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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Title I and School–Family–Community Partnerships: Using Research to Realize the Potential

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Title I's requirements for parent and community involvement in both schoolwide programs and targeted assistance schools, along with requirements for funding such involvement, challenge Title I schools to think seriously about and to plan for involvement that will help make a difference in children's learning. In this article, we (a) review the requirements and how they may be interpreted (especially the requirement for school–parent contracts); (b) briefly summarize recent research on the effects of school–family partnerships on students, teachers, and parents; and (c) discuss two major research-based comprehensive programs for building school–family–community partnerships that provide a foundation upon which Title I schools could develop, in conjunction with parents, their own comprehensive and effective programs.

REQUIREMENTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The guidelines for school, family, and community partnerships in the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 reflect knowledge gained in research,

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educational policy, and school and classroom practice in many states, districts, and schools. The new regulations give direction to Title I schools in the building of comprehensive programs of parent involvement that could have major benefits for student success in school.

The guidelines reflect many important advances in research and in practice. Since the initiation of Head Start in the 1960s, and particularly since the early 1980s when parent involvement was identified as a component of "effective schools," leading educators have been working to increase family–school–community connections that will improve student attitudes, behavior, and learning from preschool through high school. Many federal, state, district, and school policy leaders have written mission statements, policies, enactments, and other guidelines that support the development of school–family–community partnerships. Simultaneously, many researchers have been working to increase knowledge and understanding of the structures, processes, and results of partnerships with all families and at all grade levels.

From these efforts, researchers and educators have created a shared language that emphasizes families (instead of only parents), partnerships (which highlight shared responsibilites), and types of involvement (which recognize the many different ways in which families and schools can collaborate to benefit all students). The evolution of terms, knowledge, and approaches has made it possible for researchers and educators to work together to identify important questions for study and to use the results of research in practice. For example, research has been particularly important for increasing an understanding that not all family–school partnership activities lead to higher student achievement, but that different types of involvement, if well implemented, yield different, important results for students, teachers, and parents. (For comprehensive reviews and collections of research on school, family, and community partnerships, see, e.g., Chavkin, 1993; Christenson & Conoley, 1992; Epstein, 1992; Rutherford, 1995; Ryan, Adams, Cullota, Weisberg, & Hampton, 1995; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Swap, 1993; for descriptions of promising programs, see Fruchter, Galletta, & White, 1992; Rioux & Berla, 1993.)

The advances in research and practice have been formalized in the 1994 education legislation. Federal policy leaders used language that encourages and requires educators to communicate with and involve families and communities in the schools and in their children's learning and development. The 1994 regulations codify the knowledge and practices that researchers, policy leaders, and leading educators suggest should be helpful in all schools. The research and practical bases not only put the law in context, but also should promote educators' confidence that they can take the same actions as other educators to establish good connections with all families across the grades and in all geographic locations.

Thus, IASA's Title I (along with the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994)[1] specifies useful guidelines and mandates for states, districts, and schools. Four features are especially important:

1. Funding: The law provides federal funds that can be used to support staff, program development, and specific activities to fulfill the guidelines and mandates for school–family–community partnerships. It is important to note that in schoolwide projects, funds can be combined or commingled from federal, state, local, and private sources to support a school's program of partnership and other school reforms consistent with the legislation.
2. Flexibility: The law recognizes the need for local ingenuity, creativity, and waivers to design and tailor programs of partnership to meet the needs and interests of each school's teachers, parents, students, and others. Thus, across the nation, school teams of teachers, parents, and others will select different practices of family–school connections to meet the intent and guidelines of Title I and other policies.
3. Coherence: The law emphasizes the importance of developing integrated programs that unite all children and families, in contrast to past activities that often fragmented, separated, or segregated programs for families of children in categorical programs.
4. Commitment: The law offers multiyear funding to states, districts, and schools. It is now well established that it takes several years to plan and implement a program of partnerships with families and communities that becomes part of regular teaching practice.

Title I's language on family involvement is also better than in the past:

1. Improved sense of community: IASA stipulates that families whose children receive Title I services must be integrated with all other families in a unified school community. Compared to schoolwide programs, targeted assistance schools have the added challenge of developing fully integrated programs of partnership to include all families when only some children have been identified for Title I services.

In the past, it was not unusual for schools to separate the families of children who received special services in categorical programs from the rest of the school community. Meetings and workshops for Chapter 1 families often excluded other families. Likewise, Chapter 1 families often felt excluded from the larger school population. Families of Chapter 1 children often felt no need to attend "regular"

[1]For a more extensive analysis of the implications of Goals 2000 and School-to-Work legislation for school–family–community partnerships, see Epstein (in press).

school meetings, or felt uncomfortable or unwelcome at these meetings. Policies were written for Chapter 1 parent involvement, but not for a full program of partnership. Such practices worked against the development of a cohesive school community.

2. Improved content: IASA's language specifies that partnerships with families should be linked with student learning. Families need to understand school programs, the academic standards that schools set for their children, and new or existing assessments that are used to measure progress. The legislation recognizes that basic information of this sort helps families become more knowledgeable partners with their schools and enables them to assist their children's success in school.

In the past, it was not unusual for parent involvement to be a perfunctory part of Chapter 1/Title I, with a representative or two on school or district councils. Little attention was given to how these individuals represented other parents, how to provide them with leadership skills and training, and how to help families influence their own children's learning.

3. Improved funding options: The legislation makes explicit connections between Title I and Goals 2000, and, for schoolwide programs, advises schools, districts, and states to combine or "commingle" IASA and other funds to support challenging academic programs, coherent school improvement plans, and unified programs to involve all parents. Schools that receive more than $500,000 in Title I funds must spend at least 1% of that allocation on family involvement programs. It will take more than that amount to support staff and activity costs for a good program, but options for combining funds from various sources could help many districts and schools make real advances in their connections with families.

Title I permits the use of funds for transportation and child care to help parents attend Title I and other school meetings. Funding also may be used for home visits; literacy programs for parents; translators to encourage attendance and participation of parents who speak languages other than English and to provide these parents with translated information in useful forms; and activities that assist families at the point of transition from preschool to elementary school. Funds could contribute to the salaries of district-level or school-level coordinators, program planning, and implementation costs to help all schools develop comprehensive programs.

HIDDEN CHALLENGES FOR SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Despite improved wording, there are a number of problems that could make it difficult for schools to develop strong partnerships with families in response to the mandates and guidelines in the new Title I legislation.

Some of the seemingly simple directives for partnership activities are difficult to accomplish. For example, Title I stipulates a public information component to communicate with families and others in the community about school policies and programs. However, public information must be continuously updated and connections renewed—no easy task. Research and practice show that successful communications are most likely to occur when educators work with families and others to identify the most useful content, form, frequency, reading levels, and locations for sharing information. Channels of communication must be designed to flow from school to home and from home to school. Schools must know which families they are or are not reaching in order to improve their communications with families who cannot come to the school building for meetings or workshops, new families who arrive after the start of the school year, or others with special needs.

As another example, Title I stipulates that parents must participate in the writing of district plans for the Title I program. A challenge for all districts and schools is to make this a productive rather than a symbolic process. Effective strategies are needed for electing or selecting leaders to represent the interests and concerns of all racial or ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, neighborhoods, and other major subgroups served by the school. In some schools, the same few parents are always the representatives, raising questions about how well the ideas of all groups are represented.

Once elected, parents on all councils, committees, and parent organizations need assistance in how to serve as leaders, express their own voices as representatives, and represent the interests of all other families. This requires designing schedules, forms, and processes for gathering ideas and reporting results of decisions to other families. Activities may include summarizing information for families and the public in a school or community newspaper; opening a suggestion box; conducting an annual survey or review of family and community ideas, interests, and questions; or conducting an annual meeting to share ideas.

INTERPRETING THE SCHOOL–PARENT COMPACT

The Title I directive for a "school–parent compact" provides an example of the need to distinguish between mechanical responses to mandates and deeper mechanisms that could help schools develop strong programs of partnership. Title I asks each school to develop jointly with parents a "compact" that outlines how parents, the school staff, and students will share responsibility for improving student achievement and for helping students reach high performance standards that are set by their states, districts, or schools. The compact is supposed to stipulate how often teachers will send home reports; when parent–teacher conferences will be held; and how parents can volunteer, observe in classrooms, and participate in other ways.

Other sections of the Title I regulations also ask schools to communicate with families in various ways; help parents understand the national goals, state standards, and Title I programs; offer family literacy programs; integrate Title I activities with Head Start and other programs; train teachers to work with families; develop a comprehensive school improvement plan; and involve community groups and agencies. Thus, the legislation provides many ideas for involving families, but leaves it up to the schools to design and organize their work to integrate all of their activities with families in a coherent plan or program. Educators have the opportunity to interpret the school–parent compact broadly or narrowly.

The legislative language of Title I could be interpreted broadly to define *compact* to mean a full plan and process to implement a comprehensive program of partnership. With this definition, a compact is an agreement to establish, implement, monitor, and improve partnerships in an organized way. This may include a mission statement, an organized approach for program development, a multiyear outline, and a 1-year detailed plan for implementing practices in all of the six major types of involvement delineated by Epstein (1995). The plan and progress are shared with all teachers and families and with the school's council. Plans are updated each year to continue the compact. This broad definition of a compact is consistent with Title I's intent to increase the involvement of families in developing school policies and programs and in helping students improve their school performance. In this way, a compact is a mechanism for developing an integrated program of partnership.

The legislative language of Title I also could be interpreted narrowly to define *compact* to mean a contract or pledge that teachers, parents, and students sign to promise to fulfill certain school-related responsibilities. The narrow definition makes a compact a mechanical or symbolic activity. Indeed, even contracts or pledges can be well or poorly designed. Weak versions ask parents to sign a list of things they agree to do to assist their children and the schools. Broader and better pledges offer parallel lists of responsibilities that teachers, parents, and students sign; that are tailored to each grade level; and that are shared so that all are aware of each other's promises. Well-designed pledges focus on partnership activities (e.g., how each will communicate with and help the others) rather than on activities that may differ from family to family by choice or culture.

Note that there is a point of connection between the broad and narrow views: A compact defined broadly is an agreement to create a comprehensive program of partnership. It serves as a mechanism and organizer for developing, implementing, monitoring, and improving activities to reach all families. The broad plan may include but is not limited to individual agreements or pledges. A pledges for parents, teachers, and students is just one of the many communication practices that a school may choose to include in a comprehensive plan of school, family, and community partnerships.

Thus, the Title I guidelines offer many challenges and opportunities for partnerships. To take advantage of the opportunities, schools need to put mechanisms in place that identify and develop leadership, budgets, structures, and processes to organize their work.

SUMMARY OF RECENT RESEARCH

Recent advances in the theory, research, and development of school–family–community partnerships can help schools receiving Title I funds to plan and implement comprehensive programs that meet not only the letter of the new laws, but also the spirit. In the past decade, research has greatly increased our understanding in many areas of school–family–community partnerships. Many studies have examined how family environments influence family involvement in schools; how school environments influence family involvement; and the effects of family–school partnerships on parents, students, and teachers. The following summary is derived from Epstein's (1992) review of research. (See that article for many references that confirm these general findings.)

Effects on Students

Studies of the effects of family–school partnerships on students' motivation, achievement, and success in school have become more focused. Earlier studies delivered a clear general message: Families are important for children's learning, development, and school success across the grades. More recent studies have better identified the specific effects of particular types of school–family collaboration. For example, many studies suggest that parent assistance at home (as opposed to a few parents participating at the school building) has important consequences for children's achievement, attendance, school adaptability, and classroom behavior. Studies in the United States and other nations indicate that subject-specific practices involve families with their children at home in ways that directly assist student learning in those subjects (Sanders & Epstein, in press).

Effects on Parents

School–family partnerships initiated by schools and teachers can effectively reach and influence most families, including low-income, minority, and single-parent families. For example, inner-city parents whose children are in classrooms in which teachers actively use parent-involvement practices report that they receive many ideas about how to help at home from the teachers and understand more than in previous years about what their child is being taught in school. Also, although single

mothers and mothers who work outside the home are less likely than other parents to come to the school for meetings or workshops, they are as likely or more likely to spend time helping their children at home on school work.

Effects on Teachers

Significant numbers of teachers at all grade levels are becoming more aware of the need to involve families as partners in their children's education, but their initiatives to involve parents are most prevalent at the elementary school level and in specific subject areas. Also, although teachers agree strongly that parent involvement contributes to more effective teaching, more successful students, and more positive school climates, only about half believe that they can change parents' behaviors. Many teachers also still hold to the belief that parents do not really want to be involved: Teachers in urban Chapter 1 schools reported that most parents are not involved in their children's education and do not want to be. Conversely, parents in the same schools reported that they are involved with their children at home in various ways, but they need more and better information from teachers about how to help at home and they need to hear that they are welcome to become involved at school. It is important to note that when teachers begin to implement practices to involve families, they develop more positive attitudes about parents and about the assistance that parents can offer to help students succeed in school.

Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Title I schools also should be assisted by a new theoretical perspective that not only guides more targeted research on school–family–community partnerships, but also provides a foundation for developing and implementing comprehensive partnerships. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence revises earlier sociological theories that propose that social organizations are most effective if they have separate goals, missions, and responsibilities. The new theory proposes that families, schools, and communities are most effective if they have overlapping or shared goals, missions, and responsibilities for children (for discussions of the sociological, psychological, and educational perspectives that are integrated in this model and the initial research conducted to identify and test the concepts, see Epstein, 1987, 1990, 1995).

The theoretical model identifies the school, family, and community as spheres of influence that by conditions or design can be pushed together or apart to overlap more or less. This means that the three influential contexts for student learning and development—home, school, and community—conduct some work separately or independently and other work jointly in order to maximize student success in school. The model also identifies the institutional and interpersonal connections that influence student learning and development—the interactions of teachers, parents, students, and others. When Title I schools begin to plan their strategies for establishing connections with families and communities, they can apply the theory to organize activities in the overlapping school–family–community areas.

Framework of Six Types of Involvement

Epstein's typology of school–family–community involvement provides further structure for the development and implementation of a comprehensive program of partnerships. The six types are as follows:

1. Parenting: the basic obligations of families.
2. Communicating: the basic obligations of schools.
3. Volunteering: family involvement at school.
4. Learning at home: family involvement with children on academic activities.
5. Decision making: family participation in school governance and advocacy.
6. Collaborating with the community: exchanges with community organizations.

Title I schools that conduct activities in each of these areas will find themselves building a truly comprehensive program of school–family–community partnerships.

RESEARCH-BASED APPROACHES FOR DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL–FAMILY–COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Two recent major research projects—Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships, and Parent–Teacher Action Research—demonstrate how schools can put effective mechanisms in place to develop and carry out comprehensive programs of partnership. Both approaches build on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the six-type framework of family–school–community partnerships. Both approaches can help Title I schoolwide programs; schools with targeted Title I assistance; and all other elementary, middle, and high schools to develop positive comprehensive programs of school–family–community partnerships.

Action Teams for School–Family–Community Partnerships

More than 70 elementary, middle, and high schools have been involved in designing and testing an approach using Action Teams for School, Family, and Community

Partnerships. In each school, an action team guides the development and implementation of a program that includes activities for the six major types of involvement. Each action team consists of at least six members including teachers, parents, administrators, counselors, students in the upper grades, and others. The action team first inventories the school's present practices of partnership through checklists, surveys, or focus groups of parents, teachers, and students. During this process, most schools find that they already are carrying out many practices that link the school, the home, and the community, some of which are promising and some of which are not. Based on the inventory, the action team creates a 3-year outline of their goals and objectives for partnerships and ways to maintain, improve, or add practices to address the needs and interests revealed by the initial inventory. The action team then writes a 1-year plan that details the activities for the 1st year and how activities for the six types of involvement will be implemented and evaluated.

To organize the work, each action team member serves as chair or co-chair of one of six subcommittees, each taking responsibility for working with others in the school to address one type of involvement. For example, the chair of the action team's Type 2 communications committee may work with teachers, parents, students, and community members to plan, monitor, and improve the school's newsletters and conference schedules and content, or how report card information is perceived and understood by students and families; the chair of the Type 5 decision-making committee may work with others to improve outreach to identify and enlist parent leaders to better represent all parents in the school. The action team also may focus on how family and community involvement could help students reach important learning goals set by a school council or school improvement team.

With the assistance of other teachers, parents, students, and community members, the action team selects and implements new or improved practices of partnership that meet the school's needs, interests, and goals. The plans and progress on implementation are shared with the school council, teachers, parents, and students. At the end of each year, the action team reassesses its work, updates its 3-year outline, and develops another 1-year plan to improve and maintain its partnership program.

The action team approach for facilitating partnerships ensures that schools address all the relevant facets of family and community involvement. The model has been fully implemented in Title I and other elementary and middle schools in two regions of the Baltimore City Public Schools[2] and is being extended into other regions. It also has been adopted by many teams of teachers, parents, and administrators in other states, districts, and schools as well as in other countries. The schools involved report numerous effects—increased communications with high-poverty urban parents, increased parental participation in school activities, more parents working with their children at home on homework (with beneficial effects on student attitudes and learning), and others.

[2]For a description of the work conducted in three Baltimore City schools, see Sanders (this issue).

The action team approach has also had a direct impact on extending the concept of parent and community involvement as a needed and effective component of students' experiences in high school, which is generally a neglected area. Studies of six high schools (two urban, two suburban, and two rural) showed that family and community involvement not only can be accomplished, but also can have positive effects on students' goal-setting abilities, attendance, and morale and can help schools create stronger connections with community services (Connors & Epstein, 1994; Epstein & Connors, 1994).

The research conducted at the high school level illustrates how the action team approach can be applied by any school to develop comprehensive school–family–community partnerships. In a series of meetings, an action team from each school collaborated with researchers to identify each school's "trust funds"—a combination of existing practices and ideas for further practices. The schools and researchers categorized the activities that were being conducted according to the six-type framework to help schools build strong family, school, and community partnerships.

The next task was to examine the schools' current practices and ideas; make improvements; and add other practices based on the specific needs and interests of the schools' teachers, students, and families. Surveys administered in the six schools indicated that the activities that parents, students, and teachers wanted their schools to add or improve were similar for schools in city, suburban, and rural locations. Also, teachers, students, and families had surprisingly common visions of how high schools should inform and involve families in their teens' education (Connors & Epstein, 1994).

The high schools in this project implemented new and improved practices for ninth-grade students and families; they followed that work by extending the practices to inform and involve families throughout the grades. Some generally successful practices included the development of "survival packets" for students and parents which include school telephone numbers, important meeting dates, and school policies; goal-setting projects that involve families in discussions with students about their goals for achievement, attendance, and self-confidence; improved open-school nights; postive postcards and other positive communications with all families; and interactive homework in various subjects.

Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships at the elementary, middle, and high school levels have shown how to plan, implement, improve,

and maintain a full program of partnerships that include all types of involvement. The knowledge gained enables Title I and other schools to apply the theory and research to the interests and needs of their own teachers, students, and families (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1996).[3]

Parent–Teacher Action Research

Parent–Teacher Action Research brings together teams of parents, teachers, principals, and facilitators who, through a process of action research, are able to simultaneously learn about family–school–community partnerships and take action on at least one type of involvement at a time to improve the partnerships in their school. Studies of this collaborative process, conducted in eight schools in seven cities, found that the work of the teams had an impact on school and district-level policies, as well as a direct impact on student motivation and learning and on school–home relations (Davies, Palanki, & Burch, 1993; Palanki & Burch, 1995). Not only did the families and children addressed by the practices benefit, the parents who were part of the team process benefited as well. Practices developed by the teams included mentoring programs, home visiting activities, school–home partnership activities, and parent–teacher communication activities.

The Parent–Teacher Action Research Project was a multisite collaborative action research project conducted in eight elementary and middle schools that are part of a national reform network, the League of Schools Reaching Out. The work of this network is coordinated by the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) at Boston University. The schools applied for and received funds from IRE's foundation grants to carry out a family and community involvement project of their own choosing.

Each school formed an action research team that collected information on the program and its benefits for children and families. Each team met regularly to review and reflect on project progress and to identify and coordinate strategies for improvement. Foundation funds also provided a part-time facilitator who worked on site from 6 to 8 days a month to assist the project and coordinate the research. Research staff at Boston University complemented the school-based research through cross-site analysis and examination of the effects on policy.

[3]The National Network of Partnership 2000 Schools has been established at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) to assist states, districts, and schools in using the action team approach to develop comprehensive programs of school–family–community partnerships. Information and membership forms are available from Karen Clark Salinas, Partnership 2000 Schools, Communications Director, CRESPAR, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218.

The following summaries illustrate how some of the schools involved in the Parent–Teacher Action Research project were able to build comprehensive sets of activities that addressed multiple elements of Epstein's (1995) six-type framework.

Two middle schools created a team of parents and teachers that focused on improving home–school communication. They coordinated the installation of answering machines, and telephones in classrooms, established a parent visitor/guest lecturer program, and established a parent worker program. One of the schools also initiated an interactive homework program.

A rural elementary school reached out to its least connected parents through a church-based parent center, a parent-to-parent phone chain, and home visits. The seven-member action research team examined the effects of the program by compiling portfolios on children's progress and their family's involvement.[4]

An urban elementary school located between two low-income housing projects crafted a comprehensive child development program for children in preschool through Grade 3. A team of home visitors (known as parent educators) visited parents bimonthly, worked with them on home-learning activities, connected them with community resources, and served as classroom tutors 1 day a week. The school gathered parents' perspectives on the program's impact by having about 40 parents keep journals on their work with parent educators and its effects on their children.[5]

A Midwestern school district established an early childhood and parent education program for families with infants 10 to 24 months old. The program is an offshoot of Missouri's Parents as Teachers program, a nationally recognized early childhood and parent education model. A team of parent educators conducted home visits to work with mothers on activity boxes that contain different toys and materials for parents to use with their children. The seven parent educators were the action research team. An urban school serving students in Grades 4 through 8 recruited mentors from the community to work with students in and outside of classrooms. The Parent–Teacher Action Research project also identified five categories of learning conditions that needed to be emphasized for the school's students—a sense of history; connectedness with others around learning experiences; a sense of uniqueness; the power to influence the circumstances of life; and models that help children establish meaningful values, goals, ideals, and personal standards. Emphases on these categories led teachers to develop instructional approaches that are more fully grounded in the realities of students' lives and heritages and that are more cooperative and experiential.

An elementary school located in a racially and economically mixed neighborhood established a home-visitor project as part of a series of programs designed to build parent involvement at the school. The home-visitor team consists of parent

[4]See Dalton et al. (this issue) for a case study of this school.

[5]See Binford and Robertson (this issue) for a case study of this school.

volunteers who have received 2 days of training and who meet monthly to problem solve. The family of every new child entering the school receives a home visit to welcome them and encourage their involvement. More than 90% of all families meet with their child's teachers at least twice a year.

In a large Southwestern middle school in which 85% of the students are Spanish speaking, the action research team developed a program that included home visitors (who are bilingual parents), teacher training workshops, a parent center, and coordination with an already established parent–community group.

Schools that use the Parent–Teacher Action Research approach have shown (Palanki & Burch, 1995) that it is possible to (a) develop constructive two-way communication processes between families and school staff using journals, phone logs, answering machines and other channels; (b) increase the participation of teachers and parents in educational planning and assessment for individual students, using family portfolios, individual education plans, and other more traditional assessments; and (c) increase the participation of teachers and parents in schoolwide educational decision making, curriculum development, and assessment by collecting data from a wide range of parents, teachers, students, and community members.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

IASA Title I makes it possible for educators in all schools— elementary, middle, and high—to apply funds over time to develop programs of partnership with all families that are tailored to local needs and interests of schools, families, students, and communities. However, educators need to see the big picture of how partnerships improve schools, strengthen families, and assist student learning and development. The opportunity is available to develop comprehensive programs of partnership across the grades, from children's early years through their high school graduations.

The legislative language reflects knowledge gained in research and in practice. It recognizes that all schools must tailor practices to the needs of the students and their families. It recognizes that all families need good information about their children's education at every grade level, that they need to be involved with their children to motivate and encourage them to do their best in school. The directives are clear about the need to integrate the families of students receiving Title I services with all other families to create one school community.

The Title I mandates for school–family connections will be best met by leaders who take a broad view of family involvement and who build, over time, a full program of partnership. In particular, a school–parent compact may be defined narrowly as a list of responsibilities, or broadly as a plan for a comprehensive program of partnership that requires leadership, action, and support at the school, district, and state levels. The broader definition requires staff and financial support to enable all schools to help families help children succeed in school.

Schools that apply the broader definition, however, will focus on reaching all families through a balanced set of activities at home and at school that address the six major types of involvement. They will focus on the process of program development with educators, families, and others working together to tailor programs to their needs and interests. They will make a partnership program as much a part of regular teaching practice at each grade level as a math program or an assessment program.

Theory, research, and development in practice now provide a base for educators in Title I and all schools—elementary, middle, and high—to develop strong, comprehensive programs of partnership. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence, framework of six types of involvement, and the use of action team and action research approaches can help educators, families, and others work together to tailor a comprehensive and effective program that meets their local needs and interests.

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School, Family, Community Partnerships: Overview and New Directions[1,2]

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School, Family, Community Partnerships: Overview and New Directions

Overview: A Base on Which to Build

Sociologists' attention to schools, families, and communities has changed dramatically over the past thirty years. In the late 1960s and 1970s, most studies of families, schools, or communities were conducted as if these were separate or competing contexts. Researchers argued heatedly about whether schools or families were more important for students' cognitive and social development. There was clear agreement about the importance of families, disagreement about the effectiveness of schools, cursory attention to communities, and little attention to how these contexts worked together.

At about the same time, the topic of "parent involvement" gained prominence with the implementation of federal Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I programs in preschool and early elementary grades. These programs legislated the involvement of low-income parents in the education of their young children to prepare them for successful entry to school. Also, in the 1960s, more women were graduating from college, entering the work force, and becoming active in decisions about the early care and schooling of their children. There were, then, pressures and opportunities for families with more *and* with less formal education to increase their participation in their children's education.

In the 1970s, the effective schools movement captured the attention of educators and researchers interested in improving schools for traditionally underserved students. Parent involvement was one topic that research and practice suggested would strengthen schools and increase student success. Community involvement also became a central issue in school reform during this period. For example, the New York City community control movement challenged educators, policy leaders, and researchers to test new practices of community participation in decisions about the education of minority and low income.

In the past decade, attention has focused on improving schools to maintain U.S. leadership and competitiveness in a global economy. In addition to concerns about the quality of students' skills for occupations that will determine the nation's success in the twenty-first century, there are concerns about

the growing social and economic problems faced by families in this country. There are more families in which both parents are employed during the school day; more young, single parents, many of whom work outside the home; more children in poverty; and more family mobility during the school years. At the same time, there are proportionally fewer federally subsidized social programs for the number of children, families, and communities in need of assistance. These factors increase the importance of good school programs for students and the need to redesign policies and practices that link schools, families, and communities.

The simultaneous influence on children of schools, families, and communities is undeniable, but too often the connections across contexts are ignored in theory, research, policy, and practice. Sociologists who study schools rarely examine how school practices affect family or community influences on children or how families and communities affect the schools. Similarly, sociologists who study families rarely account for school or community characteristics or interactions that affect family life.

New Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives

The first frameworks to explain the concept of parent involvement focused mainly on the roles that *parents* need to play and not the work that *schools* need to do to organize strong programs to involve all families in their children's education. The community was rarely considered in research that examined family conditions or school effects on students.

In the 1980s, studies began to clarify terms, recasting the emphasis from *parent involvement* (activities left up to the parent) to *school and family partnerships* (programs that include school and family responsibilities). Discussions also turned to ways that communities influence the quality of family life and students' futures. It is now generally agreed that *school, family, and community partnerships* are needed to improve the children's chances of success in school. Advances in theory and research have helped to shape the field.

Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. The results of early empirical studies of the effects of parent involvement could not be explained by established sociological theories that stressed that schools or families are most effective if they set separate goals and unique missions. Rather, a social organizational perspective was needed that posited that the most effective families, schools, and communities had common goals and shared missions concerning children's learning and development, and that these contexts are overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein 1987).

The model of overlapping spheres of influence includes external and internal structures. The external structure can, by conditions or design, be pulled together or apart by important forces (i.e., background and practices of families, schools, and communities, developmental characteristics of students, historical and policy contexts). These forces create conditions, opportunities, and incentives for more or fewer shared activities in school, family, and community contexts. The internal structure of the model specifies institutional and individual lines of communication, and locates where and how social interactions occur within and across the boundaries of school, home, and community. The theory integrates and extends many ecological, educational, psychological, and sociological theories of social organizations, interpersonal relationships, and life course development The overlapping spheres model places concepts of cultural capital, social networks and social capital in a broader theoretical context, as the areas of overlap and internal structure show where and how networks are formed and cultural and social capital are acquired.

Summary of Research

Research is accumulating that confirms the usefulness of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Many surveys and field studies of teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels indicate that everyone believes family involvement in education is important, but only some schools and teachers presently conduct positive, comprehensive partnerships with all families. Educators presently do more to involve families in the younger grades, but age-appropriate involvement

is found at all grade levels. Although parents express interest in many types of involvement, most want to know more about how to help their own child at home each year. This type of involvement is least well organized by teachers after the earliest grades.

Researchers from many disciplines are using various methodologies to study the implementation and effects of connections of schools and communities with families of various backgrounds and cultures, and with students at different age and grade levels. (See numerous authors in Booth & Dunn, 1995; Chavkin 1993; Christenson & Conoley 1992; Fagnano & Werber 1994; Fruchter, Galletta, & White 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Rioux & Berla 1993; Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weissberg, & Hampton 1995; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; and Swap, 1993 for studies and practical programs that illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of the field.) Four major conclusions from many studies in the U.S. and other nations provide a foundation for future research:

Teachers, parents, and students presently have little understanding of each others' interests in children and in schools. Most teachers do not know parents' goals for their children, how parents try to help their children, how they might be involved at school, and what information parents want to be more effective in their interactions with their children about schoolwork. Most parents do not know much about existing or new school programs, improvement plans, assessments, course offerings, or what teachers require of their children each year in school. Similarly, neither parents nor teachers fully understand what *students* think about family-school partnerships. Many studies in the U. S. and other nations point to the need to measure and compare teachers', parents', and students' views to identify gaps in knowledge that each has about the other and to identify their common interests in education.

School and classroom practices influence family involvement. Presently, on average, families with more formal education and higher incomes are more likely to be partners with their children's schools (Lareau, 1989). However, studies show that teachers' practices to involve families are as or more important than family background variables such as race, ethnicity, social class, marital status, or

mother's education or work status for determining whether and how parents become involved in their children's education. Also, family practices of involvement are as or more important than family background variables for determining whether and how their children progress and succeed in school. At the elementary, middle, and high school levels, many studies confirm that if schools implement good programs, parents respond by conducting those practices, including parents with less formal education or lower incomes who might not have otherwise become involved on their own.

Teachers' who involve parents rate them more positively and stereotype families less. Teachers who frequently involve families in their children's education rate single and married parents, and more and less formally educated parents, equally in helpfulness and follow-through with their children at home. By contrast, teachers who do not frequently involve families give more stereotypic ratings to single parents and to those with less formal education, marking them lower in helpfulness and follow-through than other parents. Importantly, parents and principals give higher ratings to teachers who frequently involve families. By involving families, educators change their attitudes about parents' skills and interests in education.

Specific results or outcomes are linked to different types of involvement. The results of many studies and activities in schools, districts, and states contributed to the development of a framework of six major types of involvement that fall within the overlapping the spheres of influence model (Epstein, 1995). Briefly, the six types of involvement needed in schools' comprehensive programs of partnership are:

Type 1 -- PARENTING: Assist families with parenting and childrearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Obtain information from families to help schools understand families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.

Type 2 -- COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress with school-to-home and home-to-school communications. Create two-way communication channels so that families can easily communicate with teachers and administrators.

Type 3 --VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, activities, 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, goal setting, 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. Assist family representatives to obtain information from and give information to those they represent.

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. Enable students, staff, and families to contribute service to the community.

Each type of involvement may be operationalized by hundreds of *practices* that schools may choose to develop their programs. Each of the six types poses specific *challenges* to schools for the successful implementation of activities. Also, different types of involvement lead to different *results* or outcomes for students, parents, and teachers. That is, the most immediate results of involvement will be linked to the design and focus of the practice.

In sum, questions about school, family, and community involvement and effects are being studied with increasing sophistication. Researchers across disciplines employ many methodologies including surveys, case studies, experimental and quasi-experimental designs, longitudinal data collections, field tests, program evaluations, and policy analyses. As research proceeds, researchers must ask clearer questions, employ better samples, collect deeper data, create more fully-specified measurement models, and conduct more elegant analyses to more clearly identify the results of school-family-community partnerships.

New Directions: Questions to Address

Four topics have emerged from recent research that set an extensive agenda for new studies of school, family, and community connections: transitions, community connections, students' roles in partnerships, and results.

1. **Transitions: Which practices of school-family-community partnership are effective at important *points of transition* -- from one grade level to the next, across school levels, or at other times that students change teachers or schools?**

Students and their families change grade levels, classes, and teachers every year. In the overlapping spheres of influence model, time is one of the forces that affects the nature and extent of family-school-community connections. Research is needed on regular transitions across the grades and to new school levels to learn how practices of partnership change or remain the same from birth through high school; the challenges for schools, families, and communities at each stage of children's development; and the results of partnerships across the grades. Studies of continuity and change are demanding because they require longitudinal data, retrospective data, or other innovative cohort data and analyses.

Many studies report dramatic declines in family involvement as students move to new levels of schooling. Research is needed on the design and effects of activities to help students and their families make successful transitions from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, middle to high schools, and high schools to postsecondary settings. How should families be included in transitional processes to help students adjust, prevent failure, and maximize success in their new schools? Should feeder or receiver schools, or both, conduct these activities? How might teachers collect information from families about their children each year? How do families learn about new teachers' criteria for children's success in their classrooms? What are the results of alternative approaches to help students and families with these regular transitions?

Questions also are emerging about the annual transitions that students and their families experience from the summer to the fall of the school year, including: How can partnerships help prevent the loss of skills that occur for some students over the summer? What are the best designs for summer learning opportunities for students with their families and peers in school, at home, and in the community? How should summer learning activities be organized and by which teachers --- as part of

the *concluding* school year or as part of the *oncoming* school year? What are the effects in the fall on students of various summer intervention programs and activities?

Other questions should be addressed about various unscheduled transitions in schooling due to family moves, migrancy, homelessness, disciplinary suspensions, expulsions, or transfers, and other circumstances that affect children, families, and their connections with schools. Research is needed on the organization and effects of various approaches to partnerships with families in highly mobile schools and communities.

2. Community connections: How can we better understand components of "community" in school, family, and community partnerships?

Community is a venerable and vast term in sociology that demands new and focused attention in studies of school, family, and community partnerships. The "community" includes the schools, families, children, and all of the businesses, organizations, neighborhoods, and other groups and individuals who have a stake in the success of children in school, and who serve children and families as a matter of course or in times of trouble.

Beyond demographic data. In the past, many sociologists identified and categorized communities using census data on education, income, race, or other descriptors of populations. Although useful, these data do not address the inherent powers *within* all communities. Studies are beginning to identify the human talents and social resources that represent strengths of people, programs, and organizations in any community. More than low or high rankings on demographic characteristics, the qualities within communities may more accurately predict and explain the success of students, the strengths of school programs, and the capacities of families to guide and assist their children. It is important to ask: How might adults in all communities share their varied skills, knowledge, and talents with children, such as making repairs, gardening, butchering, cooking, using transportation, obtaining needed services, public speaking, chess, sports, music, dance, art, science, and others. How might local communities identify.

organize, and study the effects of available resources to help students, families, and schools? With what results for the children, adults, schools, and communities?

Participation in community organizations and programs. Questions should be asked about the effects on achievement and behavior of student participation in community activities, including clubs, community service, and religious activities. For example, studies show that African-American students' regular involvement in church activities has positive effects on school-related attitudes and behaviors which affect achievement (Sanders, 1996). Similar results are reported for other groups of students.

Diverse cultural communities. Researchers are beginning to explore the strengths of families and communities with various racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics, with attention to family and community rituals, values, cultural norms, aspirations for children, racial identity development, and formal and informal networks of support. Studies are needed to learn: What are the commonalities and contrasts in diverse families' support for children's education? How do schools help all students families become part of a whole-school community?

Integrated services. There is widespread interest in integrating services of schools, governmental agencies, and community organizations to support families, provide health, recreation, training and other services, and to increase student success in school (Dryfoos 1994). Studies of interagency connections have been mainly anecdotal and focused on conditions for implementation. Research is needed to know: What are the effects of alternative approaches of interagency collaborations that include health, recreation, job training, child care, and other services? What structures and processes are required for two, three, or more organizations to integrate their services, and with what effects for students and families?

New directions for studies about community start from the inside out with attention to the traditions, talents, and resources of families and other individuals and groups. Studies are needed on

how to identify and harness the strengths that are present in all communities to assist students, engage families, and improve schools.

3. Students' roles: How can we better understand the role of students in school, family, and community partnerships?

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence places students at the center of the model. Indeed, the main reason that educators, parents, and students interact is to assist students to succeed in school and in life. Ironically, students often are excluded from family-school communications. Most often, students feel "acted on" rather than actors, or "done to" rather than the doers in their education. Research is needed to define, design, and study students' roles in school, family, and community partnerships across the grades from preschool through high school. A few studies in this and other countries have asked students for their views of and experiences with home-school-community connections. Students express an overwhelming desire to participate in parent-teacher conferences and on school committees, to have their families better informed about and more involved in their education and extracurricular activities, and to communicate more with their families about school work, goals, and decisions.

When they believe that their families are involved in their education, students report that their schools and families are more similar, that their teachers and parents know each other, that they do more homework on weekends, and that they like school better. In high school, students who report that their families are involved have more positive attitudes about school, better attendance, and better grades than other students, even after accounting for their scores on these measures in the middle grades.

Without question, students are responsible for their own education, but they can be helped or hindered in their attainments by their schools, families, and communities and by the connections or lack of connections across contexts. Knowledge gained to date prompts many questions about students' roles in education and in partnerships: How should education be organized to enable students to take appropriate leadership for their learning at all grade levels? What are the results of alternative practices that include students with their families and communities in the six major types of involvement?

4. Results. What are the effects of particular types of involvement for families, students, and for teaching practice at all levels of schooling?

One of the most persistent misunderstandings of many researchers, policy leaders, and educators is that *any* family involvement activity leads to all good things for students, parents, teachers, and schools. Results are accumulating that show that not all partnership activities lead directly to student learning, better report card grades, or higher standardized test scores. Rather, different outcomes are theoretically linked to each of the six types of involvement. For example, studies conducted in the U. S. and other nations indicate that subject-specific interactive homework that encourages parent-child discussions at home initially affects students' skills and achievement in the specific subject. By contrast, information about school attendance policies and phone calls about absence are more likely to increase student attendance, whereas information on child development is more likely to boost family confidence about parenting.

Many studies are needed on the effects of specific partnership activities on the attitudes, behaviors, skills, and approaches of students, parents, and educators. Studies of results also are needed on the three topics discussed above, i.e., .the effects of alternative programs and practices at times of transition, in connection with the community, and of students' roles in partnerships.

Positive and negative results of involvement. Although positive results of family involvement on various student outcomes have been given the most attention, some studies report negative correlations of some types of involvement with student achievement, behavior, and parental attitudes. For example, teachers more often telephone or have conferences with parents of students who need extra help to improve their academics or behavior. More communications about students' problems are negatively related to parents' ratings of schools; parents are less satisfied when their children are in trouble or failing. Importantly, negative correlations are not found when schools develop comprehensive programs of partnership that include positive phone calls, conferences, and other positive communications with all families, not just those whose children have academic or behavioral problems. We know relatively little

about which practices produce positive or negative results, for whom, and under what conditions. Longitudinal studies are needed on whether and how school communications with families help students improve *over time*. That is, which contacts are most successful in helping students with problems return to successful paths?

Conclusion

Research on school-family-community partnerships has become interdisciplinary, international, and central for fully understanding children's learning and development. Studies confirm:

- Schools can be assisted by thoughtful federal, state, district, and school leadership and policies to develop strong and responsive programs of partnerships with families and communities.
- More parents become involved when schools establish good programs including six types of partnerships.
- Communities possess resources to promote student social and intellectual development and family strengths.
- Students are more positive about and do better in school if their families and communities are involved in various productive ways.

Opportunities for Sociologists

Despite many advances in understanding the nature and results of school, family, and community partnerships, there still is much to learn. In addition to the four topics discussed in this chapter, other inquiries are needed to increase knowledge and improve practice:

- Federal, state, and local policies promote partnerships, but there are few rigorous studies of the separate and combined effects of policies across levels on the design or results of programs. Comparative studies are needed on the effects of varied budgets, staff responsibilities, and other allocations for developing partnerships.

- Courses are increasing that prepare teachers and administrators to involve families in children's education. Studies are needed on the impact of alternative forms and contents of preservice, inservice, and advanced courses on educators' attitudes and practices of partnership.

- Most studies have been conducted with data from mothers, but we need to know more about the nature and effects of the involvement of fathers, siblings, and other family members across the grades.

• Most progress in the past decade in understanding partnerships has been made by researchers, educators, policy leaders, parents, and others working together to define questions that are important for improving practice. Research is needed on the impact of alternative forms of collaborative arrangements such as university-school programs and various action research approaches.

• Partnerships are one item on most school improvement agendas, but studies are needed on the design and effects of connections of school-family-community partnerships with other components of school reform.

Sociologists of education, family, community, occupations, and organizations have important contributions to make to the field of school-family-community partnerships. Opportunities for research are enhanced by the availability of national data (such as the National Education Longitudinal Study or the forthcoming Early Childhood Longitudinal Study) that can be used to address many of the questions raised in this chapter. Researchers' data collected in local, regional, state, and national surveys, case studies, interviews, and field studies also are needed for in-depth analyses of the design and effects of partnerships at all levels of schooling.

The organization, implementation, and results of school, family, and community connections should interest sociologists who study educational environments and outcomes, family structures and processes, intergenerational studies, mobility, cultural diversity, attainment processes, and development over the life course. Researchers with these and related specialties are needed to increase knowledge about partnerships to contribute to more effective educational policy and practice. The topics discussed in this article and the application of research on partnerships should interest educators, social workers, school psychologists, and others who work with children, families, schools, and communities. Practitioners are needed to apply research-based practices of partnership in order to increase the opportunities for all families to be productively involved in their children's education.

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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

[illegible], 1994, edited by C. L. Fagnano and B. Z. Werber. Boulder CO: Westview.

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3

Theory to Practice: School and Family Partnerships Lead to School Improvement and Student Success

Joyce L. Epstein

The Milken Family Foundation's National Education Conference offers a forum for discussion on the sociology of education, and that in education is a rarity. It is a rarity for educators to have an opportunity to think about how sociology contributes to our thinking about schools, families and communities. What follows, then, is a discussion about how we think about, how we talk about, and how we act to produce school, family, and community partnerships.

The Concept of "Partnership"

The term "school, family, and community partnerships" is a better, broader term than "parent involvement" to express the shared interests, responsibilities, investments, and the overlapping influences of family, school and community for the education and development of the children they share across the school years. The broader term emphasizes that the institutions share the major responsibilities for children's education and development and that all—school, family and community—are needed to support children as students. In addition to recognizing the school as an equal in the partnership, the broader term recognizes the important potential influence of all family members, not just parents, and all family structures, not just natural parents. Moreover, the term allows students to join the partnership as communicators with and for their own families and schools. The term makes room, too, for community groups, individuals, agencies and organizations to work with schools and families to invest in the education of children whose futures affect the quality of life of the community, of the family, and of the child.

Partnership is a word that encompasses many of the themes about "capital" referred to in Coleman's and Milken's chapters. We *take stock* in our partnerships; we account for our *resources* and *investments*, and we look for *profits* for all concerned. Thus I choose to emphasize the word partnership for this discussion about school, family and community connections.

Theoretical Model: Overlapping Spheres of Influence

The term "partnership" is represented in a theoretical model that I call "overlapping spheres of influence" (Epstein, 1987a, 1992). The spheres of influence on children's learning and development include the family and the school, or, in full form, the family, school, community and peer group. The spheres can, by design, be pushed together to overlap to create an area for partnership activities, or pushed apart to separate the family and school based on forces that operate in each environment. The external model of the spheres of influence shows that the extent of overlap is affected by forces of (a) time, to account for changes in age and grade levels of students and the influence of historic changes, and (b) efforts and behavior to account for the backgrounds, philosophies and practices that occur in each environment. The *external model* recognizes pictorially that there are some practices that schools and families (and other spheres) conduct separately and some practices that they conduct jointly in order to influence children's learning and development.

We know that in many schools there still are educators who say, "If the family would just do its job, we could do our job." That wording represents a view of "separate spheres of influence." In effect, these people are saying, "Let's separate the family and the school in order to have the most efficient organizations possible. If the family carries out its mission, we'll all do very well, thank you." In other, more complicated words, this has been the prevailing theory in sociology from the turn of the century until approximately the mid-1970s (Waller, 1932; Weber, 1947; Parsons, 1959). As we began to study school and family partnerships, we found that the theory of separate spheres was not useful for explaining the effective organization of education for children. Rather, our data suggested the need to push the spheres together so that they overlap somewhat, as shown in Figure 3.1. This picture recognizes that the school and the family *share* their children (Epstein, 1987a). All the years the children attend school, they attend home. Regardless of family structure or economic conditions, families send the best children they have to school, and educators send them home again.

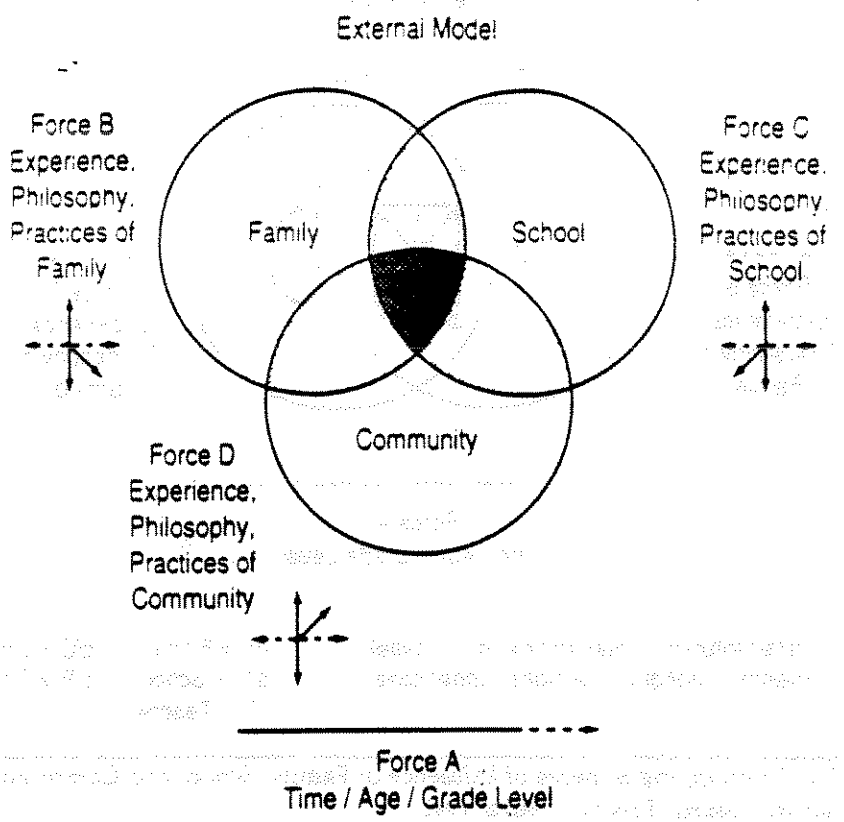

FIGURE 3.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School and Community on Children's Learning. *Source*: Epstein, 1987a, 1992

The *internal model* of the spheres of influence, shown in detail in Figure 3.2, recognizes the influence of the complex and essential interpersonal relations and influence patterns that occur between and among individuals at home and at school in practices that concern students' education and development. The same connections could be drawn for the full model of interactions of family, school, community and peer group. There are two levels of interpersonal relations and exchanges that represent different practices that we work on as we develop partnerships. One occurs at the ***institutional level***, such as when a school invites all families to an event or sends the same communications to all families. In Figure 3.2, the letters F and S, for Family and School designate a general or common practice to involve all families in a school. The second level of interactions occurs at the ***individual level***, as when a parent, teacher, or student meet in conference to discuss an individual student's progress or problem, or when a teacher telephones or writes to a parent for an individual communication.

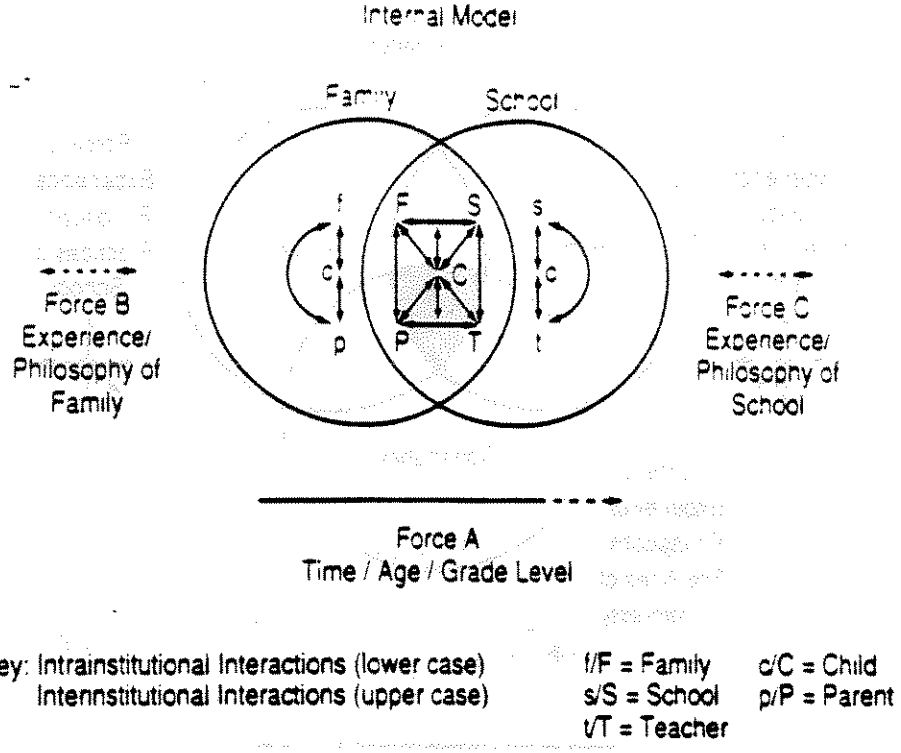

FIGURE 3.2 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School and Community on Children's Learning *Source:* Epstein, 1987a, 1992

In Figure 3.2, all of the arrows intersect at the very center of the picture, at the letter C, for child. It is this "central role of the student" that is the reason we talk about partnerships. Students are at the center of the model of overlapping spheres of influence for school, family and community partnerships. They are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. School and family partnerships do not "produce" successful students. Rather, the partnership activities that include teachers, parents, and students engage, guide, energize, and motivate students so that *they* produce their own success. The model assumes that student learning, development, and success, broadly defined—not just achievement test scores—are the main reasons for school and family partnerships. Further, productive connections of schools, families and communities, and pertinent individual interactions of teachers, parents, and students are conducted in order to help students increase their academic skills, self-esteem, positive attitudes toward learning, independence, other achievements, talents, accomplishments, and other desired behaviors that are characteristic of successful students. Figure 3.2 shows the social exchanges that can, through good design of programs and practices, produce the human and social capital that we want to result from school and family partnerships.

Six Major Types of Involvement

If we say that schools and families overlap in their responsibilities, what practices of partnership should occur in those areas of overlap? How can educators design a program that represents the model shown in Figures 3.1 and 3.2? Our research since 1980 has provided a good deal of information about how we think good practices of partnership can be developed in every school. Our data has led us to create a framework of six major types of partnership activities to form a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships. The six types of involvement that form a comprehensive program of partnership are not unfamiliar to many practitioners. As we review the types of involvement I ask you to ask yourselves, "Do we do this at our school? How do we do it? With which families do we do this? And, how well does this work at our school?"

Figure 3.3, entitled Type 1, refers to the basic obligations of families. It is what families do when people say, "If the family would just do its job!" This includes the basic levels of support for health and safety, nutrition, housing, parenting skills and child rearing that are the parents' jobs across the grades. Particularly important are families' activities to establish positive home conditions that support their children's learning and behavior across all the school years. Schools usually assist families to develop this knowledge by organizing family support programs and by running workshops. Topics may include, for example, How to be a parent of a successful first grader or fourth grader, What is a middle school? What is an early adolescent? How to discipline a middle school child, How to prevent drug abuse, and so on. These kinds of workshops help parents understand their obligations, parenting skills, and home conditions for learning all across the school years.

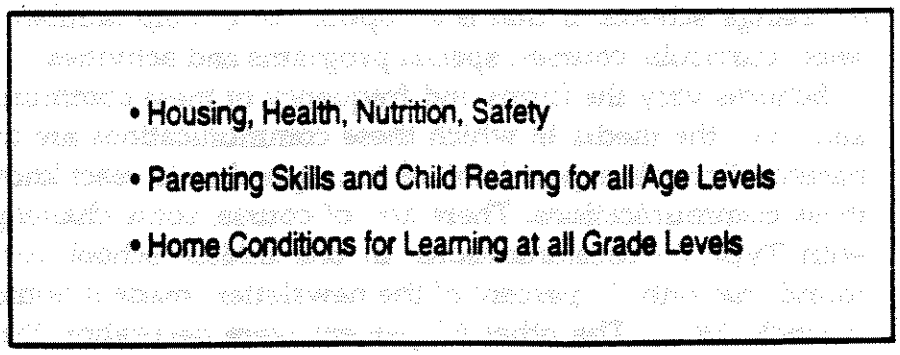

FIGURE 3.3 Type 1—Basic Obligations of Parents. *Source:* Epstein, 1992

For each of the six types of involvement in the partnership model there are "challenges." A challenge is an educator's euphemism for "problem." The challenges must be overcome to successfully produce each type of partnership, and to create social connections and exchanges that work. One challenge for Type 1 is that once a workshop for parents is planned, refreshments delivered, and an expert speaker engaged, only 6 or 13 people show up! We conducted a large survey of parents to find out when parents are able to come to school (Epstein, 1986). Of the total respondents, about one fourth said the morning, one fourth replied the afternoon, and the rest answered the evening hours. If you factor in the topic of the workshop and other variables that affect people's time and interests, your equation would predict that 6-13 parents would show up.

This does not mean that schools should stop conducting workshops to fulfill Type 1 to help parents understand their basic obligations for parenting at each grade level. Rather, they need to use the technology of the 1990s and into the twenty-first century to help all parents who cannot come to the workshop at that hour on that day to get the information in forms and in languages that they can understand, and in ways they can access the information. For example, a videotape of a workshop can be seen at school at any time of the day. That video becomes a part of the school's video library on parenting skills and home conditions for learning. Or, the information from the workshop may be offered in a tape recording that can be borrowed, or in a written summary, or via a computerized phone line that parents can call to hear a summary of the main parts of the workshop. Schools need to be innovative and technologically alert to overcome the challenges of Type 1 and to help all families at each grade level understand how they can build home conditions to support their children as students across the years.

The next figure explains Type 2—the basic obligations of schools to effectively communicate with families about school programs and children's progress. Communications include notices, calls, report cards, conferences, memos, and other information that all parents receive during a school year. It includes the information to help families choose or change schools, if that is an option; or to help families help students select curricula, courses, special programs and activities.

Schools vary the forms and frequency of these communications. They also vary the media in which these communications are delivered to all parents. Schools expect families to respond or to react knowledgeably to these communications. There are, of course, some challenges associated with Type 2 communications. In one middle school, for example, we found that only 33 percent of the newsletters made it home (Epstein and Herrick, 1991). The other 67 percent were decorating the city of Baltimore. Another example of a Type 2 challenge concerns conferences.

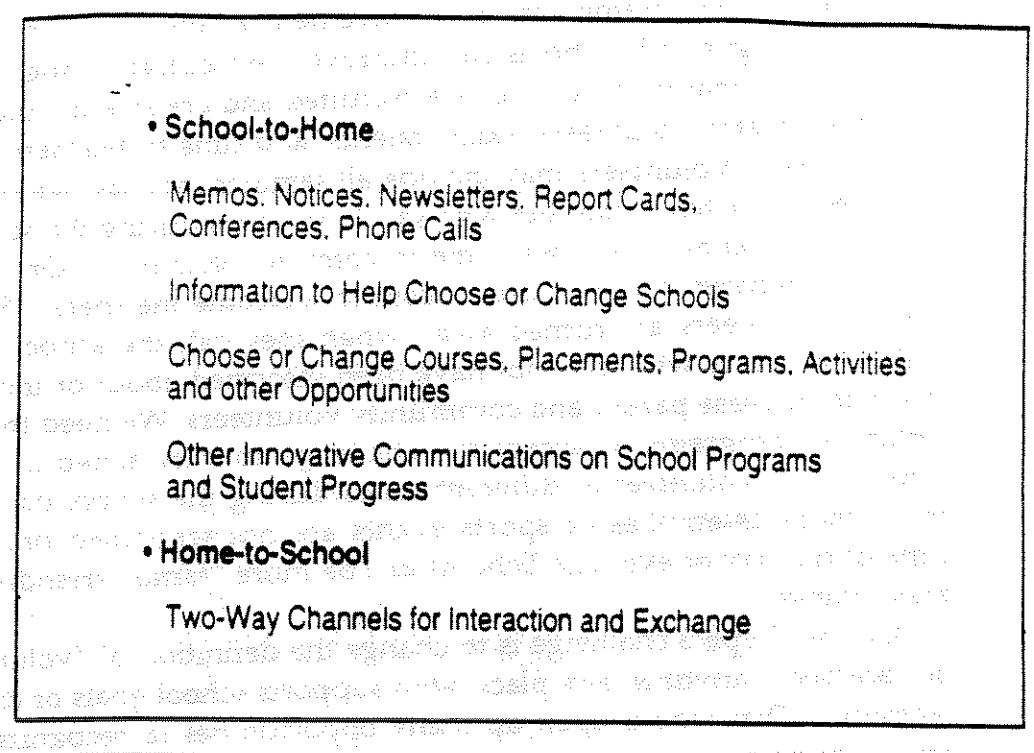

FIGURE 3.4 Type 2—Basic Obligations of Schools Communications. *Source:* Epstein, 1992

Parent-teacher conference schedules must reflect the fact that over two thirds of the mothers of children in a school may work full or part-time during the school day (Epstein, 1986). As a third example, if report cards go home with no explanation of how grades are earned or how grades can be improved, then educators cannot complain that families are not being responsive to students' problems. If schools communicate with families, the information must not only get home, but also must be understood by all families. That means it must be written in the languages and vocabularies that all families can read or access.

In our surveys of elementary, middle, and high school teachers, parents, and (at the high school level) students, we found that parents are very eager for this information (Epstein, 1986; Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Connors and Epstein, 1994). Parents at all economic levels, in all communities—urban, rural and suburban—are asking, "How do I help? What can I do? Where is the information I need?" When children are infants or young toddlers, a variety of places offer families information about early growth and development, and about parental duties and responsibilities. This information becomes more complex and more difficult to acquire as children go from elementary to middle to high school grades. School, family, and community partnerships can assure that information flows in both directions: school information to home and family information to school.

Type 3 in my framework is involvement at the school building, as shown in Figure 3.5. Schools can improve their outreach and vary their schedules so that more families are recruited and are able to volunteer; so that they match volunteers' skills, talents, and time to teachers' and students' needs. Volunteers may include all families, not just well-educated families. We listen to families who say, "I'm home during the school day, but I didn't know I was welcome to come to volunteer." Or, "I would like to volunteer, but they don't seem to welcome me there." Some potential volunteers are turned away when they call the school and talk with a secretary who may not have been informed about or included in plans to increase parent and community volunteers. We need to develop volunteer programs to accept the challenge to vary schedules so that families can volunteer at different times during the school day, and so that school assemblies or sports events are not scheduled only at one time of the day or evening. Schools can be more "family friendly" about these things.

Another Type 3 challenge is to change the definition of "volunteer" to be "anybody, anytime, any place, who supports school goals or children's learning." That would open up many opportunities to recognize volunteers who participate at home and in the community, as well as those who come to school during the school day. Some private schools allow volunteers to work in the evenings, on weekends, on business holidays (as

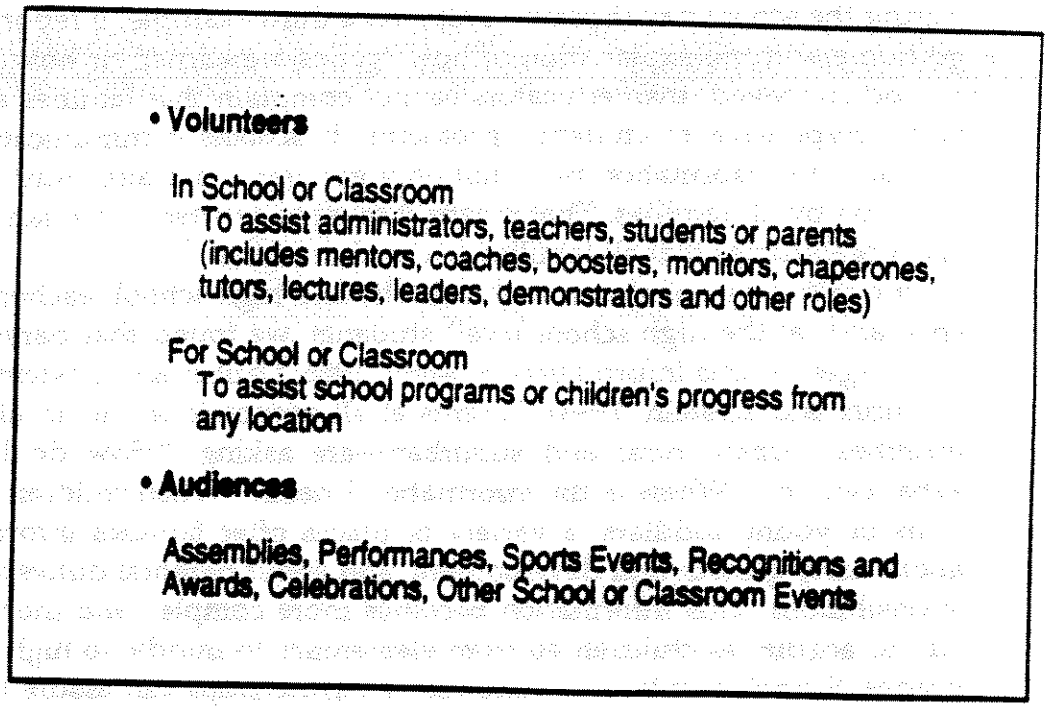

FIGURE 3.5 Type 3—Involvement at School. *Source:* Epstein, 1992

distinct from school holidays) and in the summer. The number of volunteers can be increased by broadening the definition of volunteers and arranging more inclusive processes for volunteering.

The next type of involvement—Type 4—refers to family involvement in learning activities at home, as reported in Figure 3.6. A large part of my research efforts have focused on this type. It may be the hardest type to implement because it requires every teacher to recognize the connection between the child in the classroom, the curriculum of the school, and the family's connection to the child as a learner at home. Most parents say they want answers to the question: "How do I help my child this year do better in school?" Although only some parents want to be involved at the school building as volunteers or in leadership roles, just about all want to know what they can do at home each year to help their child do better in school.

One Type 4 challenge is for teachers to overcome some inaccurate ideas about family involvement in homework and other learning activities at home. Some teachers consider this type of involvement and ask, "Does that mean that I have to teach every parent of every child in my room how to teach every subject?" Fortunately, Type 4 does *not* mean this.

The saying "Parents are their children's first and most important teacher" is true. But this axiom does mean that parents want to teach their children the curriculum of the school. Parents are not asking, "How do I teach my fifth grader fractions?" or, "How do I teach my seventh grader science?" Our research with thousands of parents has shown that parents want to motivate, encourage, monitor, keep track of, interact with, and talk about school work at home. They want to be knowledgeable partners, not teachers of all curricula (Epstein, 1986; Dauber and Epstein, 1993; Connors and Epstein, 1994).

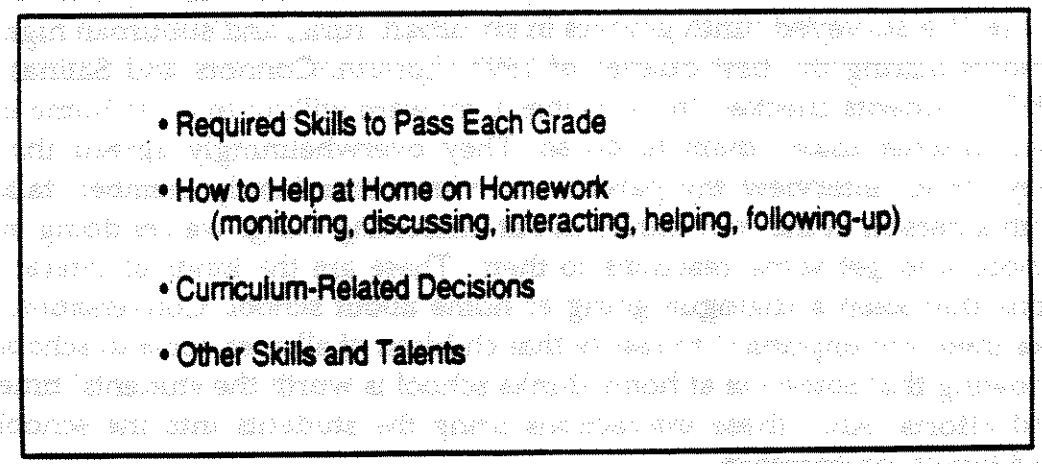

FIGURE 3.6 Type 4—Involvement in Learning Activities at Home. *Source:* Epstein, 1992

Parents have been told to ask their child everyday, "How was school today?" Students usually answer "O.K." or "good" or "Ugh." Schools must help parents move beyond this relatively unprovocative question in order to engage their children in discussions about learning. Students need to know that Mom thinks math is important and interesting, that science is all around them, that social studies links to something that their parents, grandparents, or great grandparents did in earlier times, that English writing is something everyone does to communicate, and that people at home are interested in hearing a paragraph or story they write for school.

These kinds of interactions with their children enable parents to stay informed and to be involved in their children's learning. To help teachers improve their communications with parents in Type 4, we developed an interactive homework process called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork, or TIPS (Epstein, Jackson and Salinas, 1992). Simply put, for TIPS, teachers design homework that requires children to talk to someone at home about something interesting they are learning in class. This takes place on a regular, systematic basis, perhaps weekly or biweekly. With TIPS, the child is the "interacter," the interviewer, the demonstrator of a new skill learned in school. The parent is the listener, reactor, or is asked to share ideas. For example, a middle grades science homework activity asks students to conduct an experiment and discuss osmosis at home. TIPS puts school on the agenda at home with activities that promote thinking, stimulate interest, improve the design of homework, and have a chance of increasing student success in school by improving their homework completion, weekly tests, and report card grades. There are TIPS program manuals for teachers and prototype activities to help elementary and middle grades educators use this process.

A high school TIPS program is in its early stages. Some believe high school students do not wish to recognize let alone talk with a parent at home. We surveyed ninth graders in six urban, rural, and suburban high schools during the first quarter of 1993 (Epstein, Connors and Salinas, 1993). Students checked the activities they were willing to do at home if their teacher asked them to do so. They overwhelmingly agreed that they could: interview my parent, interview some family member, talk with a person in the community about interesting things we are doing in school, and get some reactions to them. These are the kinds of interactions that keep a dialogue going at home about school. Conversations like these are important to assure that children of all ages come to school knowing that someone at home thinks school is worth the students' time and efforts. And, these interactions bring the students into the school and family partnership.

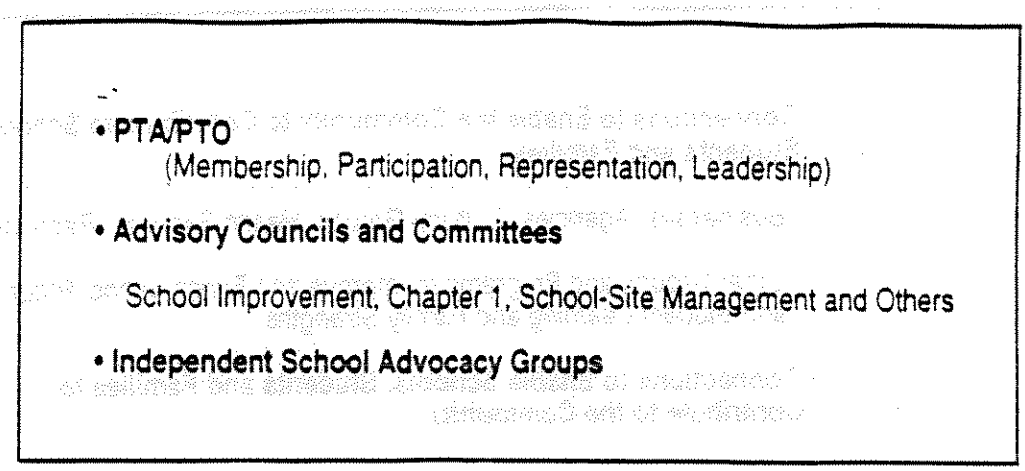

FIGURE 3.7 Type 5—Decision Making, Participation, Leadership and School Advocacy
Source: Epstein, 1992

The fifth type of involvement, shown in Figure 3.7, is decision making, participation, leadership and school advocacy. Activities in this type involve parents in committees, PTA, PTO, school-site management teams and school-based decision-making teams. There are numerous efforts across this country to bring the voices of parents into school decision making and school improvement activities that affect their children. One challenge for success with Type 5 is to correct problems of lack of representation of some groups of parents. In some schools there is very little input from parents to their representatives, and there is very little return of information to parents from their parent-leaders. As an example, in one school we visited in California, 80 percent of the children were Hispanic, 20 percent Anglo, but just about all of the parent representatives and committee members were from Anglo families. A new principal came to that school, saw the situation as unacceptable, and over a four- or five-year period was able to alter the percentage of participation to about 50 percent Anglo, 50 percent Hispanic representation. And, he and the parents were still working on the issue as of the summer of 1992.

The last type of involvement, Type 6, concerns collaborations and exchanges with the community (see Figure 3.8). These are the connections that enable the community to contribute to schools, students, and families. These also include connections that students make to serve others in their community. There is a growing interest in this type of partnership as can be seen in other chapters throughout this volume. School partnerships with individuals and institutions in the community can assist all children, strengthen school programs, and improve the connections that families make to resources and services in their community.

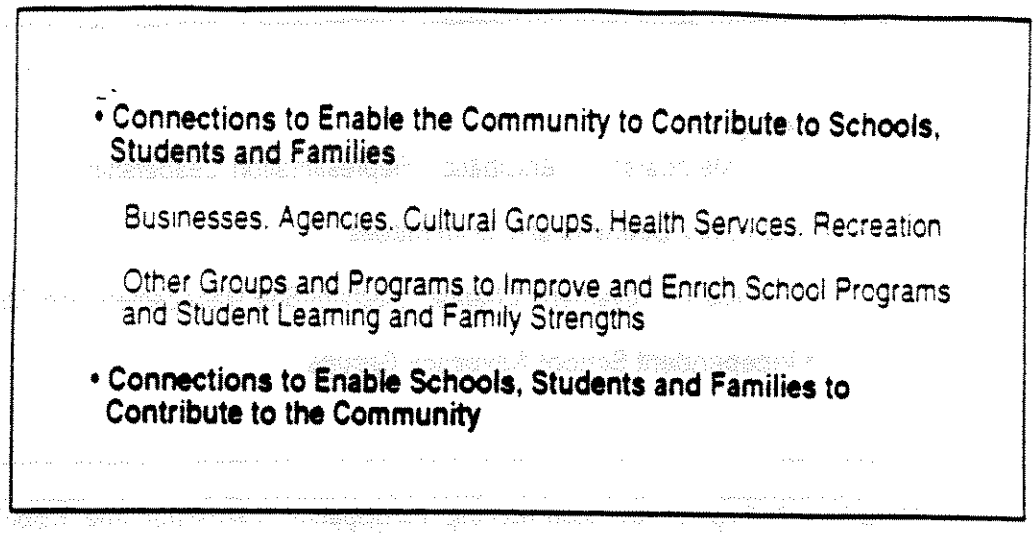

FIGURE 3.7 Type 6—Collaborations and Exchanges with the Community *Source:* Epstein, 1992

We recently conducted a survey of high school students and asked the students if they participated in a school-business partnership (Epstein, Connors and Salinas, 1993). Schools are proud of their school-business partnerships, but not many students are involved in or benefited by these partnerships. Thus, one challenge of Type 6 activities is to assure greater equity in the access that students and families have to opportunities and experiences with business partners and other community services.

The framework of six types of involvement helps any school create a comprehensive program of partnership with families and with the community. There are hundreds of practices that can be selected to operationalize each type. As we noted, each type of involvement has serious challenges that get in the way of successfully reaching or involving all families. These problems must be solved through thoughtful program development activities.

Also, each type of involvement leads to different outcomes for students, families, and schools. Not all types lead quickly or directly to student achievement gains. One of the first results of each involvement type is parents' appreciation of the efforts by schools to keep them informed. When we first began studying practices of school-family partnerships in the early 1980s, we found that parents became involved who previously had not been involved, and parents immediately increased their regard and support for teachers. Another short-term result is that teachers change their attitudes about parents. As they increase their communications and interactions with parents, teachers begin to perceive parents as supporters. For example, at the start of one of the projects in a school in

the League of Schools Reaching Out (Davies, 1990), teachers did not want volunteers in their classrooms. A project facilitator was successful in getting a few teachers to organize the work of volunteers and to use them well. During the course of the term, the facilitator received a succession of little notes from other teachers saying that they, too, were ready to accept a volunteer. It is important to recognize that teachers change their attitude as they watch partnership activities work.

The partnership process nurtures itself. Teachers become willing to communicate more with parents in different ways. Parents feel more welcome at the school and understand how to help at home. And, parent-child communications also increase.

There also are tangible results for students. Students whose teachers communicate frequently with their parents about learning activities at home do more homework than do other students, and have more positive attitudes about school, do more schoolwork on weekends, and benefit in specific skills (Epstein, 1991, 1992). Students at all grade levels and in all communities report that they want someone at home to talk with about school and homework. They are not so sure they want someone always at the school building. At the middle school level, however, children do not mind if parents or other volunteers are in classrooms assisting with enrichment programs. For example, middle schools students gave positive ratings to a program in which parent and other volunteers show and discuss art prints in their social studies classrooms, and learned something about art in the process (Epstein and Dauber, 1989).

Teachers take pride in sharing their progress and their problems, their observations and their plans with colleagues. We have been involved in programs with many inner-city elementary and middle schools for five years, and, more recently with a set of urban, suburban, and rural high schools. It has been extremely encouraging to observe the dynamics of teachers and parents sharing ideas, making plans, and improving their partnership.

Conclusion: Planning for Partnerships

To put the six types of involvement to work, educators must organize their work for action. This includes writing a policy of school and family partnerships that explicitly includes reference to goals for all of the types. Leadership is needed at the state, district, and school levels structure to guide program development, but ultimately, the work must be accomplished school by school. One way to assure that progress is made at the school level is to create an Action Team for School and Family Partnerships. With ideas from other teachers, parents, and students, the

Action Team (with an overall leader) is responsible for looking three years ahead to plan how the school will conduct its school, family, and community partnerships. The members of the Action Team become leaders of subcommittees for each of the types of involvement, adding or improving one or two practices for each type each year. Over three years, real progress can be made with practices to improve information to parents about child development, increase communication about school programs and student progress, increases and improves volunteers, designs better ways to encourage interactions at home about school work, increases parent participation in school decisions, and connects families and students to community resources and services. These are general goals for each of the six types of involvement.

This chapter illustrates an area of social science that has been energized and strengthened by a new theoretical view of social organizations that simultaneously influence children; by steady advances in research in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and education; and by a continuing collaboration of researchers and educators working together to help each other understand the possibilities and challenges of school, family, and community partnerships.

A report from the

SCHOOL, FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

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

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Michelle Fine.

A Response

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To reflect the past election year and the work of educators in many states, districts, and schools, I would say that organizing for parental involvement is like bringing a Democrat to the presidency—it is tough but it can be done.

POWER IN PARTNERSHIP

Fine's article offers an opportunity to discuss some concepts that confuse educators and researchers about "parental involvement," or what I prefer to call "school and family partnerships."[1] Among the important distinctions is the difference between "power" as used in the examples in Fine's article (i.e., parents' voices and participation in school decision making) and "partnership." The latter term recognizes and acts on the responsibilities shared by families and schools for the education and development of the children they share across the school years. In my work—in theory, research, and work with schools—placing parents in decision-making roles is *one* of six major types of involvement in a comprehensive program of partnership. The six types of involvement develop multiple powers and broader empowerments than does a focus on decision making alone. In short form, the six types are:

Type 1: Basic obligations of families including parenting skills and home conditions for learning at each age and grade level.
Type 2: Basic obligations of schools including school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
Type 3: Volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support the school and students.
Type 4: Involvement of families in learning activities at home.
Type 5: Participation by families in decision making, governance, and advocacy.
Type 6: Collaborations with community groups and agencies to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Three important facts about these types of involvement are that (1) there are hundreds of practices that can be selected or designed to operationalize each type; (2) each type has serious challenges that often get in the way of successfully reaching or involving all families, and these problems must be solved through program development; and (3) each type leads directly to *different* important outcomes for schools, for students, and for families. Not all types of involvement lead quickly or directly to achievement gains for students.[2]

The types are *not* levels arranged in priority order. One is not more important than another. As they build their programs of partnership, schools and families working together can purposely select practices for each type of involvement that have greater probability of helping them reach various goals to benefit schools, families, and students. I read Fine's discussion of three projects thinking of what each of them helps us learn about school and family partnerships.

THE THREE PROJECTS: WHERE ARE THE PARTNERS?

The *Baltimore project* was not designed as a process for school reform. Rather, it was designed to learn about families and their needs, and to assist a small sample of families in one neighborhood. In this particular project, as Fine notes, the ties to the school in the neighborhood were weak from the start of the project to its conclusion. By design, this project did not aim to help many parents become more empowered to participate in school decision making. Nor was the project about helping the neighborhood school build a lasting structure to become partner to its students' families. The project was more an example of an activity than reflects Type 6 in our framework—an effort by a third party to provide community-based services to some families to help them help themselves and their children. The project increased an understanding of the difficulties families face in poor urban neighborhoods. That is useful. In terms of school reform and family involvement, however, the project reinforces the fact that *real partnerships cannot form when key partners—here, the schools—are excluded.*

The *Chicago project* is mainly about restructuring. By law, all of the city's schools have an elected council that they did not have before the law was passed. The legislated process is flawed, however, in that ties to teachers in the schools were weak from the start. We learn, again, from this example that *real partnerships cannot form when key partners—here, the teachers—are excluded.*

In schools that are "working" in Chicago, it is likely that this weakness was corrected on site so that teachers have an equal voice with parents and administrators in school decisions. But in many (if not most) schools, the inequitable distribution of power reduces the chance of developing strong and comprehensive programs of partnership. Many components of partnership *require* the shared interests, investments, joys, trials, and efforts of teachers working with parents, students, and administrators.

The "brilliance" of Chicago's restructuring is tarnished by the lack of real reform in many schools in the quality of classroom curricula, the joy and professionalism of teaching, and the success of students. "Power" is taken very seriously, but many school councils receive little guidance about how to use their power to advance the quality of education for all children or to develop productive partnerships with all families in the major types of involvement.[3] In effect, Chicago gave parents power on the councils and waits to see if the schools improve. This does not allow schools and families that have been at odds for years to grow into partnerships. It is like wanting to be tall and wearing adult size thirteen shoes, hoping your feet will grow into them. The steps are clumsy and the falls along the way are painful—not the best way to move toward a goal that takes time to reach.

Only the *Philadelphia project* in Fine's article shows sensitivity to the process of developing school and family partnerships—in this case, to the parents' right to be part of the decision-making process for reforming their children's high schools. Part of a large, multimillion-dollar program for comprehensive school reform, the councils are one component of innovative teacher-designed "charter" schools.[4]

As Fine notes, some school councils are making more progress than others. After parents feel comfortable talking with each other, they begin to talk and work with educators on more equal bases. The councils advance even more if they solve some of the challenges typically associated with Type 5 activities to become representative of all families in the school. Fine's description of the Philadelphia project confirms my findings and those of Comer that it takes three to five years (or more) to develop successful shared decision making or other types of partnership.[5] If Philadelphia's high school councils stay the course, family participation in decision making will move from being "politically imperative" to being philosophically expected—part of regular school practice. Some councils may, in time, take leadership to help their schools implement other types of involvement, but it is more likely that other focused program-development initiatives will be needed to produce comprehensive programs of partnership in all schools.

The Philadelphia example shows how important it is to include teachers and parents as well as administrators from the start of reform activities. It also shows that this type of involvement can be successfully addressed in high schools, where little systematic attention has been given to any forms of partnership.

Philadelphia is asking some of the right questions about the reasons for parent involvement. As Fine puts it, is it to be better parents? To be advisors on community issues? Or to be fully entitled partners in school decision making? In my framework, these are not hierarchical or either/or questions. Different practices of partnership will produce these and other results. The main goal, however, is to mobilize resources and support from all available sources to help more children—ideally all children—to be more successful students from preschool through high school.

THE PROCESS OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

There are ongoing efforts in Baltimore and in many other locations that take a different approach to understanding and improving school and family partnerships, including my own work with elementary, middle, and high schools in Baltimore and other locations. This includes increasing the power of parents to participate in decision making, but also developing other types of involvement to reach other outcomes. The educators and families in our projects are helping us learn how, despite the difficulties faced by families in the inner city, schools and families *can* work together to strengthen the support students receive for education.[6]

We work with schools to identify their starting points on all six types of involvement; to set goals for future qualities of partnership; to form action teams to work to design, select, implement, and evaluate new practices. This is a step-by-step process of program development that works for incremental progress, aims to resolve problems in relationships, and seeks to build a climate for partnerships.

Families are helped to gain multiple powers as they become better informed and inform the school about their children (Type 1); receive communications from and send communications to the school about programs and children's progress (Type 2); volunteer to help in many ways, or attend school events (Type 3); interact about classwork with their own children at home (Type 4); participate in parent-teacher organizations, school-based management teams, other committees or councils, or advocacy groups (Type 5); and use community resources to strengthen their families and aid their children (Type 6). Schools also gain specific powers because of their interactions and new relationships with families.

We are experiencing the same sense of cautious optimism that Fine expresses in her observations of Philadelphia in the schools we have been working with in Baltimore, in other parts of Maryland, and in those states, districts, and schools that we observe that are adopting our framework of six types to build their programs.