

## LOOKING BACK OR FORWARD?

There are other topics on which my perceptions and experiences differ from Fine's. I do not think that education in our urban schools was better for poor, minority children in the 1970s. Although there were some (few) successful efforts to "decentralize," in most places this was not accompanied by high-quality education for all students. In the 1970s there was even less recognition than now of the need to move toward partnership across the grades, and there were fewer partnerships on many types of involvement in urban elementary, middle, and high schools. On other statistics, the gaps in black and white achievement and dropout rates were greater in the 1970s than they are now. Schools need not look back with false nostalgia, but should look forward with new concepts and forms for partnerships.

I do not think that school bureaucracies in most cities or towns premeditatedly construct or wickedly perpetuate antagonisms with families or community groups. Rather, educators are often afraid to venture into partnerships due to lack of knowledge, training, and prior experience. Many are fearful of sharing information and even more fearful of sharing power. Some blatantly blame families for children's failures, without blaming their own unresponsive school programs and their lack of partnership with families. We know that rather than blaming educators or families for their past failings (an endless exercise, akin to the Middle East peace process), we must move forward with preservice education and in-service programs to develop educators' capacities to understand and work with concepts and practices of partnership, including all six types of involvement.<sup>7</sup> We must work hard, too, to conduct research and evaluation that ask the tough questions about the effects of different practices and processes, and to translate results into useful information that will assist school program development.

The encouraging fact is that educators in many states, districts, and schools are trying to figure out how to improve their connections with parents to help children.<sup>8</sup> Those that make progress are not consumed by questions of power, but are concerned with improving communication and practices of partnership. It is true that despite real progress over the past few years, there are still too many schools in which few parents have conferences with teachers; there is no functioning parent association; information is not shared to help families talk with or guide their children's learning; information to help plan children's future education and work is kept secret from most families; volunteers are not organized or not welcome; children think their families are not respected and valued; and other connections of schools, families, and communities need attention, including steps toward parity of power in decision making. There are still too many states and districts without the leadership structure and fiscal support to guide all of their schools in program development for partnership. Because some urban public schools (as well as some suburban and rural) have made real progress on these issues,

however, we know that others—indeed, all—could do so. We hope they will be looking forward with new ideas and new processes to build school and family partnerships, and not back to the 1970s to replay power politics.

## WHAT POWERS FAMILIES WANT

Fine frames her questions in terms of *power*, *authority*, and *control*. These are not the words that most parents use when they express how they want to be involved in their children's education.<sup>9</sup> They use words like *information*, *communication*, and *participation*. Parents seek many powers through more and better information, more interactions with teachers and administrators, and more responsive school services. Some parents want to voice their opinions about school decisions on school boards or on school committees (and most want their voices represented). Most parents—indeed, nearly all parents at all grade levels—want to know, "How can I help my child at home this year?" The equity they seek first is for their children to have equal access to a good education, to be captured by the curriculum, to receive individual attention from caring teachers, to graduate from high school, and to go on to more education or good jobs. These are powers that only some parents presently have, but that just about all parents very much want. If we listen to the parents of children in all grades in school, we will build programs of partnership, not contests for power.

## POWER-FULL PARTNERSHIPS

Distinctions between power and partnership are not mere semantics. The politics of power often yield conflict and disharmony. The politics of partnership stress equity and caring relationships. The two approaches take and use a different vocabulary for leadership roles and leadership styles, and focus on different outcomes for parents and for children. In building comprehensive programs of partnership we know that those in power must come to care, and those who care must gain some power.

Most districts and schools will not soon write laws to mandate full "democracy" in running the schools. Many are presently struggling to understand how to organize shared decision making and school-based management with teachers and their unions, and some parent and community representatives. The buzzwords of the 1990s—shared decision making/school-based management—are just starting to hum. The schools and districts need much assistance in staff development, staff leadership, and financial support (as in Philadelphia's project) to successfully establish school-based management.

Most districts and schools can immediately write policies to develop programs of partnership, including greater and more equal participation of families in school decision making, but also including the other types of involvement that produce many powers. In programs for reforming schools for the next century, we need power in partnerships.

Notes

- 1 Joyce L. Epstein, "School and Family Partnerships," in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 6th Edition, ed. Marvin Alkin (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1139-51.
- 2 See Ron Branch, "On Improving School and Family Connections: A Conversation with Joyce Epstein," *Educational Leadership* 17 (1989): 24-27; Joyce L. Epstein and Lori J. Connors, "School and Family Partnerships," *MASSP Practitioner*, Vol. 18, June 1992 (whole issue) (for middle grades and high schools); and Joyce L. Epstein, "Effects of Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement on Change in Student Achievement in Reading and Math," in  *literacy through Family, Community, and School Interaction*, ed. Steven Silvern (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1991), pp. 261-76.
- 3 Anthony Bryk, Barbara Schneider, and associates, "Workshop on Chicago School Reform: A Discussion of Research in Progress" (case studies of Chicago schools) (Papers presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1992).
- 4 Ann Bradley, "Reforming Philadelphia's High Schools from Within," *Education Week* 12 (November 18, 1992), 1, 17-19.
- 5 Joyce L. Epstein and Susan L. Dauber, "School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools," *Elementary School Journal* 91 (1991): 289-303; and Jaume P. Conner, *School Power: Implications of an Intervention Project* (New York: Free Press, 1980).
- 6 See Joyce L. Epstein, "Baltimore School and Family Connections Project: University-School Community Collaboration" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1992). Also, for detailed examples of some projects, see Joyce L. Epstein and Susan C. Herrick, "Improving School and Family Partnerships in Urban Middle Grades Schools: Orientation Days and School Newsletters," *CDS Report 20* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, 1991); idem, "Two Reports: Implementation and Effects of Summer Home Learning Packets in the Middle Grades," *CDS Report 21* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, 1991); Susan C. Herrick and Joyce L. Epstein, "Improving School and Family Partnerships in Urban Elementary Schools: Reading Activity Packets and School Newsletters," *CDS Report 19* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, 1991); and Loretta Coates, "The Parent Club," in *The School-Community Goodbook*, ed. Carl S. Hyman (Baltimore: Fund for Educational Excellence, 1992), pp. 172-75. Other references are in a full list of reports that can be obtained from the author.
- 7 Recent references that will help bring concepts of partnership to preservice education and advanced courses include Sandra L. Christenson and Jane Close Conoley, eds., *Home-School Collaboration: Enhancing Children's Academic Competence* (Silver Springs, Md.: National Association of School Psychologists, 1992); Susan McAllister Swap, *Developing Home-School Partnerships: From Concept to Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993); and Joyce L. Epstein, *School and Family Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, in press).
- 8 Educators and families are working together to create more comprehensive programs in areas as diverse as Arlington, Virginia; Cecil County, Maryland; McAllen, Texas; San Diego, California; St. Paul, Minnesota; the state of Utah and many of its districts; schools in Don Davert's League of Schools Reaching Out in many communities; and in many other states, districts and schools. See also the special section in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1991, for other examples of federal, state, district, and school efforts to build school and family partnerships as one aspect of school reform.
- 9 Joyce L. Epstein, "Parents' Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement," *The Elementary School Journal* 86 (1986): 277-94; and Susan L. Dauber and Joyce L. Epstein, "Parents' Attitudes and Practices of Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools," in *Parents and Schools in a Pluralistic Society*, ed. Nancy Chavkin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 53-71.

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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

# Paths to Partnership

What We Can Learn from Federal, State, District, and School Initiatives



Illustration by Kris Hackleman

*Although most schools embrace the concepts of partnership and parent involvement, few have translated their beliefs into plans or their plans into action, Ms. Epstein asserts. The articles in this Kappan special section suggest that shared vision and concerted effort can yield a variety of effective programs to connect schools, families, and communities.*

BY JOYCE L. EPSTEIN

**L**EADERS AT the national, state, district, and school levels are following new paths to partnership between schools and families. The articles in this *Kappan* special section illustrate a few of the many avenues that may someday add up to a nationwide highway system of connections between schools, families, and communities to promote the success of children in school. The articles, singly or as a group, offer descriptions of the real possibilities that may be adopted, reviewed, and revised by other educators.

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## NATIONAL INITIATIVES

Two federal initiatives are featured in this section: the widespread Chapter 1 programs that specify the importance of family involvement and the selective, competitive FIRST (Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching) grants that encourage creative and innovative thinking and hard work by local districts and by individual schools to design, implement, and discover new possibilities for school/family/community partnerships. Diane D'Angelo and Ralph Adler challenge all educators to make the most of the new Chapter 1 regulations that increase options and support for family involvement. The FIRST program challenges educators to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities for the funding of special projects, particularly those that allow schools to develop practices that reach all families.

There are other important federal initiatives in addition to those described in this section. For example, Head Start continues its influential work in enlisting families as partners in the education of preschoolers. There is great potential, too, in Even Start — a new two-generational program that links the education of underachieving parents with the education of their children (ages 1 through 7). The aims of Even Start are to increase the literacy skills of parents, to improve the preschool activities of children, and to help parents understand their role and influence in their children's education so that more children succeed in school. The variety of state and local designs of Even Start programs have opened up new opportunities to learn more about how partnerships in the early years of childhood are developed and to document the effects on adults and children of alternative approaches.

Another promising development on the federal level is the support by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement for a new five-year Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning. The center will extend the research and development agenda on the effects of partnerships between and among the institutions that most affect children's learning from birth through adolescence. The investment in this center attests to the federal government's

## CALIFORNIA'S POLICY RECOGNIZES THE CONNECTIONS THAT LINK SCHOOL CURRICULA, FAMILY INVOLVEMENT, AND STUDENT SUCCESS.

recognition that the joint role of families, communities, and schools is a topic about which we have much to learn, even as we work to improve practice.

A number of national organizations are encouraging their members to understand and to develop partnerships. The National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers have initiated new projects on the topic of family and community involvement. The National Association of State Boards of Education has published a thoughtful booklet, *Partners in Educational Improvement: Schools, Parents, and the Community*. The Education Commission of the States (ECS) held a conference and issued a report, *Drawing in the Family: What States Can Do*. ECS is continuing to pay attention to parent involvement through its All Children Can Learn program and many others.

Although the new regulations reauthorizing Chapter 1 require participating districts to plan for family involvement, Chapter 2 may offer the best hope for developing coordinated programs, because funds in Chapter 2 may be applied to any local reform activities designed to improve the quality of programs and educational innovation. This could and should include new curricula and student learning, but innovative thinkers will be able

to link parent involvement aimed at helping children succeed in their school work, homework, and learning to the criteria for Chapter 2.

D'Angelo and Adler's examples of Chapter 1 practices and the summary of projects supported by FIRST offer options that can be duplicated in most schools and districts. The experience of the schools in McAllen, Texas, which is detailed in a sidebar with their article, illustrates advanced levels of coordination of the new regulations governing Chapter 1, innovative uses of Chapter 2, and the judicious assignment of local resources. However, more examples and more documentation are needed regarding ways to include families as partners in learning by combining and coordinating Chapter 1, relevant programs under Chapter 2, Title VII, the Adult Education Act, the Education of the Handicapped Act, Head Start and Even Start, Learnfare, and other programs that provide resources and guidelines for improving education.

## STATE INITIATIVES

Zelma Solomon describes the development of California's policy on parent involvement. Her account is testimony to the long hours and hard work needed to move from a simple awareness of the importance of state-level policy to the framing of guidelines, the issuing of mandates, and the passage of state legislation requiring all districts and schools to act to develop their own policies and practices designed to involve families in their children's schooling.

California's policy is important because it recognizes the connections that link school curricula, family involvement, and student success. It is unique, as well, in that the state recognizes the importance of parent involvement at all grade levels and with all families and does not isolate those in categorical programs. Perhaps most important, California's policy is written to replace top-down dictates with "enabling" actions to help districts and schools understand, design, develop, and implement their own policies and programs.

A second approach to parent involvement that is growing more popular in the states is to award competitive grants to allow some schools to work out the prob-

lems of connecting with families, to improve their own programs, and to share the results of their experiences with other educators. Warren Chapman describes the Illinois Urban Education Partnership Grants program, funded through Chapter 2. This program is significant because the state has recognized the multi-year requirements for school improvement and for family and community involvement and has provided schools with grant funding for a minimum of two years. Moreover, the program pays serious attention to evaluation. These features are essential for grants programs because only over time and through evaluation will we ever learn which investments will advance practice and increase knowledge.

Other state initiatives exist in addition to those described in this special section. Tennessee was an early leader when in 1986 it awarded more than \$1 million in grants to urban and rural schools for various demonstration projects to boost student performance, attitudes, and behaviors. A New Jersey program, Partners in Learning Grants, is structured to encourage and enable schools with experience in building partnerships to help other schools.

A potentially important new activity was initiated in Minnesota by more than 25 organizations, including the state department of education, the University of Minnesota, local colleges, the chamber of commerce, many state agencies, Head Start, African-American Parent Advocates, the Urban Coalition of Minneapolis, and other groups. At a conference, representatives of these groups conducted strategy sessions and produced a list of desired activities for school/family partnerships that require no funding, low funding, or significant funding and that result either in no major institutional change or in significant change. Building consensus and planning priorities in these sessions were first steps toward developing a state policy, starting grants programs, and undertaking other activities to help Minnesota educators create more successful partnerships with families and other community groups.

In its Parents as Teachers program, Missouri's state department of education has been a leader in the development of programs to involve all families in the education of their children from birth to age 3. The state is poised to continue

leading with Success Is Homemade, a new program that will extend family involvement from kindergarten through grade 12. From the outset, Missouri plans to evaluate school processes and the effects of new practices, making this promising program one to watch.

Other activities on the part of states include Washington's requirement that competence in parent involvement be one of the "generic standards" for state certification of teachers and administrators.<sup>3</sup> Were this activity to be undertaken in many states, more courses would be instituted at colleges and universities to prepare teachers and administrators to work more productively with parents as partners.

Other state departments of education have conducted (or plan to conduct) grants programs or other activities to increase awareness of and attention to school/family connections. These include the District of Columbia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, and others. These efforts, however, are often small, highly specific, and separated from a larger plan.

Despite some real advances in state leadership on school and family connections, Frank Nardine and Robert Morris dramatically highlight the unfortunate "state-of-the-states" with regard to family/school connections. Insufficient and inappropriate expenditures and allocations of staff characterize many states' efforts, and the programs in most states lack coherence. This need not be so. The examples of California and Illinois demonstrate the benefits that could result from state initiatives that are comprehensive, enabling, and carefully evaluated.

#### DISTRICT INITIATIVES

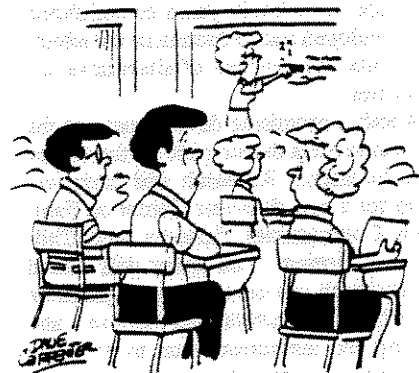
Izora Warner reviews the long-standing leadership of the Parents in Touch office in Indianapolis. Janet Chrispeels describes the real advances in policy and practice made by the schools in the San Diego city and county districts. The work in San Diego also shows the strength of nested support systems, as the state, the county office, and the city district all share the same goals for partnerships between schools and the families they

serve. Indianapolis and San Diego send a clear message to other districts: find knowledgeable staff members and support them over the long haul; make it your district's business to help all schools help all families help all children.

Commendably, both Indianapolis and San Diego have translated district leadership into national leadership: each district has hosted at least one national conference on family involvement to enable educators and parents from across the country to share ideas, practices, problems, and successes with one another.

Many other district initiatives for parent involvement exist in addition to those described in this special section. An early leader was Houston with its sensible FailSafe program of innovative approaches to connecting schools with families, including strategies for organizing parent/teacher conferences in the secondary grades so that families could meet with many teachers on the same visit and programs to allow families to borrow school computers for home use to strengthen children's skills and adult literacy. More recently, the schools in Hamilton County, Ohio, and the local parent/teacher organization have coordinated efforts to build the capabilities of teachers, administrators, and parents to work and plan together at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Many district efforts go unheralded. Many other districts are at the "information seeking" stage, ready to take steps toward partnership if they are given access to more information and some additional incentives. The reports from Indianapolis and San Diego should encourage such districts to move forward.



*"Square root? Is this math or biology?"*

## SCHOOL INITIATIVES

Don Davies provides perspectives and examples of programs that can, in effect, "turn a school around." Family/school connections are, ultimately, a school-by-school story. In the final analysis, it is the hard work of principals, teachers, and other school staff members that will determine whether and how families understand the schools, their children, and their own continuing influence in their children's learning and development.

There are hundreds of schools and thousands of teachers engaging in successful practices to involve the families of their students. Their work is often unknown and unrecognized even in their own districts — sometimes, in the case of teachers, even within their own schools. Most schools and teachers, however, have not taken significant steps toward building partnerships with families. In most schools, some parents are informed about some things some of the time by some teachers. Families still feel "lucky" when teachers inform them about and involve them in activities with their children.

Davies' intensive work with two schools reveals key components that could be instituted immediately by just about all schools to ensure involvement for all families, including a more useful and more equitable distribution of information and assistance. He summarizes new directions and new definitions that can help schools begin to move in the right direction.

Other school initiatives have followed paths similar to those in Davies' demonstration sites. In our own development and evaluation activities in the Baltimore

## MANY SCHOOLS ARE FINDING THAT MUCH CAN BE DONE TO HELP FAMILIES WORK WITH THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME.

School and Family Connections project, involving five elementary and three middle schools, we have found that over a three-year period schools with little parent involvement and high barriers to communication can make notable progress. In our project, we are working with schools; a local community foundation, and the Lilly Endowment to develop programs of parent involvement, to evaluate their efforts, and to improve their practices over time. So far, we have gathered a good deal of information on successful orientation programs, home learning activities, and newsletters at the elementary and middle levels.\*

### WHAT WE KNOW AND DON'T KNOW

The articles in this special section reveal many accessible, reproducible, and adaptable practices, along with several key themes.

- Programs at all levels reveal similarities between parents and educators where differences were once assumed. Parents and teachers are finding that they share common goals and need to share more information if they are to reach those goals.

- Programs must continue across the years of childhood and adolescence. Educators and policy makers, who may once

have thought that family involvement was an issue only in the early years of schooling, now recognize the importance of school/family connections through the high school grades.

- Programs must include all families. The examples in this special section show that leaders at the national, state, district, and school levels are working to involve all families in the education of their children, including those considered by some schools to be hard to reach.

- Programs make teachers' jobs easier and make them more successful with students. In visits to several schools, Shepherd Zeldin found that "those teachers who allocated time for collaboration rarely expressed hesitation in working with poor parents, were motivated to go beyond policy directives, and concluded that working with parents improved the teachers' effectiveness."

- Program development is not quick. The examples reveal the long time and the sensitive work that are required for real progress in partnerships: 15 years and counting in Indianapolis; seven years in McAllen, Texas; more than three years of activities in San Diego; three years for developing a state policy in California; and between two and three years to see small but real steps in the Schools Reaching Out demonstration sites, in the projects funded by grants in Illinois, and in the Baltimore School and Family Connections project.

- Grants encourage unusually productive behaviors in teachers and administrators who might otherwise feel that they lack the time to initiate partnerships with families and communities. Benefits are evident with both small and large grants (as small as \$200 or as large as \$30,000) across all levels of schooling. The larger investments, however, are more likely to ensure principals' commitment and leadership — and schoolwide change.

- Family/school coordinators (under whatever title) may be crucial to the success of school, district, and state programs to link schools, parents, and communities. Coordinators guide school staffs, provide inservice training for educators, offer services to parents, and perform other tasks that promote partnerships.

- Programs should literally make room for parents. "Parent rooms" or "clubs" in school buildings or "parent centers" in the

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community are important ways of making parents feel welcome. In these sites, parents share and discuss ideas, obtain information and resources (including borrowing print materials and video- and audiotapes), learn from each other about family problems and solutions, and so on.

• Even with rooms for parents, practices need to emphasize reaching and involving families without requiring them to come frequently to the school. Along with structures to involve a few families as volunteers or in decision-making roles, many schools are finding that much can be done to help families work with their own children at home to help them do better in school. Once considered the most difficult type of involvement, this is becoming the most relevant kind of involvement for families, schools, and student learning.

• In the 1990s technology can help improve many types of involvement. This includes radio, television, video- and audiotapes, computers, and other electronic connections between home and school, some of which offer the possibility of two-way communication.

• There are still vast gaps in our knowledge that can only be filled by rigorous research and evaluation of particular types of school/family connections in support of children's learning. We need both formal studies and clear documentation of existing practices.

#### IS IT WORTH THE COST?

How much is it worth to have twice or 10 times the number of families working with the schools as knowledgeable partners, helping students meet school goals, solving the problems that impede progress, building traditions of partnership? Most educators have not come to grips with this question.

As Nardine and Morris note, present allocations for program development and evaluation in the states are meager. The examples in this special section suggest that a variety of levels of investment can support successful partnership programs. We see examples that range from \$200 for one teacher (Davies) to \$30,000 for one school (Chapman) to more than \$100,000 for districts (San Diego, Indianapolis, and some of the grants through FIRST).

Putting it all together, it seems that a

## THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR NOT TAKING THE FIRST SURE STEPS DOWN ONE OF THE MANY PATHS TO PARTNERSHIP.

modest allocation of \$25 per student per year at the school level would establish a viable program of school/family connections. This level of support would cover the cost of a coordinator, small grants within the school for teacher-designed practices, evaluation and reporting costs, and other relatively minor expenses. In addition, \$10 per pupil at the district level and \$5 per pupil at the state level would establish a three-tiered supportive structure that recognizes that every teacher and administrator in every school, every day, makes direct or indirect contact with the families of every student. These continuous connections require investments in planned programs for successful partnerships.

Another way to look at the levels of support required is to consider that, realistically, there should be at least one full-time position dedicated to coordinating and facilitating parent involvement in each state, one in each district, and one in each school or small group of schools. There should also be ongoing, multi-year grants to encourage and reward innovative activities designed to link educators and families. A state investment might start at about \$100,000, a district-level program might begin at \$50,000, and a school-level program might begin in the \$15,000 to \$30,000 range.

As suggested by several examples in this special section, these costs can be shared through the innovative application of federal, state, and local resources. The investments may, of course, be greater than the modest amounts I've proposed, and they may need to be increased over time or as the results of particular programs become known.

Today, most schools embrace the concept of partnership, but few have translated their beliefs into plans or their plans into practice. Sometimes educators feel that it is simply impossible to jump the hurdles, remove the barriers, and solve the real problems that prevent them from viewing families as resources for promoting children's learning. The contributions to this *Kappan* special section suggest that this view is too pessimistic. Shared vision and concerted effort have led to a variety of successful programs to connect schools, families, and communities. There is no excuse for not taking the first sure steps down one of the many paths to partnership.

1. The Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning is a consortium of higher education institutions made up of Boston University, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Illinois at Champaign, Yale University, Wheelock College, and the Institute for Responsive Education.
2. Don Lueder, "Tennessee Parents Were Invited to Participate and They Did," *Educational Leadership*, October 1989, pp. 8-11.
3. Washington State Department of Education, Regulation WAC 180-79-130, Professional Preparation, 10 June 1986, pp. 8-9.
4. There are five reports on the Baltimore School and Family Connections project, 1989-90: Joyce L. Epstein and Susan C. Herrick, "Reactions of Parents and Students to Summer Home Learning Packets in the Middle Grades" and "Reactions of Parents to Newsletters in the Middle Grades"; and Susan C. Herrick and Joyce L. Epstein, "Reactions of Parents, Students, and Teachers to Orientation Days in Middle School," "Reactions of Parents and Teachers to Reading Activity Packets in the Primary Grades," and "Reactions of Parents to Newsletters in the Elementary Grades." All the reports are available from the Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students at Johns Hopkins University.
5. Shepherd Zeldin, "Implementation of Home-School-Community Policies," *Equity and Choice*, Vol. 6, 1990, pp. 56-67. Other researchers have reached similar conclusions. See, for example, James P. Comer, "New Haven's School-Community Connection," *Educational Leadership*, March 1987, pp. 13-16; Janice Earle, *Restructuring Seattle's Middle Schools* (Alexandria, Va.: National Association of State Boards of Education, 1989); and Jean Krasnow, "Building New Parent-Teacher Partnerships: Teacher Research Teams Stimulate Reflection," *Equity and Choice*, vol. 6, 1990, pp. 25-30. K

# Chapter 1

## A Catalyst for Improving Parent Involvement

*Schools and districts seeking to improve communications with families should look to the successful strategies of Chapter 1 programs, Ms. D'Angelo and Mr. Adler suggest.*

BY DIANE A. D'ANGELO AND  
C. RALPH ADLER

**T**HE "TELEPHONE game" offers a good example of how a message changes as it is filtered through multiple perspectives and interpretations. As the game is played in the classroom, the teacher whispers a message to one child, who whispers it to a second child, and so on, until the message reaches the last child. Usually, it bears little resemblance to what the teacher originally said.

Imagine what would happen if the first child had a hearing problem, the second child could barely speak English, and the third child did not want to believe the message. By the time the message had completed such a circuit of the room, neither the language nor the content of the message would be intelligible.

Whenever human beings try to communicate with one another, natural barriers exist, and a school trying to com-

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municate with parents is no exception. But these barriers must be broken down if schools are to involve parents meaningfully in their children's education. After many decades of limited success, schools are now beginning to put more thought into their communication with parents, knowing that the initial contacts can make or break relationships and that first contacts often affect later communication. Communication is like a magnet that draws together the "spheres of influence" that affect children's lives: school, home, community, and the peer group.<sup>1</sup>

In dozens of school systems around the country, evidence is growing that extra care in fashioning and maintaining channels of communication between schools and families is paying off.<sup>2</sup> Underlying these new and more responsive approaches is the recognition that any parent may be "hard to reach" at times. Thus it is not possible to design a single method of communication that will always reach all parents. Too many variables interfere, including parents' level of literacy; language preferred for reading, listening, speaking, and writing; daily commitments and responsibilities that may affect the time, energy, and attention available to devote to school; and parents' level of comfort in becoming involved in their children's education. Such community factors as ethnic and neighborhood diversity, cultural beliefs, and history of parent involvement may multiply the barriers to effective communication between schools and homes.

Most schools and school systems that are making strides in parent involvement began by working to understand how and when parents may be hard to reach. Then

they fine-tuned their communication to respond to the qualities, characteristics, and needs of the parents. In the more successful cases, this has meant creating, selecting, pilot testing, evaluating, revising, and fine-tuning practices many times until acceptable levels of communication are achieved.

Chapter 1 has always required the involvement of parents, and the Hawkins-Stafford School Improvement Amendments of 1988 reaffirmed this commitment. The new regulations governing Chapter 1 renew the emphasis on parent involvement in general and broaden the definition of parent involvement to promote more comprehensive programs. Under these new regulations, many Chapter 1 programs have been thoughtfully analyzing the range of parent interests, energies, ideas, needs, cultures, languages, and lifestyles that are represented in their schools and communities in order to design activities and programs that will draw parents into the education of their children. The new Chapter 1 regulations require programs to assess their own effectiveness in increasing parent involvement and so may be a catalyst for developing more extensive, creative, and responsive programs.

The examples that follow are drawn from Chapter 1 programs across the country that have taken significant steps toward building better communications with the very families that many other schools find hard to reach. These successful efforts to remove barriers between school and home may help other schools or systems take the first steps in a tough but rewarding process. The examples of communication strategies fall into three main categories: face-to-face.

technological, and written communication.

#### FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

New (or renewed) interest in parent involvement has not been around long enough to have developed "conventional" wisdom — but, if there were some, it would be that person-to-person communication is best. Well-planned parent/teacher conferences and home visits are usually successful in removing barriers and building healthy home/school relationships.

The Chapter 1 program in Lima, Ohio,

has as a main goal the establishment of a personal relationship with every parent. The face-to-face meeting goes directly to the heart of parents' role in helping their children do better in school. At an initial parent/teacher conference, parents are given a packet that will help them engage in learning activities with their children at home. Lima's conferences, regular phone calls, and home visits set a tone for mutual understanding that makes other kinds of communication (progress reports, report cards, activity calendars, or discussions about problems that arise during the year) more welcome and more successful.

Many schools around the country are establishing parent centers that serve a variety of purposes: not only do they allow person-to-person contact between parents and teachers, but they also give parents materials and information to take home and serve as places for parents to practice new skills and meet other parents. Buffalo's Chapter 1 Parent Resource Center, for example, is located in a convenient downtown area (though not in a school). Parents are invited to drop in to review resource materials or to take part in workshops. Students and families from all the Buffalo schools take part in such ongoing activities as Reading with the Stars, a program in which sports figures, television personalities, or other local celebrities read stories to children while parents meet separately with Chapter 1 staff members to discuss effective strategies for reading to and with their children. Each parent then selects a book to give to his or her own child as a gift. Refreshments and the distribution of T-shirts with the program logo top off the day.

Also in Buffalo, a computer lending program brings parents to the Chapter 1 Parent Resource Center for training in computer use as a prelude to borrowing a computer to use at home for up to eight weeks. Parents learn how to select and use software that meets the needs of individual students. Adult education programs are also conducted in the computer lab. The center has the support of the local schools, and the assistant superintendent is a frequent participant at the center.

The Natchez/Adams (Mississippi) Chapter 1 program has a parent center that serves two primary, two elementary, one middle, and two nonpublic schools. The center works continually to make education a part of parents' lives and to enable parents to work more effectively with their children. The process begins when parents receive forms from their children's teachers that outline the skills that their children need to practice. Parents bring these forms to the parent center and are trained in the use of instructional materials to help their children. Once the initial materials have been used, parents can return to the center and check out other materials on their own.

The Migrant Education State Parent Advisory Council in New York has also



made great strides in bringing parents and teachers face to face, especially through a series of workshops on such topics as dealing with stress, parent empowerment, parent involvement in schools, and improving a child's self-image. Many parents have gone on from participation in these workshops to become trainers who conduct the workshops for other parents in their own districts.

#### TAPPING TECHNOLOGY

Many Chapter 1 programs are finding new ways to use electronic communications to make contact with a wider range of parents. In McAllen, Texas, the school district has created a community partnership with local radio stations, and it sponsors "Discusiones Escolares," a weekly program in Spanish that deals with various topics and seeks to encourage parents to become more involved in their children's education. Family and school re-

lationships, parent involvement at school, preventing school dropouts, communicating with teenagers, and creating a learning atmosphere at home are some of the topics that this radio program has addressed. Parents and others in the community may check out copies of the script or a cassette tape of each program from the parent coordinators at their schools. The efforts of the McAllen school system to foster parent involvement — not just for Chapter 1 families — have been extensive and are detailed in the sidebar below.

Educators are also catching on to the public's comfort with videotape. Videotapes of workshops, meetings, or Chapter 1 tutoring sessions give parents who cannot come to school for those events an opportunity to observe the activities firsthand. Poudre School District in Fort Collins, Colorado, produced a videotape titled "Reading Aloud to Children," which features parents and children of

various ages demonstrating practical techniques for improving and enjoying family reading. The tape was designed to stimulate discussion in parent groups or for individual parents to use as a resource at home. To accommodate the diverse population in the community, the tape is available in English and Spanish.

The telephone is also being used in better ways to reach out to parents. School districts such as San Diego and Indianapolis have established homework hotlines for students and parents. In Casey County, Kentucky, some classrooms have been outfitted with portable phones to make it easier for teachers and parents to contact one another. The Chapter 1 program in Omaha, Nebraska, has established a telephone service called the Chapter 1 Talk Box. Each Talk Box caller hears a three-minute message about books and reading. Messages are changed twice a week and correspond with themes and lessons in classrooms. For example,

### Meeting the Challenge In McAllen, Texas

**O**NE OF THE most common problems in schools that provide Chapter 1 services is developing a strong, coherent parent involvement program for the school as a whole, while at the same time conducting programs for students eligible for Chapter 1 services. This problem often leads schools to develop programs that separate families eligible for Chapter 1 from the rest of the families in the school.

The McAllen Chapter 1 program offers some examples of ways for schools to move beyond simple compliance with federal mandates to involve the parents of Chapter 1 students in order to develop more comprehensive parent involvement efforts that meet federal directives and better serve local needs. For the past seven years the McAllen schools have worked slowly but surely to build stronger school/family connections, combining Chapter 1 support with other support for school improvement and with local investment.

The task has not been easy. The community is mainly Hispanic, and many re-

cent immigrants and migrant families have little or no proficiency in English. Over the past seven years, under the leadership of Superintendent Pablo Perez, the McAllen program has changed in important ways in an effort to involve all parents.

The district's parent involvement programs were initially administered under federally funded projects, such as bilingual education or Chapter 1. When Perez became superintendent, he began to broaden parent involvement to include all parents, not just those eligible for specific federal programs. This required increasing the district's investment in school and family activities. The district budget for parent involvement tripled, and parent involvement in McAllen is no longer supported solely by federal funds.

The staff has grown from one parent coordinator for Chapter 1 services to the current five parent coordinators and several federally funded community aides. The position of "facilitator" was created at each building to help with instructional leadership and so free the principals to spend more time directly involved with parents and parent activities.

To expand the base of support for parent involvement, Perez encouraged the formation of school/community partnerships. Today, each school has at least

one community partner that provides resources (e.g., donations, volunteers, in-kind services, etc.) to support school programs and children's learning. More than 200 businesses and other community partners contribute in this way. Not long ago, two bond issues for new schools passed easily — in part because of greater community awareness of school needs.

Parent involvement is now an explicit goal of the district. All support personnel for parent involvement are supervised at the district level by a centrally located administrator for educational support services and not isolated under a coordinator of federal projects. In practice, this means that the district has integrated its parent involvement efforts into its regular school program.

All parents of children in McAllen schools may become involved in five major types of activities: parent education programs, school/home and home/school communications, opportunities to volunteer for school projects, helping their own children at home, and activity in the parent/teacher organization.

Most staff members involved with parent activities are bilingual or are making efforts to become bilingual so that they can communicate better with students and their families. At each school, the parent/student handbook is provided in both

one week a poem titled "Now That Days Are Colder" was heard by callers in response to one classroom teacher's question, "How do chipmunks, robins, and frogs spend the winter?"

#### THE WRITTEN WORD

The written word has historically been the main medium of communication between home and school on school policies, programs, and curriculum. But the form and format of written information can vary greatly, depending on the needs of families and the ingenuity of the school.

The Chapter 1 program in Omaha publishes a monthly newsletter that highlights home activities that are coordinated with classroom activities. Every month's issue of the newsletter reports on the meeting of the parent advisory council and gives information about the Chapter 1 program and how parents can get involved.

The monthly newsletters also focus on classroom themes. For example, children were asked, "What do you miss most when the cold north wind starts to blow?" As a related activity, parents were urged to save the tops of the carrots they cooked for dinner and to place them in a shallow pan of water near a sunny window. The family could then watch the ferns sprout from the carrot tops. Parents were encouraged to talk with their children about what they saw happening as the plants grew.

In addition to the newsletter, a Chapter 1 calendar is published each year. As an added bonus, Omaha Chapter 1 students and parents are offered many opportunities for extra learning throughout the year. During school vacations, for example, Chapter 1 students receive "The Sizzler" — a packet of learning materials for the entire family to use at home.

Chapter 1 schools in Cahokia, Illinois, distribute a newsletter that includes stu-

dent writing, notices of parent meetings, and activities that parents and children can do at home together. In addition, Cahokia has put together a handbook for parents titled *How to Help Your Child Learn*. This handbook includes practical suggestions on such topics as ways to help children pay attention, ways to develop their self-concept, and ways to say "good for you."

In a similar effort, the Chapter 1 program in Palatine, Illinois, distributes a quarterly newsletter to parents (available in Spanish for bilingual families) that is designed to highlight the writings of Chapter 1 students. Parents eagerly read their children's contributions. A small section of the newsletter carries news of coming events of interest to parents, such as a workshop featuring Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook*.

Some written materials have been developed that are designed to reach larger audiences of parents than those with-

English and Spanish versions.

Several special populations are still targeted for parent involvement services related to federally funded programs. Families benefit from community aides, home visits, evening family study centers, computer-assisted language programs, and programs on parenting skills and other topics. However, many of these services are paid for by combining sources of funding so that all parents may participate. When migrant families, families with limited proficiency in English, or Chapter 1 families participate in parent involvement activities, they do so knowing that the district is encouraging similar involvement from all families.

Each principal is responsible for the design and direction of a school's program because parent involvement must be primarily a building-level activity. For example, at one school the parent/teacher organization trains parents and other volunteers to run a self-esteem program for students in the school. This program was initiated and implemented by parents, though it is supported by the administration and the teaching staff.

Several schools have set aside space for parents to use as meeting rooms or workrooms for volunteers. School buildings, community buildings, and even some family homes are used to accommodate

a variety of meetings and events that involve parents in the education of their children.

Parents are encouraged to attend parent/teacher conferences, evening open-house events, and other meetings. Child-care and, in some cases, transportation (e.g., for Chapter 1 parents) are regularly provided. For those who cannot attend, a home visit is encouraged. Indeed, some Chapter 1 funds in McAllen are used to hire parent liaisons. While district staff members, including teachers, make some home visits, the parent liaisons visit families new to the district as well as those who have not come to school or have not responded to attempts to contact them. The parent liaisons bring information directly to these parents and introduce them to the local parent center and to the variety of services and activities that are available to them.

A junior high school principal who believes that the best strategy for dealing with parents is to meet them face to face gives teachers two planning periods a day during which they may confer with parents or set up appointments for meetings at other times. In other schools in the district, administrators teach classes while teachers conduct home visits during the day; the principal of one school conducts the home visits himself.

Parent involvement in McAllen is not solely a district effort. "Parent and community involvement" is one of six program improvement objectives of the state, and interest and investment in parent involvement in McAllen have "filtered down" from the state level and "bubbled up" from individual buildings.

McAllen's district slogan is: "All children can learn, and together we can make a difference." Parents, schools, and the community at large have shared the responsibility for making the state goal a reality. McAllen's district staff now estimates that nearly 99% of parents have some productive contact with their children's schools. The staff is working to reach the other 1% and to continue to improve the level, extent, and quality of involvement for all families.

The approach to parent involvement taken by the schools in McAllen may be adapted to the local conditions of any district or school. Yet doing so will take time and continued commitment. Comprehensive programs to involve parents will require long-term leadership and some additional resources, but Chapter 1 and other categorical programs can be combined and coordinated with local initiatives to promote school/family partnerships that can make a difference. — DAD'A

in a single school district. The Oregon State Parent Advisory Panel has developed a booklet for parents titled *Parent Involvement: The Critical Link*. This booklet is designed to meet the growing need for information to guide parents and schools in their cooperative efforts to help each child reach his or her full potential. It highlights various forms of parent involvement and the associated responsibilities of the school and of parents.

Another such resource is *Pizzas, Pennies, and Pumpkin Seeds*, a book of mathematical activities for parents and children that is produced by the Chapter 1 office of the Colorado Department of Education. The activities presented in this book encourage parents and children to explore uses of mathematics in everyday life.

The key to creating effective written materials is the presentation and the reading level of the materials. The following tips, from Push Literacy Action Now of Washington, D.C., may help educators develop better written information for parents.

- Keep sentences short. Try to keep sentences to 10 or fewer words, and never allow them to include more than 20 words.

- Keep paragraphs short. Try to keep paragraphs to an average of six lines.

- Use easy words. Let the short, familiar words bear the main burden of getting your point across. Use big words or technical terms when only those words will express a message accurately.

- Get to the point. State the purpose of your message up front and omit irrelevant information.

- Write things in logical order. The newspaper formula of "who, what, where, when, why, and how" is helpful as an organizing device.

- Be definite. Don't hedge. Be careful with such words as *seems, may, perhaps, possibly, generally, usually, and apparently*. Give a clear picture of what you want to say.

- Be direct. Speak to each reader. Say "you should" or "please do" instead of "parents should."

- Use the active voice more often than the passive. Put the subject at the beginning of the sentence. For example, write "Please sign and return the consent slip if you want your child to go on the trip

to the zoo," rather than "A consent slip must be signed by the parent in order for the child to attend the field trip to the zoo."

- Use pictures and subheads. A page of solid text looks like a sea of gray, and readers tend to drown in it. A gray page discourages readers before they begin. Pictures and subheads break up the page and give clues to what is important. Bold print can also help to highlight important words or phrases.

- Watch type size and the use of capital letters. For easy reading, use at least 12-point type, and don't overuse capitals. Too many capital letters are hard to read, even for good readers. A good rule of thumb is: when in doubt, use lower-case letters.

- Know your audience. Ask yourself, For whom is the material being written, and how well does the audience read? If you aren't sure, test your materials on a few people representative of the target audience. When in doubt, assume that there are at least some poor readers in your audience.

- Know yourself. Be yourself. Write as you would talk, and write to express — not to impress.

- Write and rewrite. Write a draft, then read it over. How long are the sentences? How many long words have you used? Have you used the passive voice a great deal? Are there unexplained technical words? Have you used jargon or abbreviations that your audience may not know? Can you say the same thing more clearly, more succinctly, or more interestingly? Ask someone else to read what you've written. Then rewrite it.

#### GENERAL ADVICE

Chapter 1 programs across the country work hard to communicate with families and to build partnerships between home and school. Here are some general rules of thumb that they have learned — and that may help other educators not involved with Chapter 1 — to improve communications.

- Communication strategies for individual schools should be adapted to match the needs of families. For example, some material will need to be translated into other languages or put in alternative formats (e.g., audio- or videocassettes) to meet the needs of parents who do not

speaking English or who cannot read.

- Materials must reach the intended audience. Some schools designate the same day each week or each month as "message day," to help parents know when to ask their children for information from school. Other schools put important communications on brightly colored paper so that parents can easily spot them among their children's papers.

- Parent meetings and workshops are most successful when they include food, family, and fun. But some parents will be unable to attend even when the times of events are varied, transportation and child care are provided, and parents have input into the choice of topic. If a meeting, workshop, presentation, assembly, or other event presents information deemed essential for parents, then the schools must find other ways to get that information to those who cannot be there. For example, schools may videotape a workshop or send a short summary home in the next newsletter.

- Don't wait for a problem to arise before contacting parents. "Good news" telephone calls and notes establish a tone of shared celebration and help set the stage for ongoing communication.

The Chapter 1 programs discussed here have found new potential in their parent involvement efforts by following some variation of a basic recipe: combine the needs of a specific parent audience with creative ideas for generating activities, and blend in an understanding of good communication. An awareness of the range of parent interests, energies, ideas, needs, cultures, languages, and lifestyles must come before programs are developed and activities designed. From this common recipe come programs that differ widely, but all are the result of a judicious mix of careful thought, home-grown creativity, and professional ingenuity.

1. Joyce L. Epstein, "School and Family Connections: Theory, Research, and Implications for Integrating Sociologies of Education and Family," in Donald G. Unger and Marvin B. Sussman, eds., *Families in Community Settings: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Haworth Press, 1990), pp. 99-126.

2. Janet Chrispeels, Marcia Boruta, and Mary Daugherty, *Communicating with Parents* (San Diego: San Diego County Office of Education, 1988).

# The Illinois Experience

## State Grants to Improve Schools Through Parent Involvement

*In Illinois, Urban Education Partnership Grants have funded demonstration projects that effectively serve the dual goals of school improvement and parent involvement. Mr. Chapman provides the details.*

BY WARREN CHAPMAN

**I**N THE SUMMER of 1987 the Illinois State Board of Education established a major program objective for 1987 through 1991: that the board "adopt, strengthen, and expand policies, procedures, and programs which address the problems of at-risk children and youth." Six areas of emphasis were identified under this objective: early intervention, early childhood education, minority achievement, urban education, truancy prevention, and alternative education.

In order to address these areas in new ways, the board simultaneously created the Urban Education Partnership Grants program. Because the needs of today's students have become so complex that they are outstripping the services of the agencies and schools that were created to serve them, collaborative partnerships must be established that involve schools, families, businesses, social service agencies, and other groups in an effort to coordinate resources, solve problems, and provide more chances for student

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success. Urban Partnership Grants are designed to enable schools with high concentrations of at-risk students to develop and implement new strategies to meet the multifaceted needs of these youngsters.

Money from Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 is used to fund the grants. A unique feature of these grants is that they are school-based and require the participation of the principal, the school staff, the parents, and a variety of partners from the community.

#### RATIONALE

For more than three decades, we have assigned schools a myriad of tasks — including, but not limited to, developing students' academic achievement, helping individuals contribute to and flourish in society, enhancing social equality and social progress, and increasing understanding of cultural diversity. Historically, schools have been granted a great deal of autonomy in carrying out these tasks. Society did not challenge the schools as long as it seemed that the assigned tasks were being accomplished satisfactorily. For decades schools have succeeded or failed with only minimal input and assistance from the families, communities, and businesses they serve.

Today, however, the tasks assigned to schools and the public's expectations for them have changed dramatically. In addition to the earlier requirements, we now ask schools to Americanize immigrants, to delay the entry of young people into the labor market, to serve as custodians of children during certain hours of the day, to help desegregate society, to battle drug abuse, to improve the health of students, and to solve a variety of other social problems.

Though we have expanded the responsibility of the public schools to provide social services to students and their families, we have failed to supply additional resources to fund these new services. Several national groups have recognized the complexity of the problems facing today's schools and have acknowledged that the resources of the schools alone are insufficient to deal with them. Recent statements from the Council of the Great City Schools, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the Education Commission of the States have called the coor-

## INNOVATION AND HARD WORK CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD SOLVING THE PROBLEMS AND RESOLVING THE ISSUES RELATED TO URBAN SCHOOLS.

dination of children's services, especially in urban areas, a top national priority. These groups are encouraging schools in urban areas to forge more effective connections with social service agencies, community-based organizations, and businesses.

The development of these links will take a great deal of effort, because both the schools and the social service agencies are accustomed to operating autonomously. To date, connections between schools, families, and other community groups have been few in number and inconsistent in quality.

#### URBAN EDUCATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Illinois school reform program of 1985 established goals and strategies designed to improve educational outcomes. One major goal was to improve the education of students who reside in the state's urban communities. Although all schools needed to work to improve their programs and increase their students' chances for success, it was clear that education reform in urban school districts had to take different forms because of the size, complexity, demography, and other characteristics of urban centers.

While the problems that face urban schools are severe and the issues complex, innovation and hard work can go a long way toward solving the problems and resolving the issues.

During the 1987-88 school year the state board in Illinois began to foster urban school reform by awarding grants to demonstration programs through the Urban Education Partnership Grants program. Three major principles guide the program.

- Problems facing urban schools can be solved through collaboration and partnership between the schools and business, government, social service agencies, and community groups. Therefore, efforts should be made to improve the communication and cooperation of schools with other government offices and agencies, including those dealing with housing, health, and welfare at the state, county, and municipal levels. Schools should also be encouraged to communicate and cooperate with parents and with institutions in the private sector that are concerned with a well-educated citizenry.

- The objectives, programs, and practices supported by the grants must enhance educational equity. This principle establishes a firm commitment to integration, recognizes the pluralism of society and of the student body, and encourages diversity, options, and choices. It is intended to help restore public confidence in the schools' ability to provide educational services to a diverse student population through programs that respond to the cultures of the students served.

- Nationwide networking with other agencies and institutions is essential for information sharing, data collection, and resource development. Programs and practices that have been successful in a single urban school district should be recognized and shared with other districts. The grant program also encourages continuous evaluation of programs and practices and the reporting of findings to the public.

During the past three years, more than 30 two-year projects were funded by the Urban Education Partnership Grants program. The grants (ranging in value to a maximum of \$30,000 per year) were awarded directly to schools, not to districts, and all were designed to support programs and activities that focus on im-



proving student outcomes. The principals, as the project directors, identified the needs in their schools and, with input from parents and teachers, proposed programs to address those needs at the school level.

The projects were to be evaluated by objective measures of outcomes, including (but not limited to) improved student attendance, higher standardized test scores, improved grades, increased parent involvement, and decreased discipline problems. Each school that applied for a grant proposed a design for an educational program to improve outcomes through a collaborative effort or partnership involving at least one parent or community group, social service agency, government agency, or business. The grants were awarded to schools according to how well the applicants explained their partnerships and how well the proposed partnerships addressed the pressing intellectual and social needs of youngsters at risk of failing. Members of the staff of the state board of education provided technical assistance.

#### PARTNERSHIPS AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Partnerships promote links between institutions that make each stronger than it is on its own. But partnerships also give the community new insights into the problems and successes of educators and provide opportunities for parents and other citizens to make meaningful contributions to the schools. Many partnerships promote home/school interaction and enable principals and teachers to make better use of external resources.

The work of Joyce Epstein was seminal in establishing parent involvement guidelines for the Urban Education Partnership Grants program. Epstein has documented how important it is for state departments to foster meaningful parent involvement programs in schools by providing both financial and technical support.<sup>1</sup>

School districts and school administrators are strongly influenced by state policies, guidelines, and funding for educational programs. Through their policies and actions, state agencies either recognize or ignore the connections between the educational and socializing institutions in children's lives, particularly fam-

ilies and schools. Illinois wanted to emphasize that the quality of family/school connections can dramatically affect the academic and social development of children.

Staff members with the Illinois program encouraged all schools applying for grants to take into account the five elements of Epstein's model of parent involvement:

- basic obligations of families, including health, safety, and a positive home environment;
- basic obligations of schools, including communication with parents regarding their child's programs and progress;
- parent involvement at school, including volunteer activities and support for sports, student performances, and other activities;
- parent involvement in learning activities at home, including supervising homework and helping children work on skills that will help them learn in the classroom; and
- parent involvement in governance, decision making, and advocacy, including participation in parent/teacher organizations and in various decision-making and advisory roles.<sup>2</sup>

A majority of the programs that have been funded by the Illinois Urban Education Partnership Grants program have included one or more types of parent involvement, as illustrated in the examples described below.

**Project A.** School A is an inner-city elementary school. Most of its students are Hispanic, and most have limited skills in speaking and writing English. Histor-

ically, students at School A scored below grade level on written and verbal sections of the district's standardized tests. Parent involvement at the school had been limited, mainly because the school was unable to involve parents creatively in meaningful activities.

The school applied for and was awarded an Urban Partnership Grant. The main focus of its proposal was to improve the language and writing skills of students in the primary grades through a whole-language approach.

The grant included support for students to go on field trips to museums, to the zoo, and to other educational events. A group of parents accompanied the students and teachers on these trips. After the trips, the students returned to the school and told stories of their experiences to the parents, who encouraged children to give as much detail as possible and who acted as scribes, writing down what the children said in Spanish or in English. Parents who were not able to participate in the field trips were encouraged to write down stories for their own children at home. Each child's dictated work was collected throughout the year in a portfolio.

By the end of the school year, one could see that in virtually every instance students were telling stories of their experiences in greater detail, using larger vocabularies, and creating sentences that were more complex than had been the case at the beginning of the school year. In addition, parents who were involved in this program improved their own vocabularies and writing skills. Most im-



*"I think it all started back in the third grade when my dog ate my report."*

portant, parents learned how to assist their own children in learning at home. Teachers and parents learned how to work together in ways that improved the academic achievement of students.

**Project B.** School B is a suburban junior high school with a racially diverse student body. For several years, test scores of students at the school had been declining. Only about 40% of the students turned in assigned homework. Although parents were concerned about the education of their children, the school conducted few activities that allowed parents to help with their children's education.

The project funded by the school's Urban Partnership Grant focused on raising students' test scores and improving their report card grades. The project had three main components. First, it established a homework lab that was available to students two days a week. Three classroom teachers were on hand to give assistance when needed, and students learned to help one another with assignments. Targeted students were assigned to the lab by their teachers, but many other students chose to attend the lab to do their homework, rather than to go home to an empty house. As time passed, the homework lab became more and more popular. Soon it was the "in" place to be — and not just for students. Teachers also started to stay after school when it became clear that the students wanted individualized help.

The second component of School B's project was the establishment of "improvement contracts" for individual students. Each participating student met with a counselor to draw up a contract setting the goal of raising report card grades in three subject areas. The contract was then signed by the student, the teacher or teachers involved, and the student's parent(s). These contracts proved very influential in establishing meaningful communication between teachers and parents. The structure they established gave parents a reason to monitor both homework and schoolwork regularly. Parents, teachers, and students received immediate feedback about the students' academic progress.

The third phase of the project was the most distinctive. Since 90% of School B's students had VCRs in their homes, the school produced instructional videotapes

in cooperation with the local cable company. This joint venture resulted in two series of tapes: a video bank of "critical lessons" and a parent education series.

The parent education tapes showed parents effective ways to motivate their children to learn. For example, one tape concentrated on teaching parents to observe their children's study habits and organizational skills. The tape then provided ways to motivate children to improve — other than by yelling, threats, or bribery.

The critical lessons were taped class sessions that students could use as instructional supplements. These videos covered a number of topics in mathematics, English, and social studies, including the U.S. Constitution and how to write a research paper. Each tape allowed students and their parents to view a class and to study the important points of the lesson. This enabled parents to discuss substantive ideas with their children and to become actively involved in their children's learning. This innovative use of new technology acknowledged the fact that many parents cannot come to school to see what their children are learning. Thus the project did the next best thing: it brought the school to the parents.

The Urban Education Partnership Grants program also funded projects at other schools that fostered and documented parent involvement of various kinds. For example, throughout the year at one school, a "welcome wagon" gave parents new to the school information about the school, about their children's grade levels, and about ways to become involved in their children's education. Home visits by the principal and other staff members and parent-to-parent exchanges also brought information about the school directly into parents' homes.

Some funded projects helped to improve school newsletters; others provided translators for parents who did not understand English well. Still other projects made use of the telephone as a way of communicating with parents. One school used trained parent volunteers in a homework center, and several schools organized parent volunteers to work in classrooms with at-risk students or with those lacking proficiency in English. Parent volunteers in some schools served as translators at meetings of the parent/teacher organization.

#### WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The Illinois experience with the awarding of sizable, multi-year, competitive grants may prove helpful to other states. Through the use of grant-funded demonstration projects that design, implement, and evaluate combined approaches to school improvement and parent involvement, we have learned valuable lessons about altering the practices of the participating schools and those of other schools that benefit from the experience at the demonstration sites.

First, we learned that multi-year grants are important. Most state grants are awarded for a single year, but it often takes longer than a year to see progress in improving urban schools and involving parents. With support that lasts longer, the schools are able to establish and stabilize their programs.

We also learned that it is important to consider multiple outcomes, not just scores on achievement tests. Improving scores on achievement tests takes longer than improving other measures of school success, such as attendance, discipline, report card grades, level of parent involvement, and so on.

The funded programs were highly successful. The grants energized the schools that received them and helped increase parent involvement over the course of the grant periods. Outside evaluators hired by the Illinois State Board of Education to determine whether the schools were meeting their stated goals confirmed that parent involvement affected student achievement and that many more parents had become involved with their children's education as a result of the schools' efforts.<sup>1</sup> The evaluators interviewed people in 20 of the schools that received grants and collected quantitative and qualitative data that showed that 87% of the schools in the program accomplished more than 90% of their stated goals. This evidence that such low-cost strategies yield relatively high returns is very encouraging.

1. Joyce L. Epstein, "Parent Involvement: State Education Agencies Should Lead the Way," *Community Education Journal*, vol. 14, 1987, pp. 4-9.

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# California's Policy on Parent Involvement

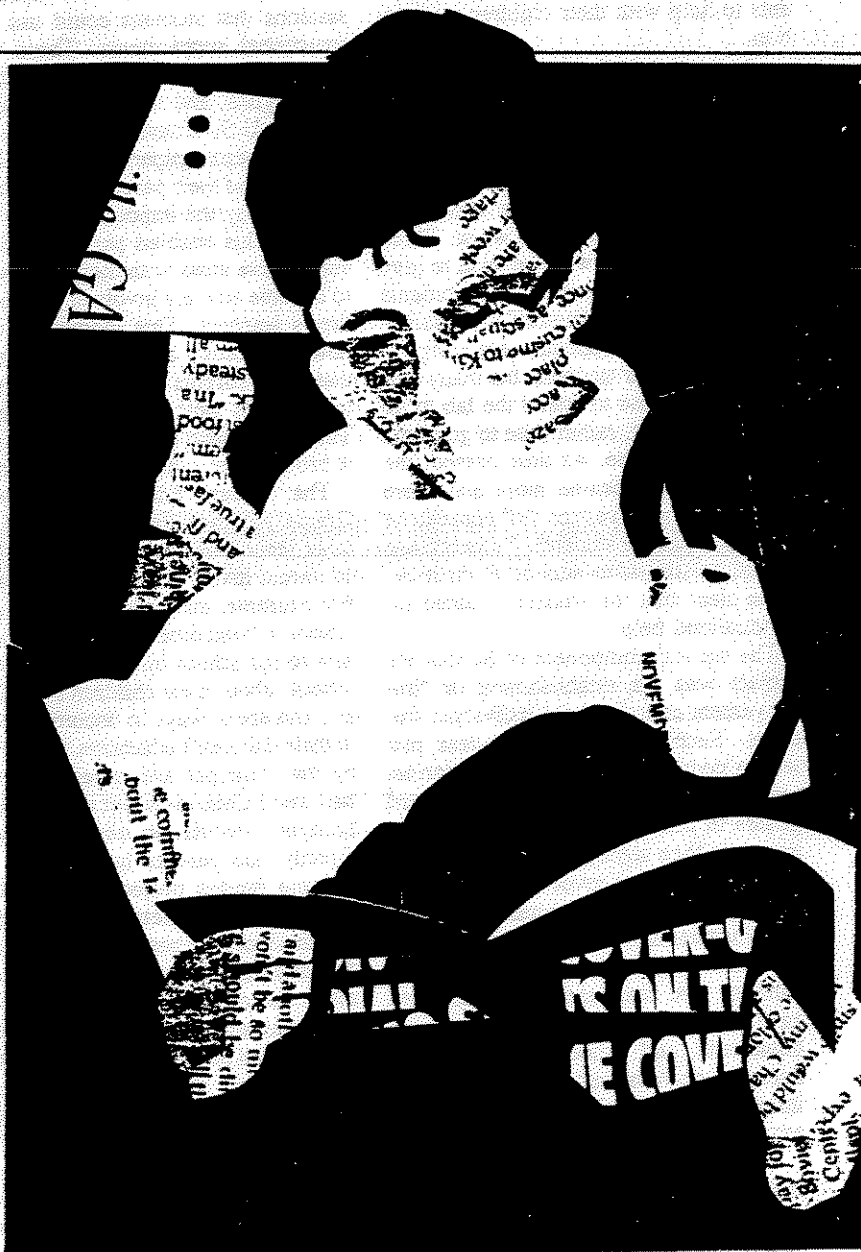
## State Leadership for Local Initiatives

*Ms. Solomon details how California's policy on parent involvement enables districts and schools to develop appropriate programs that support the primary goal of improving student learning.*

BY ZELMA P. SOLOMON

**T**HE SCHOOL reform movement of the 1980s made significant strides in setting goals to improve instruction and to increase student achievement. But most schools still face a great deal of hard work before they actually reach the goals they have set for all students. A critical, but often overlooked, dimension of effective schooling is parent involvement. Research has shown clearly that successful students tend to receive long-term support from parents or other adults at home as well as strong support from teachers and others at school. Effective family/school partnerships may very well be essential for helping more students to reach the ambitious education goals that the nation has set for the year 2000.

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Parent involvement that boosts student learning doesn't just happen. Thoughtful, coordinated plans and systematic actions must integrate parent involvement into school and classroom programs. Such coordination starts with leadership at the state level.

State leadership is exercised *not* by dictating a formula for parent involvement, but rather by *enabling* schools to understand and implement practices that are useful at each site. School leadership enables parents to support their children's academic and social development across the curriculum and across the grades through involvement at the school and involvement in learning activities at home.

State leadership for comprehensive programs of parent involvement recognizes and respects the diversity within and between schools. In turn, school policies, programs, and practices must recognize and respect the diverse attitudes, cultures, skills, and needs of individual families.

State leadership requires more than just a statement of policy. State education agencies demonstrate leadership by carrying out action plans to help local school districts and individual schools develop comprehensive and continuing programs of parent involvement across all grade levels.

In California, the policy on parent involvement was inspired and informed by an earlier initiative on curriculum reform. Thus the parent involvement policy supports the state's major goal of improving student learning.

#### LINKING PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND CURRICULUM REFORM

Strengthening the curriculum is a major goal of education reform in California. The state department urged California educators to come to a professional consensus on the content of a high-quality curriculum — one that teaches critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills to all students. Reviews were conducted, standards for K-8 and secondary schools were developed, frameworks for each discipline were revised, and criteria to assess program quality and curricula were defined. This work preceded the state's attention to parent involvement.

Between February 1988 and May 1990

the "parenting unit" in the state department began a process that was to alter dramatically the relationship between parents and schools in California. The state initiatives designed to involve parents fell into four broad categories: governance, client services, parents as teachers, and parents as parents. Parents involved in governance at the school level provide advice on programs and school policies. Parents involved as clients receive some kind of service. For example, some parents are enrolled in an instructional program in child-rearing. State initiatives that deal with parents as teachers allow parents to serve as instructional aides or classroom volunteers. And initiatives that focus on parents as parents help parents encourage and assist their children at home.

The most common form of parent involvement that the state department promoted was parent participation in governance activities, particularly in activities that fulfilled federal and state requirements for parent representation on school councils. But these governance activities did not directly support the state's primary goals of improving the curriculum and the learning of students.

#### LEARNING FROM RESEARCH

Research on parent involvement consistently shows that parents can make a difference in the quality of their children's education if districts and schools enable them to become involved in education in a variety of ways. Henry Becker and Joyce Epstein have reported that involving parents in learning activities with their children at home is one kind of parent involvement that teachers find particularly useful and that parents frequently request. These activities benefit student learning, probably by increasing the educational productivity of the time that parents and children spend with one another at home.

In an earlier study, Ira Gordon suggested that parents of students in the early grades play six critical roles: volunteer, paid employee, teacher at home, audience, decision maker, and adult learner. These roles are believed to influence not only parents' behavior and their children's work, but also the quality of the schools and communities with which the families interact.

James Comer found that a long-term program (including parent involvement) that was designed to change the governance and organization of two inner-city schools in New Haven, Connecticut, resulted in significant gains in student achievement.<sup>3</sup> James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer concluded that students in Catholic and other private high schools performed better than comparable students in public schools at least partly because of the relationship between the schools and the families and communities they served.<sup>4</sup> Many other research studies have contributed to the general conclusion that a child's education is a responsibility shared by school and family.

A review of parent involvement activities revealed that the state department was not providing leadership to help schools involve parents in the two types of activities that most directly support the state's major goal of improving the curriculum: involving parents in learning activities with their children at home and establishing partnerships with community and family service agencies to benefit students and their families.

Epstein's five types of parent involvement formed the foundation on which the state department could develop and expand its parent involvement initiative.<sup>5</sup> A state task force on parent involvement



"They never quit, do they?"

added a sixth type of parent involvement (linking the school and family with the community to strengthen schools and to improve students' learning). The state board adopted a policy on parent involvement, which states:

Comprehensive programs of parent involvement require schools to involve parents at all grade levels and in a variety of roles. These programs should be designed to:

1. help parents develop parenting skills and foster conditions at home that support learning;
2. provide parents with the knowledge of techniques designed to assist children in learning at home;
3. provide access to and coordinate community and support services for children and families;
4. promote clear two-way communication between the school and the family as to the school programs and children's progress;
5. involve parents, after appropriate training, in instructional and support roles at school; and
6. support parents as decision makers and develop their leadership in governance, advisory, and advocacy roles.

The steps the department took to analyze its aims and to produce its parent involvement policy should be helpful to other state boards.

- Step 1. Form an advisory committee on parent involvement policy. Recruit and select for membership on that committee key researchers, district and school administrators, teachers, parents, community representatives, and state department staff members — all dedicated to school improvement and able to contribute to the development of a policy on parent involvement. Choose a chairperson who has the skills necessary to organize and facilitate the work of the committee and who will be directly responsible for the final product and for documentation of the process.

- Step 2. Communicate and clarify the committee's role in policy development. Link the committee with the state's leaders so that the committee knows, in advance, that the state expects to support, assist, and approve a policy statement.

- Step 3. Develop a shared perspective among committee members and provide them with necessary background information on other pertinent policies, mis-

sions, and goals that relate to the topic of parent involvement.

- Step 4. Draft a policy. Review all information, and allow the committee to discuss and debate issues and to clarify the goals for a policy. Draft a policy that reflects the major goals and that is aligned with the state department's other school reform efforts. Structure activities so that the committee contributes to the writing and editing of the policy. Assign to the chairperson the responsibility of shaping and polishing the draft policy and of shepherding the revisions through state offices for approval. Provide the chairperson with the support staff needed to complete the final steps.

- Step 5. Draft a concurrent action plan. Both the policy statement and plan of action should be short and clear and should include not only a statement of beliefs, goals, and desired actions, but also an outline of state-directed and state-supported activities that will help districts help schools to implement the policy.

- Step 6. Develop an evaluation plan. Design strategies to monitor and evaluate the progress of the implementation of the policy, including the state's activities and the work of the schools.

- Step 7. Submit the proposed policy to the appropriate parties — line administrators, the legal office, the state superin-

tendent, and the state board of education — for approval.

#### SETTING A POLICY IN MOTION

The state department initiative on parent involvement, aligned with the state's strategies for curriculum reform and based on research, required more than simply the issuing of a policy; it required continuing state support. Therefore, the department of education developed a five-year plan of action that outlined the steps it could take to enable school districts to develop local policies and plans.

In its first two years the California initiative completed a variety of activities. Activities in other states will vary, but the outline below illustrates the kinds of activities needed to put a state parent involvement policy into practice.

- The superintendent of public instruction announced the adoption of the state board policy and initiative in a public media event. He described the department of education's activities to implement the initiative.

- Regional workshops — for administrators, teachers, and parents — were held across the state to introduce the policy and to bring information about successful practices to school districts and schools.

- The state department developed booklets that included information on what parents should know about the mathematics, English/language arts, and history/social science programs and offered tips on how parents can help students succeed in these subjects. Booklets in other disciplines (e.g., science) are still being developed.

- The department has disseminated summaries of research findings and promising practices to school districts and schools to support their efforts to develop comprehensive parent involvement programs.

- The department has assisted local education agencies to develop and implement local policies based on the types of parent involvement outlined in the state board policy. With help from the department, school administrators and teachers have developed cost-effective programs of parent involvement that provide all families with multiple opportunities to participate in their children's learning activities at home and at school.

## WORK ON STRENGTHENING THE CALIFORNIA CURRICULUM — A MAJOR REFORM GOAL — PRECEDED THE STATE'S ATTEN- TION TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT.

- In collaboration with a consortium of local cable television companies and with the state university and the state college systems, the department has created a series of 15 one-hour television programs titled "Parent Power — Math: The Home/School Connection." The first half of each show is devoted to a particular math content area, and the second half is designed to give parents tips on how they can be involved in learning activities at home across all grade levels.

- The department worked with the legislature to write and sponsor bills to stimulate the development and implementation of comprehensive programs and practices of parent involvement. In September 1990 Assembly Bill 322, written by Assemblywoman Maxine Waters, was signed into law. The bill requires districts receiving specified federal and state funds to establish programs of parent involvement, and it also requires districts to adopt parent involvement policies for those schools that do not receive any of these funds.

- The state department established an interdepartmental committee on parent involvement, composed of representatives of each unit in the department that provides any parent involvement services to school districts, schools, and families or that serves as a liaison with community groups. The committee is to meet quarterly to review the parent involvement activities; to coordinate services to schools and districts; to plan staff development and evaluation activities, including updating research and practice; and to ensure that all activities support and strengthen the state board policy.

- The department established and convened an interagency partnership committee composed of department staff members and representatives of the state social service agencies. This committee is to meet quarterly to design ways of collaborating more effectively with school districts and families on activities in line with the state board policy.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

It takes longer than two years to introduce a new policy and to develop the experience needed to allow all districts and schools to write policies and implement programs that involve all parents productively. California and other states

might consider a number of other activities to promote comprehensive programs of parent involvement.

- A state might develop and disseminate literature and videotapes that include information and practices relating to parent involvement. Helpful information might include why schools should not give up on parents too quickly; how to avoid categorizing certain parents as unreachable or uncooperative; the expected connections between parents' rates of involvement and the number and types of efforts made to contact them (e.g., frequency of calls, notes, and visits); and descriptions of successful programs.

- A state might offer state-of-the-art inservice training for district and school administrators and policy leaders to enable them to guide teachers in improving the quality and variety of parent involvement. The training might cover such topics as why parent involvement is worth it; how to integrate effective homework procedures into the instructional program; how to encourage, support, and reward teachers and volunteers for partnership activities; basic strategies for identifying and mobilizing "out-of-school" opportunities for learning; facts about families' diversities and strengths that affect student academic achievement; ways to integrate resources from categorical programs to support schoolwide comprehensive parent involvement programs; and ways to help parents support, learn from, and motivate one another.

- A state might offer state-of-the-art inservice training for classroom teachers to enable them to work more effectively with parents. This training might cover such topics as ways of providing information and advice to parents in writing, by telephone, in home visits, and in parent/teacher conferences and workshops; ways to help parents encourage their children's progress on each school goal and in each subject; ways parents can help children make successful transitions across school levels; and ways families can prepare children for taking tests.

A parent involvement initiative should be an integral (but clearly defined) part of every state's school improvement strategy. As a separate component of school improvement, a state policy on parent involvement should involve families in

ways that contribute to a general climate of high demands on and high expectations for students. The most successful policies, I believe, will emphasize helping parents promote student learning at home and in school and helping teachers help parents to understand what their children are learning in each curriculum area at each grade level.

The parent involvement initiative in California links parent involvement to children's academic learning; it is not involvement merely for involvement's sake. The California policy stresses the importance of involving families at all grade levels, K-12. It also stresses the importance of developing comprehensive programs that include all parents, not just the families of children in special-needs or categorical programs. Finally, the California policy is "enabling," not dictatorial. Although a state law now requires districts and schools to work to involve parents, the districts and schools have a great deal of leeway to adapt parent involvement to the needs of their students, families, and communities.

Any school can be more successful if parents are productively involved in their children's education. Any student can be more successful if schools link comprehensive parent involvement programs to curricula and to teaching and learning. California is well on the way to showing the importance of state leadership in helping all schools develop strong programs to involve all families in their children's education.

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# Parent Involvement In the States

## How Firm Is the Commitment?

*Unfortunately, much of the existing state legislation amounts to little more than lip service paid to the widely accepted idea that parents play a critical role in a child's education, according to Messrs. Nardine and Morris. Only in a few cases is state law backed by an adequate staff and significant funding.*

BY FRANK E. NARDINE AND  
ROBERT D. MORRIS

**F**OR MORE THAN a decade, interest in parent involvement in student learning has been growing. Nationwide polls of educators and of the public at large support the concept of more interaction between home and school.<sup>1</sup> However, not much attention has been paid to the way states have addressed the issue. Joyce Epstein has warned that "words about the importance of parent involvement are meaningless without financial and technical support." She points out that "state education agencies have offered mainly symbolic, verbal support for the importance of parent involvement, but little financial support for staff and programs needed to improve parent under-

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standing, teacher practices, and family and school connections.<sup>2</sup>

State-level policies, programs, and staffing in the area of parent involvement are essential because they provide leadership and legitimize the requirements that districts and schools set policies and that they make plans to involve parents. With the strategic application of legislation, policies, guidelines, and staffing decisions and with the judicious allocation of state and federal funds, high-level state administrators can, to a large degree, ensure the success of parent involvement in a state.

Although parent involvement activities are occurring in states, school districts, and schools, it is difficult to draw a nationwide picture of state-level activity. With the possible exception of parent involvement in special education, only a few limited studies have attempted to ascertain the level of parent involvement activities now occurring or being planned by the states. For example, Heather Weiss has described four state initiatives.<sup>3</sup> And researchers supported by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory surveyed policy makers in six southern states in order to obtain their perspectives on parent involvement.<sup>4</sup> They questioned individuals responsible for school governance and policy making to determine their attitudes toward parent involvement and to get a sense of current practices and future policy recommendations. However, the researchers did not draw any conclusions about the level of leadership that state education officials exercise in promoting parent involvement.

In 1988 a survey of the states was conducted to learn more about their investments in parent involvement.<sup>5</sup> In a follow-up nationwide survey, the states were canvassed for information on the status of parent involvement legislation and guidelines.<sup>6</sup> The findings of these two studies are summarized below.

#### STATE ACTIVITIES IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The first study assessed the status of state leadership, staffing patterns, funding, training, and technical assistance for parent involvement activities. We developed a seven-page survey on parent involvement that consisted of questions about staffing for parent involvement, ac-

## ONLY NINE STATES DEVOTE ONE OR MORE FTEs TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT FOR EACH 100,000 STUDENTS.

tual or planned activities by the state department of education, technical assistance, targets of assistance (districts or schools), collaboration with other state offices, state-sponsored conferences, and a variety of other topics. The goal was to identify the nature and extent of the commitment to parent involvement on the part of state education agencies in all 50 states.

Data collection was difficult because clear information was lacking about which offices within state agencies were engaged in parent involvement activities. We sent surveys to all state-level education offices and programs that might possibly deal with parent involvement practices. In addition, we asked the respondents to suggest other agencies or individuals capable of providing information about state-level activities so that we would not overlook any offices or programs and inadvertently underreport state-level activity.

The surveys were mailed in the fall of 1988 to 235 individuals, including all 50 state superintendents or commissioners of education; selected coordinators or department heads of bilingual, migrant, Chapter 1, community education, and compensatory education programs; and 38 other individuals suggested by respondents. A total of 116 usable questionnaires representing all 50 states were returned. Written and telephone contact with a sample of nonrespondents suggested that failure to return the questionnaires

indicated the absence of any significant parent involvement programs and practices.

The responsibilities for parent involvement of the offices and individuals surveyed are not comparable across states. For example, some states have separate migrant, bilingual, and Chapter 1 programs; others combine all three in a single office. A number of states have parent involvement programs that operate directly out of the superintendent's or the commissioner's office. Still others have created special external units specifically to support parent involvement. We identified 10 program categories: Chapter 1 programs, bilingual programs, migrant programs, community education, state and federal services, compensatory education programs, adult/early childhood education programs, office of the superintendent, special services, and other.

For each state, the number of staff members and the percentage of time devoted to parent involvement activities were multiplied to produce full-time equivalents (FTEs) for each of the 10 program categories. These values were accumulated to describe total staffing by state and by type of state education agency as discussed above. The largest number of states assign staff members to parent involvement activities in migrant education programs and in Chapter 1 programs. Few assign staff members responsible for parent involvement activities to adult/early childhood education programs. Most staff members in the state departments work on parent involvement activities only part of the time.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics were used to standardize these figures according to the number of FTEs in parent involvement activities for each 100,000 students.<sup>7</sup> A majority of states (31) devote less than one-fourth of an FTE to parent involvement for each 100,000 students. State education agencies nationwide allocated, on average, about one FTE to parent involvement for every 500,000 public school pupils. Only nine states (Hawaii, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Vermont) devote one or more FTEs to parent involvement for each 100,000 students.<sup>8</sup> Other calculations show that the states range from zero to three-fourths of



an FTE per \$100 million in combined local, state, and federal education revenues. No state had the equivalent of at least one full-time staff person whose duties were allocated to parent involvement per \$100 million budgeted.<sup>9</sup>

We also asked respondents to indicate whether a given type of technical assistance related to parent involvement was 1) currently implemented; 2) planned for the upcoming year but not yet implemented; or 3) neither planned nor implemented. At least half of the states reported that they conduct seminars, workshops, or courses for school- or district-level personnel (68%) or for parents (58%); 66% collect and disseminate materials and information on parent involvement; 53% help parent involvement projects develop advisory councils that include parents; and 53% develop materials for use by schools or districts. Up to 80% of the respondents said that they are planning to conduct these activities in the coming year.

Other activities are not as prevalent. Forty-five percent of the states help districts coordinate parent involvement activities with other community groups; 42% distribute funds for developing parent involvement activities in the district; 41% develop materials for use by parents; 37% develop programs and materials for inservice training; and 35% help schools and districts develop evaluations of parent involvement activities.

Half of the states report that they neither conduct nor plan to conduct state evaluations of local activities. Fifty-six percent do not have plans to develop standards for inservice training of teachers or administrators. 58% do not plan to conduct recognition programs for outstanding local parent involvement programs, and 66% give no demonstration grants to develop local parent involvement activities.

#### SURVEY OF LEGISLATION AND GUIDELINES

The follow-up study assessed the status of state legislation, guidelines, and regulations dealing with parent involvement. Questionnaires were sent to the legislative bureaus and chief educational administrative officers in all 50 states. All but three states (Indiana, Iowa, and Washington) responded. Of the 47 states

that provided information, 20 reported that they had enacted parent involvement legislation. Pennsylvania and Arkansas had legislation concerning only parent involvement in disciplinary actions, and Tennessee had mandatory parent/teacher conferences held twice yearly outside of regular school hours. Six states indicated that their departments of education had written guidelines on parent involvement, and 21 states confirmed that they had neither legislation nor written guidelines directly related to parent involvement activities.

Most states have not made legislation on parent involvement a high priority, however. Their decisions about guidelines and regulations are quite diverse, as the following examples demonstrate.

Four states (Alaska, Colorado, Alabama, and Nevada) indicated that they believed federal legislation alone to be sufficient to involve parents in the educational process. They reasoned that federal legislation is straightforward and comprehensive and that additional state regulations to encourage implementation of federal requirements would serve no purpose. For example, Alaska suggested that the school districts "carry the burden of compliance with federal requirements," and additional regulations would compound that burden.

Some states have enacted parent involvement legislation using suggestive, rather than enforceable language. A word used frequently in such legislation is "encourage." For example, Tennessee's Parent/Teacher Partnership Act of 1989 "encourages local school systems to develop programs that create opportunities for parents and faculty members to discuss pertinent educational matters." In Maine, the state board of education regulations "encourage parent involvement." Connecticut has enacted legislation and funding programs to "encourage" parent participation in the educational process. Finally, although North Dakota has neither legislation nor guidelines, the department makes available sample policies, procedures, surveys, and evaluation instruments that school districts "may choose to use" as they implement federal laws and regulations. It is difficult to assess the impact of legislation that merely suggests or encourages parent involvement without clear commitments or requirements for accountability.

Four states (Missouri, Oregon, South Carolina, and Massachusetts) have explicit statutory mandates to ensure statewide parent involvement programs and activities. In Missouri, the Early Childhood Development Act requires parent education and family support services to be provided in every school district. This program has been successfully implemented and has been emulated by a number of other states.

Oregon enacted extensive legislation concerning parent involvement in the educational process. The state department of education in Oregon administers state-supported and state-approved programs for parent education to help families more effectively foster their children's cognitive, social, and physical development. The department is also charged with involving parents in prekindergarten programs that are comparable to the federal Head Start program as well as with "examining, monitoring, and assessing" their effectiveness. The state superintendent is required to report to the legislature biennially on the results of this assessment.

Through its Education Improvement Act of 1984, South Carolina has established school improvement councils in each district. The initiatives dealing with parent involvement include provisions for parenting classes, provisions for adult education, and provisions for seminars for families with youngsters 5 years old and younger to help parents function effectively as their children's first teachers.

Massachusetts has established a grants program called the School Improvement Fund. Each school that has three parents as members of its school improvement council is eligible for a grant. The activity of the school improvement councils is also monitored by the state.

Combining data from these two studies, we find that the states with parent involvement legislation in place tend to assign more staff members to parent involvement (an average of 2.02 FTEs) than do states without legislation (1.05 FTEs). However, the states with parent involvement legislation or guidelines tend to be larger and to have, on average, more students than those without. Hence, the number of FTEs per 100,000 students in states with parent involvement legislation (.40 FTEs) is not substantially different from the number of FTEs per

100,000 students in states without such legislation (.47).

The data show that, with regard to parent involvement, state leadership and the assignment of state staff members have reflected only minimal efforts. Viewed from any perspective, the data suggest that state education agencies still offer little financial support for staff and programs.

Levels of staffing and funding in all states are very small when compared to the size of the job that needs to be done. Even those states that claim to provide leadership in parent involvement practices provide insufficient financial and human resources to support strong programs of collaboration between schools and families at the district and school levels.

For whatever reason, state-level administrators have played a limited leadership role in the parent involvement movement. In actual practice, they seem not to have advanced much beyond the concept of "bake sale" parent involvement.<sup>10</sup>

Staff members in most states supervise limited clearinghouses that distribute information on parent involvement, and they may plan one or two conferences a year. While these kinds of activities are clearly necessary and useful, they are not sufficient to establish and maintain meaningful partnerships between parents and educators in all districts and schools in a state.

The strategies employed to involve parents in the educational process vary widely from state to state. Just over half of the states have passed legislation to increase home/school collaboration. Some have enacted legislation that mandates parent involvement, while others have merely enacted statutes that encourage

parent involvement. Some have focused legislation and guidelines on a specific group or problem, and these states work to involve parents accordingly. Several states have enacted legislation that reinforces federal regulations with regard to parent involvement. Others have neither legislation nor guidelines. Parent involvement still has a long way to go to become an integral part of state education policies.

Some states claim that federal regulations are sufficient to promote parent involvement. Most of the parent involvement activities documented in this survey are connected to federal mandates or to federally funded compensatory programs. Such practices overlook those eligible youngsters who are not currently served by such federal programs as Head Start as well as those who are not from low-income families in the first place. If federal regulations and programs alone guide the schools' efforts, statewide parent involvement activities will not take place, because all but the most disadvantaged children and families are excluded from these programs.

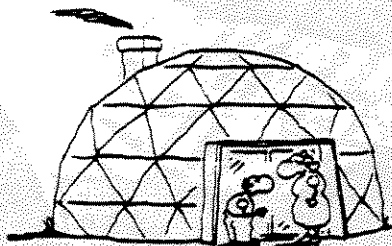
Despite nearly 25 years of federal legislation and support for parent involvement, despite a plethora of findings supporting the positive outcomes of greater home/school collaboration, and despite parents' interest in more meaningful participation in the education of their children, most states have not developed adequate parent involvement policies, passed enabling legislation, or produced written guidelines.

Today's parents increasingly desire a voice in the educational process. Legislators and state and local school officials need to view parents as legitimate partners in their children's education. In order to guarantee parents' input, states must lead the way in requiring meaningful parent involvement. State law may be the only way to ensure this outcome.

Unfortunately, it appears that much of the existing state legislation amounts to little more than lip service paid to the widely accepted idea that parents play a critical role in a child's education. Only in a few exceptional cases does a state law come with significant funds and personnel. Unfortunately, this may be the reality in an era of budget cuts and fiscal restraint, but it is clearly inadequate for the task at hand.

As a nation, we spend more than \$158 billion annually on public elementary and secondary education.<sup>11</sup> If we believe that parents can make an invaluable, sustained contribution to their children's education, then the educational leaders of our states need to give parent involvement a much higher priority.

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10. Anne Henderson, Carl Marburger, and Theodora Ooms. *Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educator's Guide to Working with Parents* (Columbia, Md.: National Center for Citizens in Education, 1985).
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"I flunked geometry, mom."

# District Leadership In Parent Involvement

## Policies and Actions in San Diego

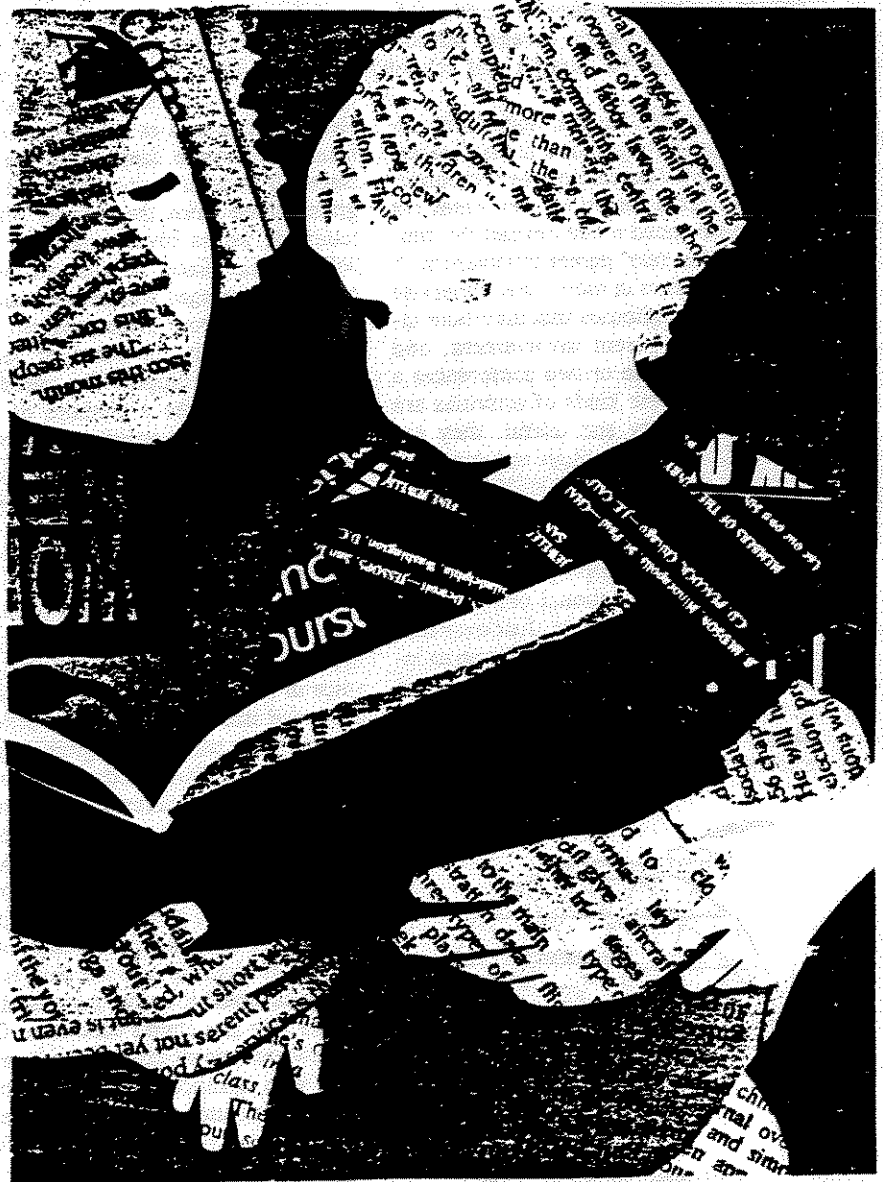
*Although efforts to mandate parent involvement have often failed to affect student achievement, Ms. Chrispeels sees promise in the initiatives under way in San Diego.*

BY JANET H. CHRISPEELS

**A**DMINISTRATORS, teachers, and parents all say that they want parents to be more involved in their children's education.<sup>1</sup> Translating the rhetoric of increased parent involvement into action, however, has proved difficult, especially in schools with large percentages of racially diverse students from low-income families.

The involvement of middle-class parents has long been the norm for American education. Interdependence and interaction seem to grow naturally between these parents and their schools, often with little guidance from the schools.<sup>2</sup> Teachers expect that most middle-class families will support their children's learning at home, in the community, and at school. In fact, many of the characteristics associated with effective schools — high expectations, opportunities to learn, an emphasis on academics, a safe and orderly environment, frequent monitoring of student progress, and rewards and recognition for achievement — are mat-

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ters of course in the homes and communities of middle-class students as well as in their schools.

Recognizing the power of parent support to enhance student achievement, since the mid-1960s educators and policy makers have tried, by means of various federal and state legislative mandates, to replicate the conditions of middle-class parent involvement in schools serving largely low-income students. The main purpose of including parent involvement policies in regulations governing a variety of federal initiatives — including Head Start (1964); Follow Through (1967); the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965); the Bilingual Education Act (1968); and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) — was to improve student achievement in school. At the state level, the California legislature mandated parent participation in early childhood education programs in 1972 and expanded participation requirements in 1976 when the state's school improvement program was established.

But all these attempts to mandate parent involvement have had only minimal impact on the achievement of low-income students.<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that, when parent involvement programs are well-designed, they can have a positive effect on student achievement.<sup>4</sup> In many instances, however, administrators' and teachers' low expectations for and negative attitudes toward low-income or non-English-speaking children and their parents have prevented the development and implementation of well-designed programs.<sup>5</sup> As Milbrey McLaughlin and Patrick Shields point out, "It is not clear that policy can mandate the things that matter."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the difficulty of moving from the level of policy to high-quality parent involvement at the school level, new policy initiatives are being undertaken in California at both the state and district levels. Although policies cannot mandate changes in beliefs, they can serve several useful functions. First, policies create an institutionally sanctioned framework to guide practice by determining, for example, what type of parent involvement activities should have priority. Second, policies express "official" beliefs that can, over time, influence the beliefs of others. Third, policies supported by ef-

## NEW STATE AND DISTRICT POLICY INITIATIVES IN CALIFORNIA RECOGNIZE THAT PARENT INVOLVEMENT IS MULTI- FACETED AND TAKES ACTIVE EFFORT.

fective strategies for implementation can apply pressure for change by recognizing, supporting, and rewarding specific attitudes and behaviors.

In California the state department of education and several local districts have adopted policies that provide a clearer definition of parent involvement. This development is significant because one of the biggest barriers blocking the development of successful programs is that groups that must work together have different understandings of the concept. Administrators often equate parent involvement with fund raising or with participation on school advisory groups. Teachers think of parent involvement as sending children to school on time, attending parent/teacher conferences, helping with homework, and responding to teacher requests. Parents want to be kept better informed about their children's progress, would like to be welcomed more openly at the school and in the classroom, and want information each year about how they can help their children be more successful in school.<sup>7</sup>

The new state and district policy initiatives in California recognize that effective parent involvement is multifaceted and requires active efforts on the part of schools. This article describes how the coordination of state, district, and individual school efforts to enhance parent involvement may eventually lead to improved student achievement.

### STATE POLICY

The California State Board of Education adopted a policy on parent involvement in January 1989. The policy guides the efforts of the state department of education and local districts to strengthen family/school partnerships. Its comprehensive approach recognizes parents' multiple roles; the policy calls for programs and actions that help parents develop parenting skills, give them information on how to foster their children's learning, use community resources to support families and students, promote two-way communication between home and school, involve parents at school as volunteers in both instructional and support activities, and involve parents in school governance and in advocacy roles.

The parent involvement unit of the state department has been implementing the state board's policy in various ways. First, it sponsored a series of regional conferences to explain the policy, to present parent involvement research from around the country, and to share strategies that local school districts have found successful. From 200 to 500 parents, teachers, principals, and district administrators attended each conference. Second, the unit has been providing technical assistance and support to local districts and schools by disseminating information and research on parent involvement. Third, in a unique collaborative effort, the parent involvement unit joined with the University of California to establish a joint committee on parent involvement. This body has undertaken a number of projects, including co-sponsoring parent involvement conferences with local school districts in six counties and publishing booklets for parents in English and Spanish. Under the committee's aegis, representatives from the education departments of the nine University of California campuses participated in two symposia exploring the kinds of preservice and inservice training that would enable teachers to work effectively with families from all socioeconomic levels.

### COUNTY SUPPORT

The state's efforts are supported and extended by the county offices of education, the intermediate level of the education structure in California. These offices

perform many functions that are typically the responsibility of school districts (or other intermediate units) in other states, including serving as conduits for delivering information to schools.

The San Diego County Office of Education provides a good example of how an intermediate unit can support schools' efforts to involve parents. The office has played three major roles: information clearinghouse, source of direct services to parents, and source of direct services to districts and schools in the form of staff development and assistance in planning.

**Information clearinghouse.** For the past three years, the county office has shared information on parent involvement by holding annual countywide conferences. School teams composed of the principal and selected teachers, resource staff members, parents, and community representatives attend the conferences to learn about exemplary programs and to work together to plan programs for their own schools.

The county office also gathers information and makes it available through publications — some for parents and others for staff. One of the county's publications, *Communicating with Parents*, provides 300 pages of ideas and strategies to help administrators and teachers develop comprehensive parent involvement programs at both the school and classroom levels.<sup>3</sup>

**Direct services to parents.** In addition to sponsoring conferences for parents and educators, the county office has installed a telephone information system specifically for parents. Called EdInfo, the service offers 75 prerecorded messages in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day. EdInfo is funded through a grant from the Wells Fargo Bank Foundation. The messages on EdInfo address such topics as home/school partnerships, parents as teachers, tests and testing, college and careers, special programs, drug and alcohol abuse, and health issues.

The county office also uses its own educational television facilities as a way of providing information to parents. "The Parent Hour," a monthly show, features discussions with experts on such topics as discipline, self-esteem, special education, helping with reading, parent/teacher conferences, and summer learning activities. The San Diego city school district also uses the station to host a monthly

call-in show, "Speaking of Schools," on which parents join Superintendent Thomas Payzant and a panel of teachers to discuss critical issues facing schools and families.

**Direct services to districts and schools.** The county office holds training workshops to help schools and districts implement various parent outreach programs. The county has been especially active with the Family Math program,<sup>9</sup> which invites parents and children to come to school one or more times a year to enjoy math games and activities together. In the last three years more than 580 teachers and parents have been trained to conduct Family Math sessions and have done so at 302 schools. Six schools (elementary and middle) in the San Ysidro area have also offered the program in Spanish.

The most recent outreach effort to receive county support has been the Family Reading program. The aim of Family Reading is to involve parents in significant learning activities at home.<sup>10</sup> Parent and teacher teams who were trained by the county in 1989-90 are currently implementing the program in their schools.

The county has also conducted workshops on such topics as using parent volunteers in the classroom, conducting parent/teacher conferences, and developing school-site parent involvement plans. In addition, the county office works in conjunction with the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA). Over the last two years, the office has presented two-day CSLA parent involvement workshops to more than 200 San Diego administrators and prospective administrators. All these efforts have reinforced state and district policies and expectations for district and school action to increase parent involvement.

#### DISTRICT ACTION

With support from the state and the county offices, local districts are significantly increasing their efforts to reach out to parents to build the kinds of partnerships that will have an impact on student achievement. The Boston-based Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) recently recognized local efforts in California by inviting Montgomery Junior High School in the Sweetwater Union High School District and nine of the San Diego City Schools (SDCS) to join the League

of Schools Reaching Out (see the article by Don Davies on page 376 of this *Kaplan*). In the spring of 1990, 150 parents and teachers from these schools participated in IRE's national teleconference on parent involvement. The parent involvement efforts of the SDCS are representative of the actions of other districts in the region.

**Adopting a local policy.** In early 1988 the SDCS established a task force to explore ways in which parent involvement could be strengthened in the district. The group, made up of 33 community and school representatives, became convinced that the best way to move forward was to persuade the board of education to adopt an official policy on parent involvement. The task force spent several months, sometimes in heated debate, framing a policy statement to present to the board. The policy, adopted in July 1988, is parallel to the state policy in most areas and outlines a multifaceted definition of parent involvement. The board commits itself to:

- involve parents as partners in school governance, including shared decision making and advisory functions;
- establish effective two-way communication with all parents, respecting the diversity and differing needs of families;
- develop strategies and programmatic structures at schools to enable parents to participate actively in their children's education;
- provide support and coordination for school staff and parents to implement and sustain appropriate parent involvement from kindergarten through grade 12; and
- use schools to connect students and families with community resources that provide educational enrichment and support.

The task force's decision to draft a policy has proved to be a wise one, giving shape and direction to district actions and to the work of individual schools. The implementation plan that flowed from the policy has focused on three major efforts: building the capabilities of staff members, creating partnerships, and providing follow-up and support services.

**Building staff capabilities.** The district policy clearly recognizes that building the capacities of teachers, administrators, and other school staff members to work effectively with families is a prerequisite for improved family/school partner-

ships.<sup>11</sup> In order to accomplish this goal, the district established a department to oversee the implementation of the policy and to assist the schools. One of the department's first actions was to launch a quarterly staff newsletter, *The Vital Connection*, which contains articles on parent involvement research, suggestions for school-based activities, and information on upcoming workshops. Included with the newsletter are black-line masters of articles that principals can duplicate and include in their own school newsletters for parents.

As another aid to staff members, the department distributed copies of the county publication, *Communicating with Parents*, to schools in the district. Feeling the need to supplement this publication, the department put out its own parent involvement handbook for principals.<sup>12</sup> The manual discusses the district's parent involvement policy and describes steps for schools to take in developing comprehensive family outreach programs. It emphasizes that staff members' attitudes and behavior toward parents are major determinants of the level of parent involvement the school will be able to achieve.

Workshops are an essential component of staff development in parent involvement. Those for principals and assistant principals introduce them to the handbook and to other district resource materials. Staff members at different schools have participated in the Lee Canter and Associates training program. Parents on Our Side. The new department responsible for parent involvement programs is using a trainer-of-trainers model with such programs as Family Reading, Parents Growing Together, and Living with 10- to 15-Year-Olds.<sup>13</sup> Other workshops are planned in the areas of parent/teacher conferences, family-friendly homework and study skills, and developing parent involvement plans.

*Creating partnerships.* The goal of strengthening staff members' capabilities is to build stronger partnerships with parents at each school. In the fall of 1989 the SDCS board of education took a more direct step to foster partnerships by allocating \$100,000 for parent involvement incentive grants. From 58 applications, the district's parent involvement task force awarded 16 grants ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000. Nine of the grants

were for innovative projects, and seven were for projects linking schools with community agencies to provide parenting programs.

The innovative grants encompassed a wide variety of creative approaches to building family/school partnerships. For example, Oak Park Elementary School found that an effective way to involve parents from diverse cultural backgrounds was to train representative parent and teacher facilitators who could meet with each ethnic and racial group separately to brainstorm, to solve problems, and to discuss issues and concerns. As a result, each group felt for the first time that it was important and that its views counted. After the separate meetings, the school held a joint session to develop a parent involvement plan. Parents and teachers were surprised to see that all groups shared common concerns and needs.

A second school, Torrey Pines Elementary, used some of its incentive grant money to implement a hands-on science program developed and conducted by parent volunteers. In each primary class, four to six parents came to school once a week to spend 1½ hours leading small groups of students in science activities. The groups covered a single topic, such as space, ecology, or earth science, every six weeks. The science lessons allowed teachers to witness successful cooperative learning groups in which Hispanic and Anglo students actively worked together. In addition, the teachers learned that, with well-designed activities, parents could be teachers, too.

Lincoln Prep High School, another grant recipient, demonstrated effective ways to link schools with the broader community. The school helped students and their families find needed community services through a school-sponsored telephone referral system. In addition, the school reached out to the surrounding feeder schools and invited parents to a series of parenting workshops. This effort not only improved parenting skills but, perhaps more important, showed parents that parent involvement needs to be sustained throughout children's school careers, including the high school years.

While not all the data on the impact of the grants have been compiled, the enthusiasm of the schools encouraged the board to continue the program for another

year. For the 1990-91 school year 23 grants have been awarded for both innovative and community-based projects. The district implementation plan also calls for guiding and assisting 12 schools (representing all grade levels) in developing comprehensive parent involvement programs that can serve as models for other schools in the district.

*Follow-up and support services.* The district has attempted to provide follow-up and support in several ways. First, it has clarified the roles and responsibilities of the various parties charged with implementing the policy. Second, it has established parent involvement as a component of the improvement plans that all schools are required to develop. Third, the parent involvement task force has continued to meet on a monthly basis to discuss implementation issues and to serve as a sounding board for parental, community, or staff concerns.

Finally, an interdivisional staff group has been formed that brings together representatives from special education, curriculum and instruction, staff development, adult education, the School Improvement Program, Chapter 1, and other categorical programs to explore how all of the district's divisions with responsibilities for parent involvement can improve and coordinate their services and programs. For example, this year the district department that supervises parent involvement programs collaborated with Chapter 1 support staff to offer two intensive all-day workshops for Chapter 1 school teams. More collaborative activities, such as the development of a parent leadership training program, are planned for the future.

#### PROMISES AND CHALLENGES

If the success of parent involvement as a strategy for enhancing the achievement of low-income students depends so much on teachers' attitudes toward parents, will these new policy initiatives prove any more effective than previously mandated parent involvement programs? Obviously, it is too soon to tell. But several differences between current and previous initiatives bode well for the new efforts.

First, the local and state policies are similar in content and purpose. This coordinated approach should increase the impact at both levels.

Second, what have been put into place are policies, not mandates. The language of policies reflects beliefs, not demands (which tend to be viewed as burdens and to elicit minimal compliance). The implementation of policies, on the other hand, provides more flexibility to encourage innovation and to reward and recognize success.

Third, research and practice in the last 25 years have begun to identify the types of family/school partnership activities that affect student learning. For example, the earlier the intervention and the longer it is sustained, the greater the impact on student outcomes. Training parents to be tutors of their children has also been shown to increase student achievement.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, the new initiatives recognize the need for staff development and training. The exact nature of that training has yet to be fully defined, but Nancy Chavkin and David Williams have made a good start by identifying some of the skills that teachers need.<sup>15</sup> The new initiatives also recognize that teachers must learn from the families of their students. The most important role for families from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds may be to help teachers understand the educational experiences, customs, and values of parents as well as their expectations for their children. Opportunities for teachers to visit the homes of their students and learn directly from parents about their children may not only be the best training for teachers and parents but may also be a way to craft meaningful partnerships.

Fifth, both state and district policies stress the need for parent involvement to continue throughout the school years. The awarding of incentive grants to mid-

dle and junior high schools and to high schools is an encouraging sign that teachers and administrators at the secondary level recognize the need to strengthen family/school ties. The efforts of one high school to develop a coordinated communitywide approach involving its feeder schools are also promising.

Despite the strengths of the new initiatives, the task of changing attitudes and practices will not be easy. A recent incident illustrates the point. A committee consisting of parents, teachers, and administrators associated with a large urban high school met over a period of several months to develop a parent involvement implementation plan. Everyone recognized the need for better communication between home and school and the need to give parents easier access to teachers to discuss concerns about student progress. However, when the plan was presented to the principal, he would allocate no resources to help implement it and, in fact, felt that no changes were needed. Without leadership at each school, significant improvements in family/school relationships are unlikely to occur.

Other problems have become apparent in connection with the incentive grants awarded by the district. While the parents and staff members involved in the projects at each school were extremely positive about their activities, administrators expressed less willingness to reallocate the resources of the schools in order to continue the projects beyond the grant funding. In addition, most of the projects focused on training parents for a traditional school-based format, which has been shown to have less impact on student achievement than programs that train parents to work with their children in the home. Most schools still want parents to come to them rather than going to the parents. Most of the efforts have been directed at "fixing" parents rather than at altering school structures and practices.

Finally, neither the state, the county, nor the district has given serious consideration to documenting and evaluating its efforts. The limited funds set aside to support parent involvement do not include resources for such research. Given the scarcity of teachers' and parents' time and of resources available for family/school partnerships, it is vitally impor-

tant to document the activities and approaches that truly affect the learning of low-income and less educationally advantaged students. The new parent involvement policy initiatives offer the hope that higher student achievement can be attained through increased parent involvement. It will be important to know if they are fulfilling their promise.

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15. Chavkin and Williams, op. cit.



"Sorry, Bigley, but it's all the budget will allow for research."

# Parents in Touch

## District Leadership for Parent Involvement

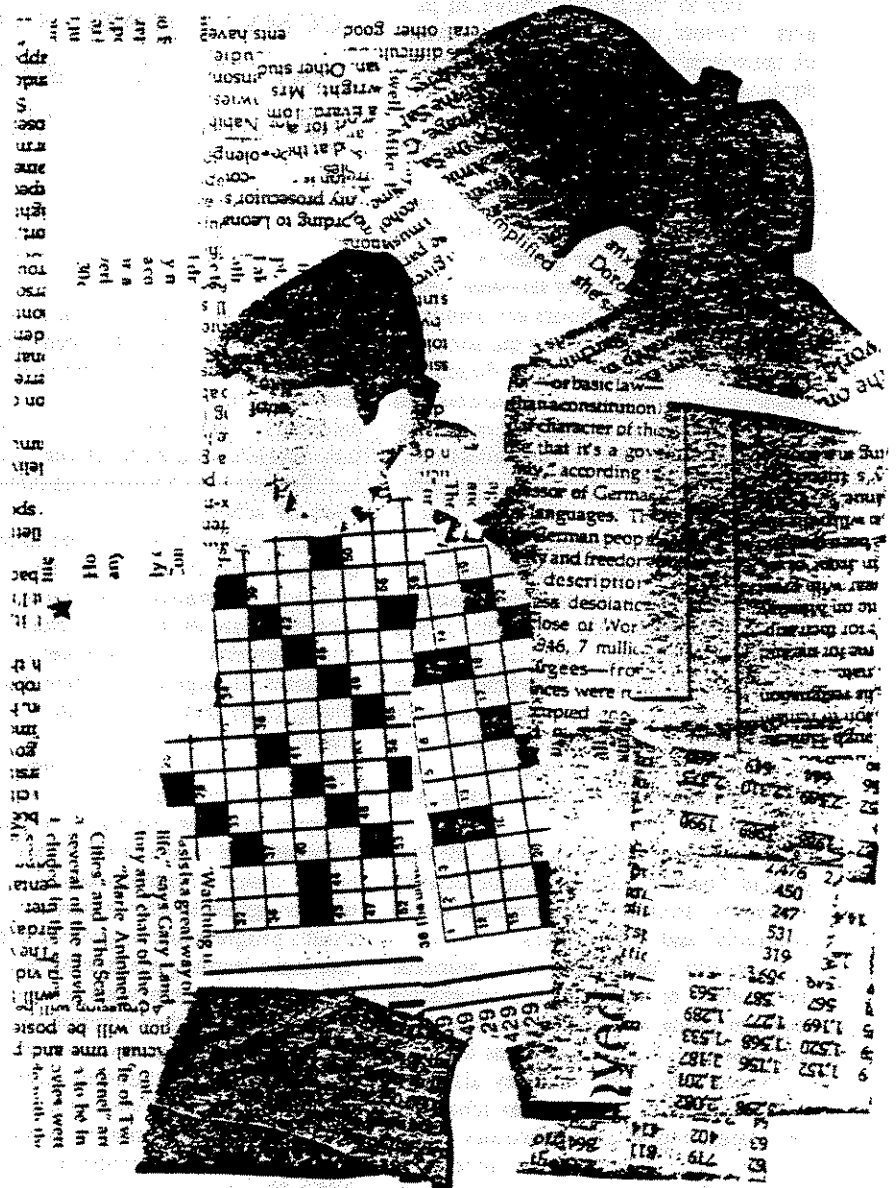
*Ms. Warner describes some strategies used in Indianapolis to facilitate the kind of two-way communication that enables parents to stay in touch and to become partners with the schools in the education of their children.*

BY IZONA WARNER

**P**ARENT INVOLVEMENT is not a new idea in the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). In 1978 the district submitted a proposal to the Lilly Endowment, requesting a three-year grant to enhance the level of parent involvement in students' education. That proposal grew out of a growing awareness of successful practices around the country, a review of the literature, and a formal needs assessment within the school district that had brought to light parents' wish that the schools would keep them better informed. We proposed developing a multifaceted, systemwide parent involvement program.

The result was the establishment of Parents in Touch, which continues to this day as the umbrella program for parent involvement in the IPS. Its name clearly states its goal: to facilitate the kind of two-way communication that enables parents to stay in touch and to become partners with the schools in the education of their children.

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Why should parents enter into such partnerships with schools? As the first teachers of their children, parents have the primary responsibility for children's learning. Children's ideas and attitudes about the importance of education and learning begin with the expectations and beliefs of their parents. Therefore, parents have a crucial role in both the function and the reform of schooling. Teachers and administrators have an obligation to help parents carry out their natural roles as models for and helpers of their own children. Working together, schools and families can improve student achievement, attendance, and behavior.

In order to reach and involve all parents, Parents in Touch uses a variety of approaches. Several of the district's strategies are described below.

#### PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent/teacher conferences are a major emphasis of the Parents in Touch program. Conferences for grades K-12 are held at the end of the first six-week grading period. Adjusted hours are arranged through agreement between the administration and the Indianapolis Education Association so that working parents can be accommodated. In each school, a coordinator is designated to schedule conferences. The goal is to meet with all students' families early in the school year to establish communication.

At the conferences, report cards are distributed, and parents and teachers share information about students. They assess progress and may set goals for increasing students' achievement. The conferences are also an opportunity for teachers to distribute materials developed by Parents in Touch to help parents understand and support their children and the schools.

At the elementary level (K-6), the Parents in Touch materials include activity calendars, student/teacher/parent (STP) contracts, and STP folders.

- Activity calendars are prepared for parents of students in kindergarten through grade 3. The calendars include curriculum-related suggestions for daily activities with children. They also provide information about holiday schedules, test dates, report card schedules, and a variety of community and school resources. Spelling assignments for the en-

## PARENTS IN TOUCH VIEWS CONFERENCES AT ALL LEVELS OF SCHOOLING AS VEHICLES FOR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION ON MATTERS RELATED TO STUDENT SUCCESS.

tire school year are included, so that youngsters and families can practice them. If parents cannot attend the conferences, their children are given the calendars to take home. At the elementary level, about 83% of the students' families attended conferences during the 1988-89 school year.

- STP contracts are offered to parents by schools that choose to use them. These contracts — prepared in triplicate and signed by parents, teachers, and students — are agreements to fulfill certain commitments. By signing, the parent agrees, among other things, to see that the child attends school regularly, to establish a regular time for homework, and to provide a place for study. The student agrees to come to school prepared to learn, to complete and return homework on time, and to observe regular study hours. The teacher agrees to advise parents of their child's progress and to provide activities that make learning meaningful and enjoyable. Although principals are not parties to the contracts, they commit themselves to endorsing parent involvement and to ensuring that the building climate encourages learning. Twenty thousand contracts were distributed by schools that participated in this program during the 1989-90 school year.

- STP folders go home weekly and then are returned to school. The folders contain students' completed assignments and information that will help parents monitor homework. They also provide a place for parents and teachers to write notes to one another.

The materials provided by Parents in Touch to foster parent involvement at the junior high school level (grades 7-8) include folders, STP contracts, and a weekly calendar.

- Folders containing school policies on homework and attendance, on grading procedures, and on dates for distributing report cards are given to all parents at the first parent/teacher conference or are sent home with students whose parents cannot attend. Overviews of the magnet school programs available at the high school level are also included for parents' consideration.

- STP contracts are prepared in triplicate and discussed with middle-grade parents during the conferences. These contracts are similar to the elementary STP contracts but are tailored to the needs of middle-schoolers; for example, they include information to help parents improve their interactions with early adolescents.

- All junior high schools provide weekly calendars on which students can list their daily assignments in each class. The calendars enable parents to monitor their children's homework.

At the high school level, the materials provided by Parents in Touch include a folder and a course record.

- Folders, distributed at the first parent/teacher conference, give parents general information about graduation requirements, courses, class rankings and standings, the attendance policy, and the faculty advisory program.

- A course record for each student is enclosed in his or her folder. This record lists all courses taken and the grades the student received. Parents can assess a child's status by comparing the course record with the requirements for graduation.

In addition to providing these materials, some high schools hold meetings to give parents information that deals with college financial aid programs.

In short, Parents in Touch views conferences at all levels of schooling as vehicles for two-way communication on

matters that are important for student success. The conferences are designed to allow parents and teachers to begin a productive relationship that will grow throughout the school year.

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#### DIAL-A-TEACHER

The Dial-a-Teacher program is designed to give students and parents assistance with and information about homework. Located in a library/media center, Dial-a-Teacher operates Monday through Thursday (except on holidays) between the hours of 5 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Dial-a-Teacher is staffed by two teams of teacher specialists, paid by funds from Chapter 2. Each five-member team is composed of specialists in math, social studies, science, language arts, and elementary education.

The teacher specialists act as an extension of the classroom, helping students who need extra assistance and who might not complete their homework without it. They also answer questions from parents about their children's homework. The teachers lead students to the right answers, rather than merely give them the solutions.

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#### HOMEWORK HOTLINE

"Homework Hotline" is a live call-in television program, produced by the IPS Center for Instructional Television and aired every Tuesday from 5 to 6 p.m. Two paid teacher specialists assist callers with mathematics problems for grades 1-6. Students and parents can talk with the television teachers and simultaneously see the problems worked on the chalkboard. American Cablevision, with approximately 67,000 subscribers, and Comcast Cablevision, with approximately 81,000 subscribers, carry the program on their public television channels.

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#### PARENT LINE/COMMUNICATOR

The Parent Line/Communicator is a computerized telephone system that gives callers access to about 140 three- to four-minute tape-recorded messages on a variety of school-related topics. Each tape also refers callers to sources of additional information. Sample topics include school policies, option programs, magnet schools, parenting skills, adult edu-

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## PARENT EDUCATION SEMINARS ARE OFFERED AT WORK SITES IN THE INDIANAPOLIS COMMUNITY TO SERVE PARENTS WHO CANNOT COME TO THE SCHOOLS.

tion. Interaction among participants is encouraged.

As part of the Parent Focus outreach effort, Parents in Touch invites public servants and people affiliated with community agencies to share their expertise with parents attending the workshops. Presenters have come from the Family Services Association, the Salvation Army, the prosecutor's office, the juvenile court, Alcoholics Anonymous, and other organizations and agencies.

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#### WORK-SITE SEMINARS

Parent education seminars are offered at work sites in the Indianapolis community to serve parents who cannot come to workshops that are held in the school buildings. The seminars, held during lunch hours, help parents who are employed to balance work and family responsibilities. Partnerships that link home, school, and work site can make a difference in the academic success of many students, can reduce parents' anxiety about child-rearing problems, can promote a supportive atmosphere among employees, and can increase organizational loyalty. Employees bring a brown-bag lunch, or the employers provide lunch. These monthly seminars are co-sponsored by the Education Council of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and by local businesses. The seminar topics, taken from those covered in the Parent Focus Series, are chosen after the employees have been surveyed about their interests and needs.

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#### TIPS

One method for teachers to increase parents' involvement in their children's learning and development is a process called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), developed by Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University. The TIPS process structures homework assignments so that they include communications from school to home and from home to school and so that parents and children talk together at home about schoolwork. Parents in Touch obtained a grant from the state department of education to fund a summer program in which IPS teachers developed math and science homework assignments for grades 2, 3, 4, and 5. The short, easy-to-distribute activities are coordinated with the curriculum of each

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#### THE PARENT FOCUS SERIES

The Parent Focus Series is a parent education program offering 90 special workshops that schools may request from Parents in Touch. Some workshops run as a series of five or six 90-minute sessions. Others meet only once. The workshops include discussions, lectures, and videos on such topics as early adolescent development, building children's self-esteem, teaching responsibility, and helping with homework.

Workshops are offered during both daytime and evening hours, and child care is sometimes provided. The workshops are not formal support groups, but some sessions end up serving that func-

subject to focus on specific skills at each grade level. TIPS builds students' skills, informs parents about schoolwork, expands the amount of supervised learning time, and increases parents' appreciation of teachers and their support for the schools.

#### SUPERINTENDENT'S PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

The staffs of Parents in Touch and of the IPS Office of School and Community Relations provide administrative support for the superintendent's advisory council, which includes parent representatives. The council has developed a mission statement regarding the family/school partnership and is designing a structure that will support the statement. A proposal to put the council's ideas into practice will be presented to the board of school commissioners and should become part of district policy.

#### MEETING CHAPTER 1 MANDATES

The Parents in Touch staff is responsible for helping the district meet Chapter 1 mandates for parent involvement. Several strategies are used.

- The staff plans and conducts curriculum-related workshops to give parents suggestions for activities that they can use to reinforce their children's reading and math skills.

- The staff works with the district-wide Chapter 1 Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and helps it implement activities.

- The staff organizes, conducts, or facilitates parent education workshops, volunteer activities, and leadership training.

- Conferences between parents and Chapter 1 staff members are coordinated to coincide with the first parent/teacher conferences of the school year at each building.

- The Be Excited About Reading (BEAR) project began in the fall of 1990. Parents of children in grades K-6 are asked to promote and encourage reading for pleasure. Read-along tape recordings are provided for parents who do not read well themselves. Parents and students who read two or more books per month receive an award.

- Parents are given "deposit slips"

for investing in their children's future by participating in such Chapter 1 activities as workshops, training sessions, and PAC meetings. Each event attended earns one slip, and, if four slips are accumulated within one semester, they are redeemable for a premium.

#### A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

According to Epstein, a successful effort to involve parents in their children's education requires five basic ingredients.<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive programs of parent involvement should include all five elements, and the Indianapolis program operationalizes Epstein's model by means of the the strategies described above.

Developing parenting skills is the goal of the first component of Epstein's model. Parents are first and foremost supporters of their children; they provide food, clothing, shelter, and psychological support for their children as they grow up. Parents in Touch helps parents fulfill their parenting roles by providing information and ideas about the characteristics of and suggesting strategies for the development of a home environment that supports the learning behaviors of children at each grade level.

The second component of Epstein's model and of the IPS parent involvement effort is communication. The staff works hard to design effective forms of com-

munication that will reach all parents.

The third component of the parent involvement model is the use of parent volunteers. IPS encourages parents to work as volunteers at the school or to attend and support events and meetings.

The fourth component of Epstein's model is encouraging children's learning activities at home. Parents in Touch provides ideas, materials, and training to parents through its own programs and through TIPS homework activities.

The final component of the parent involvement model is encouraging parental participation in decision making across the district. The Parents in Touch staff supports this effort by recruiting parents and by helping to develop parent leadership.

IPS believes it can better meet the academic and developmental needs of its students if substantive collaboration between parents, teachers, and administrators is increased. Parent involvement is viewed as an important component of the district's school improvement plan. If all children can learn, then all parents can help to make that happen.

1. The needs assessment was conducted by Ned S. Hubbell and Associates in 1975.

2. Joyce L. Epstein, "What Principals Should Know About Parent Involvement," *Principal*, vol. 60, 1987, pp. 6-9; and Ron Brandt, "On Improving School and Family Connections: A Conversation with Joyce Epstein," *Educational Leadership*, October 1989, pp. 24-27. K



"At least they're educated guesses. I ought to get some credit for that!"

# Schools Reaching Out

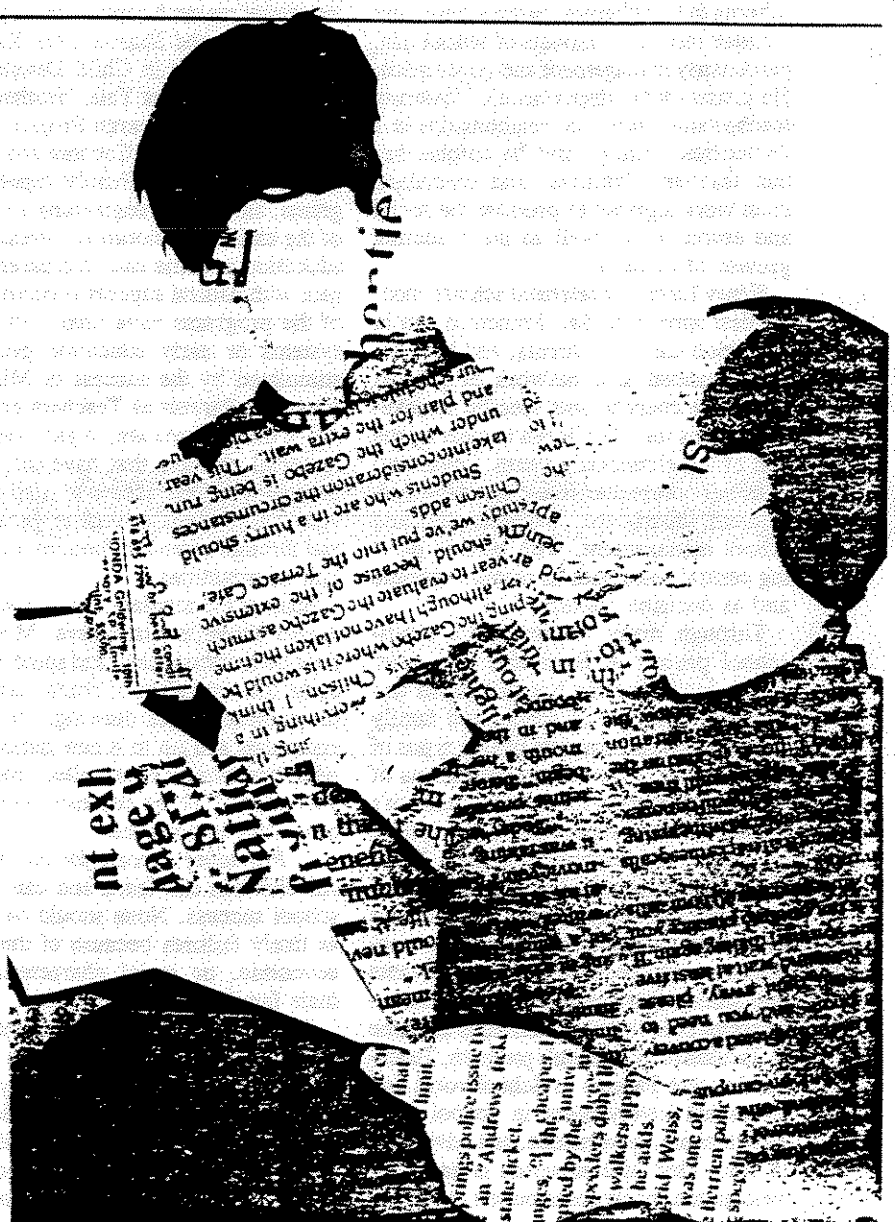
## Family, School, and Community Partnerships For Student Success

*In working toward new definitions and practices of parent involvement, Mr. Davies notes, members of the League of Schools Reaching Out will be moving toward realizing the ideal embodied in an old African saying: "The whole village educates the child."*

BY DON DAVIES

**H**OW IMPORTANT is involving parents in the schools — particularly in urban schools? Is it a part of the mainstream movement to reform and restructure American schools, or is it a sideshow? As it is traditionally defined and practiced, parent involvement is not powerful enough to have a significant impact on the policies and practices of urban schools. In fact, an emphasis on traditional parent involvement can divert attention from the fact that schools and families have inadequately promoted the academic and social success of some children. But, if its definitions and practices are redefined, parent involvement can make a powerful contribution to efforts to reform urban schools and to achieve our national

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aim of providing a successful school experience for all children of all backgrounds and circumstances.

#### NEW APPROACHES TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

In recent years progress toward redefining parent involvement and linking it to school reform has been made on several fronts. James Comer, a Yale University psychiatrist, and his colleagues in several states have been working to reform schools that serve poor and minority children. Comer believes that, for these schools to be effective, parents must play a major role in all aspects of school life, particularly management and governance. He insists on the importance of fostering teacher/student/parent relationships in a democratic setting, and he emphasizes that teachers, families, and specialists must work together to promote the social and emotional as well as the academic growth of children.<sup>1</sup>

Henry Levin's accelerated schools model, first applied in San Francisco and in Redwood City, California, and now being expanded to a network of schools across the country, sets specific achievement goals for all children to meet by the end of the elementary years. Levin emphasizes comprehensive changes in curriculum, instruction, organization, and school management, with parents playing central roles both as resource people and as decision makers.<sup>2</sup>

Through many studies and a multi-school project in Baltimore and other cities, Joyce Epstein has developed and is testing a model of school and family connections that consists of five types of involvement: 1) the basic obligations of parenting (responsibility for children's health, safety, supervision, discipline, guidance, and learning at home); 2) the basic obligation of schools to communicate with the home; 3) the involvement of parents at school as volunteers, supporters, and spectators at school events and student performances; 4) parent involvement in learning activities at home — facilitated by Epstein's program, Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork; and 5) parent involvement in school decision making, governance, and advocacy. A sixth kind of connection is under investigation for its contribution to school/family relations: collaboration and ex-

changes between schools and community organizations, agencies, and businesses. Epstein emphasizes the concept of overlapping spheres of influence and responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

Dorothy Rich's Home and School Institute sponsors projects in several school districts that assist parents in fostering children's learning at home.<sup>4</sup> And David Seeley has made important contributions to redefining parent involvement to encompass a wide range of family/school/community/learner partnerships.<sup>5</sup>

The "family support" movement has several well-known advocates at major university research centers, including Edward Zigler and Sharon Lynn Kagan of the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale, Heather Weiss of the Family Research Project at Harvard, and Moncrieff Cochran and his colleagues at Cornell. Family support programs, aimed at strengthening all aspects of the child's development, stress parent education at home and help parents connect with natural support systems. Many of the programs have links with school systems or early education programs, stimulated by the success of Missouri's statewide Parents as Teachers program. All of these efforts are, in part, responses to social changes that have left today's parents with less access to help and advice than parents of earlier generations had through extended families and close-knit communities.<sup>6</sup>

Each of the scholars and projects mentioned above is distinctive. Most have their own orthodoxies, and some have become the equivalent of brand names. But the commonalities outweigh the differences and add up to a new definition of what has usually been called "parent involvement." Three common themes are of central importance:

1. *Providing success for all children.* All children can learn and can achieve school success. None should be labeled as likely failures because of the social, economic, or racial characteristics of their families or communities.

2. *Serving the whole child.* Social, emotional, physical, and academic growth and development are inextricably linked. To foster cognitive and academic development, all other facets of development must also be addressed by schools, by families, and by other institutions that affect the child.

3. *Sharing responsibility.* The social, emotional, physical, and academic development of the child is a shared and overlapping responsibility of the school, the family, and other community agencies and institutions. In order to promote the social and academic development of children, the key institutions must change their practices and their relationships with one another.

#### SCHOOLS REACHING OUT

The Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) used these three themes as keynotes for a national project called Schools Reaching Out. The project, supported by five foundations (Leon Lowenstein, J.M. Aaron Diamond, the *Boston Globe*, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundations), set as its purpose to redefine and expand parent involvement as a part of urban school reform.

The project began two years ago with two demonstration schools: the David A. Ellis Elementary School in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and P.S. 111 on the West Side of Manhattan. It has expanded into the League of Schools Reaching Out with a current membership of 41 elementary and middle schools in 19 urban school districts in 13 states and Puerto Rico. The league subscribes to no single orthodoxy, but its members share a commitment to the three themes sketched above. The league schools will be considering issues raised in seven reports written by researchers for the project, who gathered data not only in the two demonstration schools but also in other member schools. The schools are starting to put together new and broader definitions of parent involvement.

- The new definitions go beyond the term *parent*, which is too narrow to describe today's reality. *Family* is a more encompassing term. The most significant adults in the lives of many children may be grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, or even neighbors who provide child care.

- The new definitions go beyond parents or families to include all of the community agencies and institutions that serve children. Urban families need support and assistance — particularly those under stress because of economic hardship, the struggle to find adequate housing, or barriers of language and social

custom. Urban schools also need support and assistance to understand families, and communities can contribute a great deal to children's academic and social development.

- The new definitions go beyond having family members come to the school. Activities and services include those that occur at home and in neighborhood settings as well.

- The new definitions include not only those parents who readily respond to teacher and school initiatives but also the families that schools consider "hard to reach." The latter group (which in some schools encompasses a majority of families) includes those who lack the energy, time, self-confidence, or English-language proficiency to take part in traditional parent involvement activities, as well as those who are fearful of schools because of past experiences or cultural norms. In most schools, activities that fit the old definitions of parent involvement engage only a relatively small number of parents, who provide leadership and service and who are aware of the advantages of such involvement to themselves and their own children. And, of course, it is their children who benefit the most.

- The new definitions go beyond the agendas and priorities of teachers and school administrators to include the priorities of families themselves, and they extend beyond specifically academic activities to include all the contributions that families make to the education of their children.

- The new definitions of parent involvement in urban schools replace the old "deficit" views of the pathologies, traumas, and troubles of urban families and communities with a new mindset that emphasizes the inherent strengths of families. Improving the capacity of urban families to foster the social and academic growth of their children means building on the strengths of those families and of their diverse, multicultural communities. Cultural differences are not diseases to be treated but healthy opportunities for learning. The new definitions recognize that all families can be more effective in all aspects of child-rearing.

The League of Schools Reaching Out invites schools to choose among the brand-name approaches to building school/family/community relationships and to improving schools or to mix and

## THE NEW DEFINITIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN SCHOOLS EMPHASIZE THE INHERENT STRENGTHS OF FAMILIES.

match these and others with their own inventions to create new models — as long as these models focus on helping all children (not just some of them) succeed and on using family and community interventions and partnerships to help reach this goal. The new definitions should take the league schools beyond the traditional view of "parent involvement" as a desirable end in itself and move them toward involvement as a means of improving school outcomes, particularly the academic achievement and social success of children.

I do not claim that the path of shared responsibility and partnerships is the *only* valid approach to reforming and restructuring schools. League members have worked with the IRE to search for practices that work. The schools will help one another understand, develop, and test new strategies that give practical meaning to the general concepts of providing success for all, serving the whole child, and sharing responsibility.

From the work accomplished thus far in the Schools Reaching Out project, I propose a three-part strategy for league schools and for other schools that want to move toward partnership. Three ideas that were found to work in the demon-

stration elementary schools of this project can be adapted to almost any school without necessarily waiting for the central office to invest heavily in parent involvement or to begin the process of systemwide restructuring. They are: 1) the parent center, 2) home visitors, and 3) action research teams of teachers.

### THE PARENT CENTER

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot got it right: "The presence of parents can transform the culture of a school." At the Ellis School in Boston, the parent center — a room for parents — was a low-cost success. Some of the project's researchers said that the school was "a different place" because the parent center existed. It made possible the substantial, continuing, and positive physical presence of family members in the school. The tone and content of school conversations about parents and their communities change when parents are physically present in the building. It is difficult for school employees to say, "The parents just don't care," when caring parents can be seen daily.

Staffing the center were two paid coordinators (both of them parents of children in the school), as well as a number of unpaid volunteers. Parent visitors dropped in for coffee, a chat, and information; the center also sponsored English-as-a-second-language (ESL) and General Education Development (GED) classes for parents. Parents reported feeling more positive about the school and about being involved in their children's education because they had a welcoming "place of their own" in the school.

School administrators and teachers used the center as a resource. For example, through the parent center they could reach a mother whose child was in emotional distress, make arrangements for a school open house, order teaching materials, or offer comfort to children in moments of crisis.

Ellis School provides good examples of the kinds of specific activities in which a parent center might be involved. About 150 of the school's 350 families were directly reached by parent center activities during the year. The Ellis center:

- offered ESL and GED classes — both requested by parents and both well-attended;
- organized grade-level breakfasts that

brought together teachers, administrators, and family members to talk informally and in a nonthreatening atmosphere about curriculum, grade-level objectives, and classroom concerns;

- sponsored breakfasts for fathers, designed to bring male family members to the school to discuss the contributions that men can make to children's motivation and academic interests;

- served as an escort and referral service for dozens of parents who needed help in dealing with social service, housing, and health agencies;

- organized a clothing exchange and a school store-on-a-cart;

- organized a small library of books and toys for children; and

- recruited parent volunteers requested by teachers.

What are the requirements for a workable parent center? Based on our experience at Ellis, the requirements are simple.

1. *A physical space.* At Ellis, the center was located in a small classroom.

2. *Adult-sized tables and chairs.* At Ellis, there was also an old but comfortable sofa that someone had donated.

3. *A paid staff of parents.* At Ellis, there were two part-time coordinators, paid \$10 per hour; at least one of them was present from just before school started in the morning until the school building closed at 4 p.m. Project funds paid for the staff salaries, but Chapter 1 funds can be used for parent workers, as can other state and federal funds.

4. *A telephone.* A phone is a low-cost but crucial piece of equipment to en-

courage school/family/community connections. At Ellis, the center's telephone was one of only two in the building and thus served as a magnet that drew teachers to the center.

5. *A coffee pot, a hot plate, and occasional snacks.* It is generally agreed that food eases conversation, sharing, and conviviality.

A parent center can be organized in any school. The cost is low: money from Chapter 1 and other special programs can be used, or small grants from local businesses or foundations may be obtained. The school district must provide — and protect — the space. A parent center is a useful way to encourage the sharing of responsibility for children's education.

#### HOME VISITORS

Family support programs and research on families with children in the elementary and middle grades have shown that families of all socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups want to learn more about how to help their children learn and succeed. What families do (rather than what demographic groups they fall into) affects children's learning. Behaviors linked to children's success include parents' positive reinforcement of children's academic efforts, supervision of homework, and reading, talking, and telling stories.

Since most families want to help their children learn and since family help is a positive factor in children's learning, schools should reach out to families in homes and in neighborhood settings to provide information, materials, and guidance to that large constituency that does not come to the school. A home visitor program, the second successful element in the demonstration elementary schools in the Schools Reaching Out project, makes this service possible. At Ellis School, a home visitor program reached about 75 families that had little other contact with the school and that said they would welcome such visitors.

Who were the home visitors? The school recruited and trained four women residents of the community who had experience in such community work as adult education, counseling, or the care and education of young children. They were paid \$10 an hour, and they visited four to five families a week.

What did they do? They were not so-

cial workers or truant officers. They provided information to families about school expectations, the curriculum, rules, and requirements, and they dispensed advice and materials on how family members could help children with their schoolwork. They reinforced the school's Raise a Reader program, in which parents were encouraged to read regularly to their children at home. The home visitors also provided information and referrals on topics ranging from housing and health services to summer camps and child-rearing. They listened to family members' concerns and heard about their needs and interests, which they in turn conveyed to the teachers. The home visitors met with groups of teachers, many of whom treated them like colleagues and joined them in discussing strategies for helping with homework, dealing with parents' questions about schoolwork, and fostering children's language development.

There are a few requirements for a home visitor program.

1. A new definition of parent involvement is needed that is not limited to traditional parent activities in the school building. In addition, families must be viewed not as deficient but as sources of strength.

2. Funds are needed to pay the home visitors. As long as a program's focus is on improving student achievement, as it is in the Schools Reaching Out project, the school should be able to use Chapter 1 funds or funds for bilingual education for this purpose.

3. Training must be provided to the home visitors. Colleges, universities, and social service agencies are likely to have staff members who are interested in the program and who are willing to provide several hours of training so that home visitors can have a clear view of their responsibilities and the essential skills they need to help families help their children succeed.

4. A modest amount of supervision and support is needed. The principal, a Chapter 1 or bilingual teacher, or the coordinator of the parent center must oversee the program and supervise the home visitors.

5. Administrators and teachers must be willing to communicate with the home visitors so that their work in students' homes will be closely linked to classroom and school objectives.



*To them, the Beach Boys are ancient history.*

Given such modest requirements, just about every urban school should be able to implement this practice. Through home visits, many families that are not linked to the school can be engaged in a collaborative effort to boost the chances for their children to succeed.

#### ACTION RESEARCH TEAMS

The third successful innovation in our demonstration elementary schools was the establishment of action research teams to involve teachers directly in studying home/school/community relations and in devising actions to improve their own practices. School/family/community partnerships will amount to little more than empty rhetoric unless teachers help design the partnerships, are devoted to making them work, and eventually find themselves benefiting from them.

Some approaches to parent involvement, such as the parent center and the home visitor program, engage parents and paraprofessionals. But without teacher participation, the partnership idea is seriously incomplete. The action research teams of teachers operate on the assumption that change and improvement in schools are most likely to occur when there are opportunities for teachers to work together collegially, with time for reflection and with support for trying new strategies. In both Ellis School and P.S. 111, Jean Krasnow found that "the process of enabling teacher researchers [to work] together in small problem-solving groups, using action research techniques, may be an innovation that in itself produces new thinking and reflection in the school."<sup>3</sup>

What are the features of this strategy? In both of the demonstration schools a researcher/facilitator organized a group of four teachers who met at least monthly. After doing some background reading in parent involvement and undergoing other training activities, the action research team in each school interviewed the rest of the faculty to determine how teachers felt about parents and parent involvement, what past activities had been successful (or not successful) in involving parents, and what concerns teachers had about increasing parent involvement. The studies uncovered some of the inevitable ambivalence and tensions that surround the idea of parent involvement

## JUST ABOUT ANY SCHOOL, URBAN OR NOT, CAN APPLY THE THREE-PART STRATEGY OF THE SCHOOLS REACHING OUT PROGRAM.

— mixed feelings that are always present but often not dealt with by teachers.

The teams used the results of the interviews to design several projects aimed at increasing collaboration between the school and its families. One of the projects, called Raise a Reader, bought children's books — as well as cloth to make tote bags in which primary students could carry books to and from school. The action research team also came up with the idea of awarding a series of minigrants (each totaling \$150 to \$200) to teachers who were not on the team to encourage them to reach out to families in a variety of ways that would enhance children's learning. This strategy produced a number of imaginative activities at little cost.

The research teams and the minigrants were teacher-controlled, nonbureaucratic mechanisms. Each teacher on a team received a stipend of between \$400 and \$600 — a modest amount but a concrete acknowledgment of a professional effort.

Action research teams of teachers require just a few changes in a school and its staff.

1. At least a small number of teachers must be willing to engage in the process of improving parent involvement.

2. Funds for small grants or stipends

to teachers are necessary. These may be available from a local source.

3. A researcher/facilitator who is sensitive to teacher concerns can help teachers write proposals, design interviews, analyze and write up results, and lead discussions that will encourage reflection. There might be teachers or administrators already on a school's staff who understand the process well enough to serve as facilitators. A local university would be a good place to look for a volunteer or a low-cost facilitator — a faculty member or a graduate student could use the activity as a research opportunity. Another possible source of expertise is a school district's central office staff. Volunteers might also come from a local corporation, a community organization, or a senior citizens center.

Some schools in the League of Schools Reaching Out are considering modifying the concept of action research to include parents as members of the research teams. The assumption is that bringing parents and teachers together to study problems of home/school relations will be beneficial to a school's overall plan of sharing responsibility.

#### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The potential of a parent involvement program will be enhanced if it is treated as an integrated strategy with three distinct features: a means of attracting family members to the school (the parent center); a means of reaching families at home (the home visitors); and a clearly supported, teacher-controlled way of engaging teachers in improving curriculum and instruction through the creation of new kinds of connections with parents and other community resources (the action research team).

Just about any school, urban or not, can apply the three-part strategy of the Schools Reaching Out program. The costs are relatively low, and schools may be able to use outside funds, such as those from Chapter 1, to cover a large portion of the expense. No "superstar" principals or teachers are required.

Just about any school can arrange for parents, teachers, and administrators to participate together in planning, decision making, and governance. The laboratory school in New York, P.S. 111, developed an effective School/Community



Planning and Policy Council, which included parents and representatives of the community and became a strong asset to the school's outreach efforts. The council linked those efforts to the overall school improvement plan, which focused on strengthening teaching and the curriculum in the language arts. Such councils may help pave the way for more fully developed school-based management.

No school's outreach strategy will be complete — conceptually or politically — until educators and parents learn how shared decision making can help them "put it all together." Most past efforts toward school-based decision making have been a disappointment. Such disappointment is likely to continue unless collaborative approaches to governance — like other forms of outreach — are integrated into an overall school restructuring effort that encompasses all aspects of school life.

#### LEADERSHIP

In any school — including those in the League of Schools Reaching Out — leadership is essential if a school staff is to choose the partnership approach to school reform and to develop an understanding of the basic concepts of providing success for all children, serving the whole child, and sharing responsibility. However, these concepts are still radical in most urban schools. The choice to move in the direction suggested by this article — and by others in this issue of the *Kappan* — should be made by a broad spectrum of the constituents in a school and its community, not just by the principal. However, in most cases the leadership to

reach out to the community will have to come from the principal, with the involvement of at least some of the teaching staff. According to the traditions of bureaucratic practice, leadership rests with the principal and will continue to do so until school-based management and other restructuring activities are much more widely implemented.

The administrators and teachers who are most likely to reach out to the community are those who have a sense of the urgency of the nation's urban educational and social problems, who are willing to see themselves as part of both the problem and the solution, who don't find outrageous the belief that all children can learn and succeed, and who see that teachers and administrators can benefit from improved connections with families. Sharing responsibility for children's learning and development can reduce the burden, the isolation, and the stress felt by so many hard-working and dedicated school professionals today.

The League of Schools Reaching Out offers a network of information, support, encouragement, recognition, and opportunities for research and pilot projects. It is a way for busy administrators, teachers, and parents to share experiences about what works and what doesn't. Through the league's mechanisms — a newsletter, a journal, and other publications; technical assistance; videos; computer bulletin boards; and video conferences — schools can draw on the theoretical and practical ideas that have been derived in recent years from the work of Comer, Epstein, Levin, Rich, Kagan, Zigler, Cochran, Weiss, Seeley, IRE's Schools Reaching Out, and others.

Members of the league have an opportunity to help one another pull together the diverse strands and recognize the commonalities in the progress that has been made toward new definitions and practices of parent involvement. In doing so, they will be moving toward realizing the ideal embodied in an old African saying: "The whole village educates the child."

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2. Henry M. Levin, "Accelerating Elementary Education for Disadvantaged Students," paper presented at the Summer Institute of the Council of Chief State School Officers, Whitefish, Mont., 1987.

3. Joyce L. Epstein, "How Do We Improve Programs of Parent Involvement?" *Educational Horizons*, vol. 66, 1988, pp. 58-59; Joyce L. Epstein and Susan L. Dauber, "School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools," *Elementary School Journal*, January 1991 (in press); Joyce L. Epstein, "Toward a Theory of Family-School Connections: Teacher Practices and Parent Involvement," in Klaus Hurrelman, Franz-Xaver Kaufman, and Friedrich Losel, eds., *Social Intervention: Potential and Constraints* (New York: de Gruyter, 1987), pp. 121-36; idem, *Teachers Manual: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)* (Baltimore: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Johns Hopkins University, 1987); and Joyce L. Epstein and Susan L. Dauber, *Evaluation of Students' Knowledge and Attitudes in the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Social Studies and Art Program* (Baltimore: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, Johns Hopkins University, Report 41, 1989).

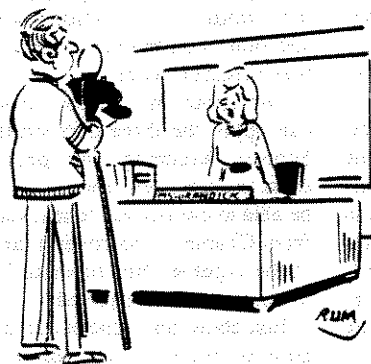
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7. See the following articles in the spring 1990 issue of *Equity and Choice*: Martin G. Brooks and Richard A. Sussman, "Including Parents in the Schools: How Can Third Party Interventions Make a Difference?," pp. 44-55; Don Davies, "Shall We Wait for the Revolution? A Few Lessons from the Schools Reaching Out Project," pp. 68-73; Dolores S. Goode, "The Community Portrait Process: School-Community Collaboration," pp. 32-37; Jean Krasnow, "Building New Parent-Teacher Partnerships: Teacher-Researcher Teams Simulate Reflection," pp. 25-31; David S. Seeley, "Are Schools That Are Reaching Out Restructuring?," pp. 38-43; Susan M. Swap, "Comparing Three Philosophies of Home-School Collaboration," pp. 9-19; and Shepherd Zeldin, "The Implementation of Home-School-Community Partnership Policies: Policy from the Perspective of Principals and Teachers," pp. 56-63.

8. Krasnow, p. 31.



"If I smile for the yearbook picture, no one will recognize me."

# The FIRST Grants

## Federal Leadership to Advance School and Family Partnerships

*The following pages provide brief descriptions of the diverse Family/School Partnership projects that the FIRST program has funded in the past two years.*

**T**HE FUND for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST) was created in 1988 to seek, encourage, and reward innovative projects and reforms designed to improve the education and achievement of America's elementary and secondary school students. FIRST, a program of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, not only funds new and promising projects but also shares with parents, educators, and all concerned citizens information about projects and reforms that have already demonstrated success. Through these endeavors, the program places itself at the center of America's renewed commitment to guarantee its children an education second to none.

An important aspect of the legislation that created FIRST was its recognition of the irreplaceable role of parents in the education of their children. Congress cited strong evidence of the direct relationship between parent involvement and improved student achievement, attitudes, and performance in school.

Congress also recognized that families are changing. Growing numbers of students come from single-parent homes, families in which both parents work, or homes in which the primary caregiver is

*The descriptions of programs supported by the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST) were contributed by CHRISTOPHER T. CROSS, assistant secretary, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.; RICHARD T. LA POINTE, director of FIRST; and CARL JENSEN, FIRST team leader.*

not the biological parent. To increase the participation of all families in their children's education, thereby increasing the chances that all children will succeed, Congress made it part of the mission of FIRST to encourage and support innovative and effective partnerships between families and schools.

### THE FAMILY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Family/School Partnership program, a subsidiary program of FIRST, awards federal grants to eligible local education agencies for projects that help families work with their children at home, that train teachers in methods of effective communication and cooperation with parents, that enhance existing family involvement programs, and that initiate programs to promote family responsibility for children's education. Although the Family/School Partnership program may fund some projects that incorporate the teaching of parenting skills, its emphasis is on achieving a greater balance between the home and the school as partners in the education of children.

A 15-member board advises the secretary of education and the director of FIRST on the selection of projects to be funded. The awards range from \$40,000 to \$180,000 and provide funding for one, two, or three years. The competition is rigorous. In 1989, 14 of 414 applicants were awarded grants; in 1990, 31 of 436 applicants received funding. This type of national competition, so demanding of excellence, results in promising programs to improve the quality of family/school partnerships across the coun-

try. Projects that are not funded — and there are many outstanding ones — may benefit from the process of submitting a proposal and may find other sources of support.

A funded project may, over time, qualify for inclusion in the National Diffusion Network and, in that way, become a model program, or it may serve as a demonstration site and so benefit other schools in the area.

The projects that were awarded Family/School Partnership grants for the 1989-90 and 1990-91 school years are summarized below. The descriptions are provided in the hope that they will 1) spur the interest of educators and parents in the kinds of improvements that these projects are attempting, 2) expand readers' networks for information on family/school partnerships, 3) encourage those contemplating or already involved in similar efforts to move boldly ahead, and 4) motivate others involved with family/school partnerships to submit proposals to FIRST for the 1991 competition.

### FAMILY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP GRANTS, 1989-90

**Project PASS (Partners Achieving School Success).** PASS is a partnership that involves middle school staff members, at-risk students, and families. Significant features of the program include the identification of targeted students during the first 12 weeks of the seventh grade; one-on-one partnerships between a trained staff member, a targeted student, and the student's family; training for parents; school/family homework activi-

ties organized and monitored by a program coordinator; and long-term analysis of the program's effectiveness by monitoring participating students through high school. (Elizabeth Pinkerton, Elk Grove Unified School District, 8820 Elk Grove Blvd., Elk Grove, CA 95624.)

**Project MIRROR (Managing Integrated Resources - Reaching Out Remediation).** Early intervention is the central priority for the family/school partnership program operating in the West Fresno (California) School District. Community role models work with families and students. Successful individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds share their own experiences with the disadvantaged students of West Fresno to create a "mirror effect." The program features six results-oriented objectives designed to improve the level of participation and involvement of families in the education of their children. The activities include teacher and family training; a family/school retreat; a strategic planning session to establish a dialogue between the school and families; a prescriptive learning and family tutorial component, which features an automated homework information system; and research and evaluation. (Norman Douglas, West Fresno School District, 2888 South Ivy, Fresno, CA 93706.)

**Partners for Success.** This project addresses the problems of at-risk high school students with limited English proficiency. The project director and resource teacher take primary responsibility for reaching out to students and to par-

ents who are not actively involved in the school and its programs. Recruitment efforts include personal contacts with students, advertisement of the program at the schools and in community media, and the use of students to refer other students. A commons room at the high school is used by parents and students for informal conversations and for formally organized events. A key feature of the project is a work/study arrangement that places students in part-time jobs under the supervision of the resource teacher. Students are also encouraged to participate in such other activities as tutoring; a class on study skills and decision making; school clubs and social events; a program of visits to colleges, cultural events, and industries throughout the Bay Area; and family meetings. (Juanita Contin, Gilroy Unified School District, 7810 Arroyo Cir., Gilroy, CA 95020.)

**Booneville's Family/School Partnership.** Designed to benefit students in grades 4 through 9, the Family/School Partnership program builds on early intervention and other existing programs to create a new range of services. The program aims to improve instruction, academic performance, and rates of school attendance by means of school-based management, shared decision making, and accountability for results. Students are taught in smaller classes with parent tutors. The program includes a children's support system that offers health, nutritional, and psychological services. (Martha D. Turner, Owsley County Board of Education, P.O. Box 416, Booneville, KY 41314.)

**Improving the Math Performance of Students Through the Combined Powers of Parents and Teachers: A Multi-Media Approach.** This program was designed both to enhance parents' understanding of their children's social and cognitive development and to improve parents' and students' skills in mathematics using materials that are relevant to their lives. The program is held on Saturday mornings, with two major components: a family mathematics program and a social and cognitive development program. Home visits, take-home materials, the use of computers, and real-world applications are stressed. (Jannette Adkins, Yorktown Center, 7301 Race Track Rd., Bowie, MD 20715.)

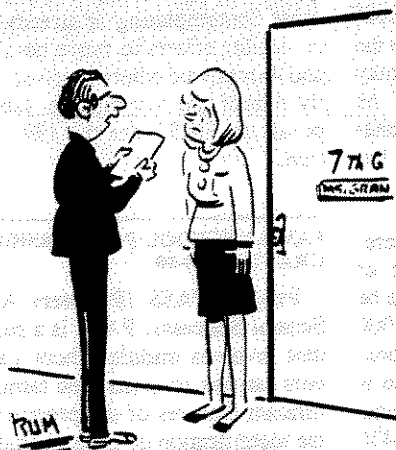
**Parents as Partners Intergeneration-**

**al Literacy Project.** This project represents a collaboration between the Chelsea Public Schools, Boston University, and several community organizations. Its objectives are to improve the literacy skills of adults and to diminish the incidence of reading disability among school-age children. University staff members working out of a community center offer a "story time" program for children while their parents are taught specific strategies for improving their own literacy and ways to become involved in their children's education. (Janis Rennie, Chelsea Public Schools, Chelsea, MA 02105.)

**Muskegon's Early Intervention to Improve School Achievement.** This program assesses student achievement and shares the results with the family as an indication of how parents' attitudes influence school behavior. When a child is absent excessively, a social worker is sent to the home to determine the problem. The program also aims to increase parent involvement in school-related activities by offering workshops for parents and helping families become aware of community resources. Finally, the program emphasizes individual attention in the classroom. (Lawrence DeVoogd, Public Schools of the City of Muskegon, 349 W. Webster, Muskegon, MI 49440.)

**Involvement of Families in Improving the Educational Achievements of Their Children.** This program offers joint learning experiences for targeted children and their parents. Parents receive literacy and parenting education, using learning materials focusing on parenting and family issues. The program provides a family resource center and makes an effort to coordinate other resources in the community. (Ronald McGinnis, St. Paul Public School District 625, 360 Colborne St., St. Paul, MN 55102.)

**Partners in Learning.** This program has three components: 1) the student/parent program involves students in grades K-8 and their parents in computer and workbook activities designed to improve reading, writing, math, and study skills; 2) the adult basic education program helps adults with basic reading and math skills and prepares them for the General Education Development (GED) exam; and 3) the English-as-a-second-language program works with people of all ages who are beginning to learn Eng-



*"Your next fall's seventh-grade class will be even larger. They got reinforcements."*

lish in a formal classroom format. All three components of the program are designed around the take-home computers that are housed in 15 Chapter 1 schools in the district. The computers are checked out on a revolving basis, serving a total of 800 families annually. The success of the project will be measured by standardized tests. (Vicki Smith, Las Cruces School District 2, 301 W. Amador, Las Cruces, NM 88005.)

**Developing Multicultural Awareness Through Literature.** Seeking to empower parents and children by recognizing their cultural differences as assets, this program introduces children, parents, and teachers to some of the world's best children's literature. Teachers receive training in family involvement activities, and parents and students are given educational materials for learning at home. (Phyllis Gonon, Community School District 18, 755 E. 100th St., Brooklyn, NY 11236.)

**Family/School Partnership to Assist Economically and Academically Disadvantaged Students.** This project serving preschool through 12th-grade students concentrates on three areas: parent awareness, parent partnership, and a parent advisory council. A guidance counselor assists parents and students with issues that affect students' ability to perform well in school. A curriculum specialist prepares materials for students to take home in order to stimulate discussion with parents regarding classroom activities. A final tier of the project is a parent council, which serves as an oversight committee. At the end of each semester the project will be evaluated to determine how well it is meeting the goals set forth at its inception, and staff members will be asked to assess parent and student responsiveness and progress. (Dan Foreman, Heavener Public Schools, P.O. Box 698, Heavener, OK 74937.)

**Washington County LIFE (Learning Is for Everyone).** The LIFE program promotes family involvement in education in rural areas to increase student achievement. Students in grades K-8 are being helped to develop a positive attitude toward education, and parents are encouraged to establish high educational expectations for their children and to pass these along through home-learning activities and research-based techniques in parenting and behavior management.

(Christine Ejlali, Washington County Board of Education, 405 W. College St., Jonesborough, TN 37659.)

**Arlington's Family/School Partnership Project.** Involving nine elementary schools in a county with a growing number of students with limited proficiency in English, this project is designed to increase community and parent involvement. The program offers staff development workshops that deal with family/school partnerships and has organized a countywide technical team that receives input from and provides assistance to project participants, as well as developing project materials. Each of the nine schools also has its own coordinating committee, consisting of parents and staff members, to identify specific school and community needs and to develop ways of addressing them. The project will produce a training manual for parents and teachers of elementary students and a resource guide for parents, in both Spanish and English. (Emma V. Hainer, Arlington Public Schools, 1426 N. Quincy St., Arlington, VA 22207.)

**Cooperative Parent/Child Remediation and Attitude Enhancement Program.** This take-home computer program assists Appalachian students in grades 1-6 and their parents. The program provides a diagnosis and prescription in the areas of reading and mathematics for each participant. Pretests, posttests, and surveys are used to evaluate progress and ensure success. (David M. Godby, Logan County Board of Education, P.O. Box 477, 671 E. Stratton St., Logan, WV 25601.)

#### FAMILY/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP GRANTS, 1990-91

The 1990-91 projects have just recently begun, but it is hoped that these brief descriptions will still illustrate the diverse types of parent involvement that may benefit students across all grade levels.

**Parents Advocating, Promoting, Assisting Students.** This project focuses on early intervention strategies, including coordination with the local Head Start program. It will also provide staff development activities in curriculum alignment, curriculum integration, and developmental assessments. (Kathleen Karol, Flagstaff Unified School District 1, 3285 E. Sparrow Ave., Flagstaff, AZ 86004.)

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**Improving Parental Involvement and K-1 Student Achievement.** This project promotes parent meetings, classes on parenting, parent/teacher conferences, and home visits. Parents are taught to work with their children in the classroom and to use these skills at home with required reading assignments. (Pamela Burkhardt, Creighton Elementary No. 14, 2702 E. Flower St., Phoenix, AZ 85016.)

**Focused In-Home Resources and School-Based Training.** This project enables kindergarten and first-grade students and their parents to make creative use of in-home materials and experiences. A school/community program is also part of the project. (Herman Moya, Isaac School District No. 5, 1701 N. 35th Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85009.)

**Granger Junior High School Comprehensive School Reform.** The Sweetwater Union High School District has formed a partnership with the San Diego State University Foundation, which focuses on increasing parent involvement through parent education classes and intensive outreach to parents of seventh- and eighth-grade students. Other reforms include modifying the school environment through specialized strategies aimed at developing social skills and emphasizing after-school experiential social learning. (Harris Teller, Sweetwater Union High School District, 1130 Fifth Ave., Chula Vista, CA 92011.)

**Cajon Family/School Partnership.** Parent volunteers work with students in the classrooms to produce student publications. Parents and students participate in after-school workshops on computer technology and desktop publishing. Teachers are involved in workshops on the most effective ways to communicate with parents. (Yvonne Johnson, Cajon Valley Union School District, 189 Roanoke Rd., P.O. Box 1007, El Cajon, CA 92022-1007.)

**Project Reflections.** Through home visits, families are given educational materials and taught how to get involved with their children's schools. The program also holds family/school retreats, provides a health and wellness dietician, and offers after-school tutoring services. (Norman Douglass, West Fresno School District, 2888 S. Ivy, Fresno, CA 93706.)

**Love, Leadership, and Literacy.** Part

of this project will be the development of a home-learning program for families with disadvantaged students in grades 7 through 12. Other strategies for fostering the success of these students include partnerships that involve teachers, students, and families so that all three groups become accountable for educational outcomes; an incentive program that provides students with mentors for leadership and success; and empowerment pedagogy — an emphasis on literacy, writing skills, and cooperative learning. (Anna Perez, Baldwin Park Unified School District, 3699 N. Holly Ave., Los Angeles, CA 91706.)

**Los Angeles Family/School Partnership Project.** Parents are trained to represent their community as members of school councils. The training covers policy and planning, conflict resolution skills, constituency representation, small-group interaction, budget fundamentals, school operations, and information on available community resources. (Sharon Robinson, Los Angeles Unified School District, 450 N. Grand Ave., Room A-427, Los Angeles, CA 90012.)

**Modesto Parent Partnership Project.** Teacher training and parent involvement activities are offered at several school sites. The program encourages parents to read with their children, holds family workshops to provide parents with effective teaching and parenting strategies, and helps parents of at-risk students to improve home-learning conditions. (Steve Seidell, Modesto City Schools, 426 Locust St., Modesto, CA 95351.)

**Sanger Unified School District Family/School Partnership.** Home instruction is delivered in the form of small-group activities held in the homes of host families. Home/school activities take place on Saturday mornings at the schools. Another aim of the project is to help parents feel more successful at and comfortable with school activities. (Steven Carlson, Sanger Unified School District, 1905 Seventh St., Sanger, CA 93657.)

**Parents Assist Developing Reading and Esteem in Students (PADRES).** This project, directed toward students in grades K-5 at four elementary schools, involves some 400 students with limited proficiency in English and their families. Parents are trained to work with children who lack language facility. A key ele-

ment of the project is a "buddy system," in which staff members work directly with parents and students to improve study habits and time-management skills, to monitor academic and social progress, and to increase the students' self-esteem in the school setting. (Jean Cross, Santa Ana Unified School District, 1405 French St., Santa Ana, CA 92701.)

**Parenting Through Books and Beyond.** Two hundred California schools are matched with 200 schools in New York to reach the goal of reading one million pages. Participants read at home and at school, read with their families, write to pen pals at their partner school, and share information about their favorite books and authors. (Sue Holtkamp, Solana Beach School District, 309 N. Rios Ave., Solana Beach, CA 92075.)

**Parenting Through Math and Science and Beyond.** The purpose of this project is to motivate students and parents to use mathematics and science to conduct investigations outside of school. Central to the project are family workshops, which focus on the integration and application of math and science skills, family/school collaboration, parent/child cooperative learning, and effective parenting strategies. Families receive activity packets to help them apply at home the skills learned in the workshops. (Sue Holtkamp, Solana Beach School District, 309 N. Rios Ave., Solana Beach, CA 92075.)

**Family/School Partnership Project.** This project will institute site-based management, flexible student scheduling to allow all students ample time to grasp skills, and personalized school curricula to meet individual needs. (Paul Jackson, Harrison School District 2, 4880 Dover Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80916.)

**United Partners.** This project establishes a family resource center that features a computerized database of community resources. Training in the use of the database is offered to parents, students, and school personnel. The program has also installed a model technological system that links selected homes of special populations with the schools to give them more access to information and to ensure students equal opportunities for high-quality education. (Anita Salazar, Weld County School District 8, 301 Reynolds St., Fort Lupton, CO 80621.)

**Family/School Partnership.** Families

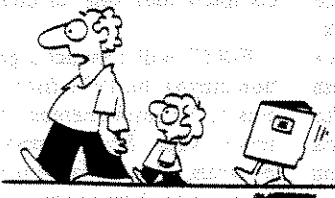
are grouped into clusters of 10 led by a school/home connector and a lead family. The program offers family-centered training and services to parents, including meetings with individual families, home visits, and packets of materials for home study. Parents are encouraged to take the GED exam. (Maude L. Storr, School Board of Broward County, 1320 S.W. Fourth St., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33312.)

**Sulphur Springs Elementary School Family/School Partnership.** Parents participate in school-based decision making through a school advisory council. The project also offers school-based training sessions to help parents read and talk with their children, as well as follow-up home visits. (Eugene Ymiolok and Judith Lombana, Hillsborough County School Board, 901 E. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33602.)

**Personal Efficacy for the Parents of the Underachiever and Slow Learner.** Parents of underachievers and slow learners are trained to understand their children's needs and to use home intervention strategies to help students improve their academic achievement. (Ronald E. Kimmons, School District 147, 155th Place and Hoyne Ave., Harvey, IL 60426.)

**Owsley County Schools Family/School Partnership.** Parent centers are set up in the schools to allow parents access to IBM's "Principle of the Alphabet Literacy System." Parents are trained to train other adults to help children at home and to instill positive attitudes toward education. The program also includes staff training. (Martha D. Turner, Owsley County Board of Education, P.O. Box 340, Booneville, KY 41314.)

**Lansing Family/School Partnership.** This project operates out of four Chapter 1 schools in the Lansing school district in conjunction with the local Literacy Volunteers of America program.



*"When my teachers told me that my records would follow me through life, I thought they were exaggerating."*

Parents will be encouraged to participate in adult education programs, to attend parenting classes for single parents, to use learning centers, to help with tutoring, and to conduct literacy activities. Monthly dinners and home visits are also planned. (Michael Hunter, Lansing School District, 519 Kalamazoo St., Lansing, MI 48933.)

**Project PACE (Parents as Competent Educators).** This program uses a parent-centered intervention approach with three components: a home curriculum for instruction and tutorial assistance, parent training, and parent and staff research. The district's three elementary schools will adopt the project's curriculum program. (Maria Etienne, School District of the City of Pontiac, 350 E. Wide Track Dr., Pontiac, MI 48342.)

**School/Family Partnership Initiative.** Parent involvement committees will be established at each of the 11 junior high schools in the district. Home visitation teams will give professional and technical assistance to families, particularly those with students considered to be most at risk academically. The program will also provide training for school staff, parents, and health care professionals. (Rueben Dilworth, Jackson Public School District, P.O. Box 2338, Jackson, MS 39225-2338.)

**Home/School Partnership.** Components of this project include family workshops, a parent resource center with a lending library in each school, a booklet on early childhood for parents of preschoolers, a tutoring program for students, and an adult literacy program for families. Individual student profiles and monthly progress reports will also be part of the program. (Lois McGuire, Bayonne City School District, Ave. A and 29th St., Bayonne, NJ 07002.)

**Family/School Partnership Program in Three Chapter 1 Schools.** This project focuses on 1) training for parents and school staff in family/school collaboration, based on a program at the Ackerman Institute; 2) training for parents to work together with their children at home, based on the Megaskills program and the Family Math program; and 3) shared decision making involving school staff and parents. (Raseh Nagi, Community School District 22, 2525 Haring St., Brooklyn, NY 11235.)

**Project PACT (Parents - Administrators - Children - Teachers).** This project emphasizes parent/staff training that will shift the relationship between families and schools to one of mutual trust, regular communication, and effective cooperation on problem solving. Parents will have access to information and resources and will learn practical approaches for helping their children with schoolwork. (Jon Moscow, Community School District 2, 330 W. 18th St., New York, NY 10011.)

**White Plains Family/School Partnership.** Activities of this project include a monthly Saturday drop-in program, follow-up home visits for families of the students who are most at risk, English-as-a-second-language and GED classes for parents, training for grandmothers who are the primary caretakers of children, and a school district orientation series for parents. (Saul M. Yanofsky, White Plains City School District, 5 Homestead Ln., White Plains, NY 10605.)

**Project LIFE (Lima Intervention and Family Education).** Parents attend training sessions in the schools that include discussions of video presentations and the assignment of "homework" activities to try at home with their children. Topics covered include teen sexuality and drug abuse. The program also emphasizes dropout prevention. (Charles Buroker, Lima City School District, Lima, OH 45802-2000.)

**A Cooperative Arrangement: Houston ISD and ADVANCE.** This project, involving four elementary schools, offers home-based parent training and community-based parenting education classes with the aim of reducing students' high-risk factors by teaching parents to assist their children in the home. Another component of the project is a nine-month program focused on language stimulation, competency development, and cognitive growth for infants. (Sylvia F. Macy, Houston Independent School District, 3830 Richmond, Houston, TX 77027.)

**Parents as School Supporters.** This program trains parents as home teachers and supplies instructional materials in reading and mathematics for learning at home. Training for parents also includes computer education, communication methods to use with children, and involvement with school-based management. The project will function in two

elementary schools and in the Harlandale Middle School. (Amy Perkins, Harlandale Independent School District, 102 Genevieve St., San Antonio, TX 78214-2997.)

**Family/School Partners in Education: A Model for Rural Schools.** This program trains parents as tutors. The business community will be actively involved, providing "work-release time" for parent training. A mobile resource center will travel to the different districts, serving as a training site. (Margaret Lee, Greensville County Public Schools, P.O. Box 1156, Emporia, VA 23847.)

**Milwaukee Family/School Partnership.** Components of this program include parent advisory councils, goal setting for students and families, referral services to other social agencies for parents, employment and training services for both youths and adults, home visits, and the provision of services to students enrolled in alternative educational programs. (Belkis Santos, Milwaukee Public Schools, 5225 W. Vliet St., Milwaukee, WI 53208.)

#### THE SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS PROGRAM

FIRST runs another competitive grants program, the Schools and Teachers program. The projects funded by this division of FIRST are intended to increase educational opportunities and to improve students' school performance. Some of the grants awarded to public and private schools and to other institutions and groups have supported projects that include family/school partnerships at the school level. Information on these grants is available from FIRST.

#### THE PROMISE OF THESE PROJECTS

With its competitive grants programs, FIRST has demonstrated leadership at the federal level in encouraging practical programs to improve school/family partnerships and in studying whether and how schools and districts can organize, implement, and evaluate programs that increase all families' involvement in education.

The FIRST Family/School Partnership projects will provide valuable information about new directions and new practices in several ways. The funded projects focus on all levels of schooling — pre-

school through high school. Although they prominently feature preschool and elementary grades, about one-fourth focus only on the middle and high school years, and nearly half include more than one level of schooling. The grants are divided approximately equally between rural and urban local education agencies. Thus the efforts can address questions of whether different types of activities can be organized successfully at different levels of schooling in differing locales and of how parents can be involved with their children's education in urban and rural communities.

The projects are diverse and should produce information about better ways to facilitate all the major types of parent involvement that are discussed in the other articles in this issue of the *Kappan*. Of the 45 Family/School Partnership awards made during the past two years, for example, more than 30 will implement and evaluate activities that build *parenting and child-rearing skills*. Families will be able to learn about children's health and nutrition and about child and adolescent development.

About 20 projects will implement and evaluate activities to improve *school and family communications*, using such means as new computer and telephone systems, other technological advances, old methods of coming together to "meet and eat," conferences between teachers and parents, and home visits.

Only a few projects will focus on the implementation and evaluation of programs for *volunteers*. Parents will be present in the classrooms as tutors, helping teachers to help students, or they will work at the schools in other capacities.

More than half of the projects will address the most difficult type of involvement and the one for which parents request the most help: *assisting children at home*. The funded projects take important steps in implementing and evaluating learning activities at home, using such approaches as interactive homework, family mathematics and reading, science activities, computer-based learning with computers borrowed from the school for home use, and other activities that link the family with the child's classwork and learning.

More than one-fourth of the projects will implement and evaluate ways to include parents in *decision making and gov-*

*ernance*, school-site management, school councils and committees, and other activities that give parents a voice in the management of their schools.

A few projects will implement and evaluate activities aimed at *linking schools, families, and communities*. These programs will organize services in community centers, help families to obtain needed community resources, introduce students to mentors, and coordinate inter-agency services for families and children through the schools.

Some of the projects combine several types of activities to begin building more comprehensive programs of school and family connections.

Many projects, regardless of the specific type of involvement on which they focus, emphasize families of children who are at risk of failing in school or who have other educational problems that should benefit from the joint efforts of schools and families. These projects will be working to show that families that are not usually involved in their children's education can be helped by schools and by other community groups to become more involved in ways that matter for students' success. The projects will address questions of whether families are hard to reach or whether schools simply need to try new strategies.

One of the most promising features of the projects is that all will give serious attention to evaluation. Many of the projects stress the importance of learning whether and how family/school partnerships can improve student achievement, attendance, behavior, attitudes, and self-esteem. They will also try to determine which other school goals might benefit from partnerships with families. The projects will address questions of whether schools' efforts to involve families are "worth it" in terms of improving more students' chances for success. Much can be learned from these projects as they complete their one- to three-year terms.

FIRST will conduct a grants competition during the 1991 fiscal year for projects to be implemented in the 1991-92 school year. For information about the program, its annual priorities, and the application procedure, write or phone the FIRST Program, 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W., Rm. 522, Washington, DC 20208-5524. Ph. 202/219-1496.

*A report from the*

SCHOOL, FAMILY & COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

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