. Parker & J. Rustici, March 1992	10.00		
CFC14	<i>Family Education and Training from Research to Practice — Implementation Plan</i> S. L. Kagan, P. Neville & J. Rustici, February 1993	6.75		
CFCUR	<i>Family Education and Training: Preparing for Successful Employment in Early Care and Education — Integrated Curriculum Guide</i> J. Rustici, S. L. Kagan, & M. Hamilton-Lee, 1996	25.00		
CFCSET1	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	35.00		

**THE ROAD TO READINESS**

CFC03	<i>What Does Learning Mean for Infants and Toddlers? The Contributions of the Child, the Family, and the Community</i> K. M. Young & E. Marx, March 1992.	5.00		
CFC18	<i>Language and Emotional Milestones in Infants and Toddlers: On the Road to Readiness</i> C. E. Monsset, April 1993.	6.00		
CFC26	<i>School Readiness: Parents and Professionals Speak on Social and Emotional Needs of Young Children</i> C. E. Monsset, October 1994.	7.75		
CFCSET2	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	15.75		

**MULTICULTURAL STUDIES OF FAMILY SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN'S SUCCESS**

CFC11	<i>A Saga of Irish-American Achievement: Constructing a Positive Identity</i> S. M. Swap & J. Krasnow, October 1992.	7.50		
CFC12	<i>I saw puerto rico once: A Review of the Literature on Puerto Rican Families and School Achievement in the United States</i> N. M. Hildago, October 1992.	6.25		
CFC16	<i>Toward a Theory of African American School Achievement</i> T. Perry, May 1993.	7.50		
CFCSET3	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	18.25		

**STUDIES OF CHINESE AMERICAN YOUNG CHILDREN**

CFC02	<i>Toward an Understanding of Chinese-American Educational Achievement: A Literature Review</i> S.-F. Siu, February 1992.	5.00		
CFC31	<i>Success in School: The Journey of Two Chinese-American Families</i> S.-F. Siu & J. Feldman, October 1994.	4.00		
CFC36	<i>Patterns of Chinese American Family Involvement in Young Children's Education: Final Report</i> S.-F. Siu & J. A. Feldman, July 1996.	11.00		
CFCQ&A	<i>Questions &amp; Answers: What Research Says About the Education of Chinese American Children</i> S.-F. Siu, 1996.	4.00		
CFCSET4	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	20.00		
<b>NATURAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS: IMPACT ON PUERTO RICAN FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES &amp; SCHOOLS</b>				
CFC10	<i>The Puerto Rican Community and Natural Support Systems: Implications for the Education of Children</i> M. Delgado, April 1992.	5.00		
CFC34	<i>Use of Puerto Rican Natural Support Systems as a Bridge Between Community and Schools</i> M. Delgado & H. Rivera, March 1996.	7.00		
CFCSET5	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	10.00		

**EFFECTS OF SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATION ON CHILDREN'S MOTIVATION & LEARNING**

CFC15	<i>Parent Involvement: The Relationship Between Home Communication and Parents' Perceptions and Beliefs</i> C. Ames, with M. Khoju & T. Watkins, March 1993.	6.25		
CFC28	<i>Teachers' School-to-Home Communications and Parent Involvement: The Role of Parent Perceptions and Beliefs</i> C. Ames, L. de Stefano, T. Watkins, & S. Sheldon, April 1995.	7.75		
CFCSET6	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	12.25		

### PARTNERS IN LEARNING: FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

CFC08	<i>Project SIFED: A Three-Year Evaluation of a Family Literacy Program</i> . L. J. DoJan. April 1992.	3.75		
CFC13	<i>Project SIFED: A Family Focus on Literacy</i> . L. J. Connors. February 1993.	6.50		
CFC22	<i>Small Wins: The Promises and Challenges of Family Literacy</i> . L. J. Connors. April 1994.	7.50		
CFC27	<i>Removing Barriers to Learning: Factors that Affect Participation and Dropout in Parent Interventions</i> . L. DoJan & B. Haxby. January 1995.	6.00		
CFC32	<i>Participation in Adult Education and Its Effects on Home Literacy</i> . L. Connors-Tadros. October 1995.	7.50		
CFC35	<i>Effects of Even Start in Family Literacy: Local and National Comparisons</i> . L. Connors-Tadros. March 1996.	8.50		
CFCSET7	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	30.00		

### STUDIES OF PARENT CENTERS IN SCHOOLS

CFC20	<i>Parent Family Centers: Dimensions of Functioning in 28 Schools in 14 States</i> . V. R. Johnson. September 1993.	5.75		
CFC23	<i>Parent Centers in Urban Schools: Four Case Studies</i> . V. R. Johnson. April 1994.	8.25		
CFCPCTR	<i>Family Center Guidebook</i> . V. R. Johnson. 1996.	15.00		
CFCVID1	<i>Building Community: How to Start a Family Center in Your School</i> . VHS. 20 minutes. 1992.	15.00		
CFCKIT	FAMILY CENTER STARTER KIT — INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	35.00		

### PARENT INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL CHOICE

CFC05	<i>Information about Schools of Choice: Strategies for Reaching Families</i> . L. H. Salganik & R. L. Carver. March 1992.	4.25		
CFC19	<i>Parent Information for School Choice: The Case of Massachusetts</i> . C. L. Glenn, K. McLaughlin, & L. Salganik. May 1993.	5.50		
CFCSET8	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	9.00		

### STUDIES OF POLICIES TO INCREASE FAMILY-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

STUDIES OF SCHOOLS REACHING OUT				
CFC01	<i>A Portrait of Schools Reaching Out: Report of a Survey of Practices and Policies of Family-Community-School Collaboration</i> . D. Davies, P. Burch, & V. Johnson. February 1992.	8.00		
CFC17	<i>Getting Started: Action Research in Family-School-Community Partnerships</i> . D. Davies, P. Burch, & A. Palanki. March 1993.	8.00		
CFC30	<i>In Our Hands: A Multi-Site Parent-Teacher Action Research Project</i> . A. Palanki & P. Burch, with D. Davies. July 1995.	15.00		
CFC33	<i>Crossing Boundaries: Multi-National Action Research on Family-School Collaboration</i> . D. Davies & V. Johnson (Eds.). January 1996.	15.00		
CFCSET9	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	40.00		
IDENTIFYING AND ANALYZING POLICIES				
CFC07	<i>Mapping the Policy Landscape: What Federal and State Governments are Doing to Promote Family-School-Community Partnerships</i> . A. Palanki, P. Burch, & D. Davies. March 1992.	5.00		
CFC21	<i>Fitting Policy to Family Needs: Delivering Comprehensive Services Through Collaboration and Family Empowerment</i> . D. Davies, P. Burch, & A. Palanki. September 1993.	7.00		
CFC29	<i>From Clients to Partners: Four Case Studies of Collaboration and Family Involvement in the Development of School-Linked Services</i> . P. Burch & A. Palanki, with D. Davies. April 1995.	8.00		
CFCSET10	INCLUDES ITEMS LISTED ABOVE	18.00		

POLICY INFORMATION			
CFCSUCCES	<i>Partnerships for Student Success</i> , D. Davies, 1996	3.00	
CFCVID2	<i>A Tale of Two Partnerships</i> , P. Brady & R. Migho, VHS 25 minutes, 1996	5.00	
CFCACTION	<i>Partners in Action: A Resource Guide</i> , M. Gavrin, C. S. Strickland, & C. Lam (Eds.), 1996	10.00	
CFCWANT	<i>What Parents Want</i> , N. Sconvers, 1996	3.00	
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In: Handbook of Parenting, Volume 4: Applied and Practical Parenting, edited by Marc H. Bornstein. Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995. Pp. 437-458.

## 18

# Parent and School Partnerships

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### INTRODUCTION

Families and schools have important roles to play in socializing and educating this nation's children. In this chapter, the literature on relations between parents and schools—how they separately and jointly influence the education of children—is reviewed. There are two main purposes of this chapter. The first is to encourage researchers who study families or parenting to include attention to schools and for those who study schools and teaching to attend to families. The authors hope to expand the agendas of researchers to examine the connections of schools, families, and communities to improve children's learning and development.

The second purpose is to show how research and development contribute useful information to both schools and families in their efforts to create broader and deeper support for student learning. Thus, the chapter is intended to be informative to professionals, as well as researchers, in a wide variety of venues who work with and for families and children in schools, community agencies, private practice, or as policymakers.

The chapter begins with a historical summary of relations between parents and schools in the American educational system. Patterns in this country's history are focused on to illustrate the evolution from tight family and community control of children's schooling, to great separation of the roles of families and schools, to the budding emergence of productive partnerships. Some of the reasons for these changes in patterns of interactions and how parents and educators have viewed each others' roles are discussed.

The next section discusses some of the major theories of parent-school relations and how they, too, have changed over time. Theories of separate, nested, and overlapping influences of families and schools have guided research, and also are reflected in school practice. Models of family involvement that describe and define parents' roles in schools, based on the various theories, also are identified.

Although some parents conduct practices on their own to support children's learning at home, schools can take leadership to reach all parents, and to guide their efforts to support and increase their



children's success in school. A framework of six major types of family-school partnership practices is reviewed to assist educators in developing their school programs to inform and involve families, and to guide researchers in new studies of the forms and results of partnerships. In this section are presented new ideas of family roles and responsibilities to increase their participation in their children's education in each major type of involvement.

In the next section, a selection of educational issues (such as new forms of student assessments and school organization) that parents may face as their children progress through the grades is discussed. School reform initiatives presently are bringing new forms and features of organization, curriculum, and instruction into schools and classrooms. Parents are often not informed about these changes and how they affect their children's education and experiences. Educators need to consider how to involve families in the design and decisions of school reform, and how to inform all families of decisions that are made.

These are practical and research issues because little is known about how to prevent gaps from developing in parents' knowledge about their children's school programs, or the best ways to organize, periodically update, and continually renew information families have about changes in school programs and practices.

Because of the breadth and depth of this chapter, with its simultaneous and detailed focus on families and schools, the authors have elected to limit this review in two ways. First, the historic themes and issues of family and school relations focus on only the American educational system. This does not deny an important and growing interest in family involvement in other countries. For example, there has been a long and strong interest in family involvement in children's education in Japan (H. W. Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). There mothers have a history of close involvement in monitoring and assisting their children's progress in school. There is an emerging interest in research and development on partnerships of schools and families in many other nations. For example, the national Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (1990) conducts an International Network of researchers in over 4 nations who are presently interested in or actively conducting research on the topic of school and family connections at different age and grade levels. At annual roundtables and in a biannual newsletter, representatives from many nations share their research and discuss issues of mutual interest on this topic.

In some countries, interest is just emerging; in some, one or two scholars are forging ahead; and in a few, (i.e., England, Australia, Portugal, Canada) a large number of researchers are actively studying topics similar to those raised in this chapter. Studies in Australia (Toomey, 1990), Austria (Krumm, Astleithner, Herder, & Moosbrucher, 1990), Spain (Martinez-Gonzalez, 1990), and Portugal (D. Davies, 1988) document the diversity of parents' and schools' present skills at partnership. For example, Toomey identified five groups of parents of preschool children in an Australian sample—the enthusiasts, silent majority, stressed, independents, and noncoping parents. The goal in Australia, as in the United States, is for schools to provide information and guidance to increase the percentage of enthusiasts who are partners with the schools. Over the next few years there should be a solid base of international research and development to review.

Also, attention in this chapter has been limited to the connections of families, schools, and communities for children from preschool (about 4 years old) to high school (about 17 years old). See the chapter by Honig in this *Handbook* for more information on the early years, and reviews of studies of programs and approaches of family and community in children's learning from birth to 3 years (Morisset, 1993; K. Young & Marx, 1992). Many chapters in Volume I of the *Handbook* on parenting children of different ages and with special conditions provide additional information on children from birth through high school that supplement our attention to partnerships of families, schools, and communities.

Finally, although this chapter is titled "Parent and School Partnerships" to be consistent with other chapters in this *Handbook*, we caution researchers and educators about the use of the word *parent* in connection with the emerging forms of partnerships that are described here. Although much of the literature has focused on mothers (in survey data, in observations, and in school practices), more

attention is needed on the separate and distinct impact of fathers on children's education and development (Lamb, 1981; McBride, 1989; also see Parke, in this *Handbook*). However, the present authors see a real need to broaden vocabularies and to replace *parent* with *family*, *parent involvement* with *school and family partnerships*, and to increase attention to the roles of various family members (e.g., fathers and grandparents), and to individuals and groups in the community, as partners with schools in children's education.

Turn now to the first section of this chapter to begin the discussion of the relations between parents and schools with a look back in time for important trends and themes in the historical literature.

### A GLANCE THROUGH TIME

The historical literature on parents and schools reveals recurring themes of conflict and dissonance. One wonders why. Parents and schools seem like such natural allies, each concerned with the welfare of the children they share. Perhaps this is the heart of the matter. Society places tremendous responsibility and expectations on both parents and schools to ensure the quality of this collective "future." But, society's ideas about how families and schools should carry out their responsibilities are always in flux. Consequently, the conflict and dissonance in the relations between parents and schools may stem from the underlying uncertainty generated by changing societal needs (Finkelstein, 1992).

Until recently there has been little recognition of the ways that parents and schools can work together to reduce their conflicts and share their responsibilities for socializing and educating children. This section discusses a few examples of the changing roles and relations of families and schools from the early years of this country's history, and points out some of the sources of conflict between parents and teachers, and the need for new forms of contact. This is, by necessity, a limited review of selected themes to provide a historical context for the later discussions of theory and practice. (See chapter by French, in this *Handbook*, for further discussion of historical issues and parenting.)

In colonial days, children's education was mainly conducted in naturally occurring situations such as the family, church, farm, and shop. The informal education provided by the family was the foundation on which a formal educational system was built. At first, education occurring in schools was seen as *supplementing* education occurring in the home and community. The primary purposes of education at this time were to inculcate children with the religious and political beliefs of the time and to prepare all children for their work as members of a family and community.

The family was regarded as fundamental to a healthy, religious, and civil society. In New England, where the first public or "common" schools were formed, family, church, state, and school worked in concert. In an effort to reduce conflict and build the political consensus that was needed to support a fledgling democracy, schools were often governed by the same trustees who governed the church (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gutek, 1992; Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Amendments to the Constitution delineated the rights of citizens, but more significantly for public schools, separated church and state. The separation of church and state precipitated a transformation in the purpose of schooling from the needs of a religious community toward the needs of a democratic society. This shift in emphasis reduced the power of the family over the education of children and signaled the beginning of a process in which outside institutions took over some of the earlier functions of the family (Lewis, 1989).

At first, not all families saw the public schools as important for their children's progress or success in society. The middle and upper classes were resistant to sending their children to public schools. These schools were considered as appropriate places "to civilize the lower classes" (Williams, 1989, p. 72). However, as a result of compulsory attendance and public funding laws, by the early 1900s most children of all social classes attended public schooling.

The Industrial Revolution increased the recognition that the family alone could not educate and socialize their children for the occupations that were emerging in the factories and cities. As nondomestic occupations increased, families had to balance their strong interests and emotions in

rearing their children with the need to educate their children to enable them to get better jobs. Education and the public schools became the major mechanism for families to improve their economic and social status, and that of their children. Sons of farmers, daughters of immigrants, and other children of parents who had no formal schooling themselves hoped to improve their families' standing in society through education (Finkelstein, 1992).

Given the nation's founding principles of equality and freedom, this society idealizes the school as the *great equalizer*. Schools are expected to "open doors for all." However, the schools assumed the role of "sorting" children toward different career paths in response to the need for a diversified labor force. Only some students with the highest intellectual skills were assisted to obtain education beyond the elementary years (Gutok, 1992).

The schools, as the most *public* of institutions, always have mirrored the struggle in society over the sharing of power among people of different races, classes, and genders. For example, inequities in the educational preparation and opportunities of White and African-American students have been debated from the earliest days of the nation's history (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Families and schools surely were in conflict if parents had aspirations for their children to go further in school than they were permitted to go.

Similarly, throughout history we have debated questions about the equality of education for males and females. What roles are *possible* for women? How do these roles affect children, families, and society? Women's access to education, subsequent career paths, and roles in the family and community have influenced their relations with teachers and their connections with their children's schools (Epstein, 1987b; Lightfoot, 1978).

Schools emerged from the Industrial Revolution as institutions designed to compensate for the declining authority of families and communities. For the past century, schools were assigned many more responsibilities: "... preserve democracy, eliminate poverty, reduce unemployment, ease the assimilation of immigrants to the nation, overcome differences between ethnic groups, advance scientific knowledge and technological progress, prevent traffic accidents, raise health standards, refine moral character, and guide young people into useful occupations" (Ravitch, 1983, cited in Williams, 1989, p. xii).

Interestingly, the additional demands on schools have helped to redirect relations between parents and schools from conflict toward collaboration. There is growing recognition that families, schools, and communities must learn how to work together to combine all resources in order to help children reach important educational goals. The need for cooperation is forcing a shift in emphases from changing families to meet the needs of schools to changing schools to meet the needs of children and families.

### CHANGING THEORIES OF FAMILY-SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

In this section some of the predominant theories of family and school relations are explored, and some of the major models of parent involvement that outline how theories have been translated into practice in the schools are reviewed. Theoretical frameworks for understanding and researching family-school relations are found in sociological and psychological literatures concerned with organizational efficiency and effectiveness and in child development.

#### Theoretical Perspectives on Family and School

In this century, three broad theoretical perspectives have guided thinking about school and family connections. A few of the distinctions in these perspectives are summarized here (see Epstein, 1987b, for an extended discussion). The three theories discussed next of separate, embedded, and overlapping influences of schools and families have been used to study and explain the learning and development of children of all races and cultures.

It should be noted that an increasing number of scholars are attempting to make explicit the impact and influence on children of unique factors related to the minority experience, including the nature of connections between minority families and their children's schools (Coll et al., 1993; Laosa, 1981; Perry, 1993; see also Garcia Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, in this *Handbook*; Harkness & Super, in this *Handbook*). Historical discussions and extensive references on these issues can be found for African-Americans (Perry, 1993); Chinese-Americans (Siu, 1992); Irish-Americans (Swap & Krasnow, 1992); and Puerto Ricans (Hidalgo, 1992).

**Separate influences.** The psychological and sociological literatures in the early twentieth century argued for the separateness of teachers' and parents' roles in schooling. Anna Freud (1935, cited in Lightfoot, 1978) discussed the "dangers" of teachers becoming too "motherlike," resulting in children who would become "too demanding" of teachers. Waller (1932) wrote about the necessity of separate roles for parents and teachers in order to successfully train children in the responsibilities of school and the demands of work. These views reflected other long-standing sociological theories that organizations are most effective when they set unique missions and fulfill distinct responsibilities. Early educational theories also supported the separateness of families and schools and their separate though sequential responsibilities. For example, the early view that children's minds were a *tabula rasa* directed parents to fill the child's "blank slate" with basic social skills in the early years. Then, parents presented the child to the school to be "imprinted" with academic skills. All of these perspectives put the family in charge of their child's social development, and put the school in charge of education.

**Embedded influences.** Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) introduced a theoretical framework that recognized the multiple and interdependent influences of various contexts on children's development. His research and writings focused on how processes and dynamics experienced within the family are affected by both relations between family members and conditions outside the family. Bronfenbrenner's paradigm emphasizes that children's development is "embedded" or nested within the *microsystem* and the *macrosystem*. The *microsystem* refers to relations in the immediate setting in which the child is actually present (e.g., how events at home can affect the child's progress in school and vice versa). The *macrosystem* refers to patterns of cultural or societal beliefs that influence behavior within the family (e.g., roles of mothers and fathers).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) model has been depicted as concentric circles of increasingly distal influences on children's development. Researchers use this paradigm to study the contextual and interrelated effects of maternal employment, day care, social support, community conditions, and other factors on children's achievement, other indicators of success in school, and other aspects of development. Bronfenbrenner's work was significant in moving researchers toward a recognition of the more complex and dynamic realities of the effects of multiple contexts on human development. (See also Lemer, Castellino, Terry, Villarruel, & McKinney, in this *Handbook*.)

**Overlapping influences.** Epstein (1987b) suggested a social-organizational perspective of overlapping spheres of influence for understanding and studying school and family relations. The overlapping spheres of influence model integrates and extends the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the educational insight of Leichter (1974) about "families as educators," the sociological perspectives on connections of professional and nonprofessional institutions and individuals of Litwak and Meyer (1974), the emphasis on shared responsibility for children's education and well-being of Seeley (1981), and a long tradition of sociological and psychological research on school and family environments and their effects.

Pictorially, this model is shown as spheres that can, by design, be pushed together to overlap or pushed apart to separate, based on forces that operate in a given environment. The model identifies an *external* structure of moving spheres and an *internal* structure of interpersonal exchanges and interactions of the members of the various environments. The full model recognizes the interlocking

histories of institutions that motivate, socialize, and educate children, and the changing and accumulating skills of individuals in them as the basis for studying connections that benefit children's learning and development. The theoretical components are translated into variables in researchers' measurement models.

The external model assumes that shared responsibilities are affected by forces of (1) *time* to account for changes in the ages and grade levels of students and the influence of historic change on environments and (2) *behavior* to account for the background characteristics, philosophies, and practices of each environment. The internal model identifies the interpersonal relationships and influence patterns that occur between home and school in practices conducted jointly. There are two levels of interaction: (1) between the institutions of schools and families (as when schools invite all families to events or send the same communications to all families) and (2) between and among individuals (as when a parent and teacher meet in conference to discuss or assist the progress of a specific child). The child, placed at the center of the internal structure of the model, is assumed to be the reason for and a participant in home and school partnerships, and the main actor in student learning and success in school.

### Relating Theory to Practice

Practices of schools to involve families have evolved from focusing on the separate responsibilities of educators and families to recognizing their overlapping responsibilities in a program of school and family partnerships. Although some educators and some families continue to function more as separate institutions, there is growing awareness of the need for families and schools to share their mutual interests, knowledge, experience, and resources to promote children's learning. A number of manuals, articles, and books have been written for educators in recent years describing how to involve families. Swap (1993) discussed four ways that schools resist or encourage effective school-family partnerships: the protective model, the school-to-home transmission model, the curriculum enrichment model, and the partnership model of family-school relations. These approaches reflect the theoretical distinctions between separate and overlapping spheres of influence.

The protective model takes a somewhat "businesslike" view in requiring parents to "delegate to the school the responsibility of educating their children" although parents should "hold school personnel accountable for the results" (Swap, 1993, p. 28). This model reflects the theory that schools will be most successful and children will learn best if educators have *separate* roles from parents in educating children. Schools may involve families in some aspects of the school—fundraising and chaperoning for instance—but these activities need not encourage regular or serious parent-teacher communications or broad involvement of families in their children's learning or in the life of the school.

The school-to-home transmission model recognizes the continuities of school life and home life, but in one direction only—school to home. The model does not specifically encourage two-way communication—home to school. In practice, this model assumes that all families ascribe to the *school's* values, beliefs, and goals. School staff may go to great efforts to communicate their curriculum goals and efforts, discipline policy, and other important information to families. But opportunities are few for families to give feedback to school staff or shape the school's policies or practices.

Both of these models result in practices that give parents a proscribed and limited role in the school and do not allow for informed or deep involvement in their children's daily school activities or curriculum. Neither do they attempt to integrate families' knowledge, needs, or cultures into the life of the school. Even if educators' efforts to communicate are well intentioned, both of these models may promote one-way or top-down practices that ignore or minimize the range of needs and resources of children and families.

The curriculum enrichment model emphasizes opportunities for parents and teachers to learn about and from each other and to share their cultural knowledge and skills through active involvement in

children's learning. However, exchanges on curriculum between families and school staff represent a limited set of communications, and are not necessarily part of a more comprehensive program of partnership with many types of involvement.

The partnership model defines family-school relations as encompassing "long-term commitments, mutual respect, widespread involvement of families and educators in many levels of activities, and sharing of planning and decision-making responsibilities" (Swap, 1993, p. 47). Most important for long-term change, school staff and families working together under this model "are actively engaged in defining and constructing a framework for parent involvement and a series of roles for parents that are adapted to the school's mission" (p. 50). The partnership model is one example of how Epstein's (1987b) theory of overlapping spheres of influence translates into practice.

Epstein's (1987b) theory and research support a framework of six types of school and family partnership practices (described later). Swap's (1993) partnership model, consistent with Epstein's, emphasizes creating two-way communication, enhancing learning at home and at school, providing mutual support, and making joint decisions as key elements to a successful partnership between home and school.

*Summary.* The three theories just discussed illustrate how an understanding of the nature of the relations between parents and schools has changed. Theorists increasingly recognize the complex, interrelations between child development and the environment. Interpersonal and organizational factors play a role in how well students learn, and how well families and schools work together. Schools determine much of the nature and form of interactions between parents and schools through the practices they use to inform, invite, and involve families. Most schools do not have explicit philosophies that encourage and guide the hard work necessary to build strong school-family partnerships. Researchers and educators must continue to develop the abilities of students, parents, schools, and community members to share responsibility for children's learning.

### THE NATURE OF FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS

A common theme of each of the theories and practical models presented previously is simply that *families are important* for children's learning and development. Many studies report that family income and parents' formal education influence student achievement and parent involvement (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Coleman, 1987; Entwisle, Alexander, Cadigan, & Pallas, 1986; Lareau, 1989; Useem, 1992; see also Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst; Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif; Bradley; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, all in this *Handbook*). Regardless of parent income or education, however, research suggests that students at all grade levels do better in their academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors, if they happen to have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Clark, 1983; Comer, 1980; Davies, 1988; Epstein, 1986; Scott-Jones, 1987).

In this section, some examples of parenting practices that facilitate students' academic achievement and success in school are offered. These practices are, for the most part, invisible from schools and teachers. Most studies show that the amount and type of contact between parents and schools is uneven and presently depends more on parents' initiatives than on schools' or teachers' efforts to systematically involve all parents. Efforts to encourage schools to take leadership in involving families in children's learning have begun to identify new patterns and practices of interaction between families and schools.

#### What Parents Do to Support Children's Education

Parents are usually left on their own, to draw from their personal experiences, knowledge, and resources, to figure out how to best support their children's learning in school. Many parents do fine on their own, but all families could use help to better support their children's learning, and some

families need greater assistance from the schools. Further, research identifying important parenting practices for student achievement needs to be disseminated in appropriate forms to families and teachers. Important to note, teachers who do give parents specific information on their children's learning and progress in school measurably influence what parents do at home to support children's learning (Ames, 1993; Epstein, 1991).

**Literacy-related parenting practices.** Parents are urged by professionals to establish a rich oral language environment in the home from infancy on in order to boost children's chances for success in school (Morisset, 1993; K. Young & Marx, 1992). Parents also are asked to support children's reading by creating a rich and stimulating print or written language environment, including serving as model readers for their children (Strickland & Cullinan, 1990).

Topping (1985) identified specific factors that link parent involvement and children's reading. These are: (1) allowing more time for children to practice reading at home, (2) making reading more enjoyable and valued, (3) giving children praise and feedback, and (4) modeling reading and writing behaviors at home so that children relate to and to imitate these behaviors. Others also report significant effects on children's reading skills and parent-child relationships from listening to a child read and from sharing and exploring books (Evans, 1993; Wolfendale, 1985).

When educators assist and guide families in supporting children's literacy development, more families conduct these practices and children's reading skills improve (Epstein, 1991). A number of programs help educators organize their work with families, such as sending books home for parent-child reading (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982) and teaching parents book-reading strategies (Handel, 1992).

**Homework-related parenting practices.** Teachers often give homework to help students develop independence and responsibility in their academic work and to share classroom activities with parents (Epstein, 1987a; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). Parents and teachers alike believe that parents have a role to play in children's homework. Teachers expect parents to monitor student homework, but they often do not give parents guidelines about the purpose of the homework or how best to help their child (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Some educators are using new programs and approaches to engage students and parents in discussions about their academic subjects. Evaluations of these approaches indicate that parents can effectively interact with their children in reading, language arts, and other homework activities in the elementary and middle grades (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, Herrick, & Coates, in press; Herrick & Epstein, 1991).

Clark (1993) studied the homework-related practices of parents of third-grade students (about 8 or 9 years old). In a sample of 460 predominantly Hispanic-American, African-American, Asian-American, and other non-Anglo families, he found that most parents were sending their children to school regularly, providing a regular time and a quiet place to study, and expecting them to complete homework assignments. However, in homes of high-achieving students, parents also: (1) checked homework for neatness and accuracy, (2) demonstrated how to use the dictionary and references materials, (3) were knowledgeable about how to help with homework, (4) read or studied in the home, and (5) expected their children to get postsecondary education. Most of these practices can be guided so that all families have the information they need to monitor and motivate their children.

Parents of elementary school children report spending more time helping their children and feel more capable of helping with homework than parents of students in the middle grades (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Parental involvement also influences the amount of time that high school seniors spend on homework, and this, in turn, is positively related to students' grades. Data show that parental monitoring of students' whereabouts and activities, progress in school, and support and encouragement for postsecondary plans has a small but significant effect on homework completion (Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987). As children progress through the grades and the curriculum becomes more complex, parents want information and assistance from the school to help their children and adolescents with homework (Connors & Epstein, 1994; Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

Without guidance from teachers at each grade level, families have different ideas about what their involvement in their child's homework should be. According to one study, some families consider homework to be the child's practice time for unfinished classwork, and that parents should not correct or question the child's homework because that would interfere with the teacher's role. Other families believe that homework is their opportunity to communicate family practices and values to their child and to the teacher (Thompson, 1992). Some parents spend less time actively helping their children with homework, and more time in other home study and educational activities with their children (Clark, 1993).

Studies suggest ways that teachers can increase parental involvement, understanding, and confidence about student's learning and progress in school (Ames, 1993; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). For example, the *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork* (TIPS) process (Epstein, Jackson, & Salinas, 1992) enables teachers to assign weekly or biweekly interactive homework to inform and involve all families. TIPS homework activities in math, science, and language arts require children in the elementary and middle grades to talk to someone at home about interesting things they are learning in class. In this way, parents are guided by the homework design in how to interact with and help their child.

*Parental influence on college and career plans.* Parents' education levels and expectations for their children's postsecondary education are significant predictors of college attendance (M. Davies & Kandel, 1981; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Students are more likely to attend college when their parents expect them to go to college, encourage them to explore options, and help them prepare for college (Carpenter & Fleishman, 1987). In one study, consistency of encouragement across all 4 years of high school was important for determining whether students attended college and whether they attended 2- or 4-year colleges (Conklin & Dailey, 1981).

Many students report that they want to go to college, but many are not prepared to do so. In a study of high school students, 80 percent indicated that they intended to attend some form of postsecondary school, but just 50 percent were enrolled in an academic, vocational, or business program (Connors & Epstein, 1994). Many families of these students wanted the schools to give them information on financial aid, course requirements, and issues concerning their adolescents' postsecondary choices and consequences.

Schools could help more families be more effective in influencing and supporting their children's career plans. Some programs designed to expose students to postsecondary opportunities now include parents in college tours and other meetings in recognition of the fact that students are more likely to go to college, and stay in, if their families are well informed. In a Canadian study of later elementary through high school students and their parents, R. A. Young (1993) found that children's career and educational plans were better developed when parents and children engaged in career preparation activities together. Most often these parent-child activities occurred at school. Some adolescents rely on their parents for help in decisions about college and career plans (M. Davies & Kandel, 1981), but families usually look to the school and other community resources to assist them in these matters.

These three examples illustrate parenting practices that support children in the role of student with age-appropriate activities across the grades. Establishing a rich literacy environment at home begins in infancy and continues across the years. Establishing procedures at home to support, monitor, and discuss homework (e.g., providing space, allocating time for homework, and arranging time for parent-child discussions) begins in elementary school and continues through the high school years. Establishing conversations and supportive practices to help youngsters set and meet goals for postsecondary education begins in the later elementary or middle grades and continues through high school and beyond. Families are important influences on children's learning at all ages and stages of development on these and other topics, such as math literacy, career interests, peer relationships, and many others concerning their children's lives in and out of school.

Schools have the expertise and information that could help many parents conduct these and other activities with their children. If schools increased the number of families they assisted in meaningful



ways, more students would be able to use their talents and family and community resources to meet their learning goals and future plans. Studies in school and family partnerships are needed to determine how to organize and guide parenting practices effectively to assist all families, and whether and how students benefit from the interactions.

### The Prevalence of Parent Involvement at School and at Home

Reviews of survey data identified that parents who worked, single parents, and parents with low income or less formal education were typically less involved in school-based practices (Hess & Holloway, 1984; Hiner, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978) although many are involved in supporting children's learning at home (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Similar patterns of involvement are found in ethnographic studies (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Lareau, 1992). Mainly, the nature and extent of school and family connections are affected by the actions taken by schools to develop comprehensive programs of partnership (Ames, 1993; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Clark, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Although federal education programs for disadvantaged students require particular forms of parent involvement, such as parent advisory councils to help make decisions about school programs and policies or parent aides in the classroom, parents have had little direct influence on program policy (Moles, 1993). Teachers often report that parents are not interested in becoming involved in their children's education (Becker & Epstein, 1982). However, parents overwhelmingly report that they need to be involved in their children's education and that they are trying to help their children at home (Chavkin & Williams, 1987; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986; Harris, Kagay, & Ross, 1987). In a survey of over 2,000 parents whose children attended Chapter 1 inner-city elementary and middle schools, many parents reported that they try to get involved on their own without specific help from the schools. However, the extent of involvement was significantly increased when the schools provided guidance to families on how to help at home and at school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

Increasingly schools are recognizing that they need to take responsibility to involve more families in more ways. School staff, parents, and community members report that they need training, support, and resources to assess the effectiveness of current practices and design new or improved practices to build better partnerships with families. Researchers, working with educators, are beginning to identify specific strategies (e.g., interactive homework, new conference procedures) to improve communications between parents and teachers about children's learning. New information is emerging that these communications positively influence parents' beliefs about their ability to help their children and their beliefs about the effectiveness of teachers (Ames, 1993). The most effective strategies establish feelings and actions of partnership between families and schools *and* are aimed at improving student learning and development.

### Identifying the Responsibilities of Both Schools and Parents in Partnerships

To build strong partnerships between parents and schools, researchers have worked to apply the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987b) in research and practice. This work asks: What practices of shared responsibilities of schools and families fall within the area of overlap? and How can schools think about, organize, and implement practices to create a comprehensive program of partnership with families and with the community? Results from many studies led to the formulation of a framework of six major types of involvement (Epstein, 1987b) and the use of the term *partnership* (Epstein, 1992) as a guiding concept for helping schools develop comprehensive programs of family-school partnerships. Much has been written about the roles and responsibilities of schools in selecting practices to implement each type of involvement (Brandt, 1989; Davies et al., 1993). The practices must be "tailored" within and across the grades to respond to the changing characteristics and needs of students, school organizations, and families (Epstein & Connors, 1992). Here, the general goals of each type of involvement are summarized, and the roles and responsibilities of *families* that help them take steps to improve their partnerships with their children's schools are newly examined.

**Type 1: Basic obligations of families—Parenting.** Schools provide information to families about children's health and safety, supervision, nutrition, discipline and guidance, and other parenting skills and childrearing approaches. Schools also need to provide families with information about building positive home conditions that support student learning at each grade level. Some schools help parents with these basic obligations through family support programs or workshops at the school or in other locations, and in other forms of parent education, training, and information sharing.

Families must work on their own or obtain help from their schools or communities to provide for their children's housing, health, nutrition, clothing, and safety. Families also are responsible for teaching their children the attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, customs, and skills that are unique to or valued by the family, apart from the school curriculum (Rich, 1988). By establishing home conditions to support their children as students, youngsters define themselves as sons or daughters and as students. For example, parents work to provide students with a balance at home between time for chores, time for homework, and time for leisure (Epstein, 1989). If families need help with these investments, they must have the information they need to request assistance from their schools and communities and the knowledge that the help they receive will be timely and effective. Where such processes are not in place, families, educators, and others must work together to develop programs that serve these functions.

Schools are enriched and educators and youngsters are enlightened when families share their backgrounds, cultures, skills, and interests in class or school programs and activities. This two-way exchange—information *from schools* to help families understand child and adolescent development and home environments that support learning, and information *from families* to help schools understand family life, and family and students' needs, interests, and talents—is at the heart of Type 1 activities.

**Type 2: Basic obligations of schools—Communicating.** Most schools send communications to families about school programs and students' progress. This includes notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, report cards, conferences, open-house nights or other visiting opportunities, and other more innovative communications. This also includes information to help families to choose or change schools, if such policies are used in a district. Schools vary the forms, frequency, and content of communications and this greatly affects whether and how families receive information and whether the information sent home can be understood by all families.

Families must work with their children to improve Type 2 connections with the schools. Students deliver many of the communications from their teachers to their families. However, the roles of students as couriers, mediators, and interpreters in the process of school-to-home and home-to-school communication has received little attention (Montandon & Perrenoud, 1987). In a recent survey of high school students, just 24 percent reported that they promptly delivered notices from school to their families (Connors & Epstein, 1994). Families can influence the success their children have as messengers by regularly asking their children about notices from the school. Students need evidence from their parents and teachers that they benefit when their families are informed about the school's programs. Families also may increase the number and quality of communications with their children's schools if they let the teachers know that they appreciate their efforts to provide good and frequent information.

Schools are aided when families respond to and act on information sent home. To obtain these reactions from parents, schools need to communicate clearly with families. This includes good two-way connections so that families can communicate questions about school programs and give information about their children to schools, and obtain updates about their children's progress. Studies are needed on the most effective forms of communications among schools, families, and students.

**Type 3: Involvement at school—Volunteering.** This type of partnership includes parents and other volunteers at the school or in classrooms, and families who come to school to support student performances, sports, or other events. Schools increase the number of families and community members who come to the school building by varying schedules so that more are able to participate

as volunteers and as audiences at different times of the day and evening, weekends, summer, or holidays. Programs that tap parents' and community members' talents, occupations, and interests can enrich students' subject classes and improve career explorations. Mentoring, coaching, and tutoring activities may be particularly helpful as students' skills, interests, and talents become increasingly diverse in the adolescent years.

Families can take the initiative to find ways to contribute time or talent to their children's schools. Volunteering at the school building during school hours has become increasingly difficult for many families due to conflicts with work, transportation, or child-care schedules or needs. Epstein (in press) suggested a new definition that says "a volunteer can be anybody—any time and any place—who supports school goals and children's learning." All families can help schools by offering to make phone calls from home, decorate classrooms in the early morning or late afternoon, or assist at school, in the community, or at home on weekends, holidays, or vacations.

Families can also help educate and influence their employers about the legitimate needs of families of school-age children to have release time or other flexible time in order to attend school functions or to volunteer on a regular basis (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988; Soussou, no date). If policies exist (as they do in state law in Minnesota) to allow parents to leave work for a few hours each year to attend school conferences, parents should take advantage. Where these policies do not exist, parents can work together to influence policymakers to establish regulations that support families in these ways.

*Type 4: Involvement in learning activities at home.* Teachers can help parents monitor, assist, and interact with their children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with students' classwork or that contribute to success in school. Type 4 practices assist families to become more knowledgeable partners about the school curricula and teachers' instructional methods, the academic and other skills required to pass each grade, the work their children are doing in class, how to support, monitor, discuss, and help with homework, and how to help students practice and study for tests.

Families need to do more than simply ask their child, "How was school today?" In the younger grades, families may support 14 types of involvement in schooling (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1986). This may involve reading-related support that families give. In later years, parents and students also can initiate discussions and interactions about homework or school subjects. For example, homework designed and assigned by the school may ask students to take responsibilities to show parents something they wrote, a math skill they mastered, or an interesting poem or story they read. Families who interact with their children about homework in these ways will learn about classroom activities and encourage their children to share successes and ongoing progress in learning. Families also can help their children's learning by relating real-world examples of how math concepts apply to family budgeting or purchases, how reading applies to planning a family vacation, or how math and reading are required for purchasing a car. In many ways, families can help children see the usefulness of school work and other skills and talents in daily life.

*Type 5: Involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy.* Schools strengthen parent participation in school decisions by encouraging the organization of parent groups and committees, by ensuring representativeness, and by training parents and students in leadership and decision-making skills. Some parents and others in the community take leadership roles in parent-teacher-student organizations, school advisory councils, school-site decision making or improvement teams, and other school committees. Type 5 activities also refer to parents as activists in independent education advocacy groups in the community.

Families at all school levels may join and become active in the PTA, PTO, PTSA, or join other committees to participate in school decisions that affect their children. Even if they cannot (or do not wish to) participate on committees, families can communicate with the parents who take these leadership roles in order to stay informed and give their ideas about decisions to be made. Whether a school has a formal parent organization or not, one parent or a small group of parents can help a

school become more aware of parents' concerns and needs. For example, one or more parents may gather the views of other parents when writing a letter to the principal or speaking at a board meeting to request new programs or procedures, or when preparing to approach teachers about specific classroom practices or issues. A parent organization may take leadership in organizing ideas that need to be discussed to improve classroom programs or practices. In a partnership model, shared decision making and parents' initiatives to help improve school programs or priorities are considered as problem-solving activities, not problem-creating conflicts.

*Type 6: Collaborations and exchanges with the community.* Schools make connections with agencies, businesses, religious organizations, cultural associations, and other groups in the community that share responsibility for children's education and interest in their futures. This includes schools' efforts to inform students and families about community and support services, or provide or coordinate access to services such as after-school recreation, tutoring programs, field trips, cultural events, and other programs. Schools vary greatly in how much they draw on community resources to strengthen other types of practices to involve families and in how well they inform families about community services and opportunities to benefit students.

Families have many opportunities to influence whether, how often, and in what ways their children join community activities to broaden learning beyond the home and school. Even when schools help to create better connections, parents are the ones who must decide whether to obtain community services to support or strengthen the family. To make these decisions and contacts, families need good information from schools or directly from community groups. In a survey of parents of students in the elementary and middle grades, the top choice of topics for workshops organized by the school was information about how to develop children's special talents (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

Parents and other volunteers can work with school staff to identify and match common needs of families with available community resources. Parents also can help schools make connections with business or community agencies to assist students and families at the school or in other locations, or to assist the school with special programs. Parents, other family members, and others in the community also can volunteer to share their own skills and experiences, and guide youngsters to identify and develop their talents and interests.

The family-school partnership practices described in this section suggest ways for schools to take leadership to involve families in six broad areas that impact different aspects of parent knowledge and behavior, student learning and development, and teacher practices (Epstein, in press). When families are responsive to school practices to involve them they learn more about the school's program and goals, becoming more effective influencers and supporters of their children's learning through the grades. True partnerships between families and schools occur when both parties engage in mutual dialogue and action to facilitate student learning.

### TALKING POINTS FOR PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

Across the grades and at each stage of development, parents have information to gather about school programs and opportunities to further their children's school experiences and decisions to make about their children's education. At all grade levels, educators have important information to share with parents about the school's programs, children's progress, and educational decisions they may make on behalf of children. As school reform initiatives result in new practices, such as alternative assessment methods or grading systems, educators must reflect on how the changes may impact opportunities for family involvement. Families must have easy access to schools for information and dialogue when they hear of new, unfamiliar, or confusing programs or practices.

In this section a few *talking points* are discussed to illustrate that there are many topics that raise questions for parents, educators, and researchers as they seek to improve the learning outcomes for children. Some of the talking points address areas where schools are changing practices to improve

their programs. As new practices are implemented and old practices revisited, school staff must reflect on how these changes impact family-school partnerships. With each talking point some of what is known from extant research is summarized, and questions to promote new research and responsive practices by educators are offered.

#### Talking Point: The Organization of Schools

Families need to understand the organization and programs of every school their child attends, and the changes in organization that occur as students move from one level of schooling to another. The questions parents have, the information that schools share, and the opportunities for parents and schools to talk together will vary across the grades and will be influenced by the geographic location and size of the school, and other organizational features. For example, the organization of programs of partnership with families in small schools with less than 50 students per grade level will differ from programs and practices in larger junior or senior high schools with over 500 students per grade level. Some structural features of schools, such as "schools within schools," or special-subject schools may encourage communications if families need information in order to choose these schools.

Educators need to consider how the organizational features of their schools enhance or limit their practices of partnership with families. For example, families may have questions about how middle schools are different from junior high schools; how classroom organization (such as learning centers or grouping practices) affect children's ability to concentrate and learn; or whom parents should contact in the school about needed services or problems they have with their children.

Several studies showed that parents have many questions about school and classroom organization (Epstein & Herrick, 1991; Herrick & Epstein, 1991). Schools need to develop ways for parents to ask and receive answers to questions, such as a column for parents in a school newsletter, a computerized phone system, a system of "class parents" who can obtain and share answers to questions, or a parent room or club where discussions can be conducted.

*Questions for research or for designing more responsive school practices.* Following are some key questions to be asked with respect to this talking point:

- (1) How do the organizational and structural features of a school facilitate or hinder two-way communications and the sharing of information between parents and schools? How does a school welcome all types of families, and provide time for school staff and families to get to know each other?
- (2) What information about school and classroom organization does the school staff believe needs to be shared? What do families want to know? In what form is the information shared most effectively with most or all families?
- (3) What other questions about the school and its programs do parents have, and how can these questions be answered for all families on a timely basis?
- (4) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

#### Talking Point: Transitions Through Schooling

Although most schools take the time to assist students with their transitions to each new level of schooling, few schools systematically include families in these transitions as children progress through the grades (Epstein & MacIver, 1990). Yet, each time a student changes schools, the family makes the transition with the child. Many students experience a period of adjustment to the new demands and expectations of a new school. Transitions from preschool to "regular school" can be difficult for children and for families. Some students in their first year of junior high school have negative attitudes toward school, their teachers, or their own school work (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992).

Families are sure to be concerned about their children during times of change. However, only about 40 percent of the middle grades schools in the country have programs that inform and involve families in children's transition from the elementary to the middle grades (Epstein & MacIver, 1990). Even fewer high schools systematically involve families in the students' transition to that level. At each transition families need good information from schools in order to communicate knowledgeably with their children during these important, exciting, and potentially stressful times. Elementary, middle, and high schools need to develop ways to work separately and together as "feeder" and "receiver" sites to inform and involve families so that they can interact with, understand, and assist their children to make successful adjustments to new situations. This includes orienting families to the new settings, new grade levels, new relationships with school staff, and new expectations and requirements for students. Data also indicate that middle grades schools that involve families *before* the transition are more likely to continue other parent involvement practices through the middle grades (Epstein & MacIver, 1990). Thus, family involvement at points of transition also may help families continue their involvement in their children's education.

*Questions for research or for designing more responsive school practices.* These are the key questions that should be asked regarding the talking point just discussed:

- (1) How can families be prepared to understand and support the transitions their children will make at each school level?
- (2) What are the most useful schedules, forms, and contents of information and activities about transitions for families and students before students enter elementary school, while students are still in the elementary grades, after the transition to the middle grades, before moving on to high school, and while preparing for postsecondary opportunities?
- (3) What results do these exchanges have on students, families, and schools?
- (4) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

#### Talking Point: Developmental Nature of Partnerships

Practices of partnership between parents and schools typically decline as children move from elementary schools into junior and senior high schools (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; D. Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Useem, 1992). When children are younger, parents are more likely to volunteer at the school building, attend parent-teacher conferences, and supervise children's homework. Elementary schools are more likely to expect and encourage parent involvement than middle or senior high schools. In part this reflects appropriate developmental expectations; that is, younger children need more active parent support and guidance.

As children get older they need more opportunities to develop independence and responsibility, but they also continue to need adult guidance and supervision. These requirements appear to be in conflict on the surface and have serious implications for school and family partnerships. Families and secondary schools initially may be resistant to increasing or improving practices of family involvement because they may see adolescents in the middle grades and high school as bigger and older, and, therefore, less in need of adult "help." There may be a tendency to reduce involvement and interaction so as not to interfere with the development of student independence. Studies show, however, that students become *more* independent if their families and other adults remain age appropriately informed and involved in their education (Epstein, 1983). Data from several studies suggest that early adolescents *want* their families to support them in learning activities at home (Connors & Epstein, 1994; Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Herrick, 1991). Older students do support parent involvement at school, but in different roles than were common in the elementary grades (Epstein & Dauber, 1989; Montandon & Perrenoud, 1987).

*Questions for research or for designing more responsive school practices.* Following are some key questions to be asked with regard to the aforementioned talking point:

- (1) How do youngsters' developmental stages change *what* parents and children and families and schools talk about, and *how* they talk together?
- (2) How can older students be given a central role in the design and implementation of family-school partnership practices so that they see, firsthand, how such practices meet their needs for independence and for guidance?
- (3) What methods are effective in reducing resistance and increasing acceptance of students, families, and teachers to new school-family partnership practices at each grade level?
- (4) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

#### Talking Point: Evaluating Students' Readiness

Schools constantly evaluate children. Educators decide if a child is ready to start "formal" schooling, ready to move on to the next grade, or ready to learn a specific body of material. Parents have many questions and concerns about the many ways that schools evaluate their child. They also want to know what they can do to help their child be "ready" for school, and what to do if the school decides their child is not ready. They want to know how to interpret the meaning of various testing and grading practices for their child, and what to do if they don't agree with the school's evaluations or decisions about their child.

For example, one of the first experiences many parents have with public schooling is a "screening" to determine if their child is ready for kindergarten. Parents are often quite anxious about this experience. Some parents (more often those with more education) purposefully delay their child's entry into kindergarten until the child's sixth year in order to give their child an extra year to *get ready* (Lareau, 1992). This practice and others that give children 2 years in kindergarten before first grade is generally believed to be ineffective in boosting children's academic skills (Shepard & Smith, 1986). Data show that parents and teachers have different beliefs about what skills children need to be ready for kindergarten (West & Hausken, 1993). At the very least, parents need better information than they now get about how they can prepare their children for school, and about the school's expectations for children and parents.

*Questions for Research or for Designing More Responsive School Practices.* With respect to this talking point, here are some questions that need to be addressed:

- (1) What information, and in what forms, do parents need to have about the school's philosophy and teachers' expectations of readiness for kindergarten? For Grade 1? For other promotions?
- (2) When do parents need this information in order to do their part to prepare their children for school?
- (3) How can the kindergarten screening or other first contacts with the school be designed to set the stage for open, friendly, communicative, and ongoing relations between parents and schools?
- (4) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

#### Talking Point: New Forms of Assessments

New forms of testing are being introduced at all grade levels in order to increase the accountability of teachers and schools and to understand better children's progress in learning. For children in the younger grades, the use of any *single* measure of assessment for placement (such as standardized

tests) has been criticized (Meisels, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Sigel, 1992). Researchers and educators are working to design sensitive and appropriate measures to improve assessments so that school decisions about promotion, placement, and needed remedial work will be more reliable, and so that teachers better understand students' skills and needs (Wiggins, 1993).

Alternative assessment strategies are being explored and tested in many states and districts. These include the use of portfolios (e.g., Vermont, Rhode Island), other performance-based assessments, and new standardized tests of higher level skills (e.g., Connecticut, California, Maryland). Some early childhood researchers are working to develop a battery of assessments of criterion-based and performance work samples to create a "picture" of a young child's strengths and weaknesses (Meisels & Liaw, 1991).

New standards, tests, and other evaluations can be confusing to families. Families need to be informed about new national, state, and local standards on which their children will be judged because the changes in the goals, forms, and contents of assessments affect their children's work and progress in school. Mechanisms also are needed for families to share their knowledge of their children with schools as part of these new methods of assessment. Because children are often concerned about tests and evaluations, families need to know how to discuss these features of school and how to deal with their children's worries.

*Questions for research or for designing more responsive school practices.* Following are questions to be asked in connection with the aforementioned talking point:

- (1) What information do parents need in order to understand and support a school's adoption of new assessment strategies? In order to support their children's participation in new types of tests?
- (2) In what ways should families be involved in designing, implementing, or evaluating alternative assessment strategies? In helping other parents understand confusing aspects of tests or other components of assessment programs?
- (3) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

#### Talking Point: New Methods of Grouping Students

Schools are faced with the challenge of responding to the wide range of children's learning needs and abilities. Schools have traditionally responded to this diversity by grouping or "tracking" children. These practices serve to create homogenous groups of students by ability level, within grades, subjects, or classes. Tracking practices have been criticized because they often result in fixed placements, derogatory labels, and restricted learning opportunities for lower performing students (Oakes, 1989, 1992; Wheelock, 1992).

However, not all grouping practices are "bad" for students. Grouping is an organizational tool that helps teachers address the learning needs of large or small groups of children. To address the negatives associated with tracking or grouping, some schools have initiated new ways to group students heterogeneously in some or all subjects or grades. Other schools have eliminated tracking, but may still use some forms of flexible ability-grouping practices to allow teachers to adapt to the ever-changing needs of students. In a national study of middle schools that were implementing new methods of heterogeneous grouping, principals reported that parents could make or break their efforts to reduce or eliminate tracking. The principals emphasized the need to involve families early in the process of planning and implementing heterogeneous groups (Wheelock, 1992).

Families need to know about the policies and practices that schools use to group their children in various ways, the reason for the practices, and the consequences for their children. Families may be included in informational workshops and exchanges about grouping practices so they can ask questions, provide ideas, and make choices.



*Questions for research or for designing more responsive school practices.* With regard to this talking point, here are some key questions to address:

- (1) What kinds of information, and in what forms, do parents need about grouping, tracking, or untracking in order to understand the issues, contribute ideas and suggestions to the school, and support their children in their placements?
- (2) What are the students' roles in the school placement policies? What information about these topics do students need?
- (3) How can schools help students and their families understand changes that are made in policies about grouping?
- (4) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

#### Talking Point: Methods of Informing Parents of Student Progress

Report card grades serve as ongoing records for students and families of how well students are mastering specific subjects. Most parents want more information about their children's ongoing performance (Olhausen & Powell, 1992). Although parents generally report satisfaction with the information they receive on report cards, the degree of satisfaction is related to the amount of supplemental information parents are given. As children progress through the grades, the forms of report cards change, and the criteria for excellence also change. Families usually are not informed about these changes, nor are they helped to know how to interpret the grades, or how to guide their children toward better performance. Parents often are unaware of teachers' methods of reporting student progress, and are rarely asked for input into the design of reporting systems (Olhausen & Powell, 1992; Reid, 1984).

Parent-teacher conferences give schools an opportunity to share their grading practices and to help parents understand how their children's progress fits with the expectations of the school. One challenge to educators is to design conferences that inform parents of their student's achievements and that allow families to share their perspectives on their child's education and development. Another challenge is to create an integrated system of information about student assessments, including report card forms, new tests and assessments, grouping procedures, and other topics that concern children's evaluations and placements.

*Questions for research or for designing more responsive school practices.* These are some key questions to ask in connection with the talking point just discussed:

- (1) What information do parents need and want about student achievements, report cards, and progress?
- (2) What methods and constructions (meetings, conferences, and other communications) enable teachers, students, and families to share information, concerns, and achievements?
- (3) What roles can students play in developing new methods of reporting progress, making self-assessments, sharing their progress or problems with their families, and working on improving their work and behavior with their teachers and families?
- (4) How can specific studies of these factors and processes be designed and conducted to add to the knowledge base on school and family partnerships?

*Summary.* There are many other talking points that would be appropriate topics for exchange and discussion in a context of school and family partnerships and for research. Topics discussed in earlier sections—all of the examples in the outline of the six types of involvement—also are important for parents, teachers, and students to discuss in order to help students make the greatest progress in their learning and development in and out of school. One major message is emerging from history,

theory, research, and practice: Parents and school staff need to work together and talk with each other about their mutual concerns, needs, interests, responsibilities, and goals for students' learning and development.

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter began with a review of some of the reasons why family and school connections have been characterized by conflict. Parents and teachers have crossed paths throughout the history of public schooling, and the nature of partnerships changed as the nation grew and as schooling changed. With greater demands on schools, new theories and new practices are emerging that guide families and schools to work together. The theoretical, research, and practical review presented in this chapter suggests that the roles of families and schools have evolved from separate functions to shared and overlapping functions and responsibilities for children's learning and development. In educational practice, more and more educators are moving away from isolation and toward new models of family-school-community partnerships.

New approaches are needed from all participants. Studies of teachers and parents indicate that schools must organize programs of partnerships that enable families to participate in their children's education in every year of schooling. Parents also must take more responsibility to communicate with their children, their schools, and other parents in order to understand and support their children as students. Students need to be encouraged and assisted to take active roles in family-school partnerships to assist communication between parents and teachers and increase their responsibilities for their own learning and development. New definitions of parent involvement based on the concept of partnerships show strong potential for reversing some of the serious conflicts among parents and teachers and inequities and inconsistencies in students' education.

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