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Perspectives and Previews on Research and Policy for School, Family, and Community Partnerships

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Over the past decade, the field of school-family-community partnerships has been energized before our very eyes by activities in research, policy, and practice. In research, scholars from different disciplines are applying various methodologies to study connections of schools and communities with families of various backgrounds and cultures and with students at different age and grade levels. The number of master's and doctoral dissertations are increasing as graduate students and their professors become familiar with the field and seek to make new contributions.

In policy, in 1994 Congress added a new national educational goal for school and family partnerships to the major federal legislation called Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Also, Title I regulations were revised and include mandates for specific family-school connections in order for states, districts, and schools to obtain and keep federal funds. Other federal, state, and local policies have been and are being developed that mandate or encourage partnership activities.

In practice, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and others in communities are increasingly working together to meet various mandates and guidelines, and, more importantly, to design their own programs and practices.

Along with curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and staff development, a program of school-family-community connections is now viewed as one of the components of school organization that may help to promote student learning and success in school.

AN EMERGING FIELD OF STUDY

A selective summary may help to illustrate some of the changes that have occurred in this growing field of study. Traditionally, studies of families, or schools, or communities were conducted as if these were separate or competing contexts. For example, in the late 1960s and 1970s, researchers argued heatedly about whether schools or families were more important. When heads cleared, the dual contributions of schools and families were acknowledged: Students are advantaged or disadvantaged by the economic and educational resources and guidance offered by their families, and students are advantaged or disadvantaged by the quality of their experiences in schools. The debate changed as it became increasingly clear that neither schools nor families alone can do the job of educating and socializing children and preparing them for life. Rather, schools, families, and communities share responsibilities for children and influence them simultaneously.

In the 1960s, the topic of "parent involvement" gained prominence with the implementation of federal Head Start and Follow-Through programs in preschool and early elementary grades. These programs legislated the involvement of low-income parents in the education of their young children to prepare them for successful entry to school. At the same time, other factors increased the involvement of middle- and high-income parents in their children's education. For example, more women were graduating from college and entering and staying in the work force; more mothers were equal with teachers in education; and more parents were active in decisions about early care for their children. Thus, there were pressures and opportunities for families with more and with less formal education to increase their awareness of the importance of their participation in children's education and in their continuous interactions with their children's schools (Connors & Epstein, in press).

Other early policies changed basic connections of schools and families, based on demographic data, family demands, and goals for greater nutritional equity for all children. For example, schools began to serve lunch at school to all children, responding in part to the increasing numbers of working mothers who were not at home midday. Schools began to provide free breakfasts as well as free and reduced-price lunches to help poor families and their children. Research on these policies progressed from studies of whether to which food should be served in breakfasts and lunches to help students and their families.

The new policy agenda about partnerships is being driven by more complex family and community conditions, but emerging policies are still responses to poverty and other demographics, family demands, and goals for equity and excellence in students' education. The problems are well known: There are more two-parent homes in which both parents are employed; more young, single parents and more of them working outside the home; more children in poverty; more migrant and homeless children and families; more family mobility during the school year; and other factors that make it imperative to redesign and improve

policies and practices for linking schools, families, and communities. But programs of partnership are not only responses to problems of families facing difficult conditions. The new policy agenda about partnerships reflects the advances in understanding how all families need better information about their children, the schools, and the part they play across the grades to influence children's well-being, learning, and development.

Some mandates and emphases in earlier federal programs (such as the parent councils required in Title I) were limited, often perfunctory activities that informed and involved only a few parents (Keesling & Meiaragno, 1983). Other demonstration programs were quite comprehensive with home visits, assistance to parents in understanding their very young children, good communications with teachers, opportunities to volunteer, and other active interactions (Gordon, 1979). The early efforts to understand parent involvement were largely unsystematic, with few measures of the effects of specific practices of involvement. The first frameworks focused mainly on the roles that parents needed to play and not the work that schools needed to conduct in order to organize strong programs to involve all families in their children's education.

In the 1970s, the effective schools movement—a first wave of recent school reform—captured the attention of educators of students who were at risk of failing (Edmonds, 1979). Although it was not one of the initial elements of effective schools, parent involvement was quickly added to an expanding list of components that research and practice suggested would improve schools and increase student success. By the mid-1980s, the report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) directed attention to the need to improve all schools, not just those for students from economically distressed homes and communities. The *effective* schools litany evolved into lists of requirements for *restructured* schools. The school reform movements may continue to change its vocabulary: There already are discussions of *renewed*, *reinvented*, *redefined*, *responsive*, and *reconstituted* schools. Whatever the vocabulary, all school reform efforts recognize the need to improve the quality of education for all students. Each new initiative has sharpened the focus on curriculum, instruction, and connections with families.

In the 1980s, studies began to clarify the amorphous term *parent involvement*, and recast the emphasis from parent involvement (left up to the parent) to *school and family partnerships*, or, more fully, *school, family, and community partnerships*, in order to recognize the shared responsibilities for children within and across contexts. The concept of "shared responsibility" removed part of the burden from parents to figure out on their own how to become or stay involved in their children's education from year to year and put part of that burden on schools to create programs to inform and involve all families. Researchers collected data to identify separable components of involvement and began to focus more rigorously on measuring results of involvement for students, parents, and for educators (Epstein, 1987a, 1987b, 1992).

Growth in this field of study also was assisted by the federal government's creation in 1990 of the national Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning to conduct an active research and development program on school and family partnerships from birth through high school. The Center includes over 20 researchers who are conducting research, development, evaluations, and policy studies in two research programs on the early years (focusing on students and their families from birth through age 10) and on the years of early and late adolescence (focusing on students and their families from age 11-19). The Center's researchers are from several disciplines, use varied methods and measurement models, and often work closely with educators and parents to design and study new approaches for productive partnerships.

In addition to its research agenda, the Center created an International Network of over 300 researchers in the United States and more than 40 nations to encourage and to share work on many topics related school, family, and community partnerships. Some researchers in other nations have followed the Center's format to establish interdisciplinary networks in their own countries (e.g., Australia, Portugal, and Denmark) and to work with and assist educators to improve school programs of partnerships with families and communities. The discussions and debates among international colleagues and collaborative cross-national projects (Davies, 1993) have added energy to this field.

For several years, the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning and the Institute for Responsive Education have joined forces to conduct a day-long roundtable for U.S. and international colleagues to share their research and development activities prior to the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). The Center also organized international symposia for several years for the formal AERA meetings. The number of countries, researchers, topics, questions, methods and measures, and quality of work at these meetings have grown each year.

There is other evidence of the growth of interest and action in this field of study. A dozen years ago, the AERA had few papers at its annual meeting on topics concerning families. Now, multiple labels are needed to index presentations on family involvement, school partnerships, parent participation, fathers, mothers, and other related terms. The Families as Educators Special Interest Group (SIG) at AERA has grown in membership for more than a decade. The annual meetings of nearly every major social science and policy-related professional association include presentations of research and often interdisciplinary panels on topics of schools, families, communities and their connections.

As should be expected in a maturing field, new theories, studies, policies, and practices generate heat as well as light. Researchers debate assumptions, definitions, and interpretations of results (Coleman, 1987; Lareau, 1989, and this volume, chap. 4). Policy leaders and educators take different paths toward varied goals. In short, the field of school, family, and community partnerships is growing and

improving with better questions, methods, and approaches. The emerging field is strengthened by three characteristics of the participants and their work:

Academic Disciplinary Boundaries Have Blurred. Progress in research on family, school, and community connections has been made across disciplines, within and across academic specialties. Researchers in sociology, psychology, social work, anthropology, education, history, economics, and other fields are conducting studies, building on each others' work, and contributing new perspectives that are, in turn, assisting policy and practice. These investments will continue to improve the understanding of families, schools, communities, and their connections.

Professional Boundaries Have Blurred. Researchers, policy leaders, and educators are working with and learning from each other. More than for most topics in social and educational research, there has been a short time line between research and its application in practice. More than for most topics, researchers, educators, and parents have been working together to identify the goals, problems, and potential solutions to create more successful partnerships to assist more students. These cross-context connections of university researchers, educators and policy makers have transformed how some research is designed, conducted, and interpreted (also see Moles, this volume, chap. 15).

The Main Questions Have Changed. We have moved from the question, Are families important for student success in school? to *If* families are important for children's development and school success, *how* can schools help all families conduct the activities that will benefit their children? Researchers and educators have common questions, such as: What do we need to know and do to help all children succeed in school and to enable their families to help them do so? How can schools communicate with families and community groups to enable more families (indeed all of them) to guide their children on positive paths from birth through high school? How can these communications be family friendly, feasible for schools, and acceptable to students? What are the effects of alternative designs and implementation processes of practices of partnership?

From my view, the main goal of partnerships is *to develop and conduct better communications with families across the grades in order to assist students to succeed in school.* Research should question, elaborate, or clarify all of the definable parts of that goal: to develop and conduct better communications (How? Which connections, interactions, and exchanges are promoted by different types of involvement? Which supporting policies are needed?); with more families (How? With which strategies to reach most or all families? With which guidance for all teachers and administrators?); to assist more students (How? With which roles for students? With which interactions of students and adults to motivate

students to work hard and learn to their full potential?); to succeed in school (How? With which definitions and measures of success—that is, which results or outcomes of schooling?).

Research, policies, and practices are accumulating that inform all parts of this goal, but more studies and efforts in the schools are needed to fully understand whether and how the processes work. The next sections of this chapter take a *look back* to review some of the results of my and colleagues' earlier work to describe a knowledge base on which to build; then, a *look around* to discuss issues that are emerging in current research and in practice; and a *look ahead* to preview some of the questions that I believe need continued or new attention.^{1, 2}

A LOOK BACK: A BASE ON WHICH TO BUILD

For many years, my colleagues and I have been conducting studies to identify and understand what schools need to know and do to develop and implement full or comprehensive programs of partnership. This work produced a theory, framework, and vocabulary that enables researchers and educators to communicate with, learn from, and assist each other. This is still a skeletal structure, however, that needs to grow to a full body of knowledge.

In the 1980s, I developed a theoretical perspective called "overlapping spheres of influence," based on data collected with colleagues from teachers, parents, and students in the elementary grades. The results of the data analyses could not be explained by older sociological theories that stressed that social organizations would be most effective if they set separate goals and worked efficiently and effectively on unique missions. Rather, a social organizational perspective was needed that posited that the most effective families and schools had overlapping, shared goals and missions concerning children, and conducted some work collaboratively.

The model of overlapping spheres of influence includes external and internal structures. The external structure can, by conditions or design, be pushed together or pulled apart by three main forces (background and practices of families, background and practices of schools and classrooms, and time). These forces create conditions, space, and opportunities for more or fewer shared activities of schools, families, and communities. The internal structure of the model specifies institutional and interpersonal communication lines and locates where and how social interactions occur within and across the boundaries of school, home, and

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community. Institutional level interactions involve all members or groups within schools, families, and communities; individual interactions involve one student, parent, teacher, or community member; and combinations of these interactions also may occur within the areas of overlap. This theory integrates and extends a long line of ecological, educational, psychological, and sociological perspectives on social organizations and relationships (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leichter, 1974; Litwak & Meyer, 1974; Seeley, 1981; and a long line of research on school, family, and community environments and their effects. For details, references, and summaries see Epstein, 1987a, 1992.)

To study the usefulness of the theory, other researchers and practitioners and I conducted surveys of and field studies with teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Among other questions, we wanted to know: Which practices of partnership fall in the area of overlap or shared responsibility? What can be learned about the range and the results of the activities and interactions between families and schools and between schools, families, and communities? What can be learned about the policies and practical approaches that help schools develop and implement strong programs of partnership that engage all families?

Several studies helped to identify and improve a framework of six major types of involvement that fall within the areas of overlap in the spheres of influence model. Each type of involvement may be operationalized by hundreds of practices that schools may choose to develop their programs. There will be more or less overlap and shared responsibility depending on whether many of few practices on the six types of involvement are working; and each practice that is implemented opens opportunities for varied interactions of teachers, parents, students, and others across contexts. In short form, the six types explain how schools can work with families and communities to assist them to become or stay informed and involved in children's education at home and at school (Epstein, 1992). Briefly, the six types are:

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

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

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

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

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

Type 6—Collaborating With Community: Coordinate the work and resources of community businesses, agencies, colleges or universities, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Each of the six types poses specific challenges for its successful design and implementation: each type leads to some different results or outcomes for students, parents, and teachers; and each benefits from investments and commitments by the various members of the school-family-community partnership (Epstein, 1987b; Epstein & Connors, 1995).

The framework also helps researchers locate measures of involvement and the results of their studies in the same scheme that is useful to educators. That is, research on family or community volunteers at school or in other locations (Type 3) could contribute results that extend knowledge about the organization and effects of volunteers, and the results and knowledge gained could be particularly useful to schools interested in improving their volunteer programs (e.g., Epstein & Dauber, 1995.)

The results of the early studies raise many new questions. For example, one of the most consistent results in our and other surveys is that teachers have very different views of parents than parents have of themselves (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Most teachers do not know most parents' goals for their children, nor do they understand the information parents would like to have to be more effective at home. Most parents do not know what most teachers are trying to do each year in school nor about school improvement activities. Similarly, neither parents nor teachers fully understand what students think about family-school partnerships. Indeed, most adults think students want to avoid or minimize family involvement in their education. Data from students, however, suggest the opposite. Students want their families to be knowledgeable partners with their schools in their education and available as helpful sources of information, assistance, or guidance. The studies show why it is important to measure teachers', parents', and students' views to identify gaps in knowledge that each has about the other and to identify their common interests in good communications and in children's success in school.

Although the early studies confirm that there are positive connections between family involvement and student achievement, we still know relatively little about which practices, how, when, for whom, and why particular practices produce positive student outcomes. There also is evidence of some negative connections of family involvement with student behaviors, when students are in trouble or need help, but little evidence about whether the interventions help solve the problems over time. The early studies show that school and family partnerships

produce a variety of results for families, for teachers, and for students. Three results illustrate how broadly future questions must be cast:

School Practices Influence Family Involvement. Teachers' practices to involve families are as or more important than family background variables such as race or ethnicity, social class, marital status, or mother's work status for determining whether and how parents become involved in their children's education. And, family practices of involvement are as or more important than family background variables for determining whether and how students progress and succeed in school. At the elementary, middle, and high school levels, surveys of parents, teachers, principals, and students reveal that *if* schools invest in practices to involve families, then parents respond by conducting those practices, including many parents who might not have otherwise become involved on their own (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986a).

Teachers Who Involve Parents Rate Them More Positively and Stereotype Families Less. Teachers who frequently involve families in their children's education rate single and married parents and more and less formally educated parents equally in helpfulness and follow-through with their children at home. By contrast, teachers who do not frequently involve families give more stereotypic ratings to single parents and to those with less formal education, marking them lower in helpfulness and follow-through than other parents. (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1990).

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There Are Subject-Specific Links Between the Involvement of Families and Increases in Achievement by Students. Practices to involve parents at home with their children in interactions about a specific subject are likely to benefit student achievement in that subject. For example, with data that connected teacher practices, parent responses, and student achievement:

- Teachers' practices to involve parents in learning activities at home were mainly limited to reading, English, or related activities; also, principals encouraged teachers to involve parents in reading;
- Parents reported more involvement on reading activities; and
- Students improved their reading scores over one school year if parents were involved, but their math scores were not affected by frequent parent involvement in reading (Epstein, 1991).

These results suggest that specific practices of partnership may help boost student achievement in particular subjects. Research is needed to clarify whether family involvement with a child in one subject transfers to benefit the child in other subjects over time.

Other results from the early studies provide a base for new questions. For example: *On the importance and extent of involvement, on average:*

- Teachers, parents, and students agree that parent involvement is important.
- Teachers and parents report low contact with each other—even on traditional communications.

On the variations in patterns of partnership:

- Some teachers in urban, suburban, and rural schools are leaders in involving parents in many ways; other teachers avoid partnerships.
- Teachers and parents in the elementary grades (or self-contained classes) presently report more home-school connections than in the middle and high school grades (or in departmentalized programs).
- Teachers presently contact more parents if their children have problems in school; parents presently become involved more on their own if their children are doing well in school.
- The student is an important "transmitter" of information from school to home and from home to school.

On the types of involvement:

- Few parents are involved frequently at the school building.
- Most parents want to know how to help their own child at home each year.

Many other basic findings are summarized and discussed in Epstein, (in press-a).

Most of these results have been confirmed and extended by several researchers in studies of diverse populations of teachers, parents, and students (e.g., Ames, 1993; Brian, 1994; Davies, 1991; Davies, Burch, & Johnson, 1992; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Eccles, & Harold, this volume, chap. 1; Epstein & Jacobsen, 1994; Epstein & Lee, 1993, in press; Lee, 1994; Montandon & Perrenoud, 1987; and many others). But there is much more to learn. Research about school, family, and community connections needs to improve in many ways. Early research was often based on limited samples, too global or too narrow measures of involvement, and limited data on student outcomes. As research proceeds with clearer questions and better data, measurement models should be more fully specified, and analyses more elegant, and more useful for policy and practice.

A LOOK AHEAD: PERSPECTIVES AND PREVIEWS

Studies conducted by researchers in the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning and by many other researchers are adding new knowledge on school, family, and community connections at various age and

grade levels from birth through high school; in urban, suburban, and rural locations; with families of various backgrounds and cultures; new ways to understand and conduct studies of community connections with families and with schools; and new understandings of policy contexts. Studies in progress include surveys, case studies, experimental and quasi-experimental longitudinal data collections, field tests, evaluations, and program and policy development. The results of these studies will extend the field considerably, but they also raise new questions. Five topics have emerged from the ongoing research that are particularly compelling and need continued and additional study:

1. patterns and changes in partnerships across the grades that raise new questions about family involvement at *points of transition* from one grade level to the next, from one school to the next, and across the years of high school;
2. *results or consequences*—positive or negative—of particular types of involvement at all levels for students, families, and for teaching practice;
3. the *components of community* in school and family partnerships;
4. the *roles of students* in school–family–community partnerships; and
5. *collaborations of researchers with policy leaders and educators.*

Each of these topics represents an extensive research agenda, and each has implications for policy and practice.

1. Perspectives and Previews: Which Practices of Partnership Are Effective at Important Points of Transition, From One Grade Level to the Next, Across School Levels, or at Other Times That Students Change Teachers or Schools?

Students and their families age and grow and change grades, classes, and teachers every year. School and classroom programs and curricula become more complex each year and across levels. Schools also change as improvement plans and new programs are implemented. Teachers change as they become more experienced and as they add new approaches to their teaching repertory. Communities change as leaders, resources, services, and citizens come and go. All parts and participants of school, family, and community connections change constantly. Studies of partnerships, even at one point in time, must be aware of the inevitable developmental patterns of schooling.

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence encourages the measurement of concepts of change. It posits the pushing and pulling of these contexts as they are drawn together or forced apart each year by the philosophies, backgrounds, and practices of teachers, families, students, and others. Longitudinal data, case

study histories, and other methods are being important for learning more about the changing nature of partnerships across the grades.

Studies of change and transitions are demanding. Several studies by researchers in the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning are exploring continuity and change of family and community involvement with data collected over time on various topics. The studies use various methods, including surveys, interviews, observations, journals, and other reports from educators, from parents, and students. Some of these studies use mixed methods (e.g., small-sample, local case studies contrasted with large-sample surveys on the same topics) to examine how families are involved in their children's education, how involvement changes, and how the changes affect students, families, and teachers.

Regular Transitions Across the Grades. Research is accumulating on patterns of partnership across the grades. For example, longitudinal studies are in progress on how family involvement changes from kindergarten to Grade 2 in families with different cultural backgrounds (Bright, 1994; Hidalgo, 1994; Siu, 1994; Swap, 1994) and on how school programs to involve families change from Grades 2 to 5 (Ames, 1993). Many studies still are needed, however, to learn how partnerships change or remain the same across the grades from birth through high school; the challenges that families meet at each stage of their children's development; and the results for students, parents, and the schools of partnerships across the grades.

New issues about grade level changes are emerging. Students and their families change teachers every year, but little is known about these regular events that alter school and family connections. For example, the Center's research on families in different cultural groups reveals that children's new teacher may have different definitions of success than their prior teachers. Research is needed on how families learn about new teachers' ideas of how children succeed in their classrooms. A related question of equal importance is: How do teachers collect information from families about their children each year and periodically during a school year? Programmatic studies are needed on the organization and effects of various approaches to renew partnerships each year.

Alexander and Entwisle's research (this volume, chap. 5) raises another question about the annual transitions that students and their families make from the summer to the fall of the school year. Regardless of the school organization or length of the school year, home is a year-round resource. More information is needed on the question: What do schools need to do to help families maximize their influence year round? Presently, except in year-round schools, the summer is treated as a time that is separate from school. Research on summer learning and forgetting shows that summer is an influential time that affects students' skills and readiness for the next school year.

One study of the effects of summer learning packets suggests that marginal students, at risk of failing, are assisted in the fall by activities they conduct to

keep their skills active in the summer (Epstein, Herrick, & Coates, in press). Another study indicates that a summer community component in a family literacy program has positive effects for the family and for students (Connors, 1993). Questions abound, however, about the best designs for active, interesting summer learning opportunities for students with their families and peers at home and in the community. Research and development are needed on effective approaches to integrate the summer time in the school year. For example, should (and how should) summer activities be organized for students and their families as part of the *concluding* school year or as part of the *oncoming* school year?

Key Points of Transition to New Levels of Schooling. Another important focus for future work is on changes in practices of partnership when children change schools. Particularly, dramatic declines in involvement are reported after each transition point from preschool to regular school, from elementary to middle school, and from middle to high school (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Studies indicate, however, that these declines are not fixed. For example, a national survey of principals reports that middle grades schools that conduct strong transitional activities (such as inviting parents to visit the middle school while the children are still in the elementary grades) tend to continue more practices of partnership with families through the middle grades (Epstein & Mac Iver, 1990). Only about 40% of the middle grades schools in the U. S., however, conduct strong transitional activities for families. Another survey shows that only 22% of the parents in a regional sample of six urban, rural, and suburban schools report that they visited the high school when their children were in the middle grades, and only 40% of the students did so (Connors & Epstein, 1994).

Research is needed on the design and effects of strategies and activities to help students and their families make successful transitions from the elementary to middle schools, middle to high schools, and high schools to postsecondary settings, and on how to maintain appropriate family involvement across school levels. Educators are providing some insights in their practices. For example, an inner-city middle school conducted a formidable "orientation-day" program for families and students on the first day of school and received high ratings for the effort from teachers, parents, and students (Epstein & Herrick, 1991). Such demonstration projects are informative, but studies of well-planned interventions will be needed to learn which kinds of orientation practices help most students, families, and schools. Newburg (1991) worked with educators to better understand the contacts and interactions that teachers need to make as students move from one school to the next. Research is needed on how families can be included in these transitional processes to help students prevent failure and maximize success in their new schools. What are the responsibilities of schools to conduct activities that inform families ahead of time about the changes that their children will experience when they move to new schools and what families can do to understand and assist the transitions? Should feeder or receive schools, or both, conduct

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these activities? What are the results of alternative approaches to communications about transitions? A parallel set of questions concerns the nature of family involvement in students' decisions about their postsecondary paths.

Unscheduled Transitions Due to Family Moves. Other questions about changing partnerships are raised by patterns of mobility, such as when families move in and out of schools and communities mid-year. Special problems must be solved when migrant, homeless, or other families move often (e.g., see PRIME, 1992). Unscheduled or unplanned transitions affect children, families, and their connections with schools. These transitions also affect what schools and teachers know or need to know about the entering children and families. Research is needed on the organization and effects of various approaches to partnerships with families in highly mobile schools and communities.

Other unscheduled transitions raise good research questions about the design and effects of school, family, and community partnerships. For example, when students are suspended from school, meetings with parents are required before the students are readmitted; or, when students are expelled from school, they—and their families—may enter new schools in new communities; or, when students drop out of school, they—and their families—may elect alternative schools or other programs in communities. Neither research nor practice has paid much attention to the design and results of connections with families that could assist students at times of dramatic, unscheduled changes in schools, and how to prevent these upheavals.

Transition To and Through High School. Of all the topics of continuity and change, the field has the least information about connections with families when students are in high school. Building on a handful of studies that raise numerous questions (Bauch, 1988; Clark, 1983; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988), researchers in the Center are conducting surveys and field studies that ask: Which practices of partnerships are important for students, families, and schools at the high school level? How should practices to inform and involve families change from the freshman to senior years in high school? And, what are the results of partnerships for high school students, parents, and teachers?

The Center's research includes six high schools—two city, two suburban, and two rural schools—who agreed to work with researchers to design and administer surveys of teachers, parents, and students on their attitudes and ideas about partnerships in high schools (Epstein, Connors, & Salinas, 1993). The surveys are linked to the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework of six types of involvement with questions that help a high school chart present practices and plan a multiyear, full program of partnership. The high schools are continuing to implement and improve practices such as involving families with students in goal setting, improving information systems, increasing attendance, bolstering student morale, creating stronger connections with community services

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for students and families, and other activities (Epstein & Connors, 1994; Connors & Epstein, 1994).

Many questions about partnerships in high schools remain to be addressed. The NELS:88 Base-Year and Follow-Up surveys offer important data from middle and high schools, from 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students and teachers, and from 8th and 12th grade parents, and from students in postsecondary settings. One Center study of partnership in high schools using the NELS data from students shows that when parents continue their involvement over time (i.e., from middle school Grade 8 to high school Grade 10), students report better attitudes, behaviors, report card grades, and attendance in high school (Lee, 1994). Standardized achievement test scores are harder to change in the upper grades and are not directly affected by continued involvement from Grades 8 to 10.

The NELS survey data from a large sample of schools, students, and families in Grades 8, 10, 12, and postsecondary years will be useful to many researchers because they offer broad coverage of many types of family involvement over time. But the NELS data also are limited, as practices of partnership are measured mainly by single items indicators. Deeper data from purposeful local or regional samples also will be needed to study in detail the design and effects of partnerships at the high school level.

At each higher level of schooling, questions about partnerships with families and communities become more difficult because the students, contexts, and all participants become more diverse and complex. All of the topics discussed in this chapter need further study at the high school level, including transitions, outcomes, community connections, the roles of students, and how researchers and educators work together.

2. Perspectives and Previews: What Are the Results or Outcomes of Particular Types of Involvement for Families, Students, and for Teaching Practice at All Levels of Schooling?

One of the most persistent misperceptions of many researchers, policy leaders, and educators is that any family involvement leads to all good things for students, parents, teachers, and schools. It is important to restate that the major types of involvement in the framework for research and practice are expected to affect different important outcomes for students, parents, and educators (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1982, 1986a, 1992). That is, not all activities to involve families lead quickly or directly to student learning, better report card grades, or higher standardized test scores. Rather, practices of the different types of involvement are expected to have theoretically linked results in the short term. For example, communications and interactions about parenting should first affect parents' informal interactions with their children; communications and interactions about reading should first affect a family focus on reading. If families continue to influence or reinforce student attitudes, behavior, or motivation, then

student learning may improve over time. The pathways from particular family-school interactions to results for students, parents, or schools must be studied more rigorously than in the past, particularly with longitudinal data. Such studies are needed by educators in order to understand and predict the likely results of selecting and implementing particular practices to involve families in the schools and in their children's education.

For example, some Type 1 activities—such as workshops with parents or information about child development—may lead first to increasing (or, if poorly designed, to decreasing) parents' confidence about their understanding, supervision, and interaction with their children. Other practices, categorized in Type 3—such as new ways to organize, recruit, and train productive volunteers—may lead first to more effective (or, if poorly designed, to less effective) supervision by adults of student activities, more willingness of teachers to communicate in other ways with all families, or to a more varied curricular or extracurricular programs for students. By contrast, Type 5 practices—such as opening school decisions for input from parents or others in the community—may lead first to adults' feelings of more (or, if poorly organized, to less) attachment to or support for the school. The positive or negative results of different involvement activities depend on the effectiveness of the design, implementation, measures, and improvements that are made over time.

Studies are needed on whether and how results of particular types of involvement generalize over time. For example, a chain of events may, hypothetically, take this pathway: Involvement of families in reading at home leads students, first, to greater attention to and motivation in reading. This may help students maintain or improve their reading skills. Over time, parental involvement in reading may lead to family discussions and interactions with children about other subjects. Also, teachers who communicate clearly with families about reading may, over time, improve their information to families about other subjects. This may help children see that their teachers want their families involved in their education, and that their families are interested in what they are learning and in talking with them at home about school and school plans. This support from families may motivate students to do their work in their school subjects and activities and plan for their future education and careers.

This line of events and effects may progress at different rates and with different degrees of success, depending on how much and how well the school informs and involves families and how the families and students participate. Activities, progress, and success may vary by teacher, by grade level, by students' starting skill levels, and by other student, family, and school characteristics. For example, some types of family involvement may affect skills or test scores more in the lower grades when achievement test scores are more changeable. Change in standardized test scores may be made more easily by students with low scores and "room to grow," particularly if the involvement of families is clearly focused on specific achievement topics (Epstein, 1991). Or, changes in new classroom

skills and knowledge may be made by better students, who respond more quickly to new information (Epstein & Dauber, 1995). All of these variations raise researchable questions that need to be asked to more fully understand the results of particular school and family partnerships.

Improving Definitions of Achievement for Studies of Effects of Partnerships on Students. The achievement question must start with clearer definitions and measures of achievements. There are many measures of achievement besides standardized test scores that indicate students' success in school. And, some of these may be more responsive to school, home, and community conditions and, therefore, easier to change in the short term.

For example, specific-subject knowledge and skills may change from the pretest to posttest in units of work in science, math, social studies, or English, depending on the teachers' presentation of content, students' classwork, extra activities conducted with volunteers at school, and homework. In one evaluation, a program of parent volunteers working with teachers to introduce art appreciation to social studies classes significantly increased students' familiarity with art work. The subject-specific knowledge gained by students was linked directly to the content of the presentations by the volunteers (Epstein & Dauber, 1995). Several studies suggest that subject-specific family involvement affects learning in the related subject in the short term (Epstein, 1991; Epstein et al., in press).

Homework completion is another measurable achievement that influences student success in school and that may be affected by particular activities that involve families (Epstein, 1987c; Epstein, Jackson, & Salinas, 1994; Scott-Jones, 1995). If students complete their homework, they may attain higher report card grades, particularly if homework completion is counted by teachers as one component of students' marks. Or, homework completion may help students be better prepared for a class test, gain higher test scores, and, thereby, boost report card grades. New studies can help identify the effects of explicit processes and connections that are important for researchers, educators, families, and students to understand and apply.

There are other indicators of achievement. Good school attitudes, behavior, attendance, and the development of talents, interests, and other personal qualities are important for success in school. All of these may be affected (positively or negatively) by home and school practices of partnerships. Wise course choices and plans for the future also are important achievements in the upper grades that may be influenced by school, family, and student connections. These alterable outcomes that represent and contribute to success in school stand in contrast to narrow concerns with students' relative placements on standardized achievement test scores.

Because all students gain skills over time, it is difficult for many students to change their relative placement on tests or grades. There are, of course, exceptions, for example, students who dramatically find their way and become much

better students than they were before or students who lose their way and fall farther and farther behind. Studies are needed on the part that family involvement plays to increase or maintain student motivation to learn and positive attitudes and behaviors under these different conditions, or to spur greater effort by students who could do better in school.

Positive and Negative Results of Involvement. Extant studies have generated compelling questions about the results or outcomes of partnerships. Although positive results of family involvement on various student outcomes are consistent and have been given the most attention (Henderson & Berla, 1994), some studies report negative correlations of some types of involvement with student achievements and behaviors and parental attitudes. For example, one study showed that students who are lower achievers spend more time on homework and receive more help with homework (Epstein, 1987c). The link of help with homework and low achievement is provocative because it either indicates that families who help are lowering their children's skills *or* that students who need more help are given more help by their families.

Another negative correlation reported in several studies, even under highly controlled statistical procedures, links parent and teacher contacts (e.g., frequent phone calls, conferences, and other communications) with students' academic problems and bad behavior (Lee, 1994). Also, frequent parent-teacher communications about student behavior are linked to parents' low ratings of the school and to parents' reports that their students like school less, are poorer students, are absent more, and have other negative attitudes and behaviors (Epstein & Jacobsen, 1994). These patterns stand in contrast to positive results in the same studies that are reported for other types of school-family links. The patterns are provocative because they could be interpreted to mean that home-school communications produce academic and behavioral problems, *or* they may mean that, presently, schools and families make contact more often when students run into difficulties in order to try to solve the problems.

There are clues that the negative correlations described previously occur because educators reach out to many sources, including parents, to obtain extra help, attention, and resources for students who are having academic or behavioral problems. These good intentions may not pay off, however, if the only communications between school and home are about trouble. Educators who are working to develop programs of partnership recognize that they need to conduct positive communications to establish a base of good relationships to draw on if they need families to help students solve academic or behavioral problems. In some high schools, for example, educators designed activities to start the school year with a positive meeting or phone call from a "key contact person" who is available as a resource to parents all year, or use "positive post cards" that send home good news about a student's work or contributions through the school year (Epstein and Connors, 1994).

To address this issue in practice, Seattle took a comprehensive approach in two middle schools with full-time, school-based "parent outreach coordinators" who contacted and worked with students and families if, on their report cards, students failed two or more courses. The goal was to prevent students from failing again in the next report card period. Contacts, guidance, and follow-ups with students, families, teachers, school counselors, and others were designed to alert and involve all who had a stake in students' success. A parent room at each school, facilitated by the parent outreach coordinators, made all parents welcome. The parent outreach coordinators received very positive evaluations for involving families, creating a welcoming school climate and establishing positive relationships to help solve difficult academic and other problems (Earle, 1989).

Any practice can be done well or poorly. There are risks, of course, that poorly designed or badly implemented practices to involve families will be ineffective or cause problems for students, for families, and for the schools (Scott-Jones, 1987). But studies by many researchers using many methods show that well-designed and well-implemented practices yield positive results on various outcomes for students, parents, and the schools (Ames, 1993; Clark, 1983; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Scott-Jones, 1987; and many others).

Studies are needed that determine if students who are having academic or behavioral difficulties in school improve over time if their families contact or are contacted by the schools, and if the students, families, and schools work together to solve the problems. It is not enough to measure family-school contact alone—the reaching out—to determine whether family involvement helps students improve their behavior or skills. The results of those efforts must also be measured. Longitudinal studies will be needed to determine if after receiving attention from home and school, students improve their attendance, behavior, pass their courses, and stay in school. We need to know: Which contacts and follow-up activities are most successful in helping students get back on successful paths? Which students and families respond best to various interactions? For how long should schools try to get students to solve their own problems before families are involved? How do these patterns of problem solving change across the grades?

To answer such questions about the effects of family involvement on achievements and other outcomes over time, research must statistically control for students' prior achievement, other prior outcomes, and families' prior involvement. Using a full effects model with the NELS:88 Base-Year and First Follow-Up surveys of students, Lee (1994) showed that family involvement in monitoring and interacting with students about homework and, particularly, family discussions about schoolwork, courses, grades, and the future have positive effects on high school students' report card grades and attitudes about school and teachers, even after statistically accounting for family involvement and student outcomes in the middle grades.

There are indications that effects of particular types of involvement may vary by level of schooling and by reporter or participant. For example, in the middle

grades, according to principals, many types of school practices of partnership appear to boost one outcome—student attendance (Epstein & Lee, 1993). At the high school level, according to students, one type of involvement—family discussions about school, courses, and the future—appears to have positive effects on many outcomes, including attitudes, behaviors, and grades (Lee, 1994). These results reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the available data and raise many questions about effects of family involvement on students, parents, and teaching practice that must be addressed with better data and varied methods of analysis.

A detailed agenda for research on the outcomes of school, family, and community involvement can be drawn with questions about how each type of involvement is implemented in a comprehensive program. The following are examples of targeted questions on specific practices and their results that could extend research and contribute immediately useful information to teachers and administrators:

For Type 1—Parenting: How are workshop topics selected, conducted, and disseminated so that all families (not just those who can come to school) can obtain and apply information on topics that are important to parents? What are the short- and long-term effects for parents, students, and schools of parental participation in or information from workshops on parenting and childrearing across the grades? How does information from families about their children assist educators or other parents?

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

For Type 3—Volunteering and Supporting School Programs: How are volunteers recruited, welcomed, trained, and evaluated? How are the skills and talents of volunteers identified and matched with needs of teachers, students, and administrators? How do various volunteer programs and activities affect student learning, attitudes, and behavior; teacher attitudes toward parents; parent attitudes and skills; and other families?

For Type 4—Learning Activities at Home: In which forms can information about students' classwork and homework be offered to help families assist their children with their school responsibilities? How can activities be designed to enable families to use their unique "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Greenberg,

in press) to motivate their youngsters to learn new things at home? to enable students to interact with their families about things they are learning? How do activities at home that promote student and family interactions affect students' attitudes, skills, and homework?

For Type 5—Decision Making: How can all families give information to and receive information from parent leaders who represent them on councils and committees? How do family or community representatives on school site councils, school improvement teams, or committees alter (a) school improvement plans and activities or (b) the knowledge and attitudes of all parents about the school?

For Type 6—Connections With Community: How can schools help families obtain useful information about and access to community programs, services, and resources that may benefit them and their children? Which forms or approaches are most effective for sharing this information with all families? What effects will these approaches have on students' work in school? How can schools, families, and students contribute to their communities?

Focused evaluations on these and many other questions for each type of involvement should contribute to a menu of practices and their results. Information on the likely results—positive or negative and the possibilities, difficulties, and solutions to problems of involvement—would assist educators make more purposeful choices among practices of partnership to help them reach specific school or family goals.

3. Perspectives and Previews: How Can We Better Understand Components of Community in School, Family, and Community Partnerships?

Community is an old and vast term in sociology that demands new and focused attention in studies of school, family, and community partnerships. A broad definition of community refers to all individuals and institutions—in and out of school—who have a stake in the success of children in school and in the well-being of children and families. This includes schools, families, neighborhood groups, clubs, and associations, businesses, libraries, local government, religious organizations, parks and recreation departments, police and juvenile justice offices, social service and health agencies, and others who serve children and families as a matter of course or in times of trouble. Presently, there is great interest in the potential and the problems of connecting schools, families, and communities in ways that will benefit student learning and development. There is widespread interest in integrating services across community agencies and in creating structures and processes that encourage interagency cooperation and collaborations to promote family support, family and student health, and student success in school. (See, for example, a report series from the National Center for Service Integration, e.g., Kinney, Strand, Hagerup, & Bruner, 1994; and Wynn, Costello, Halpern, & Richman, 1994.)

The community is one of the overlapping spheres of influence on student learning and development in the theoretical model of partnerships (Epstein, 1988, 1992). The relationships and resources of people and groups in a community are expressed in family-community, school-community, and family-school-community interactions.

Researchers often define and represent community using aggregated data about families or citizens in an area. For example, a community is sometimes defined by the average education level of all of the parents of students in a school or geographic location; by the percentage of families with particular qualities (e.g., single parents, race or ethnic minority group, poverty level, or other economic indicators in a neighborhood); by the average educational aspirations that parents have for their children or that students have for themselves; or by an average or percentage of other descriptive variables. In the same way, U. S. Census (or similar) data have been used to characterize populations in geographic areas surrounding particular schools (such as the percentage of citizens below the poverty line in a census tract around a school).

These variables represent some but not all factors that may influence children's learning. They are limited because they rate communities in terms of more or less of selected economic, intellectual, and social qualities or resources—such as high/low income, predominately Black/White, employed/unemployed, or married/single parents. One variable is too simple a descriptor of communities. That is, a high-income community may also be predominately minority; a low-income community may be highly supportive of their schools and eager for their children to attend college. Even if several descriptive variables are considered simultaneously, the resulting combined scores set communities on a continuum that labels them as high or low. Also, such labels are limiting because of the distance they place between a rating and the actual connections and activities of families and schools with children that influence student learning, attitudes, and behavior.

There are more proximate ways to characterize and study the resources and exchanges in communities that may assist students and families. Researchers in the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning are taking some different approaches to define and study community by focusing on strengths that are available in people, programs, and organizations in all communities. The idea is to get closer to what communities do, in contrast to what communities are. The same change was important for understanding families and family-school connections—that is, focusing on what schools and families can arrange to accomplish together, rather than only on their immutable (if more easily measured) characteristics. The redirection leads to new ways to measure and to influence family, school, and community connections from infancy to adolescence.

Some Center researchers are studying the impact of community programs on very young children and their families, including studies of programs to help parents read with toddlers (Morisset, 1993) and studies of the organization and effects of family literacy programs for parents of preschool, elementary, and

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middle school students (Connors, 1993, 1994; Dolan, 1992). Another study involves the design, development, implementation, and effects of a process to train low-income women in a community for employment in child care and to improve their own parenting and involvement activities and their children's school readiness (Kagan, Neville, & Rustici, 1993).

Other researchers are studying the impact of community programs for older students and families including studies of coaching processes and programs in which adults share their skills and talents with youth (Nettles, 1992, 1993). Other studies focus on the organization of child care programs to assist teenage mothers to continue to attend high school (Scott Jones, in press); and on alternative approaches and results of interagency collaborations for high school students that include health, recreation, job training, child care, and other services (Burch, Palanki, & Davies, 1995; Dolan, in press-a).

The programs for younger and older children and their families may be based in community locations to provide services or in school locations to more easily contact and serve families and children. Community agencies, school districts, or community or parent volunteers may be responsible for staffing these and other programs that connect students and families with the strengths and services in their communities. Other connections may be made to enable students, families, or educators to contribute to their communities.

Even limited connections—such as when one school works with one community agency—pose many challenges. For example, one community-run family literacy program conducted in a school building required collaborative activities such as cross-agency planning, sharing of time, space, staff, responsibilities, and budgets (Connors, 1993). These new relationships needed to be developed by the community and school staffs. Programs operating over the long term are working to solve these problems (Dolan, in press-a, in press-b; Palanki et al., 1995), but the challenges and solutions and the effects of interagency or integrated services programs are mainly uncharted.

Questions about interagency connections open a formidable research agenda: What are the pros and cons, possibilities and problems, benefits and disadvantages of relatively simple connections of schools or families with one or two groups or programs in the community, or of more complex interagency collaborations? How should programs with connections to community be organized, implemented, and monitored to benefit children and families, schools, and the community?

Researchers also are exploring the strengths of parents and communities with various race, ethnic, and cultural characteristics (Delgado, 1992; Hidalgo, 1992, 1994; Hidalgo, Bright, Siu, Swap, & Epstein, 1995; Perry, 1993; Siu, 1992, 1994; Swap, 1994; Swap & Krasnow, 1992). These studies identify resources and strengths in families and communities that would be labeled "poor" or "deficient" if only aggregated economic statistics or census-type data were used to define them. For example, these studies suggest that resources within families and communities include rituals, traditional values, family dreams and aspirations,

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→ (Scott Jones, in press)

cultural norms for student behavior, racial identity development, practices that involve families in their children's education and schools, and formal and informal community organizations that support families.

These studies are adding new information that may help schools understand the complex nature of families and communities. For example, Hidalgo (1992) noted that immigrant families who aim to retain cultural identities and ties in their local communities require schools to change more than do immigrant families who aim to assimilate in the mainstream community. The former group wishes to be recognized and respected by their schools for their differences. Their cultures and backgrounds are potential resources for the schools. The unique needs of these families and children may require some special attention from the schools. The latter group, emphasizing assimilation, wishes to avoid attention by the schools to their newness or differences, even if they maintain their cultural traditions and identities in the home and community. They may work to change their own behaviors and attitudes to meet the expectations and demands of the schools.

In another study, Delgado (1992) identified the potential strengths of "natural support systems" in Puerto Rican communities. These include networks of extended families, religious groups, merchants, social clubs, and other individuals or groups that people contact for assistance instead of (or in addition to) seeking help from formal institutions such as hospitals, health centers, and schools. Community strengths are not often recognized or counted in studies that employ traditional economic, educational, or social statistics. Yet, the informal networks may help families and children with many basic personal, economic, spiritual, and social needs. Delgado contended that community resources could be used in better ways by formal organizations, such as schools, to communicate with students and families.

Nettles (1992) identified coaching as one way to tap communities' strengths. By coaching, adults share their skills and talents with children, including public speaking, chess, sports, music, dance, art, science, and many other interests. She proposed a framework for how to think about, organize, and implement coaching programs. To use the framework in practice, she discussed strategies of how successful coaches teach, assess, structure environments, and offer social support to students (Nettles, 1993).

Parent rooms or parent centers aim to establish a school community by welcoming parents to the school building. In these centers, parents may help each other, help the school, and receive assistance or information from the school and from the community. As described by Johnson (1993, 1994) and Coates (1992), a parentroom, parent center, or parent club is a place that draws parents, teachers, students, and community participants together and increases the frequency, duration, and types of connections that could help more children succeed in school. The first studies and descriptions of parent centers in schools and family resource centers in communities raise many questions for research on whether and how these organizational structures make it easier for schools to

help families meet their responsibilities to their children and to help families help students solve academic or behavioral problems, should they arise.

The Center's studies of community work from the inside out—starting with the traditions and talents of families or other groups. The research asks questions about how to harness the strengths that are in all communities to assist students, engage families, and improve schools. Many questions remain, however, about the organization of community resources and patterns and effects of school, family, and community interactions. For example: How can all communities' strengths be tapped in ways that support families, children's growth and development, success in school, in infancy, childhood, and adolescence? Who will organize this work? How might schools draw on the strengths of families' language and cultural differences and other family and community skills and talents to improve the education of all children and to improve the schools' relationships with families? How should partnerships change or remain the same for families with various cultural, racial, or economic backgrounds, across the grades in order to create both a sense of community among all families in a school and still meet the needs of particular families? How does the community foster learning, reinforce schooling, and recognize accomplishments? Results of such studies should contribute new ideas about how to define, measure, and mobilize communities' strengths and how to promote school, family, and community partnerships that, ultimately, benefit students who are the future citizens, leaders, and families in communities.

4. Perspectives and Previews: How Can We Better Understand the Role of the Student in School, Family, and Community Partnerships?

An important, emerging theme in the Center's work is the role of the student in school, family, and community partnerships. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence places students at the center of the model (Epstein, 1987a). The theory assumes that families, schools, and communities share an interest in and responsibility for children all across the school years and that the main reason that educators, parents, and students interact is to assist students to succeed in school and in life. It is important to focus on how schools develop good programs of partnerships and on what parents want their schools to do—to inform and involve them each year. It is more important, indeed crucial, to recognize that the student is the active learner, ultimately responsible for his or her education, and the main communicator between school and home.

Research is needed to define, design, and study students' roles in school, family, and community partnerships at different grade levels. This topic ties student development to the design and effects of family involvement in education. It promotes, even demands, interdisciplinary attention to stages of youngsters' development, interactions and relationships of many individuals, and the multiple

contexts or environments in which students learn and in which family-school-community links occur.

Most studies of family-school links have not paid attention to the students' roles in partnerships. This is true despite the fact that students have long been reporters about their schools and their families. A few examples show, however, that the student role has been hovering in research on partnerships—waiting for and deserving more attention. Bronfenbrenner (1979) advised that socialization and education should be organized so that, over time, the balance of power is given to the developing person. Also, in an earlier study, Epstein (1983) found that age-appropriate decision-making opportunities at school and at home increase students' independence and other positive outcomes (Epstein, 1983). Most often, however, literature on schools or families assumes that students are "acted on" rather than the actors or "done to" rather than the doers. The different assumptions about the students' roles in education raise questions for research about optimal designs for schooling and for school and family partnerships.

This theme is finding voice in other areas of school reform such as in reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning, constructivist approaches, and other active learning strategies. The role of the student in partnerships is being addressed in a few studies that have asked students directly about how they view the connections of their families and schools and how they participate as partners (Ames, 1993; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Epstein, 1982; Montandon & Perrenoud, 1987). Students' opinions are informative and often surprising. For example, students express an overwhelming desire to be active participants in parent-teacher conferences and to be represented on school committees (Connors & Epstein, 1994).

In practice, educators are keenly aware that students play *the* key role in their own education. For example, many important activities in high school (e.g., choosing courses, finding career interests, planning for the future, understanding school policies) are presently often left up to the student *alone*. New approaches to partnerships with families focus on how middle and high schools design and conduct activities to enable families to provide extra support, as appropriate, on important decisions that affect the lives of students and their families (Epstein & Connors, 1994, 1995).

Importantly, students at all grade levels report that they want their families to be more involved and that they are willing to be the communicators and to conduct important exchanges with their families about school work and school decisions (Connors & Epstein, 1994; Epstein & Herrick, 1991). Earlier studies show that when they know their families are involved, students report that their schools and families are more similar, that their teachers and parents know each other, that they do more homework on weekends, and that they like school better (Epstein, 1982). In high school, students who report that their families are involved in many different ways at school and who discuss school and their futures at home have more positive attitudes, better attendance, and better grades than other students, even after accounting for their scores on these outcomes in the middle grades (Lee, 1994).

If youngsters do not define themselves as "student," then they must be something else, with no need to be in school. Those who feel the support of their family, teachers, peers, and community for their work as students are more likely to maintain that view of themselves and stay in school. Thus, ironically, students' participation in school, family, and community partnerships may contribute to their increasingly independent decisions about their education.

Research is greatly needed on such questions as: How shall activities be organized to enable students to take appropriate leadership for their learning at all grade levels? How much guidance and support, rules and regulations, independence and self-direction are needed by students across the grades? in diverse communities? There are many other questions about students' motivations, goals, and achievements. Questions about the roles that students play in partnership are importantly linked to all of the preceding topics. That is, studies are needed on students' roles in partnerships at points of transition from one grade or school to the next; the results or outcomes of all six types of involvement that include or exclude students; and the results of activities that involve students and their families with the community.

Students' roles and student development have not yet been well integrated into studies of school, family, and community partnerships nor in policies and practices of involvement. These topics may be crucial for understanding, implementing, and succeeding with partnerships across the grades. Undoubtedly, students are key to the success of all aspects of school reform, including family and community involvement.

5. Perspectives and Previews: How Can Researchers, Policy Leaders, and Educators Collaborate to Develop, Study, and Improve School, Family, and Community Partnerships?

Collaborative work and thoughtful give-and-take by researchers, policy leaders, and educators are largely responsible for the progress that has been made over the past decade in understanding and developing school, family, and community partnerships. Similar collaborations will be important for future progress in this and other topics of school reform. There are two requirements for successful collaboration—multilingualism and mutual respect. That is, researchers and educators must talk each others' languages and understand and respect each others' expertise in order to combine talents to improve schools. For researchers, this means learning the vocabularies and communication skills that are needed to converse with and to write for diverse audiences, including educational policy leaders, principals, teachers, and parents. For educators, this requires a readiness and capacity to use research to address topics of school improvement. Also, researchers need to gain familiarity with the challenges of teaching highly diverse students and the daily life of schools. Educators need to gain understanding of the challenges of collecting useful data to analyze processes and effects of school

and classroom programs. Collaborations increase conversations and mutual respect as researchers, educators, parents, and students learn about their common goals and complementary strengths (Epstein, in press-b). The same requirements hold as families and students are included as planners, implementers, evaluators, and in other roles. Researchers and educators need to build communication skills and mutual respect with families and students and an understanding that parents are, indeed, partners in their children's continuing education and that students are the main actors in education.

Sharing the Role of Expert. The requirements for educators and researchers to speak with and develop respect for each other are addressed in a collaborative approach called "sharing the role of expert" (Epstein, 1986b; Epstein et al., in press). This approach recognizes that educators (policy leaders, teachers, and administrators) have particular talents and opportunities that are vital to the successful design and implementation of research-based practices. For example, administrators and teachers are responsible for implementing new strategies to involve families in their schools or classrooms as volunteers or to engage students with their families on math homework. Researchers, too, have particular talents and opportunities to design, evaluate, report, and disseminate the effects of school improvement efforts. Parents also have unique perspectives, concerns, and skills that relate to their children's success in school and that expand researchers' and educators' views. Together, educators, researchers, and parents plan new practices, collect, analyze and interpret data, and revise and improve plans, drawing on each other's expertise. The assumption is that these collaborations should lead to better practices, better processes, and better evaluations and interpretations of results than would be accomplished if the participants worked alone.

Sharing the role of expert alters how research is conducted. For example, when working directly with schools, a two-step process of evaluation is useful. The first step is to assess whether a practice actually is implemented and how its design could be improved; the second step is to study whether a practice (as implemented and improved) has measurable effects on students, families, or teaching practice. This sequence of collaborative activities helps educators and researchers get used to working with each other and assures that measures of results will not be made before a program is actually in place.

There are several emerging forms of collaborative work by researchers and educators, all of which require sharing the role of expert: school-university cooperation ("Alliance for Learning," 1994; Goodlad, 1988; Harkey & Puckett, 1990; Miller & O'Shea, 1995); teacher research, teacher-led inquiry, reflective teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Lieberman, 1993; Maher & Alson, 1990; Newburg, 1991); parent-teacher action research (Burch & Palanki, 1994; Davies, Palanki, & Burch, 1993); and action teams for school, family, and community partnerships (Epstein & Connors, 1994; Epstein et al., in press). The various forms have different implications for the nature and

products of the work of teachers and researchers. All, however, aim to encourage education policy leaders, educators, and researchers to work together, extend and share knowledge, conduct research on actions taken to improve schools, and take actions based on the results of research to continue improvements. Several include parents, and some include students or others from the community as participants in planning programs and practices, as well as in conducting and evaluating them.

Collaborations of Researchers and Education Policy Leaders. Two examples of productive collaborations of researchers and policy leaders for increasing family-school partnerships include the development of a state policy on parent involvement in California (Solomon, 1991) and the design and work of Utah's Center on Families in Education (Lloyd, this volume, chapter 16). In these cases, educators read, adapted, and extended research for their locations and purposes, and researchers supported and assisted the policy leaders and educators in those locations with their work. Many other researchers and educators have worked together to produce better school, family, and community partnerships (e.g., see articles by Chrispeels, Warner, Davies, D'Angelo, and others in the special section of *Phi Delta Kappan*, 1991; also, several examples of programs based on researchers' and educators' collaborations in Fagnano & Werber, 1994; Fruchter, Galletta, & White, 1992; Rioux & Berla, 1993).

Collaborations of Researchers and School Teams. Two examples of productive collaborations of researchers, educators, and parents to increase family-school-community partnerships include Parent-Teacher Action Research Teams and Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships.

Parent-Teacher Action Research Teams, designed by Davies and his colleagues, include teachers and parents in site-based units for school improvement and problem solving (Burch, 1993; Davies et al., 1993; Palanki, Burch, & Davies, 1995). Educators and parents work together as change agents and as researchers to improve practices of partnerships in their schools. The teams define problems or needs, identify approaches to solve the problems, design and implement interventions, examine results, and follow up their work in meetings with further plans. They may choose one problem to solve or work on several aspects of partnership. This approach aims to develop "teacher researchers" and "parent researchers" who will continue to work together on projects to improve partnerships and other aspects of school reform. In the Center projects using this approach, paid facilitators assist the work of the Parent-Teacher Action Teams, and researchers are focusing on cross-site policy studies.

Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships, designed by Epstein and her colleagues, establish teams of teachers, administrators, parents, and where possible, students and members of the community who work for 3 years or more as the "action" arm of the school council or school improvement team on the topic of partnerships. The Action Team works with others to assess

their school's present practices of partnership, parents, teachers, and students needs, and desired practices. The team members become chairs or co-chairs to oversee and to lead the implementation of multiyear plans of projects on each of the six types of involvement in our framework for partnership. They assess and share progress, problems, and new plans each year, link and report to the school improvement council, and communicate with the total school community about the school's activities to involve families. This approach is useful for developing ongoing programs of partnerships in elementary, middle and high schools (Epstein & Connors, 1994; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein et al., in press). It has been implemented in useful forms in Utah's and Wisconsin's state grants programs (Lloyd, this volume, chap. 16; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1994) and in many districts and schools. Other Action Teams could be arranged for other topics on the school improvement agenda.

In Center projects, researchers worked with educators and parents to develop and improve this approach and to study particular practices of partnership and their effects. For example, the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) interactive homework process (Epstein et al., 1994) and the volunteers in social studies and art process (Epstein & Salinas, 1991) were developed collaboratively by researchers and educators, based on sharing the role of expert and the two-step evaluation process. Now, other educators may use the Action Team approach and the research-based TIPS interactive homework and volunteers processes. Using these strategies, other researchers may become partners with school teams in their local districts, states, or regions to assist them assessing the effectiveness of their practices.

The Center's studies demonstrate different but related routes to increasing schools' capacities to plan, implement, and continue to build programs of partnership. The emerging collaborative approaches have different emphases, however. In Parent-Teacher Action Research, the goal is for teachers and parents to design and conduct research on specific practices that they add to their programs. In Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships, the goal is for teachers, administrators, parents, and others to plan a multiyear program including the six types of involvement, informally monitor or evaluate progress, update plans, and improve practices. The collaboration of educators, parents, and researchers on these Action Teams relieves some of the burden on educators who, with limited time, may not be able to transform into statistical experts; and the collaboration relieves some of the burden on researchers who cannot become instant classroom experts with knowledge of what will work in daily practice. Also, this approach preserves a role for researchers in action research and increases chances of improving the research base and of assisting many schools with their work.

Research is needed on the impact of these and other forms of collaborative work by researchers with policy leaders, educators, and parents. But more pointedly, collaborative strategies could be particularly helpful for addressing the four topics discussed earlier in this chapter. Topic 1, on understanding changes across

the grades and other important transitions, is of interest to researchers who seek better information on student development and change. Educators, in turn, need better solutions to problems of student adjustment in transitions from grade to grade, school to school, or developmental stage to stage. Researchers and educators, working collaboratively, could address common questions about how one teacher should link with the next, how information might flow from school to school at points of transition, how families should be engaged in their children's transitions, and other issues discussed with Topic 1 previously.

Topic 2, on understanding the results or outcomes of programs and practices that involve families, is a major interest to researchers of school effects. Educators, in turn, pay attention to the bottom line—results of their educational programs. Researchers and educators, working collaboratively, could address common questions about the effects of programs and practices to improve the school climate; increase teachers' effectiveness; assist mothers, fathers, or other family members in their interactions with their children and the school; increase student learning and development—all expected outcomes of productive partnerships—and other issues discussed with Topic 2 previously.

Topic 3, on understanding connections of schools and families with community services, resources, and organizations, challenges researchers to study the organization and effects of integrated services and to better define communities' roles in supporting children as students. Educators, in turn, need feasible ways to mobilize support from and connect to the school community, the students' home communities, and various communities that surround the school with potential strengths and resources. Some innovative activities to identify and tap into school communities have been designed by educators working with researchers (e.g., Floyd, 1994; Goode, 1990), but relatively little is known about the optimal organization of school, family, and community connections. Researchers and educators, working collaboratively, could address common questions about how connections with individuals, groups, and organizations in proximate and distant communities could improve the school, strengthen students' skills, assist families, benefit the community; and other issues discussed with Topic 3 previously.

Topic 4, on understanding roles that students play in school-family-community partnerships, interests researchers in many disciplines who study child and adolescent development. Educators, in turn, want better information about ways to develop students' responsibility, including the optimal mix of guidance from school and home and the design opportunities to develop independence. Researchers and educators, working collaboratively, could address common questions about student motivation; how students should be participants in school, family, and community partnerships; and other issues discussed with Topic 4 previously. Linked to this topic, researchers and educators working collaboratively also might explore questions on the most productive roles in school, family, and community partnerships for principals, district and state leaders, on-site coordinators, and families in relation to the roles of students in their own education.

In the next few years there will be many opportunities for new collaborations of researchers with policy leaders and educators to study the design and effects of guidelines, mandates, and other policies about school, family, and community connections. Two 1994 federal laws (Goals 2000: Educate America Act and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) offer directives and funding to all states to enable districts and schools to design and test ideas for productive partnerships with families. The diverse responses to these federal laws across states, districts, and schools open countless opportunities for researchers to work with policy leaders and educators to address the five topics discussed in this chapter and other questions that emerge in local planning sessions. Comparative studies also will be informative on the effects on partnership programs of states' contrasting decisions about budgets, staff responsibilities, and elements of the new programs.

By sharing the role of expert with those who design and implement programs in the schools, researchers could assist educators and increase the knowledge available on alternative approaches for organizing, funding, and implementing school, family, and community partnerships. Studies will be important on such topics as: How will states identify effective practices among demonstration programs and extend options for implementing successful programs to other districts and schools? How can schools be assisted to move from very limited investments in one type of involvement (e.g., volunteers or school councils only) to more comprehensive programs? Overall, what would a supportive policy structure look like at the federal, state, district, and local school level that would support school activities to plan, implement, and evaluate practices of partnership? On many topics, then, researchers and educators can combine talents to study the effects of the growing number of investments in partnerships, with the goal of identifying effective practices and their results that may be considered by many schools, districts, and states as they plan and improve their programs.

CONCLUSION

Over the next half dozen years or so there will be intense national attention on whether and how students succeed in school, how schools improve their instructional programs, and how families are informed and involved in schools and in their children's education. Attention also will increase on whether and how communities assist schools, families, and students. These practical concerns open important opportunities for researchers to work with educators to design and study many topics for school improvement, including school, family, and community partnerships.

Studies have accumulated that indicate that (a) students do better in school if their parents are involved in various ways; (b) more parents become involved when schools establish and conduct good programs of partnership; (c) schools can be

assisted by federal, state, district, and school leadership and policies to develop strong and responsive programs; (d) research and evaluation activities can identify differences between strong and weak policies, good and bad practices; (e) results of many studies have produced a research-based framework that should enable any school to plan and implement practices for the six major types of involvement, including practices to help meet specific goals for school improvement.

Despite real progress in understanding the potential and challenges of partnerships, there are many more questions to ask. This chapter previewed five topics that will benefit from the attention of researchers, policy leaders, educators, and families: partnerships at points of transition in schools and at the high school level; the effects of particular practices and full programs of partnership in the short and long term; the connections of communities with schools and families for student learning and development; the roles of students in partnerships; and forms of collaborative research and development by researchers, policy leaders, educators, and parents.

Other questions may be raised. For example, we need to know more about the nature and effects of fathers' participation in school and family partnerships across the grades; the effects on partnerships of particular federal, state, and local policies separately and in combination; the impact of contrasting forms of staff development and teacher and administrator preservice and advanced education on practices of partnership; the connections of parent education programs with broader programs of school and family partnerships; the connections of partnerships with other topics of school reform. Most of these important issues can be targeted within the five topics discussed in this chapter.

The complex questions for research and for practice assure that family-school links will remain a dynamic field of study.

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School-Family-Community Partnerships and Educational Change: International Perspectives¹

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The last decade has seen a rise in research on and practices of school, family and community involvement in the education of youth. This trend can be attributed to a number of factors. Low achievement and high dropout rates, especially for poor and marginalized youth, have led educators and social scientists to become more aware of the importance of family and community involvement for school effectiveness and positive student outcomes. Moreover, communitarians and others have pointed to the loss of community and collective life that many people feel in their neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools as well. In this chapter, Sanders and Epstein make the case that in order for schools to educate all youth effectively, families and communities must become full partners in the process.

Not all schools and not all nations, they point out, are at the same point in their work on partnerships. Some focus on parent participation on school councils; others concentrate more on choice of schools than on what happens to involve families after the choice is made; some are looking deeply into helping families understand their children's school subjects and curricula; and others are working on improving general communications. Drawing on Epstein's model of different forms of school-community relationship, this chapter summarizes and discusses research studies collected from social scientists in twenty nations to increase our understanding of how partnership approaches are linked to the processes and outcomes of educational change and school improvement.

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen a rise in research on and practices of school, family and community involvement in the education of youth in the United States and abroad. This trend can be attributed to a number of factors, both social and political. From a social perspective, low achievement and high dropout rates, especially for poor and marginalized youth, have led educators and social scientists to become more aware of the importance of family and community involvement for school effectiveness and student outcomes. From a political perspective, the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union and the spread of democratic systems of government in countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America have sparked dialogue about and policies to promote equal educational opportunity, and parental and community participation in the educational process (Prucha & Walterova 1992; Glenn 1989).

Whatever the reasons for this trend, there is a strong, common desire to make schools more effective institutions of learning. Concurrent with this goal is the realization that schools neither exist nor function in a vacuum. In order for schools in any nation to effectively educate *all* youth, families and communities must become partners in the process.

Epstein's theory (1987) of overlapping spheres of influence provides a framework for research and practice that reflects this viewpoint. This theory integrates and extends educational, sociological and psychological perspectives on social organizations, as well as research on the effects of family, school and community environments on educational outcomes (for details, see Epstein, 1987, 1992). Acknowledging the interlocking histories of the major institutions that socialize and educate children, the theory posits that certain goals, such as student development and academic success, are of interest to all of these institutions and are best achieved through their cooperative action and support. Pictorially, this perspective is represented by three spheres symbolizing school, family and community, whose connections are determined by the attitudes, practices and interactions of individuals within each context.

Based on years of research, Epstein (1995) has identified six types of school-family-community involvement that are important for student learning and development, and more effective schools and families. These are: 1) parenting – helping all families establish home environments that support children as students and helping schools understand families; 2) communicating – designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communication about school programs and children's progress; 3) volunteering – recruiting and organizing help and support for classrooms, school functions and student activities; 4) learning at home – providing information, ideas and opportunities to families about how to help students at home with academic decisions, homework, and curriculum-related activities; 5) decision-making – including parents in school governance, and 6) collaborating with community – identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students and their families, and from schools, families and students to support the community.

Although most schools are not yet implementing practices that effectively foster all six types of involvement, many elementary, middle and high schools are conducting practices that foster one or more of them. Some schools in this and other nations are focussing on parent representation on school councils, or on choice of schools as a form of family and student academic decision-making. Others are looking deeply into helping families understand their children's subjects and curricula. Still others are working at more general communications. It is clear that investments and actions are increasing in many nations to understand and implement productive school-family-community partnerships. This chapter summarizes and discusses research studies collected from social scientists in twenty nations² to better understand how partnership approaches are linked to the processes and outcomes of educational change and school improvement. The studies referenced here were selected from those sent by members of the International Network of Scholars of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and

Children's Learning. Although selective, these studies illustrate the significant progress in research and development in school, family, and community partnerships that has occurred in many nations over the past decade. The chapter has six sections that link the international studies with others conducted in the United States and that enrich our understanding of the six major types of family/community involvement in schools: 1) Variation in levels of family involvement; 2) Governmental policies to promote greater family involvement; 3) Programs to enhance family practices that support children's learning; 4) Community involvement with schools and families; 5) Identifying and dismantling barriers to school-family-community partnerships, and 6) Crosscutting themes about partnerships and their meaning for educational change, school improvement and future research.

VARIATION IN LEVELS OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Studies in all nations show that some parents are highly involved in their children's education and others are not. In a qualitative study of parent involvement in primary schools in Cyprus, Phtiaka (1994) found that families could generally be characterized into three types. The first type was the highly involved family. Phtiaka described these families as university-educated professionals with "privileged access to the school." They participated in and were leaders of parent groups, and were satisfied with their children's school, the information they received from the school and their children's school performance. The second group, or "middle group" comprised skilled laborers. Although they contacted the schools when they had specific concerns, these families desired more information and feedback from the school and the opportunity to be more involved in school activities. Phtiaka described the third category of families as "marginalized." Fathers, if present, were often unskilled laborers and mothers were generally housewives. This group had difficulty communicating with the school and often felt a sense of powerlessness before the school's position and authority. These families experienced more anxiety than the other two groups about their children's school work and homework. While acknowledging that it was their responsibility to assist in their children's learning, these families reported a lack of knowledge, time and energy to do so.

From her data, Phtiaka concluded that although wealthier, more educated families are more involved in the educational process, all families, even the most disadvantaged, care about their children and are interested in their education. They are willing to help and are receptive to teacher advice. However, their present perceptions of the school make them hesitant to initiate contact with teachers, and this is often perceived by schools as a lack of interest. According to Phtiaka, to bridge this gap, schools must learn to communicate with *all* families, especially those that are marginalized, and respond to these families with the understanding that they too want the best for their children.

Distinctions among groups of highly involved to uninvolved families have also been made in studies in other nations. For example, Toomey (1989) contrasts "enthusiasts" with a "silent majority" in Australia.³ The former become involved

on their own, whereas the latter need guidance from their children's schools. He concludes that schools need to take innovative approaches (such as programs to assist families in becoming more involved with their children's reading at home) in order to involve those who would not become involved on their own, and to improve the skills of students who often have difficulty succeeding in school.

For such approaches to be successful, however, schools have to tailor them to meet the specific needs of their students' families. For example, Sanagavarupu and Elliott (1996) found that Indian and Australian parents take different approaches in guiding their children's preschool education. Mothers in India regulated and monitored their children more, and expected preschoolers to complete extensive homework assigned daily by the school. They are influenced by a highly competitive and selective higher education system for which preparation starts in the earliest grades. By comparison, Australian mothers were more flexible, encouraging greater independence and expecting preschoolers to learn through developmentally appropriate play. The authors suggest that these and other differences in parenting need to be understood by schools in order to work effectively with students and their families who immigrate and enter new school systems. These and other studies underscore the importance of school programs that encourage greater communication, cooperation and interaction between families and their children's schools to enhance children's learning and development.

GOVERNMENTAL POLICY CHANGES TO PROMOTE GREATER FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Recognizing the need for *all* families to have opportunities to become more involved in their children's learning, many nations have developed policies to promote family-school connections, including – parent choice of their children's schools and parent representation on school councils or decision-making boards.

School Choice. One of the first policy changes for increasing family involvement in many nations is to offer families a choice of the school their children attend. This is often a first step for nations moving toward democracy because it is a focussed, mechanical process that can be designed and regulated by educational officials. Systems of choice are explained in terms of marketing and competitive forces; policy and business leaders are comfortable viewing parents as "consumers" (Woods, 1993). As the following research suggests, however, in order for choice systems to be effective, communication between families, schools and children is necessary.

In their study of school choice, Shapira and Haymann (1991) found that, in Israel, choosing primary schools is an option primarily exercised by upper-middle class families who have greater access to school information. The authors contend that this disparity in information may undermine the goal of integrating students with diverse socioeconomic status and academic abilities. According to Shapira and Haymann, for school choice to be equitable and non-segregated in Israel, information about schools must be extended to lower income parents.

Similarly, researchers studying school choice in Amsterdam and the United States concluded that within the currently operating educational system, most parents choose schools without having adequate information (Salganik & Carver, 1992; Van Der Wolf, 1995). They recommend providing all parents with objective information to make sound choices of schools, thereby making schools more accountable to educational consumers and more responsive to competitive market forces.

Edge, West and David (1996) also stress the importance of information in school choice decisions in Britain, and point out the importance of parent-child communication when choosing secondary schools. These authors found that school test scores are secondary to parents' and children's main concerns for programs that are responsive to students' interests, talents and needs. In addition, Edge and her colleagues report that there is room for improvement in the information that is provided to families on British secondary schools. Good choice systems, therefore, should provide all important school information in understandable terms and allow families to weigh the data as they see fit.

School Decision Making

There are natural connections between a nation's goal of democratization and the establishment of school boards and councils that include parent representatives (Prucha & Walterova 1992; Vantuch, 1996). The hope is that such representation will make dramatic improvements in school programs and lead to all kinds of social and economic advances. Most councils, however, are ineffective (Mac Beath, 1994, 1995; Beattie, 1985; Marques, 1996). Parent representatives and school personnel are not usually prepared to serve and communicate with the rest of the parent population (Wilkomirska & Marek, 1996).

As in many nations, parents in Hong Kong were found to have minimal participation in school governance or substantive decision-making (Shen, Pang, Tsoi, Yip, & Yung, 1994). The most popular vehicles for initiating parent involvement in school decision-making are parent associations (PAs) and parent-teachers organizations (PTOs) (Beattie, 1985). The majority of kindergarten, elementary, and high schools in Hong Kong have neither, although membership in PTAs is growing (I-wah, 1996). When surveyed, school supervisors, principals, and teachers stated that PTO's should primarily help to improve communications and relationships between families and schools. These school personnel did not think that parent organizations should help in formulating school policies or in monitoring the work or quality of the school. Their attitudes reflect a concern that parent organizations might interfere with the professional responsibilities and autonomy of administrators and teachers.

Other studies also show that concerns about professional autonomy inhibit many administrators and teachers from encouraging parental involvement at school, especially in the area of school governance and/or decision-making (Krumm, Moosbrugger, & Zwicker, 1992; Phtiaka, 1994; Zagoumenov, 1996). In a series of interviews with twelve primary school teachers in Australia, Newport (1994) found

that although teachers believed that parents should be informed about changes in school policies and curriculum developments, most did not believe that parents should be involved in the decision-making process. Newport argues that central to teachers' resistance to parental participation in school governance are their beliefs and definitions of teacher professionalism. She found that teachers' belief in "teacher-as-expert" created a perceived hierarchy of knowledge, value, and status that affected some teachers' collaboration with parents as equals in the process of educating children. The author contends that this belief reflects insufficient teacher training in the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to facilitate the development of effective partnerships between schools, families and communities.

By contrast, in an evaluation of New Zealand's Project CRRISP, designed to promote parental participation in decisions about curriculum development and design, Ramsay (1992) found that with appropriate training and support for families and school staff, parents and teachers can become partners in school governance with substantial educational and social gains for all stakeholders. Observation, interview and questionnaire data gathered from four schools found that schools that allocated the necessary resources, and allowed time for parents and teachers to discuss issues and decisions were most successful in promoting collaborative decision-making about curriculum. In addition, the authors found that ethnic minority and low-income parents were most involved in the process when they felt that their opinions were valued. No one strategy for promoting collaboration was found to be the best. Rather, a repertoire of strategies was necessary to ensure that parents from all ethnic and income groups believed their input and participation were welcomed. Lastly, the authors found that as schools and parents collaborated on curriculum decision-making, parents became more involved in their children's learning at home, parents and teachers communicated more easily and frequently, and teachers had the opportunity to know their students better.

It is evident that educators must work to give families the information and support they need to feel competent and comfortable enough to make decisions about where their children will attend school, and to become more active in school decision-making and other school activities. This work may not be easy given the concerns of many teachers and administrators about their professional status and autonomy, and the concerns of families about the special needs of their children. However, such attitudes can be modified. In a report about the changing role of parent involvement in Dutch schools, Smit and Van Esch (1995) concluded that experiences with parent participation in school governance have, generally, increased teachers' and students' sense of well-being. Similarly, Townsend (1996) reports increased parent satisfaction in a "self managed" school in Australia. Studies and field tests in the United States and other nations also indicate that negative attitudes that teachers and families hold about each other become more positive after partnership practices are implemented (Bastiani, 1988; Epstein 1996).

PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE FAMILY PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING

In contrast to the initial governmental approaches that emphasize mechanical changes, in school choice and decision-making, most families' concerns about involvement focus on fulfilling their parenting roles, and helping their children reach their fullest potential. To families, partnerships with schools require respect, relationships, and responsiveness to children and families' needs and goals. School-family-community connections involve interpersonal relations among teachers, principals and parents, and long term commitments to communication about children and their schools.

Of all the types of involvement, the one that most families in most nations want to know most about is how to enhance their children's learning at home. This includes how to be an effective parent at each age level, and how to interact with children at home about classwork, homework and academic plans and decisions across the grades. Recognizing the need to reach out to families in order to improve the academic success and educational experiences of students, more schools are conducting programs and practices to strengthen parenting skills and to help parents provide home environments to support their children's learning. Research suggests that activities, such as workshops and home visits, have positive influences on families' practices at home, parent and student attitudes about schools, and students' academic achievement.

Villas-Boas (1996) conducted a study to measure the effects of workshops and home visits that were designed to inform parents about literacy development on the literacy skills of low-income, first-grade Indian children in Portugal. The study compared a control group to an experimental group who attended parent workshops and received regular home visits during which story books were delivered and parents were assisted in reading these stories to their children. Children's reading gains were measured using pre- and post- standardized reading exams. Changes in parental and teacher attitudes were measured using pre- and post- questionnaires.

Villas-Boas (1996) found that the intervention program had significant, positive effects on the literacy performance of students in the experimental group. In addition, more parents in the program reported that they could talk freely with teachers about their children's learning problems, that they had higher expectations for their children's school performance, and that they better monitored their children's completion of homework. Teachers' attitudes toward parents also became more positive. Before the intervention, teachers described Indian parents as difficult to reach. After the intervention, more teachers reported that these parents were cooperative and willing to help their children at home. The Villas-Boas (1996) study confirms findings from Epstein's (1990) study that teachers who involve families at home rate poor families with less formal education more positively than do other teachers. The study in Portugal also shows that positive subject-specific practices of school-family partnerships can positively affect students' learning in the targeted subject, as well as teacher and parent attitudes.

Similar results showing the positive effects of subject-specific school-family collaborations on students' skills and related family and teacher outcomes have been found in numerous studies in the United States (Balli 1995; Epstein, Salinas, & Simon, 1996) and in other countries. Several studies in Chile indicate that when Chilean parents were provided parenting education and subject-specific training in mathematics by educators, they became more effective "teachers" or "tutors" at home as evidenced by students' statistically significant gains in mathematics achievement (Pizarro, 1992; Sanchez, 1994). Sanchez and Bagedano (1993) caution that such gains are not guaranteed for all home-school links, however. They argue that in order for desirable educational and instructional outcomes to occur, several elements are required including: 1) well-designed and well-implemented training for parents; 2) sufficient funds to implement the practice effectively; 3) sufficient time to ensure parental competence and understanding; 4) committed and knowledgeable education specialists, teachers and counselors, and 5) clear, specific subject content. If these elements are in place, the authors are optimistic about the positive influence of family-school collaborations on students' learning.

Others conducting evaluations of school-family connections and student academic outcomes have also reported favorable results. Topping (1995) found that Scottish student's spelling skills and their self-concept of ability in spelling were enhanced when their parents tutored them using a cued spelling strategy.

Results of a comprehensive study on the effects of homework on students' learning English as a foreign language (Villas-Boas, 1993) also support the belief that parental involvement in well-designed homework can enhance achievement. The study's participants were seventy-seven 6th graders from an urban, preparatory school located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Portugal. The boys and girls were eleven to twelve years of age and from lower and middle-income families. Students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control group. A criterion-referenced language pre-test was administered to each child at the start of the study.

The experimental groups were assigned homework especially designed to develop vocabulary, listening, reading and writing skills, while members of the control group received regular homework assignments. In addition, randomly selected parents of students in one of the experimental groups attended an hour-long training session on how home environmental factors affect children's learning, and what parents can do to encourage and support their children's work at home. Two weeks after the training session, parents were contacted by phone or mail to check for and encourage their involvement in their children's learning.

At the end of the four-week treatment, a post-test was administered to all students. The experimental groups' test scores were significantly higher than the test scores of the control group. Furthermore, students in the experimental group whose parents were involved in their homework, performed significantly better than students in the experimental group whose parents were not.

Additional studies emphasize other important school-related outcomes that

result from effective subject-specific school-family collaborations. In his evaluation of Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning (EPISLL), an Australian program designed to support and raise parent participation in literacy learning and the study skills of students in grades 7–10, Cairney (1995) found that the program had several positive effects. The program's participants were a diverse group of 17 families drawn from a socioeconomically disadvantaged suburb in Sydney, Australia. EPISLL consisted of 11 two-hour sessions over six weeks that introduced parents to learning strategies to use with their children at home. The content of the program included the importance of developing positive parent-child relationships, helping students to set realistic personal goals, understanding the nature of reading and writing processes, and locating and using community resources.

Written evaluations of EPISLL and structured interviews with parents and teachers revealed that parents reported improved communications and better personal relationships with their children. Parents also reported gaining new knowledge about literacy and learning, and greater confidence in themselves and their ability to help their children succeed in school. Teachers reported that the program helped open channels of communication and interaction between themselves and parents, and teachers and parents reported that students had acquired new competencies, including better study skills, and more positive academic self-concepts.

Similar outcomes were found in evaluations of IMPACT, a project that originated in England to involve parents in their children's mathematics learning. In a two-year qualitative evaluation of the program, Border and Merttens (1993) found that parents reported that IMPACT made mathematics more enjoyable and less frightening for their children, helped them to understand how their children learned mathematics, and provided opportunities to share and discuss their children's curriculum with other parents and teachers. However, parents also voiced concerns over the program, including complaints about activity instructions, unclear connections between homework activities and mathematics learning, and lack of teacher follow-up in the classroom. The authors concluded that although IMPACT successfully involves many parents in their children's school work, it may also lead to "disruptions" due to differing expectations and attitudes between teachers and parents.

Another program that reports positive results for schools, parents and their children is the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) in Ireland. Ryan (1995) found that students' attitudes and skills improved as a result of increased communication and interaction between their families and schools. The HSCL program was introduced in Dublin in 1990 to increase the academic success and school persistence of economically disadvantaged students through greater cooperation between families and schools. Through parent courses and activities and home visits, the program encourages the involvement of parents of primary school aged children at home and at school.

Outcomes for students, teachers and parents participating in HSCL have been positive. Teachers have observed improvements in students' classroom behavior,

attendance, attitudes towards teachers, parents, the school and themselves, and care in completing school work. Teachers have also noted that, at the primary level, the presence of parent volunteers has had positive effects on students' sense of well-being. In addition, teachers have reported greater comfort with parental involvement and improved parent-teacher relations.

Over two-thirds of the families involved in HSCL reported that as a consequence of their involvement, they have learned how to help their children with school learning. Parents who volunteered in classrooms reported learning more about the teacher's job and problems, and about the classroom life of a child. As a result, they found it easier to talk to teachers and ask questions. Parents have also reported that they have more positive attitudes about the school, greater trust of school personnel, greater confidence in approaching the school and teachers, and increased attendance at parent-teacher meetings.

Some parents in HSCL, however, did not get involved. Compared to more involved parents, less-involved parents were more likely to be single-parents, have more children, be unemployed, and/or perceive their children as low-achievers. According to Ryan, increased efforts are needed to advance the level of involvement of families who, for economic and social reasons, are most in need of assistance.

Similarly, Toomey (1989) followed 79 working class families of preschool students in a study of home reading activities. He found that subject-specific information and training for families in reading helped many become involved who would not otherwise have done so. Controlling on students' earlier reading competencies, those whose families participated in the program significantly increased their reading skills. He concluded that in economically disadvantaged communities, special efforts need to be made to reach parents who are less confident about assisting their children's reading and/or contacting schools. If that effort is made, parents respond and children benefit.

COMMUNITY PRACTICES OF PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

Schools are not the only institutions committed to educational change. Internationally, community-based institutions and programs are becoming involved in improving educational outcomes for today's youth. Community agencies are increasingly working with families and schools to increase the support that all children need to be successful citizens in the 21st century. The following studies show how community programs can benefit children and their families.

A community-based program in Colombia, South America that has been successful in helping children and families is PROMESA (Garcia, 1995). One of PROMESA's goals is to promote greater school attendance in rural areas in Colombia through grassroots, participatory action. The project began in 1978 with 100 families and continues today, serving about 2,000 families. Community leaders, many of whom are mothers, primary education agents, and other parents are