

involved in different aspects of program planning and implementation. Evaluation results show that PROMESA has led to more children going to primary school and staying longer. For example, the average grade level for a twelve year-old in one region served by the program increased from 2.5 to 4.2 between 1980 and 1989.

Another successful community-school collaboration is taking place in Poland (Kawecki 1993) through the Civic Educational Association (CEA), an independent organization in Poland led by teachers and parents. The CEA provides psychological and pedagogical guidance to schools serving children from economically disadvantaged families. Drawing from the knowledge and expertise of psychologists and other medical and social service specialists, the CEA provides on-site family therapy, and consultations for parents and teachers.

Research is beginning to show that the most effective community connections are well-implemented and responsive to the needs of families, students and schools. For example, Cairney and his colleagues (1995) reviewed literacy programs in Australia. Of the many literacy programs being implemented, most had not been evaluated, were often initiated by schools without family or community input, and varied greatly in content, process, purpose, and participant control. The authors argue that research and evaluation of the processes and results of literacy programs are needed to help us better understand the ways in which community groups and schools can share responsibility for program development and control. They suggest that shared community, school and family responsibilities will increase feelings of ownership among all participants and avoid the tendency of many programs to simply impose one group's cultural literacy practices on another.

Garreau (1996) extends our understanding of the need for school-family-community connections that are responsive to the needs of families and students in her study of children's return to school after cancer treatments. Doctors, nurses, treatment center administrators, families and schools must learn new ways to work together with student-patients and their peers when the students re-enter regular school. Her work suggests that in addition to working with children and families, health service providers need to connect with schools in order to improve the quality of life and education of children returning to school after severe illnesses.

Acknowledging the importance of shared responsibility and the essential role that communities can play in educational change and progress, Mawhinney (1994) conducted a study to better understand the process of school-community collaboration in Canada. Her study examined the theoretical and practical issues related to school-community collaborative efforts, and the changes needed in both practice and approach to accommodate collaborative action. Mawhinney found that the primary difficulties in establishing and maintaining school-community collaborations related to defining roles, clarifying goals for schools and community agencies, and finding and organizing funding to support programs. Her study and a study conducted by Nettles (1992) in the United States indicate that with the commitment and persistent action of key actors, successful collaborations such as tutoring, mentoring, counseling and "coaching" (Nettles, 1992) for youth and their families are possible, and increasingly necessary.

## BARRIERS TO SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The preceding studies provide information and corroborate previous findings in the United States and other countries on the potential success of school-family partnership activities at home. There are, however, potential barriers to the successful implementation of practices to involve all families (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Based on their work in Australia, Crump and Eltis (1995) remind us that although more teachers are attempting to collaborate with families, there are deeply ingrained individual and institutional histories that need to be addressed for good partnerships to develop. These include some teachers' perceptions of a lack of support or interest from the home, and some parents' negative experiences with education, either their own or their children's.

Most families have questions about how to best support their children's schooling, how to promote students' social, emotional and intellectual development at different ages, and how to help prepare them for post-secondary education and/or future employment. For answers to these and similar questions, the school is often the most convenient and accessible institution to which parents can turn. The school, therefore, can be an important source of information and support for parents in the care, socialization and education of their children. However, research (Calabrese, 1990) shows that some parents are reluctant to turn to the school for the help and information that they need. This reluctance may stem from social status or educational differences between parents and school personnel, or from the school's lack of pro-active and equitable practices of family and community involvement.

Research in Israel led Goldring (1991) to contend that a number of barriers must be removed if greater school-family interaction is to be achieved. These are: 1) lack of flexible frameworks for interactions between parents and teachers; 2) disagreement among parents and teachers over definitions of teacher professionalism, and 3) vast differences in the ways that children relate to their teachers and parents.

Studies in the United States (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) show that schools and teachers who conduct positive, comprehensive partnerships with families can break down the barriers to effective communication, and help families overcome their reluctance to use the school as a resource. Studies in Canada also indicate that such practices help more families feel more comfortable with their children's schools, and improve the schooling experiences of children. Coleman, Collinge and Tabin (1993), for example, interviewed students in grades 6 and 7, their parents and their teachers in British Columbia, Canada. As in studies conducted in the United States, the interview data indicated that parent and student attitudes about schools and their ratings of teachers are strongly affected by teacher practices of parent involvement. Coleman, Tabin and Collinge (1994) also found that student responsibility for learning was enhanced when parents, teachers and students engaged in mutually supportive activities.

Other studies also point to the importance of understanding students' views

(McGilp, 1996; Ryan & Sykes, 1993; Yue & Ho, 1996) and students' roles (Montandon & Perrenoud, 1987) in education and in school-family-community partnerships. In country after country, research, development and evaluation reports indicate that barriers are beginning to be dismantled and that schools are developing successful partnerships with families and communities. Broad based commitment and support on national, state and local levels appear vital to the success of programs of school-family-community partnerships. For example, changes in Spain and Portugal's educational policies that encourage greater parental participation in school decision-making, and better in-service teacher education stressing family-school partnerships have resulted in more communication and interaction between families and schools (Martinez, Marques, & Souta 1994). The Talk to a Literacy Learner program (TTALL), designed to promote home-school connections to help children develop literacy skills, was developed in response to an initiative of the New South Wales state government of Australia, as part of the International Literacy Year in 1990. As another example, the Ministry of Education in Chile (Icaza 1995), established policies and sponsored a number of programs to integrate families into the educational process. Progress during the past decade in the United States and elsewhere in school-family-community collaborations to improve students' learning has been noteworthy and promises to continue because of national, state and local policies, and the hard work and commitment of schools, families and communities.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

"A school door must open from both sides."

(From a statement by Jana Matousova, school principal,  
Czech Republic interviewed by Walterova, 1996).

*Crosscutting Themes about Partnerships.* Research on school-family-community partnerships is international in scope and central for understanding children's learning and development. Most children learn academic subjects in school, but how well they learn, what else they learn, and why they learn are influenced by schools, families, communities, and their connections. Research on school, family, and community partnerships is also central for understanding the social organization of schools. Most schools are directed by educators and education policy, but how effectively schools are run and how successfully teachers teach all students are influenced by school, family, and community connections. These conclusions are true across countries. International studies of the connections of families, schools, students and communities contribute to an understanding of requirements for school change and school improvement.

Research on school-family-community partnerships differs from country to country due, in part, to each nation's history of education, social research, and partnership approaches. For example, Australia has a long history of literacy programs, and so research on family, school, and community connections to literacy learning is prominent. By contrast, Poland and the Czech Republic are

developing educational structures and processes that reflect their new democracies, and so studies of families-choice of schools and participation in school decision making are prominent. Despite important differences, common themes are emerging from studies across countries that extend findings from any one nation and strengthen the knowledge base about the importance of partnerships for successful schools and successful students. Our review of selected studies by researchers in twenty nations reveals these common findings:

*Parents vary in their level of involvement with schools.* In just about all nations, some parents are closely connected to their children's schools and interact easily with teachers. Others, particularly parents with less formal education, are reluctant to contact their schools if they view them as hostile places. Family structure, family life, and parents' work patterns are changing in many countries. More mothers are educated and more are employed outside the home during the school day. Family forms are diversifying as parents divorce and remarry. Close ties with relatives are stretched as families immigrate to new communities or new countries. These factors affect families, children, and schools in all nations, and require schools to consider many different ways to communicate with the families of their students. There is more involvement by more families in the elementary than in the secondary grades, in part because, internationally, more parents feel comfortable and familiar in the early grades, and in part because educators in the early grades do more to involve families. Most parents in most countries are eager to become more involved in their children's education in all grade levels at home or at school, but need to know that they are welcomed and respected by the schools, and need useful information from the schools about how to assist their children.

*Parents are most concerned about their children's success in school.* Parents want their children to be happy and successful in school. In different cultures, these concerns are expressed in different ways. Interestingly, even when they are free to choose the schools their children attend, parents and students select schools based on a number of factors (not just academic test scores) to maximize children's chances of success and happiness. Parents want their schools to understand and respond to their children's talents and needs.

*Students need multiple sources of support to succeed in school and in their communities.* Students in all nations report that their families love and care for them, and that they learn things at school and at home. Surveys in many locations indicate that children and parents are often more in tune with each other than with teachers when asked about family goals, students' aspirations or about the kinds of assistance that students and families need to reach their goals. Research, however, shows that students who receive support from home, family and community are triply benefitted, and are more likely to be academically successful than those who do not (Sanders 1996a).

*Teachers and administrators are initially resistant to increasing family involvement.* Some educators in most locations fear that involving families and others will decrease their professional status. There is more resistance to involving families in school decision-making and curriculum design, and less opposition to involving families in fund-raising, volunteering, and communicating in traditional ways

from school to home. Other types of involvement (i.e., two-way communications and involving families with their own children on schoolwork at home) meet mild, initial resistance, but are growing areas for action and improvement.

*Teachers and administrators need pre-service, in-service, and advanced education.* Education and training is necessary in order for teachers and administrators to understand diverse families and to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to establish and maintain good programs of partnerships with all families and communities. Most educators in all nations are unprepared by their education and training to understand and work with families. In some countries, educators are required to accrue credits or other evidence of continuing education every five years, but these improvements do not have to include school-family-and community partnerships.

*Schools need the input of families and communities.* Schools need assistance from their students' families and their communities to provide rich and varied educational experiences to help all students succeed in school and in life. In most nations, funding for education is too low to meet all needs. School systems need to be able to identify, mobilize, and organize all available resources and talents to support and extend programs and opportunities for all students. Most parents need assistance to understand their children, the schools and ways to help both. Schools are in a unique position to address the fears and concerns of uninvolved parents by establishing programs and practices that encourage all parents to participate in their children's education.

Taken together, these conditions – parents' readiness, students' needs, teachers' resistance, schools' insufficiencies – set the stage for action to improve school-family-community partnerships. The studies reviewed in this chapter show that researchers and educators have identified some common approaches to increase partnerships. Researchers in more than one country conclude:

*Policies are important precursors to program development.* Progress in family participation in education has been made, in large part, by national, state, and local policies. There is, presently, a mismatch between the official policies to increase family involvement and the actions that most parents want to take to support their children's education. Most governmental policies begin with tightly controlled mechanical systems for parents to choose their children's schools or to include a few parent representatives on existing decision-making bodies. If well designed, these mechanical systems may become part of full programs of partnership, but they cannot take the place of more responsive systems that involve all families in school activities, children's progress, decisions about courses, and other aspects of their own children's learning and development. The information and activities that families seek are based on relationships and regular communications with educators. The studies summarized in this chapter suggest that, across countries, programs and practices tend to evolve from mechanical systems to also include interpersonal practices of partnership. Researchers may help to hasten the development of more responsive partnerships by collecting and interpreting data from parents and students on their educational interests and needs.

*Programs and practices of partnership make a difference in whether, how, and which*

families are involved in their children's education. Well-designed and well-implemented programs and practices enable families to become involved at school and at home, including families who are unlikely to become involved on their own. Good programs provide the climate, tools, skills, and confidence that parents need to assist their children and the schools. Positive effects of programs that reach out to involve families have been reported by researchers in such diverse locations as Australia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. In particular, teachers' attitudes about parents' interests and skills change after they begin to work with families; parents learn how to help at home and conduct many more activities with their children and schools; and students benefit in various ways when they see that their parents and teachers know and respect one another and communicate regularly.

*Subject-specific practices involve families in ways that directly assist students' learning and success.* Studies across nations indicate that students benefit when they interact with family members about topics they are learning in class. Examples tested across countries include parent-child reading, cued spelling, or interactive math or writing homework that children conduct with family members at home. Benefits are reported in studies in more than one country in mathematics and language arts. Across cultures, however, researchers caution that in order for all families to become involved, subject specific interventions must be clear, appropriate for the skills and needs of students and families, monitored and rewarded by teachers, and continually improved with input from all participants.

*Programs will be most useful to schools and to families if they are customized, comprehensive, and continually improved to help meet goals set for students by students, families and schools.* Epstein (1995) identifies a set of challenges and redefinitions for each of six major types of involvement that are essential for effective programs. The redefinitions and challenges help schools establish a varied menu of practices to involve present-day families at home, at school, and in the community. Researchers in several countries (e.g. Czech Republic, Chile, Ireland, Portugal and Spain) have taken an action team approach for organizing programs of partnership (Davies & Johnson, 1996; Epstein, Coates, Sanders, Salinas, & Simon, 1996; Sanders, 1996b) and have addressed the challenges of the six major types of involvement to improve their programs over time (Gonzalez, 1996; Icaza, 1995; Marques, 1996; Ryan, 1995; Villas-Boas, 1996; Walterova, 1996). For example, Walterova's school team in the Czech Republic initiated and expanded their partnership program with school-parent meetings, newsletters/bulletins, visiting times for parents, homework assistance, volunteers, and other activities. She reports that teachers' attitudes about parents, and parents' attitudes about the school and about their involvement improved over one year. Many studies show that *when* schools implement appropriate practices, many more parents communicate with their school and their children, and have more positive attitudes toward the school.

*The Contributions of International Research on Partnerships.* This chapter summarizes research collected from members of the International Network of Scholars of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning<sup>3</sup> which

includes researchers from more than forty countries. The Center sponsors and supports international round tables and symposia to encourage communication and exchanges among researchers studying various aspects of school-family-community partnerships, from birth through high school.

The collection of studies demonstrate that small and large studies contribute to a stronger knowledge base with common, replicated results. Although many of the studies reported in this chapter are case studies or local surveys of small samples of parents, teachers or students, the common or linked results of several studies from different nations using varied methods make any one study's findings more credible. The studies summarized here also point to new directions for future research:

*Research is needed that collects data from multiple reporters.* Several studies confirm that families, students, and others in the community have important messages for schools about their programs and their connections with each other. It is not enough to know what educators think or what policy leaders proclaim about school successes or needed improvements. Indeed, researchers should strive to examine and analyze the perspectives of all key stakeholders in the educational process, including students' views.

*Research is needed on community connections with schools, families, and students.* Policies, practices, and research have focused more on family-school connections than on how community members and groups can assist schools, families, and students. A broad agenda across countries is emerging on the organization and effects of integrated community services, including the links of schools and families with community health, civic, religious, cultural, recreational, and other community groups and agencies.

*Research using different methods is needed on the results of specific practices to involve families and communities.* Case studies, surveys, interviews, histories, and evaluations of particular practices are needed to understand the results of school-family-community connections for students at all age and grade levels. Studies in many nations are needed on short- and long-term results of specific practices of all six major types of involvement, separately, in combination, and in full programs of partnership.

*Research is needed to understand differences in family involvement across countries.* In addition to common themes, approaches, and results across nations, we need to better understand the unique influences of history, geography, politics, and legal frameworks on policies, programs, practices, and expectations for family involvement in different countries. For example, research in Hong Kong has focused on the implications of family-school partnerships when old schools close in urban centers with declining populations and new schools open in expanding suburban areas (Ho, 1995). Various topics linked to patterns of mobility and school transitions are pertinent in all nations.

New topics are emerging that are linked to other social, educational, and economic changes in third world nations. For example, patterns of family-school-community connections change when mothers gain more education. Many countries are increasing the number of years of compulsory education and equal

educational and occupational opportunities for males and females. Educational expansion will, over time, produce new patterns of family involvement in children's education by encouraging more mothers and fathers to feel comfortable in school and by alerting schools to the need for new ways to communicate with parents who have one or more jobs during the school day and evening.

International studies have helped researchers in many nations broaden their views and deepen their understanding of processes of school-family-community partnerships that may help all students succeed in school. New investments in education and emerging global economies ensure that school-family-community partnerships will remain an exciting and important field of study.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> These nations in alphabetical order are: Australia, Belarus, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.
- <sup>3</sup> (now the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University).

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# School/Family/Community Partnerships

## *Caring for the Children We Share*

*Ms. Epstein summarizes the theory, framework, and guidelines that can assist schools in building partnerships.*

By Joyce L. Epstein

**T**HE WAY schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as *children*, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents'

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skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.

What do successful partnership programs look like? How can practices be effectively designed and implemented? What are the results of better communications, interactions, and exchanges across these three important contexts? These

questions have challenged research and practice, creating an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into school, family, and community partnerships with "caring" as a core concept.

The field has been strengthened by supporting federal, state, and local policies. For example, the Goals 2000 legislation sets partnerships as a voluntary national goal for all schools; Title I specifies and mandates programs and practices of partnership in order for schools to qualify for or maintain funding. Many states and districts have developed or are preparing policies to guide schools in creating more systematic connections with families and

communities. These policies reflect research results and the prior successes of leading educators who have shown that these goals are attainable.

Underlying these policies and programs are a theory of how social organizations connect: a framework of the basic components of school, family, and community partnerships for children's learning; a growing literature on the positive and negative results of these connections for students, families, and schools; and an understanding of how to organize good programs. In this article I summarize the theory, framework, and guidelines that have assisted the schools in our research projects in building partnerships and that should help any elementary, middle, or high school to take similar steps.

### *Overlapping Spheres of Influence: Understanding The Theory*

Schools make choices. They might conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, keeping the three spheres of influence that directly affect student learning and development relatively separate. Or they might conduct many high-quality communications and interactions designed to bring all three spheres of influence closer together. With frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school.

The *external model* of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that the three major contexts in which students learn and grow — the family, the school, and the community — may be drawn together or pushed apart. In this model, there are some practices that schools, families, and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly in order to influence children's learning and development. The *internal model* of the interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community. These social relationships may be enacted and studied at an *institutional level* (e.g., when a school invites all families

to an event or sends the same communications to all families) and at an *individual level* (e.g., when a parent and a teacher meet in conference or talk by phone). Connections between schools or parents and community groups, agencies, and services can also be represented and studied within the model.<sup>1</sup>

The model of school, family, and community partnerships locates the student at the center. The inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes. The assumption is that, if children feel cared for and encouraged to work hard in the role of student, they are more likely to do their best to learn to read, write, calculate, and learn other skills and talents and to remain in school.

Interestingly and somewhat ironically, studies indicate that students are also crucial for the success of school, family, and community partnerships. Students are often their parents' main source of information about school. In strong partnership programs, teachers help students understand and conduct traditional communications with families (e.g., delivering memos or report cards) and new communications (e.g., interacting with family members about homework or participating in parent/teacher/student conferences). As we gain more information about the role of students in partnerships, we are developing a more complete understanding of how schools, families, and communities must work with students to increase their chances for success.

### *How Theory Sounds in Practice*

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

child." These phrases embody the theory of "overlapping spheres of influence."

In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more *family-like* schools. A family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. In a partnership, parents create more *school-like* families. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success. Communities, including groups of parents working together, create school-like opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize, and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence. Communities also create *family-like* settings, services, and events to enable families to better support their children. *Community-minded* families and students help their neighborhoods and other families. The concept of a community school is re-emerging. It refers to a place where programs and services for students, parents, and others are offered before, during, and after the regular school day.

Schools and communities talk about programs and services that are "family-friendly" — meaning that they take into account the needs and realities of family life in the 1990s, are feasible to conduct, and are equitable toward all families. When all these concepts combine, children experience *learning communities* or *caring communities*.<sup>2</sup>

All these terms are consistent with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, but they are not abstract concepts. You will find them daily in conversations, news stories, and celebrations of many kinds. In a family-like school, a teacher might say, "I know when a student is having a bad day and how to help him along." A student might slip and call a teacher "mom" or "dad" and then laugh with a mixture of embarrassment and glee. In a school-like family, a parent might say, "I make sure my daughter knows that homework comes first." A child might raise his hand to speak at the dinner table and then joke about acting as if he were still in school. When communities reach out to students and their families, youngsters might say, "This program really made my schoolwork make sense!" Parents or educators

might comment, "This community really supports its schools."

Once people hear about such concepts as family-like schools or school-like families, they remember positive examples of schools, teachers, and places in the community that were "like a family" to them. They may remember how a teacher paid individual attention to them, recognized their uniqueness, or praised them for real progress, just as a parent might. Or they might recall things at home that were "just like school" and supported their work as a student, or they might remember community activities that made them feel smart or good about themselves and their families. They will recall that parents, siblings, and other family members engaged in and enjoyed educational activities and took pride in the good schoolwork or homework that they did, just as a teacher might.

### **How Partnerships Work in Practice**

These terms and examples are evidence of the *potential* for schools, families, and communities to create caring educational environments. It is possible to have a school that is excellent academically but ignores families. However, that school will build barriers between teachers, parents, and children — barriers that affect school life and learning. It is possible to have a school that is ineffective academically but involves families in many good ways. With its weak academic program, that school will shortchange students' learning. Neither of these schools exemplifies a caring educational environment that requires academic excellence, good communications, and productive interactions involving school, family, and community.

Some children succeed in school without much family involvement or despite family neglect or distress, particularly if the school has excellent academic and support programs. Teachers, relatives outside of the immediate family, other families, and members of the community can provide important guidance and encouragement to these students. As support from school, family, and community accumulates, significantly more students feel secure and cared for, understand the goals of education, work to achieve to their full potential, build positive attitudes and school

behaviors, and stay in school. The shared interests and investments of schools, families, and communities create the conditions of caring that work to "overdetermine" the likelihood of student success.<sup>3</sup>

Any practice can be designed and implemented well or poorly. And even well-

***Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about it.***

implemented partnership practices may not be useful to all families. In a caring school community, participants work continually to improve the nature and effects of partnerships. Although the interactions of educators, parents, students, and community members will not always be smooth or successful, partnership programs establish a base of respect and trust on which to build. Good partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained — even strengthened — after differences have been resolved. Without this firm base, disagreements and problems that are sure to arise about schools and students will be harder to solve.

### **What Research Says**

In surveys and field studies involving teachers, parents, and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, some important patterns relating to partnerships have emerged.<sup>4</sup>

• Partnerships tend to decline across the grades, *unless* schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropri-

ate practices of partnership at each grade level.

• Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students' families.

• Schools in more economically depressed communities make more contacts with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, *unless* they work at developing balanced partnership programs that include contacts about positive accomplishments of students.

• Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers are less involved, on average, at the school building, *unless* the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children.

Researchers have also drawn the following conclusions.

• Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education.

• Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a "rhetoric rut," in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action.

• Just about all students at all levels — elementary, middle, and high school — want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school. However, students need much better information and guidance than most now receive about how their schools view partnerships and about how they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school activities, homework, and school decisions.

The research results are important because they indicate that caring communities can be built, on purpose; that they include families that might not become involved on their own; and that, by their own reports, just about all families, stu-

dents, and teachers believe that partnerships are important for helping students succeed across the grades.

Good programs will look different in each site, as individual schools tailor their practices to meet the needs and interests, time and talents, ages and grade levels of students and their families. However,

there are some commonalities across successful programs at all grade levels. These include a recognition of the overlapping spheres of influence on student development; attention to various types of involvement that promote a variety of opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work together; and an Action Team

for School, Family, and Community Partnerships to coordinate each school's work and progress.

### *Six Types of Involvement; Six Types of Caring*

A framework of six major types of in-

**Table 1.**  
**Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement and Sample Practices**

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating with Community
Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.	Recruit and organize parent help and support.	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.
<b>Sample Practices</b>	<b>Sample Practices</b>	<b>Sample Practices</b>	<b>Sample Practices</b>	<b>Sample Practices</b>	<b>Sample Practices</b>
Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.	Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.	School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.	Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.	Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.	Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services.
Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.	Language translators to assist families as needed.	Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families.	Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.	Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.	Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.
Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy).	Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.	Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.	Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.	District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement.	Service integration through partnerships involving school, civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses.
Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.	Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences on improving grades.	Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.	Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.	Information on school or local elections for school representatives.	Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others).
Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school. Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.	Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.	Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.	Calendars with activities for parents and students at home.	Networks to link all families with parent representatives.	Participation of alumni in school programs for students.
	Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.		Family math, science, and reading activities at school.		
	Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.		Summer learning packets or activities.		
			Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.		

**Table 2.**  
**Challenges and Redefinitions for the Six Types of Involvement**

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating with Community
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Provide information to <i>all</i> families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.</p> <p>Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.</p> <p>Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.</p>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications.</p> <p>Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.</p> <p>Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, and so on).</p> <p>Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.</p>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Recruit volunteers widely so that <i>all</i> families know that their time and talents are welcome.</p> <p>Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate.</p> <p>Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive.</p>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bi-monthly) that gives <i>students</i> responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork.</p> <p>Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers.</p> <p>Involve families and their children in all important curriculum-related decisions.</p>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.</p> <p>Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.</p> <p>Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.</p>	<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities.</p> <p>Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships.</p> <p>Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services.</p> <p>Match community contributions with school goals; integrate child and family services with education.</p>
<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <p>"Workshop" to mean more than a <i>meeting</i> about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, any time, in varied forms.</p>	<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <p>"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.</p>	<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <p>"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time — not just during the school day and at the school building</p>	<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <p>"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.</p> <p>"Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing — not "teaching" school subjects.</p>	<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <p>"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.</p> <p>Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.</p>	<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <p>"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development.</p> <p>"Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools.</p> <p>"Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.</p>

involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools. The framework (summarized in the accompanying tables) helps educators develop more comprehensive

programs of school and family partnerships and also helps researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practice.

Each type of involvement includes many different *practices* of partnership

(see Table 1). Each type presents particular *challenges* that must be met in order to involve all families and needed *redefinitions* of some basic principles of involvement (see Table 2). Finally, each type is likely to lead to different *results*

**Table 3.**

**Expected Results of the Six Types of Involvement for Students, Parents, and Teachers**

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating with Community
<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <p>Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents.</p> <p>Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family.</p> <p>Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework.</p> <p>Good or improved attendance.</p> <p>Awareness of importance of school.</p>	<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <p>Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades.</p> <p>Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct.</p> <p>Informed decisions about courses and programs.</p> <p>Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator.</p>	<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <p>Skill in communicating with adults.</p> <p>Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers.</p> <p>Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers.</p>	<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <p>Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork.</p> <p>Homework completion.</p> <p>Positive attitude toward schoolwork.</p> <p>View of parent as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school.</p> <p>Self-concept of ability as learner.</p>	<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <p>Awareness of representation of families in school decisions.</p> <p>Understanding that student rights are protected.</p> <p>Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students.</p>	<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <p>Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences.</p> <p>Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work.</p> <p>Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community.</p>
<p><b>For Parents</b></p> <p>Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school.</p> <p>Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting.</p> <p>Feeling of support from school and other parents.</p>	<p><b>For Parents</b></p> <p>Understanding school programs and policies.</p> <p>Monitoring and awareness of child's progress.</p> <p>Responding effectively to students' problems.</p> <p>Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers.</p>	<p><b>For Parents</b></p> <p>Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home.</p> <p>Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education.</p> <p>Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school.</p> <p>Gains in specific skills of volunteer work.</p>	<p><b>For Parents</b></p> <p>Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year.</p> <p>Discussions of school, classwork, and homework.</p> <p>Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject.</p> <p>Appreciation of teaching skills.</p> <p>Awareness of child as a learner.</p>	<p><b>For Parents</b></p> <p>Input into policies that affect child's education.</p> <p>Feeling of ownership of school.</p> <p>Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions.</p> <p>Shared experiences and connections with other families.</p> <p>Awareness of school, district, and state policies.</p>	<p><b>For Parents</b></p> <p>Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services.</p> <p>Interactions with other families in community activities.</p> <p>Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school.</p>
<p><b>For Teachers</b></p> <p>Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children.</p> <p>Respect for families' strengths and efforts.</p> <p>Understanding of student diversity.</p> <p>Awareness of own skills to share information on child development.</p>	<p><b>For Teachers</b></p> <p>Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly.</p> <p>Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications.</p> <p>Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress.</p>	<p><b>For Teachers</b></p> <p>Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school.</p> <p>Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children.</p> <p>Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers.</p>	<p><b>For Teachers</b></p> <p>Better design of homework assignments.</p> <p>Respect of family time.</p> <p>Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning.</p> <p>Satisfaction with family involvement and support.</p>	<p><b>For Teachers</b></p> <p>Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions.</p> <p>View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles.</p>	<p><b>For Teachers</b></p> <p>Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction.</p> <p>Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practice.</p> <p>Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services.</p>

for students, for parents, for teaching practice, and for school climate (see Table 3). Thus schools have choices about which practices will help achieve important goals. The tables provide examples of practices, challenges for successful implementation, redefinitions for up-to-date understanding, and results that have been documented and observed.

### *Charting the Course*

The entries in the tables are illustrative. The sample practices displayed in Table 1 are only a few of hundreds that may be selected or designed for each type of involvement. Although all schools may use the framework of six types as a guide, each school must chart its own course in choosing practices to meet the needs of its families and students.

The challenges shown (Table 2) are just a few of many that relate to the examples. There are challenges — that is, problems — for every practice of partnership, and they must be resolved in order to reach and engage all families in the best ways. Often, when one challenge is met, a new one will emerge.

The redefinitions (also in Table 2) redirect old notions so that involvement is not viewed solely as or measured only by "bodies in the building." As examples the table calls for redefinitions of workshops, communication, volunteers, homework, decision making, and community. By redefining these familiar terms, it is possible for partnership programs to reach out in new ways to many more families.

The selected results (Table 3) should help correct the widespread misperception that any practice that involves families will raise children's achievement test scores. Instead, in the short term, certain practices are more likely than others to influence students' skills and scores, while other practices are more likely to affect attitudes and behaviors. Although students are the main focus of partnerships, the various types of involvement also promote various kinds of results for parents and for teachers. For example, the expected results for parents include not only leadership in decision making, but also confidence about parenting, productive curriculum-related interactions with children, and many interactions with other parents and the school. The expected results for teachers include not only im-

proved parent/teacher conferences or school/home communications, but also better understanding of families, new approaches to homework, and other connections with families and the community.

Most of the results noted in Table 3 have been measured in at least one research study and observed as schools conduct their work. The entries are listed in positive terms to indicate the results of well-designed and well-implemented practices. It should be fully understood, however, that results may be negative if poorly designed practices exclude families or create greater barriers to communication and exchange. Research is still needed on the results of specific practices of partnership in various schools, at various grade levels, and for diverse populations of students, families, and teachers. It will be important to confirm, extend, or correct the information on results listed in Table 3 if schools are to make purposeful choices among practices that foster various types of involvement.

The tables cannot show the connections that occur when one practice activates several types of involvement simultaneously. For example, volunteers may organize and conduct a food bank (Type 3) that allows parents to pay \$15 for \$30 worth of food for their families (Type 1). The food may be subsidized by community agencies (Type 6). The recipients might then serve as volunteers for the program or in the community (perpetuating Type 3 and Type 6 activities). Or consider another example. An after-school homework club run by volunteers and the community recreation department combines Type 3 and Type 6 practices. Yet it also serves as a Type 1 activity, because the after-school program assists families with the supervision of their children. This practice may also alter the way homework interactions are conducted between students and parents at home (Type 4). These and other connections are interesting, and research is needed to understand the combined effects of such activities.

The tables also simplify the complex longitudinal influences that produce various results over time. For example, a series of events might play out as follows. The involvement of families in reading at home leads students to give more attention to reading and to be more strongly motivated to read. This in turn may help

students maintain or improve their daily reading skills and then their reading grades. With the accumulation over time of good classroom reading programs, continued home support, and increased skills and confidence in reading, students may significantly improve their reading achievement test scores. The time between reading aloud at home and increased reading test scores may vary greatly, depending on the quality and quantity of other reading activities in school and out.

Or consider another example. A study by Seyong Lee, using longitudinal data and rigorous statistical controls on background and prior influences, found important benefits for high school students' attitudes and grades as a result of continuing several types of family involvement from the middle school into the high school. However, achievement test scores were not greatly affected by partnerships at the high school level. Longitudinal studies and practical experiences that are monitored over time are needed to increase our understanding of the complex patterns of results that can develop from various partnership activities.<sup>6</sup>

The six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for students, parents, and teachers. The results for students, parents, and teachers will depend on the particular types of involvement that are implemented, as well as on the quality of the implementation.

### *Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships*

Who will work to create caring school communities that are based on the concepts of partnership? How will the necessary work on all six types of involvement get done? Although a principal or a teacher may be a leader in working with some families or with groups in the community, one person cannot create a lasting, comprehensive program that involves all families as their children progress through the grades.

From the hard work of many educators and families in many schools, we have learned that, along with clear policies and strong support from state and district

leaders and from school principals, an Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships in each school is a useful structure. The action team guides the development of a comprehensive program of partnership, including all six types of involvement, and the integration of all family and community connections within a single, unified plan and program. The trials and errors, efforts and insights of many schools in our projects have helped to identify five important steps that any school can take to develop more positive school/family/community connections.'

### ***Step 1: Create an Action Team***

A team approach is an appropriate way to build partnerships. The Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships can be the "action arm" of a school council, if one exists. The action team takes responsibility for assessing present practices, organizing options for new partnerships, implementing selected activities, evaluating next steps, and continuing to improve and coordinate practices for all six types of involvement. Although the members of the action team lead these activities, they are assisted by other teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members.

The action team should include at least three teachers from different grade levels, three parents with children in different grade levels, and at least one administrator. Teams may also include at least one member from the community at large and, at the middle and high school levels, at least two students from different grade levels. Others who are central to the school's work with families may also be included as members, such as a cafeteria worker, a school social worker, a counselor, or a school psychologist. Such diverse membership ensures that partnership activities will take into account the various needs, interests, and talents of teachers, parents, the school, and students.

The leader of the action team may be any member who has the respect of the other members, as well as good communication skills and an understanding of the partnership approach. The leader or at least one member of the action team should also serve on the school council, school improvement team, or other such body, if one exists.

In addition to group planning, mem-

bers of the action team elect (or are assigned to act as) the chair or co-chair of one of six subcommittees for each type of involvement. A team with at least six members (and perhaps as many as 12) ensures that responsibilities for leadership can be delegated so that one person is not overburdened and so that the work of the action team will continue even if members move or change schools or positions. Members may serve renewable terms of two to three years, with replacement of any who leave in the interim. Other thoughtful variations in assignments and activities may be created by small or large schools using this process.

In the first phase of our work in 1987, projects were led by "project directors" (usually teachers) and were focused on one type of involvement at a time. Some schools succeeded in developing good partnerships over several years, but others were thwarted if the project director moved, if the principal changed, or if the project grew larger than one person could handle. Other schools took a team approach in order to work on many types of involvement simultaneously. Their efforts demonstrated how to structure the program for the next set of schools in our work. Starting in 1990, this second set of schools tested and improved on the structure and work of action teams. Now, all elementary, middle, and high schools in our research and development projects and in other states and districts that are applying this work are given assistance in taking the action team approach.

### ***Step 2: Obtain Funds and Other Support***

A modest budget is needed to guide and support the work and expenses of each school's action team. Funds for state coordinators to assist districts and schools and funds for district coordinators or facilitators to help each school may come from a number of sources. These include federal, state, and local programs that mandate, request, or support family involvement, such as Title I, Title II, Title VII, Goals 2000, and other federal and similar state funding programs. In addition to paying the state and district coordinators, funds from these sources may be applied in creative ways to support staff development in the area of school, family, and community partnerships, to pay for lead

teachers at each school; to set up demonstration programs; and for other partnership expenses. In addition, local school/business partnerships, school discretionary funds, and separate fund-raising efforts targeted to the schools' partnership programs have been used to support the work of their action teams. At the very least, a school's action team requires a small stipend (at least \$1,000 per year for three to five years, with summer supplements) for time and materials needed by each subcommittee to plan, implement, and revise practices of partnership that include all six types of involvement.

The action team must also be given sufficient time and social support to do its work. This requires explicit support from the principal and district leaders to allow time for team members to meet, plan, and conduct the activities that are selected for each type of involvement. Time during the summer is also valuable — and may be essential — for planning new approaches that will start in the new school year.

### ***Step 3: Identify Starting Points***

Most schools have some teachers who conduct some practices of partnership with some families some of the time. How can good practices be organized and extended so that they may be used by all teachers, at all grade levels, with all families? The action team works to improve and systematize the typically haphazard patterns of involvement. It starts by collecting information about the school's present practices of partnership, along with the views, experiences, and wishes of teachers, parents, administrators, and students.

Assessments of starting points may be made in a variety of ways, depending on available resources, time, and talents. For example, the action team might use formal questionnaires' or telephone interviews to survey teachers, administrators, parents, and students (if resources exist to process, analyze, and report survey data). Or the action team might organize a panel of teachers, parents, and students to speak at a meeting of the parent/teacher organization or at some other school meeting as a way of initiating discussion about the goals and desired activities for partnership. Structured discussions may be conducted through a series of principal's breakfasts for representative groups of teachers, parents, students, and others, ran-

**Most schools have some teachers who conduct some practices of partnership with some families some of the time.**

dom sample phone calls may also be used to collect reactions and ideas, or formal focus groups may be convened to gather ideas about school, family, and community partnerships at the school.

What questions should be addressed? Regardless of how the information is gathered, some areas must be covered in any information gathering.

- *Present strengths.* Which practices of school/family/community partnerships are now working well for the school as a whole? For individual grade levels? For which types of involvement?

- *Needed changes.* Ideally, how do we want school, family, and community partnerships to work at this school three years from now? Which present practices should continue, and which should change? To reach school goals, what new practices are needed for each of the major types of involvement?

- *Expectations.* What do teachers expect of families? What do families expect of teachers and other school personnel? What do students expect their families to do to help them negotiate school life? What do students expect their teachers to do to keep their families informed and involved?

- *Sense of community.* Which families are we now reaching, and which are we not yet reaching? Who are the "hard-to-reach" families? What might be done to communicate with and engage these families in their children's education? Are current partnership practices coordinated to include all families as a school community? Or are families whose children receive special services (e.g., Title I, spe-

cial education, bilingual education) separated from other families?

- *Links to goals.* How are students faring on such measures of academic achievement as report card grades, on measures of attitudes and attendance, and on other indicators of success? How might family and community connections assist the school in helping more students reach higher goals and achieve greater success? Which practices of school, family, and community partnerships would directly connect to particular goals?

#### **Step 4: Develop a Three-Year Plan**

From the ideas and goals for partnerships collected from teachers, parents, and students, the action team can develop a three-year outline of the specific steps that will help the school progress from its starting point on each type of involvement to where it wants to be in three years. This plan outlines how each subcommittee will work over three years to make important, incremental advances to reach more families each year on each type of involvement. The three-year outline also shows how all school/family/community connections will be integrated into one coherent program of partnership that includes activities for the whole school community, activities to meet the special needs of children and families, activities to link to the district committees and councils, and activities conducted in each grade level.

In addition to the three-year outline of goals for each type of involvement, a detailed one-year plan should be developed for the first year's work. It should include the specific activities that will be implemented, improved, or maintained for each type of involvement; a time line of monthly actions needed for each activity; identification of the subcommittee chair who will be responsible for each type of involvement; identification of the teachers, parents, students, or others (not necessarily action team members) who will assist with the implementation of each activity; indicators of how the implementation and results of each major activity will be assessed; and other details of importance to the action team.

The three-year outline and one-year detailed plan are shared with the school council and/or parent organization, with all teach-

ers, and with the parents and students. Even if the action team makes only one good step forward each year on each of the six types of involvement, it will take 18 steps forward over three years to develop a more comprehensive and coordinated program of school/family/community partnerships.

In short, based on the input from the parents, teachers, students, and others on the school's starting points and desired partnerships, the action team will address these issues.

- *Details.* What will be done each year, for three years, to implement a program on all six types of involvement? What, specifically, will be accomplished in the first year on each type of involvement?

- *Responsibilities.* Who will be responsible for developing and implementing practices of partnership for each type of involvement? Will staff development be needed? How will teachers, administrators, parents, and students be supported and recognized for their work?

- *Costs.* What costs are associated with the improvement and maintenance of the planned activities? What sources will provide the needed funds? Will small grants or other special budgets be needed?

- *Evaluation.* How will we know how well the practices have been implemented and what their effects are on students, teachers, and families? What indicators will we use that are closely linked to the practices implemented to determine their effects?

#### **Step 5: Continue Planning And Working**

The action team should schedule an annual presentation and celebration of progress at the school so that all teachers, families, and students will know about the work that has been done each year to build partnerships. Or the district coordinator for school, family, and community partnerships might arrange an annual conference for all schools in the district. At the annual school or district meeting, the action team presents and displays the highlights of accomplishments on each type of involvement. Problems are discussed and ideas are shared about improvements, additions, and continuations for the next year.

Each year, the action team updates the school's three-year outline and develops a detailed one-year plan for the coming

year's work. It is important for educators, families, students, and the community at large to be aware of annual progress, of new plans, and of how they can help.

In short, the action team addresses the following questions. How can it ensure that the program of school/family/community partnership will continue to improve its structure, processes, and practices in order to increase the number of families who are partners with the school in their children's education? What opportunities will teachers, parents, and students have to share information on successful practices and to strengthen and maintain their efforts?

### *Characteristics of Successful Programs*

As schools have implemented partnership programs, their experience has helped to identify some important properties of successful partnerships.

• *Incremental progress.* Progress in partnerships is incremental, including more families each year in ways that benefit more students. Like reading or math programs, assessment programs, sports programs, or other school investments, partnership programs take time to develop, must be periodically reviewed, and should be continuously improved. The schools in our projects have shown that three years is the minimum time needed for an action team to complete a number of activities on each type of involvement and to establish its work as a productive and permanent structure in a school.

The development of a partnership is a process, not a single event. All teachers, families, students, and community groups do not engage in all activities on all types of involvement all at once. Not all activities implemented will succeed with all families. But with good planning, thoughtful implementation, well-designed activities, and pointed improvements, more and more families and teachers can learn to work with one another on behalf of the children whose interests they share. Similarly, not all students instantly improve their attitudes or achievements when their families become involved in their education. After all, student learning depends mainly on good curricula and instruction and on the work completed by students. However, with a well-implemented program of partnership, more students will

receive support from their families, and more will be motivated to work harder.

• *Connection to curricular and instructional reform.* A program of school/family/community partnerships that focuses on children's learning and development is an important component of curricular and instructional reform. Aspects of partnerships that aim to help more students succeed in school can be supported by federal, state, and local funds that are targeted for curricular and instructional reform. Helping families understand, monitor, and interact with students on homework, for example, can be a clear and important extension of classroom instruction, as can volunteer programs that bolster and broaden student skills, talents, and interests. Improving the content and conduct of parent/teacher/student conferences and goal-setting activities can be an important step in curricular reform; family support and family understanding of child and adolescent development and school curricula are necessary elements to assist students as learners.

The connection of partnerships to curriculum and instruction in schools and the location of leadership for these partnership programs in district departments of curriculum and instruction are important changes that move partnerships from being peripheral public relations activities about parents to being central programs about student learning and development.

• *Redefining staff development.* The action team approach to partnerships guides the work of educators by restructuring "staff development" to mean colleagues working together and with parents to develop, implement, evaluate, and continue to improve practices of partnership. This is less a "dose of inservice education" than it is an active form of developing staff talents and capacities. The teachers, administrators, and others on the action team become the "experts" on this topic for their school. Their work in this area can be supported by various federal, state, and local funding programs as a clear investment in staff development for overall school reform. Indeed, the action team approach as outlined can be applied to any or all important topics on a school improvement agenda. It need not be restricted to the pursuit of successful partnerships.

It is important to note that the development of partnership programs would be easier if educators came to their schools

prepared to work productively with families and communities. Courses or classes are needed in preservice teacher education and in advanced degree programs for teachers and administrators to help them define their professional work in terms of partnerships. Today, most educators enter schools without an understanding of family backgrounds, concepts of caring, the framework of partnerships, or the other "basics" I have discussed here. Thus most principals and district leaders are not prepared to guide and lead their staffs in developing strong school and classroom practices that inform and involve families. And most teachers and administrators are not prepared to understand, design, implement, or evaluate good practices of partnership with the families of their students. Colleges and universities that prepare educators and others who work with children and families should identify where in their curricula the theory, research, policy, and practical ideas about partnerships are presented or where in their programs these can be added.

Even with improved preservice and advanced coursework, however, each school's action team will have to tailor its menu of practices to the needs and wishes of the teachers, families, and students in the school. The framework and guidelines offered in this article can be used by thoughtful educators to organize this work, school by school.

### *The Core of Caring*

One school in our Baltimore project named its partnerships the "I Care Program." It developed an I Care Parent Club that fostered fellowship and leadership of families, an *I Care Newsletter*, and many other events and activities. Other schools also gave catchy, positive names to their programs to indicate to families, students, teachers, and everyone else in the school community that there are important relationships and exchanges that must be developed in order to assist students.

Interestingly, synonyms for "caring" match the six types of involvement: Type 1, parenting; supporting, nurturing, and rearing; Type 2, communicating, relating, reviewing, and overseeing; Type 3, volunteering; supervising and fostering; Type 4, learning at home; managing, recognizing, and rewarding; Type 5, decision

making; contributing, considering, and judging; and Type 6, collaborating with the community; sharing and giving.

Underlying all six types of involvement are two defining synonyms of caring: trusting and respecting. Of course, the varied meanings are interconnected, but it is striking that language permits us to call forth various elements of caring associated with activities for the six types of involvement. If all six types of involvement are operating well in a school's program of partnership, then all of these caring behaviors could be activated to assist children's learning and development.

Despite real progress in many states, districts, and schools over the past few years, there are still too many schools in which educators do not understand the families of their students; in which families do not understand their children's schools; and in which communities do not understand or assist the schools, families, or students. There are still too many states and districts without the policies, departments, leadership, staff, and fiscal support needed to enable all their schools to develop good programs of partnership. Yet relatively small financial investments that support and assist the work of action teams could yield significant returns for all schools, teachers, families, and students. Educators who have led the way with trials, errors, and successes provide evidence that any state, district, or school can create similar programs.<sup>11</sup>

Schools have choices. There are two

common approaches to involving families in schools and in their children's education. One approach emphasizes conflict and views the school as a battleground. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment guarantee power struggles and disharmony. The other approach emphasizes partnership and views the school as a homeland. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment invite power sharing and mutual respect and allow energies to be directed toward activities that foster student learning and development. Even when conflicts rage, however, peace must be restored sooner or later, and the partners in children's education must work together.

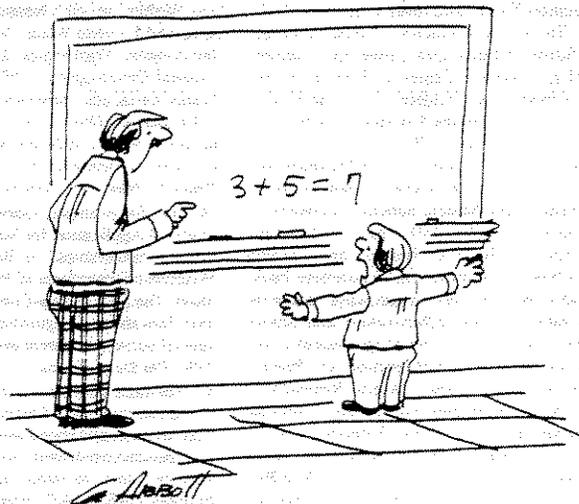
### Next Steps: Strengthening Partnerships

Collaborative work and thoughtful give-and-take among researchers, policy leaders, educators, and parents are responsible for the progress that has been made over the past decade in understanding and developing school, family, and community partnerships. Similar collaborations will be important for future progress in this and other areas of school reform. To promote these approaches, I am establishing a national network of Partnership-2000 Schools to help link state, district, and other leaders who are responsible for helping their elementary, middle, and high schools implement programs of school, family, and community partnerships by

the year 2000. The state and district coordinators must be supported for at least three years by sufficient staff and budgets to enable them to help increasing numbers of elementary, middle, and high schools in their districts to plan, implement, and maintain comprehensive programs of partnership.

Partnership-2000 Schools will be aided in putting the recommendations of this article into practice in ways that are appropriate to their locations. Implementation will include applying the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the framework of six types of involvement, and the action team approach. Researchers and staff members at Johns Hopkins will disseminate information and guidelines, send out newsletters, and hold optional annual workshops to help state and district coordinators learn new strategies and share successful ideas. Activities for leaders at the state and district levels will be shared, as will school-level programs and successful partnership practices.

The national network of Partnership-2000 Schools will begin its activities in the fall of 1995 and will continue until at least the year 2000. The goal is to enable leaders in all states and districts to assist all their schools in establishing and strengthening programs of school/family/community partnership.<sup>11</sup>



"Of course, it's wrong. That's why I go to school."

1. Joyce L. Epstein, "Toward a Theory of Family-School Connections: Teacher Practices and Parent Involvement," in Klaus Hurrelmann, Frederick Kaufmann, and Frederick Losel, eds., *Social Intervention: Potential and Constraints* (New York: DeGruyter, 1987), pp. 121-36; idem, "School and Family Partnerships," in Marvin Alkin, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1139-51; idem, "Theory to Practice: School and Family Partnerships Lead to School Improvement and Student Success," in Cheryl L. Fagnano and Beverly Z. Werber, eds., *School, Family, and Community Interaction: A View from the Firing Lines* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 39-52; and idem, *School and Family Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, forthcoming).

2. Ron Brandt, "On Parents and Schools: A Conversation with Joyce Epstein," *Educational Leadership*, October 1989, pp. 24-27; Epstein, "Toward a Theory"; Catherine C. Lewis, Eric Schaps, and Marilyn Watson, "Beyond the Pendulum: Creating Challenging and Caring Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1995, pp. 547-54; and Debra Viadero, "Learning to Care," *Education Week*, 26 October 1994, pp. 31-33.

3. A. Wade Boykin, "Harvesting Culture and Talent: African American Children and Educational Reform," in Robert Rossi, ed., *Schools and Students*

at Risk (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), pp. 116-39.

4. For references to studies by many researchers, see the following literature reviews: Epstein, "School and Family Partnerships"; idem, *School and Family Partnerships*; and idem, "Perspectives and Previews on Research and Policy for School, Family, and Community Partnerships," in Alan Booth and Judith Dunn, eds., *Family-School Links: How Do They Affect Educational Outcomes?* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, forthcoming). Research that reports patterns of involvement across the grades, for families with low and high socioeconomic status, for one- and two-parent homes, and on schools' programs of partnership includes: Carol Ames, with Madhab Khoju and Thomas Watkins, "Parents and Schools: The Impact of School-to-Home Communications on Parents' Beliefs and Perceptions," Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Center Report 15, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1993; David P. Baker and David L. Stevenson, "Mothers' Strategies for Children's School Achievement: Managing the Transition to High School," *Sociology of Education*, vol. 59, 1986, pp. 156-66; Patricia A. Bauch, "Is Parent Involvement Different in Private Schools?," *Educational Horizons*, vol. 66, 1988, pp. 78-82; Henry J. Becker and Joyce L. Epstein, "Parent Involvement: A Study of Teacher Practices," *Elementary School Journal*, vol. 83, 1982, pp. 85-102; Reginald M. Clark, *Family Life and School Achievement: Why Poor Black Children Succeed or Fail* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Susan L. Dauber and Joyce L. Epstein, "Parents' Attitudes and Practices of Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools," in Nancy Chavkin, ed., *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 53-71; Sanford M. Dornbusch and Philip L. Ritter, "Parents of High School Students: A Neglected Resource," *Educational Horizons*, vol. 66, 1988, pp. 75-77; Jacquelynne S. Eccles, "Family Involvement in Children's and Adolescents' Schooling," in Booth and Dunn, op. cit.; Joyce L. Epstein, "Parents' Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement," *Elementary School Journal*, vol. 86, 1986, pp. 277-94; idem, "Single Parents and the Schools: Effects of Marital Status on Parent and Teacher Interactions," in Maureen Hallinan, ed., *Change in Societal Institutions* (New York: Plenum, 1990), pp. 91-121; Joyce L. Epstein and Seyong Lee, "National Patterns of School and Family Connections in the Middle Grades," in Bruce A. Ryan and Gerald R. Adams, eds., *The Family-School Connection: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, forthcoming); Annette Lareau, *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1989); and Diane Scott-Jones, "Activities in the Home That Support School Learning in the Middle Grades," in Barry Rutherford, ed., *Creating Family/School Partnerships* (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association, 1995), pp. 161-81.

5. The three tables update earlier versions that were based on only five types of involvement. For other discussions of the types, practices, challenges, redefinitions, and results, see Epstein, "School and Family Partnerships"; Lori Connors Tadros and Joyce L. Epstein, "Parents and Schools," in Marc H. Bornstein, ed., *Handbook of Parenting* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, forthcoming); Joyce L. Epstein and

Lori Connors Tadros, "School and Family Partnerships in the Middle Grades," in Rutherford, op. cit.; and idem, "Trust Fund: School, Family, and Community Partnerships in High Schools," Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Center Report 24, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1994. Schools' activities with various types of involvement are outlined in Don Davies, Patricia Burch, and Vivian Johnson, "A Portrait of Schools Reaching Out: Report of a Survey on Practices and Policies of Family-Community-School Collaboration," Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Center Report 1, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1992.

6. Seyong Lee, "Family-School Connections and Students' Education: Continuity and Change of Family Involvement from the Middle Grades to High School" (Doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1994). For a discussion of issues concerning the results of partnerships, see Epstein, "Perspectives and Previews." For various research reports on results of partnerships for students and for parents, see Joyce L. Epstein, "Effects on Student Achievement of Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement," in Steven Silvern, ed., *Literacy Through Family, Community, and School Interaction* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1991), pp. 261-76; Joyce L. Epstein and Susan L. Dauber, "Effects on Students of an Interdisciplinary Program Linking Social Studies, Art, and Family Volunteers in the Middle Grades," *Journal of Early Adolescence*, vol. 15, 1995, pp. 237-66; Joyce L. Epstein and Jill Jacobsen, "Effects of School Practices to Involve Families in the Middle Grades: Parents' Perspectives," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Los Angeles, 1994; Joyce L. Epstein and Seyong Lee, "Effects of School Practices to Involve Families on Parents and Students in the Middle Grades: A View from the Schools," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Miami, 1993; and Anne T. Henderson and Nancy Berla, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994).

7. Lori Connors Tadros and Joyce L. Epstein, "Taking Stock: The Views of Teachers, Parents, and Students on School, Family, and Community Partnerships in High Schools," Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Center Report 25, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1994; Epstein and Tadros, "Trust Fund"; Joyce L. Epstein and Susan L. Dauber, "School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools," *Elementary School Journal*, vol. 91, 1991, pp. 289-303; and Joyce L. Epstein, Susan C. Hemrick, and Lucretia Coates, "Effects of Summer Home Learning Packets on Student Achievement in Language Arts in the Middle Grades," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, in press. For other approaches to the use of action teams for partnerships, see Patricia Burch and Ameetha Palanki, "Action Research on Family-School-Community Partnerships," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems*, vol. 1, 1994, pp. 16-19; Patricia Burch, Ameetha Palanki, and Don Davies, "In Our Hands: A Multi-Site Parent-Teacher Action Research Project," Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Center Report 29, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1994; Don Davies, "Schools

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8. Surveys for teachers and parents in the elementary and middle grades and for teachers, parents, and students in high school, developed and revised in 1993 by Joyce L. Epstein, Karen Clark Salinas, and Lori Connors Tadros, are available from the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University.

9. Mary Sue Ammon, "University of California Project on Teacher Preparation for Parent Involvement, Report I: April 1989 Conference and Initial Follow-up," mimeo, University of California, Berkeley, 1990; Nancy F. Chavkin and David L. Williams, "Critical Issues in Teacher Training for Parent Involvement," *Educational Horizons*, vol. 66, 1988, pp. 87-89; and Lisa Hinz, Jessica Clarke, and Joe Nathan, "A Survey of Parent Involvement Course Offerings in Minnesota's Undergraduate Preparation Programs," Center for School Change, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1992. To correct deficiencies in the education of educators, I have written a course text or supplementary reader based on the theory, framework, and approaches described in this article. See Epstein, *School and Family Partnerships*. Other useful readings for a university course include Sandra L. Christenson and Jane Close Conoley, eds., *Home-School Collaboration: Enhancing Children's Academic Competence* (Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of School Psychologists, 1992); Fagnano and Werber, op. cit.; Norman Fruchter, Anne Galietta, and J. Lynne White, *New Directions in Parent Involvement* (Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development, 1992); William Rioux and Nancy Berla, eds., *Innovations in Parent and Family Involvement* (Princeton Junction, N.J.: Even Education, 1993); and Susan McAllister Swap, *Developing Home-School Partnerships: From Concept to Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

10. See, for example, Gary Lloyd, "Research and Practical Application for School, Family, and Community Partnerships," in Booth and Dunn, op. cit.; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Worksheet: The DPI Family-Community-School Partnership Newsletter*, August/September 1994, and the special section on parent involvement in the January 1991 *Phi Delta Kappan*.

11. For more information about the national network of Partnership-2000 Schools, send the name, position, address, and phone and fax numbers of the contact person/coordinator for partnerships for your state or district to Joyce Epstein, Partnership-2000 Schools, CRESPAR/Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218. ■

# THE PRACTITIONER

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## School and Family Partnerships

Most parents love their children and want the best for them, but many do not know how to translate their care and concern into positive involvement in education. Families need more information and guidance from the schools to enable them to maintain an ongoing dialog with their adolescents about school, growing up, and their future.

The nature and content of school-family partnerships change through the years, along with the adolescents, their families, and their schools.

**1. Students are changing.** Adolescent needs and ideas about themselves differ from those of younger children. They need opportunities to develop their independence and take more responsibility for themselves, even as they continue to need adults to guide and support them.

Adolescents must balance peer relationships with adult relationships as they seek the comfort of conformity with their peers and pursue the identification of their uniqueness as individuals.

**2. Families are changing.** The family unit is changing. Parents may be older, mothers may work full-time or part-time, families may be headed by a single parent, and families may live further away from the school. Parents may be confused about their adolescents' development and worried about the problems that face adolescents in the 1990s.

Middle level and high schools must design and organize family involvement to meet parents' needs and fit the realities of family life. They must help youngsters build independence while helping parents become knowledgeable partners with the schools.

**3. Schools are changing.** Middle level and high schools are organized and staffed differently from most elementary schools. They are usually larger,

fully departmentalized, and have more teachers certified for the secondary grades, educated as subject matter experts, and unprepared to work with families.

School and family partnerships must be organized to make the best use of the various adults who have important roles in middle level and high schools.

Even with these changes, the concept of partnership persists across the grades. In the middle level and high school grades, partnerships are, in fact, three-way—family-student-school—because of the increasing maturity of adolescents and their changing relationships with adults.

### Family Environment and Involvement\*

Parental encouragement, support, appropriate supervision and guidance, and positive communication about school and learning positively influence student achievement, grades, attitudes, aspirations, and behavior.

Although, on average, more highly educated families are more involved, families from all situations—regardless of the formal education or income level of the parents, and regardless of the grade level or ability of the student—use strategies to encourage and influence their children's education.

Studies show that parents' involvement in educa-

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\*For a full review of research and issues of school and family connections through adolescence, see "School and Family Partnerships," by Joyce L. Epstein, in the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 6th ed., edited by M. Alkin, New York: Macmillan Co., 1992.

tion can help compensate for the lack of other family resources and help more youngsters define themselves as students. The benefits accrue for all students, including those from families with less education or fewer economic advantages.

The early studies documenting the importance of family environments for student success opened a new research question: If family involvement and encouragement is important, how can we help more families at all grade levels become involved in ways that help their children succeed in school?

This question guides the development and evaluation of school partnership programs with families. Research is accumulating that shows schools must take a leadership role to enable more parents to become and remain involved in their children's education. When schools take these steps, more families appreciate the assistance and become successful partners, and more students benefit in achievements, attitudes, and behavior.

As they develop school and family partnerships, educators should consider the following:

- Families remain important to adolescents, even as peers become more important.
- School-family partnership practices are declining dramatically at each grade level. Coincidentally, with each year in school, more families report they are unable to assist their children and understand the schools. Schools correct this when they implement comprehensive partnership programs.
- Most parents cannot and do not participate at the school building level, either as volunteers or in decision-making and leadership roles.
- By contrast, most parents (up to 90 percent at the middle level and 80 percent in high schools) want to know how to help their own children at home, and what to do to help them succeed at school. Studies of middle level and high schools, and of public, Catholic, and other private schools, confirm that families need and want more information and guidance from the schools.
- The social, academic, and personal problems that increase in adolescence require the concerted attention of all who share an interest and investment in children. The efforts of schools and families have not been well-organized to date. Each institution usually works separately, often without knowledge of or communication with the others.

The community also has a contribution to make, but community services and resources also have been applied without collaboration or communication with schools or families.

This disorganized delivery of services has contributed to the failure of many students to reach their potential. It helps explain the well-known and unacceptable statistics on school failure, retentions in grade, drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and the other problems that increase in adolescence.

Involving families will not, by itself, make students successful learners or high achievers. That takes the hard work of teachers, administrators, and the students themselves on a daily agenda of excellence. Nevertheless, even in good schools, more students will benefit, go farther, and reach higher if they are part of successful school, family, and community partnerships extending through the secondary school years.

## Developing Comprehensive Programs of Partnership

A research-based framework of six major types of involvement has been devised to help educators develop more comprehensive programs of school-family partnerships. Each type of involvement includes different practices that are likely to lead to different outcomes for students, parents, teaching practice, and school climate. Here, we outline the major types of involvement and include a few general examples and others that may be important for accommodating particular adolescents, families, and schools.

### Type 1. Basic obligations of families

Schools must provide families with information about adolescent health and safety, supervision, nutrition, discipline and guidance, parenting skills, and parenting approaches. This information helps families build positive home environments that support learning through high school. Some schools offer parent workshops and other forms of parent education, training, and information-sharing.

Families continue to teach their children attitudes, beliefs, customs, behaviors, and skills that, apart from the school curriculum, are unique to and valued by the family. Schools are enriched by the varying backgrounds and cultures of the students' families. This two-way exchange—information to help families understand child and adolescent development and information to help schools understand family life and students' needs, interests, and talents—is at the heart of Type 1 activities.

Type 1 practices may include helping families understand early and late adolescence, support adolescent health and mental health, and prevent key problems in adolescent development.

Families may want information (and may want to give the school information) about how to meet adolescents' simultaneous needs for increased independence and continued guidance; about understanding the importance of peers and the risks of peer pressure; and about other topics.

Families may want to know more about setting appropriate family rules, providing decision-making opportunities to adolescents, and changing discipline practices to support student development. With appropriate information, families can establish home conditions that help students balance studying, homework, part-time jobs, and home chores.

The challenge of successful Type 1 activities is to provide information to all families who want it and need it, not just the few who can attend workshops at the school. This information can be provided by videos, tape recordings, handouts, newsletters, and cable broadcasts, for example.

#### Type 2. Basic obligations of school

This category refers to the communications from schools to families about school programs and students' progress. It includes the usual notices, memos, phone calls, report cards, conferences, open-house nights or other opportunities that most schools conduct, and other more innovative communications.

It may include information to help families choose or change schools, if the district has such a policy. Schools must vary the form and frequency of communications so the information sent home can be understood by all families.

Type 2 communications help families help students select curricula, courses, special programs, and other activities each year. Information about report card grading systems helps families monitor student progress in school and helps families help students improve their grades. Parent-teacher conferences allow parents and students to meet with teachers of all subjects in efficient, productive, and friendly meetings.

Families need information at important transitions from elementary to middle level and from middle level to high school. Orientation sessions at these points recognize that families make transitions with their children, and if informed, can help students adjust to new schools.

At other key points in schooling, families need information to help students plan for college and work; to begin financial savings for education and training; to learn about scholarships, loans, and grants; and to plan for college and jobs.

The challenge of Type 2 activities is to make commu-

nications clear and understandable for all families so they can respond wisely; to incorporate two-way systems so families can initiate and respond to communications; and to help students become partners by taking information home and by discussing schoolwork and school-related decisions with their families.

#### Type 3. Involvement at school

Parents and others need to volunteer at the school or in classrooms, and families should come to school for student performances, sports, or other events. Schools increase the number of families who come to the school building by varying schedules so that more can participate as volunteers or serve as audiences at different times of the day and evening.

Volunteers can be put to better use in middle level and high schools if a coordinator matches volunteers' times and skills with the needs of teachers, administrators, and students. Programs that tap parents' talents, occupations, and interests can enrich subject classes and improve career explorations.

Mentoring, coaching, and tutoring activities may be particularly helpful as students' skills, interests, and talents become increasingly diverse in the upper grades.

The challenge of Type 3 activities is to recruit volunteers widely, make hours flexible for parents who work during the school day, and enable volunteers to contribute productively to the school and the curriculum.

A real challenge is to change the definition of "volunteer" to mean anyone, anytime, any place who supports school goals or student learning. This opens up possibilities for more parents and other community members to be volunteers.

A special challenge for middle level and high schools is to encourage students to volunteer service to their school, to assist other students who need help, and to provide and recognize the services they perform for their families and communities.

Type 3 activities help increase families' comfort and familiarity with the school and staff, students' communications with adults, and teachers' awareness of parents' willingness to contribute substantively to the school and to communicate with other parents.

#### Type 4. Involvement in home learning.

Teachers must guide parents in monitoring, assisting, and interacting with their own children at home on learning activities that are coordinated with classwork or that contribute to success in school. This involvement also includes parent-initiated, student-initiated, and teacher-directed discussions about homework or school subjects.

Schools help families become more knowledgeable about curriculum by providing information about academic and other skills required to pass each grade; methods to monitor, discuss, and help with homework; and ways to help students practice and study for tests.

It must be clear that the school does not expect families to "teach" school subjects, but to encourage, listen, react, praise, guide, monitor, and discuss the work the students bring home. This may be done by interactive homework, student-teacher-family "contracts," long-term projects, or other interactive strategies that encourage students and families to talk about schoolwork at home. Families must interact with students in ways that help them become more independent learners.

The challenge of Type 4 activities is to design a regular schedule of interactive work that enables students to discuss the important and interesting things they are learning, to interview family members, record reactions, and share written work.

Students learn that the school wants their families to know what they are learning and to talk over ideas and school decisions at home. A weekly or biweekly schedule keeps families aware of the depth of the curriculum and their children's progress.

#### **Type 5. Involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy**

Parents and others in the community should hold participatory roles in parent-teacher-student organizations, school advisory councils, school site improvement teams, Chapter 1, and other school committees. This type of involvement sees parents as activists in community educational advocacy groups.

Schools strengthen parent participation in school decisions by encouraging the organization of parent groups and committees and by training parents and students in leadership and decision-making skills. Schools can assist advocacy groups by providing information to bolster community support for school improvement. Committees' involvement is important in curriculum, safety, supplies and equipment, career development, and school improvement.

A special challenge of Type 5 activities is to include parent leaders from all racial and ethnic groups, socioeconomic levels, and geographic communities in the school. An even more difficult challenge is helping parent-leaders act as true representatives of other families, with good two-way communication. A third challenge is including students in decision-making groups and leadership positions.

#### **Type 6. Collaboration and exchanges with the community**

Schools, families, and students must establish connections with agencies, businesses, cultural groups, and community organizations that share responsibility for young people's education and their future successes. This activity includes school coordination of student access to community and support services such as after-school recreation, tutorial programs, health services, cultural events, etc.

Schools draw on community resources to provide parent education in adolescent development (Type 1); to improve schools' communications with families (Type 2); to increase the number of community volunteers at the school or to enlist business support for parent-workers to volunteer or attend activities at the school (Type 3); to enhance the curriculum and other experiences of students (Type 4); and to extend participation on school committees to business and community representatives (Type 5).

The challenge of Type 6 activities is to solve the problems usually associated with community-school connections; e.g., poor communications about the mission, strengths, and needs of the school, "turf" problems of who decides what community resources are needed or how they will be allocated and supervised, and other difficulties that lead to fragmented and selective distribution of services. Type 6 activities increase the knowledge of families, students, and schools about the resources they can tap in their community.

### **What Should Educators Do with This Framework?**

Each school must decide which practices it needs to develop a comprehensive program of school and family connections. Teachers, parents, administrators, and students must know where they are starting from and how they would like their programs and practices to grow over time.

The following questions may help principals and their school and family partnership teams organize their work. Schools should ask:

- Which partnership practices are currently working well at each grade level? What are the starting points for each of the major types of involvement?
- Which partnership practices should be improved or added in each grade?
- How do you want the school's family involvement practices to look three years from now? Which present practices should continue and which should change? What new practices are needed for each of the major

types of involvement to reach school goals?

- Are the practices of school and family partnership coherent and coordinated or fragmented? Are families separated by categories (e.g., Chapter 1, Limited English Proficient, special education), or brought together as a school community?
- Which families are you reaching and which families are "hard to reach"? What can be done to communicate better with these families?
- What do teachers expect of families? What do families expect of teachers and others at school? What do students expect their families to do to help them negotiate school life? How do students help their teachers keep their families informed and involved?
- How are students succeeding on important measures of achievement, attitude, attendance, and other indicators of success? How could families assist the school to help more students reach higher goals and greater success?
- Who will be responsible for developing and implementing partnership practices? Will staff development be needed? How will teachers, administrators, parents, and students be supported and recognized for their work?
- What costs are associated with the improvements you want? Will small grants or other special funding be needed?
- How will you evaluate the implementation and results of your efforts? How will you know whether and how well the goals you set have been accomplished? What indicators, observations, and other measures will be used?
- How will you ensure that program development continues to improve practices and to increase the number of families who are partners with the school? What opportunities will you arrange for teachers, parents, and students to share information on successful practices in order to strengthen their own efforts?

Just as with other school improvement processes, it helps to have a written policy to identify goals and a plan of action. A leadership and a committee structure must be established to accept responsibility for the conduct and progress of the plan. There must be a budget for program development; time to think, work, and share ideas; and evaluation of the implementation processes and results.

Developing notable partnerships takes three to five years. During this time, schools improve their capabilities to work with families; more families become involved in their children's education; and more students benefit from their families' knowledge, interest, and encouragement.

## To Illustrate

Hundreds of practices exist for each type of involvement. Today, at the high school level, experience, not formal evaluation, guides practice. Research during the next few years should improve what we know about the effects of specific practices so schools can select practices more purposefully.

The following are a few examples of how some middle level and high schools are putting the major types of involvement into practice.

**Type 1—Helping families with basic parenting and building home conditions that support the work of middle level and high school students.**


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 Resource Center St. Paul, Minn. 55101

The St. Paul Minnesota Public Schools, in partnership with area businesses, have established the downtown St. Paul Working Parent Resource Center. The center provides books, videos, classes, and other resources to working parents from infancy through the high school grades. Other districts (e.g., Buffalo, N.Y.; Natchez-Adams, Miss.) also have parent centers in their communities. Many schools are creating parent rooms, common rooms, or parent clubs in their buildings as places to exchange information, hold workshops and classes for families and students, and encourage other contacts between families and school staffs.

The New York City Public Schools have developed a series of workshops for parents of adolescents that focus on effective communication, adolescent development, stress management, college preparation, and school policies and procedures. The challenge, as noted above, is to find ways to relay information from the workshops to those people who are unable to attend.

The Albuquerque Public Schools have Chapter 1 funds to hire a Home-School Liaison in one middle level school and one high school. The liaison contacts families by phone and makes home visits to help students improve attendance and achievement.

Other practices in middle level and high schools include courses for parents in adult education, GED preparation, and English seminars for parents on topics difficult to discuss at home such as sexuality and drug abuse; and workshops for parents and teens.

**Type 2—Communicating with families in understandable terms and useful forms about school programs, decisions that affect students, and students' progress.**

Francis Ritchey, Indianapolis Public Schools  
 Director 901 North Carrollton  
 Parents in Touch Indianapolis, Ind. 46202

In the Indianapolis Public Schools, parent-teacher conferences and frequent communications are major practices of the Parents in Touch program. In middle level and high schools, this means conferences scheduled so that working parents can attend; folders that include policies, graduation requirements, and students' course records; shared commitment through contracts signed by parents, students, and teachers; a computerized phone information system; and other communications.

A Baltimore City middle level school has new sixth grade students and their families attend Orientation Days on the first days of school. Activities involve families and students together for a day at the school—meeting teachers, receiving information about the school program, and experiencing classes together. Evaluations of this program indicate high participation by families and positive reactions by students, parents, and middle grades teachers.

Newsletters have been improved at another Baltimore middle level school to keep families informed of school programs and to summarize school workshops that most families cannot attend. Newsletters at a Harford County high school are mailed to some families and include timely information for high school students' courses, graduation, other opportunities.

A number of school systems have begun to use telephone answering machines, electronic mailboxes, or computerized phone message systems to give parents daily or weekly information about homework assignments, class activities, notices about meetings or upcoming deadlines, and even how parents can help students at home.

Some communications seek to ease the transition from elementary to middle level, from middle level to high school, and from high school to work or college. A Clarkston, Mich., middle level administrator calls parents of all new students after one week to make personal contact with the family and to check on parents' perceptions of student adjustment.

Other Type 2 practices include giving families advance notice about special schedules, program costs, and other requirements; scheduling conferences at home with parents who have no transportation to get to the school; and helping parents of at-risk students monitor homework and schoolwork.

**Type 3—Volunteers and audiences at school to strengthen school goals and programs and to assist and support students.**

Joyce L. Epstein  
 Karen Clark Salinas  
 Directors, Teachers  
 Involve Parents in  
 Schoolwork (TIPS)  
 TIPS Social Studies  
 and Art Volunteers  
 Center on Families,  
 Communities, Schools,  
 and Children's Learning  
 The Johns Hopkins  
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 3505 N. Charles St.  
 Baltimore, Md. 21218

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Social Studies and Art establishes a teacher-volunteer partnership. Parents or other volunteers introduce artists through 20-minute class presentations designed to integrate art with the social studies curriculum in the middle grades.

In a Baltimore middle level school, a teacher-coordinator and a parent-coordinator work together to select and order art prints linked to social studies, to plan presentations, and to train volunteers. Students increase their knowledge and appreciation of art, and parents and other volunteers are involved productively at the middle level.

Other volunteers help students research careers, locate college and vocational information, coordinate college visits, and make cassette tapes for students to listen to while they read when their science or social studies books are beyond their reading skills.

**Type 4—Involving families in students' learning activities at home, including interactive homework, discussions of school subjects, and keeping schoolwork on the agenda at home.**

Joyce L. Epstein  
 Karen Clark Salinas  
 Directors, TIPS  
 Interactive Homework  
 in Language Arts and  
 Science/Health,  
 Center on Families,  
 Communities, Schools,  
 and Children's Learning  
 The Johns Hopkins  
 University  
 3505 N. Charles St.  
 Baltimore, Md. 21218

Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Interactive Homework activities for middle level in language arts, science, and health, and require students to talk to a parent or other family member in order to complete a homework assignment. Evaluations show that TIPS homework can be implemented successfully in the middle grades, that families greatly appreciate the interactions with their early adolescents, and that students learn some things about their families that they would not otherwise have known.

In Illinois, two sets of videotapes for junior high parents were produced in cooperation with the local cable company. The tapes show parents effective ways to motivate their children to learn. "Critical lessons" are taped class sessions in different subjects that students and families discuss at home.

Summer Home Learning Packets were designed to provide middle level students in Baltimore City with opportunities to practice skills and continue learning during the summer with encouragement and involvement from their families. Packets are mailed home during the summer. Evaluations show that students who worked with parents completed more summer assignments, and that some of these students did better than expected on skills in the fall.

Other examples of Type 4 activities include a middle level math program that has special demonstration forms so students can share each newly mastered math skill with their families (Akron, Ohio), and curricular materials to discuss at home, produced by teachers or district curriculum supervisors.

**Type 5—Involving families in school decision making and advocacy.**

<p>Ⓢ Jane Didear, Director Positive Parents of Dallas</p>	<p>Dallas Independent School District 3700 Ross St. Dallas, Tex. 75204</p>
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Positive Parents of Dallas, a parents/public relations organization, has raised and distributed funds to the 25 high schools and magnet schools in the city. Each high school's parent group has designed message boards, brochures, and newsletters, or arranged events to highlight school accomplishments that are based on the needs of the school community.

School-site management teams, advisory councils, and committees are other Type 5 activities that are becoming more common in middle level and high schools. In some communities, education organizations are established by parents and teachers to raise funds and promote educational programs for the local high school. The funds help organize and support parent newsletters, speakers bureaus, and high school alumni associations.

**Type 6—Collaborations and exchanges with the community.**

<p>Ⓢ Roberta Knowlton, Director School Based Youth Services Program</p>	<p>N.J. Department of Human Resources CN 700 Trenton, N.J. 08625</p>
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The School-Based Youth Services Program in New Jersey coordinates education, health, and recreation services for 13 to 19-year-olds at 29 sites in the state at or near high schools and some middle level schools. The program has helped solve many of the problems associated with integrated services programs.

The Urban League in Lorain County, Ohio, conducts

Parent Educational Parties in the homes of middle level and high school students with the aim of promoting better coordination of community services, family needs, and student success in school. These informational, educational parties for families of students enrolled in the program concentrate on increasing parental involvement in their children's education and empowering parents' advocacy skills.

The Minnesota legislature has enacted a state law that requires employers to allow (and encourage) employees who are parents to take up to 16 hours of time to be involved in their children's education through high school. This involvement can include such activities as attending conferences with their children's teachers.

The state of Virginia passed similar legislation for state employees as a model for other employers.

Many schools have business partnerships for improving school programs, students' career explorations and opportunities, and teacher internships. Other Type 6 activities include school-sponsored telephone referral to community services for teens and families; and work-site seminars for parents who cannot come to the school.

## **Comprehensive School and Family Partnerships**

As schools work to add and improve partnership practices with families and the community, their programs become more comprehensive, encompassing all six types. More comprehensive examples include the following.

<p>Ⓢ Eva Pena-Hughes, Director Language Development Magnet School for Secondary Recent Immigrant Students</p>	<p>McAllen Independent School District 2000 N. 23rd St. McAllen, Tex. 78501</p>
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The Language Development Magnet School for Secondary Recent Immigrant Students in McAllen, Tex., serves families of middle level and high school students new to the United States. The program incorporates all the major types of involvement, including workshops and classes in parent education and family English language skills development, communications from the school to the home in Spanish, volunteers at school, guided interactions with children about schoolwork at home—particularly writing and language arts activities, parents on advisory councils in decision-making roles, and collaborating with the community through the use of the families' favorite radio and TV stations and the local newspaper.

Parent volunteers and community aides help the schools coordinate activities; community partners provide resources to support school programs, and, in partnership with the local radio station, produce a weekly program in Spanish to encourage families to become more involved in their children's education.

Working with families that many other schools find "hard to reach," this program illustrates the reach-ability of all families when the efforts are based on the concept of partnership.

⊕ Janet Chrispeels, Director  
Communicating With Parents  
San Diego County Office of Education  
6401 Linda Vista Rd.  
San Diego, Calif. 92111-7399

California's statewide policy on parent involvement and similar policies in other states (e.g., Utah's Center for Families in Education) have set guidelines for schools to encourage the development of comprehensive programs. To help its schools implement state and district policies, San Diego County has developed a resource book containing practices representing many types of involvement.

The county also has a computerized telephone information system and produces a monthly television show, "Parent Hour," to provide information to parents and an opportunity for them to raise questions.

⊕ Jacolyn Burnett  
League of Schools Reaching Out  
Martin Luther King Jr./ Middle School  
77 Lawrence  
Dorchester, Mass. 02121

The Martin Luther King Middle School is a member of the national League of Schools Reaching Out organized by Don Davies. The school is building practices

in all six types of involvement, including workshops, home visits, and a parent room or office; communications in print, by phone, and other forms; volunteers; learning activities at home including a read-aloud program; parents in decision-making roles with a representative for each homeroom to keep parents informed by telephone trees and other networks; and business, university, community, and school partnerships.

### Endnote

Middle level and high schools have tended to lag behind preschools and elementary schools in developing comprehensive programs to involve families. Parent involvement is on the list of needed components in most middle level and high school improvement plans, but it is often left aside or treated casually.

Now, however, with an increasing awareness of the importance of schools and families sharing responsibility in the education and development of adolescents, and with recent advances in the theory, research, policies, and practices of partnership, the time is right for middle level and high school leaders to extend the agenda.\*

\* A list of publications, surveys, and materials for teachers from the research of Joyce Epstein and her colleagues on school and family connections is available on request. Also, NASSP members who want to receive the Center's newsletter summarizing new work by all the Center's researchers twice yearly should send their name and address to either author, Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, The John Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles, Baltimore, Md. 21218.

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# A Question of Merit: Principals' and Parents' Evaluations of Teachers

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**ABSTRACT:** *New financial incentive plans to restructure the rewards and professional development in teaching require fair and comprehensive evaluations to determine teacher quality. Some suggest that multiple judges are needed to help correct problems of shallow, partial evaluations. In this article, principals' and parents' ratings of the same teachers are compared and school, teacher, and family factors that may influence evaluations are examined. Results suggest that parents and principals emphasize different aspects of teaching in judging teachers' merits. Principals' ratings are influenced by situational factors and the extra work that establishes some teachers' leadership. Parents' ratings are influenced by the connections teachers make with families and the quality of classroom life their children experience. The ratings are not explained by teachers' education or years of experience, which are currently common criteria for annual salary increases. Although principals' judgments may be more central, parents can make important contributions in the evaluation of teachers.*

As a result of the intense debates about educational reform, many states and localities have begun to consider alternatives for evaluating and rewarding teachers. More than 40 merit, master, career ladder, incentive pay, or other financial incentive plans are in operation or

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under consideration in the United States (*Education Week*, 1985). Among the many difficult problems in designing and implementing these plans, the most difficult of all is the problem of evaluation (Cohn & Natriello, 1984; Johnson, 1984a; Jordan & Borkow, 1983). Teachers' acceptance of evaluation procedures will in large measure determine the success or failure of the new career development and compensation plans.

New ways to evaluate teachers also are needed for the regular, annual evaluations that affect teachers' salaries and promotions in school systems where incentive plans are not an issue. There is general dissatisfaction with the way that evaluations are conducted, what they measure, how they relate to the professional development and improved status of teachers, and how they contribute to the effective education of students (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Millman, 1981). In contrast to mechanical counts of years of teaching experience or academic credits earned, judgments about teacher

performance must be based on fair and comprehensive evaluation standards and procedures. This is true whether the evaluations are used to identify a few meritorious teachers or to assist many teachers to advance professionally.

Critics of current evaluation schemes complain that most are based on the principals' ratings of teachers that result from infrequent (sometimes just *one*) observations in teachers' classrooms; on cronyism, patronage, or other prejudicial decisions; or on seniority, credentials, and accumulated credits that do not involve the evaluation of teaching skills (Cramer, 1983; Jordan & Borkow, 1983; Johnson, 1984b; Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981; Stodolsky, 1984). Principals, too, dislike and distrust procedures that give them sole control over teachers' salary increases and advances (Burke, 1982; Johnson, 1984b). When principals' judgments are supplemented, it is usually by curriculum supervisors who also make infrequent visits to observe teachers. To paraphrase Scriven (1981), the principles and the principals are unclear in evaluations.

## Multiple Judges in Teacher Evaluation

Instead of judgments by one individual on few occasions, some suggest that multiple judges could rate teachers on many teaching practices that are important to student learning and development (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Educational Research Service, 1983). Different members of the school community undoubtedly have different views of good teaching, but few have attempted to determine empirically what multiple judges could contribute to the evaluation of teachers. Only with such information, however, will teachers know whether some types of judges or judgments help or hurt their chances for recognition for good teaching.

Principals and curriculum supervisors have long been recognized as appropriate evaluators of teachers, despite problems of partiality in ratings or infrequent and incomplete observations. Recently suggestions have been made to include teachers as participants in the design and conduct of self-evaluations and evaluations of their peers (Cohn & Natriello, 1984; Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983; Educational Research Service, 1983; Johnson, 1984b; Jordan & Borkow, 1983; Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981). A collegial model of school organization requires teachers and administrators to work cooperatively on all aspects of schooling, including staff evaluations (Iwanicki, 1981). Because teachers and their representatives must approve evaluation plans (Lipsky, Bacharach, & Shedd, 1984), teachers will need to be prominently involved in the development, implementation, and assessment of new evaluation systems.

Some proposals for educational reform have taken an even broader view of multiple judges. The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force (1983) suggests that school board members, school administrators, teachers, parents, and federal officials be included in identifying and selecting master teachers. Others point to the absence of parents and students from new plans to identify teachers for financial and career awards as if this were a deficit in

design (Educational Research Service, 1983).

A broad definition of multiple judges that includes parents helps us extend recent discussions of theories of effective organizations and effective teaching that underlie designs for teacher evaluations (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983). Parents, like principals or teachers, play a role in these two areas of research. Early organizational theories emphasized the incompatibility and separate responsibilities of families and schools (Parsons, 1959; Waller, 1932; Weber, 1947). More recent theories of organizational effectiveness assume that connections and shared responsibilities are important between social institutions, and that schools and families will be more effective organizations if they work together to achieve common goals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Litwak & Meyer, 1974). Parents are members of the school community, well within the "secondary boundaries" of the school organization (Corwin & Wagenaar, 1976), with financial and personal investments in the schools. As "members," parents have an interest in the success, continuation, and improvement of school organizations and should participate, as other members, in evaluating the organization and its components.

Theories of teacher effectiveness concern the classroom management skills and instructional methods of teachers that have positive impact on student learning. In contrast to theories that assume that the teacher is solely responsible for instructing students, recent theories and empirical studies suggest that teachers and parents share responsibility for the child's success in school and that parents can help teachers and students meet school goals (Epstein, 1984; Seeley, 1981; Epstein, in press). When teachers involve parents in their children's education with learning activities at home, parents may be even more aware than principals of teachers' flexibility, creativity, and communication skills. They may be knowledgeable about how the teacher interacts with the child and the family, responds to the student's needs and skills, assigns appropriate challenges in books and in homework, and inspires the student to continue

commitment to school work at home—all indicators of effective teaching. With unique interests and investments in both teacher effectiveness and school organization effectiveness, parents may be legitimate and important contributors among multiple judges in the evaluation of teachers and school programs.

Because of the states' swift reactions to calls for educational reform, there has been little time for empirical research on alternate designs for teacher evaluations. This paper looks specifically at the potential contributions of parents in comprehensive evaluations of teachers. A large-scale survey of teacher practices of parent involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982) offers data with which we can address three questions: How do parents and principals agree or differ in their ratings of the same teacher? What influences parents and principals to rate teachers highly? What do these two raters contribute to a fair and comprehensive evaluation system?

### *Data from Multiple Judges*

Elementary school principals in 11 school districts in Maryland provided evaluations of 77 first-, third-, and fifth-grade teachers' general teaching skills. They used a six-point scale from poor to outstanding to compare the teacher to others in the school on four major teaching skills:

1. Classroom lessons: Prepares lessons well; uses class time effectively.
2. Knowledge of subjects: Understands the subject matter in all areas taught.
3. Discipline: Conducts well run classes with few serious discipline problems.
4. Creativity: Makes learning exciting and important to the students; uses many novel ideas and approaches.

These categories are similar to those used in several merit/master teacher plans to evaluate teachers' planning, classroom management, instructional behavior, and school participation, and are similar to the kinds of check lists principals use to evaluate teachers in many traditional, annual evaluation systems.

Educational Researcher

Parents of 1,051 students in these teachers' classrooms provided evaluations of the overall teaching quality compared to other teachers on a six-point scale from poor to outstanding. Other data were collected on the teachers' training and experience, characteristics of the classroom population, teacher practices, family background, and family practices. The information from parents was aggregated to the classroom level and merged with data from principals and teachers. The linked data are unique, compared to previous studies of teacher evaluations, because they permit comparisons of principal and parent ratings of the same 77 teachers on overall teaching quality.

In this article, the correlates of principal and parent ratings, variation in parent evaluations, and the determinants of principal and parent ratings are examined to learn more about which factors have independent and significant associations with principal and parent evaluations of teachers. Multiple regression analysis is used to identify and to compare the independent influences of student characteristics, school factors, and parent characteristics on principal and parent ratings. The analyses are conducted at the classroom level so that the principal's evaluation of one teacher is compared with the average rating of all the parents of the children in that teacher's class. This approach minimizes distortions that could result from unusually positive or negative personal relationships between a teacher and one or a few parents.

### Correlates of Principal and Parent Evaluations of Teachers

Table I presents the correlates of principal and parent ratings of teachers. The table includes measures of teacher background, teaching approaches, family background, parent involvement, and student characteristics that could contribute to high or low ratings of teachers. We need to know whether school and family characteristics and practices affect the evaluations parents make in order to understand whether problems are solved or created when parents are among the multiple judges of teachers.

*Intercorrelation of ratings.* The

TABLE I  
Correlates of Principals' and Parents' Ratings of Teachers (N = 77)

	Principals' Ratings	Parents' Ratings
<i>Teacher Background</i>		
Years of teaching experience	-.138	.125
Highest degree	-.033	.044
<i>Teaching Approaches</i>		
Leader in parent involvement (rating by principal)	.303*	.222*
Teacher rates more children discipline problems	-.074	-.233*
<i>Family Factors (Classroom Level)</i>		
Race (white)	-.253*	-.059
City location	.280*	-.034
Parent education	-.012	-.010
Books in the home	-.057	-.079
Mother works	.085	-.182
Two-parent homes	-.403*	-.110
<i>Parent Involvement (Classroom Level)</i>		
Parents active at the school	.013	.069
Parents believe teacher thinks they should help	.172	.332*
Parents report frequent requests from teachers	.329*	.466*
Parents know more about instructional program	.233*	.495*
Parents receive many ideas on how to help at home	.093	.517*
Parents receive many communications from teacher	.107	.529*
Parents report teacher works hard to interest and excite parents	.278*	.676*
Parents report positive interpersonal skills of teacher	.134	.719*
<i>Student Status (Classroom Level)</i>		
Grade level	-.006	-.238*
Classroom achievement	-.076	-.039

\*Coefficients of .22 or more are significant at the .05 level; coefficients of .29 or more are significant at the .01 level.

correlation of principal and parent ratings is significant but modest ( $r = .274$ ). There is some mutual recognition of strong and weak teachers, but also considerable disagreement in the ratings of the same teacher by parents and by principals.

*Teacher background.* Teacher education and years of experience are *not* significant correlates of either principal or parent ratings. More experienced teachers or those with more credits earned beyond the bachelor's degree are not necessarily viewed as better teachers than less experienced teachers or those with fewer accumulated credit hours.

*Teaching approaches.* Teacher leadership in the use of parent involvement as recognized by the principal is associated with higher ratings of teachers by principals ( $r = .303$ ) and by parents ( $r = .222$ ). Teachers who report fewer discipline problems are given higher ratings by parents ( $r = -.233$ ), but discipline problems are not significantly associated with principals' ratings of their teachers.

*Family factors.* Teachers are given higher ratings by principals if their classrooms are in the city schools, include predominantly mi-

nority students, or include many children who live in one-parent homes. These factors of place, race, and parent marital status are *not* significantly related to parent ratings of teachers. The number of books in families' homes, the education of the parents, and the work status of the mother are not associated with higher ratings from principals or parents. There is no obvious connection, then, between the education of classroom parents and their ratings of teachers. Classrooms of better educated parents are no more or less likely to overpraise or overcriticize teachers. Principals may give greater consideration than parents to demographic demands on teachers that require good teaching and classroom management.

*Parent involvement.* Parents' ratings of teachers are consistently and highly associated with whether the teacher frequently involves more of them (at the classroom level) in learning activities at home ( $r = .466$ ), provides many ideas for them ( $r = .517$ ), sends them many communications ( $r = .529$ ), improves more parents' understanding of the school program ( $r = .495$ ), and sends the message that parents should help at home ( $r = .332$ ). Parent rec-

ognition that the teacher works hard to involve parents is highly associated with the parents' overall rating of teacher quality and ratings of teachers' interpersonal skills.

When more parents are involved in learning activities at home, principals hear about it from the teacher or from parents. Parent reports of high involvement, more knowledge about school, and recognition of teachers' hard work confirm or contribute to principals' high ratings of those teachers.

The number of classroom parents active at the school is not significantly associated with parent or principal ratings of teacher quality.

*Student status.* Although parent ratings of teachers were associated with the children's grade level, principal ratings were not. Parents give higher ratings to teachers of the younger grades. Neither principal nor parent ratings are associated with teachers' reports of average classroom achievement of students in reading and math.

#### *Variations in Parent Evaluations of Teachers' Merit*

One principal is usually responsible for evaluating each teacher in the school. The comparable measure from parents is the average rating of the parents of the children in the teacher's class. However, parent opinions about a teacher vary, just as ratings would vary if 20 administrators judged the same teacher. It is informative, then, to examine the factors that are associated with the variation in parent ratings of teacher quality, as shown in Table II.

High agreement by parents that the teacher works hard to interest or excite parents, and high agreement that parents know more as a result of the teachers' efforts are related to significantly less variation in parents' evaluations of teacher quality. Teachers are rated higher by more parents in classrooms where parents recognize the teacher's efforts and effectiveness.

In contrast, grade level was related to greater variation in parents' estimates—the higher the grade level, the more variation in parents' estimates of teacher quality. Parents' reports about teachers may vary more in the upper grades

TABLE II  
*Significant Correlates of Variation in Parents' Evaluations of Teachers (N = 77)*

Classroom-level Report	Correlation with Variation in Parents' Evaluations
Teacher works hard to involve parents	- .321
Parents know more about child's instructional program this year than in past	- .304
Grade level of child/teacher	+ .274
Teacher reports more discipline problems in the class	+ .273

for many reasons: Older students are more diverse in their needs, interests, and demands on teachers; parents of older students are more sophisticated about evaluation because they have more points for comparison with children's earlier teachers; teachers of older students are more diverse in their teaching styles and practices and vary more in their approaches to parents. Some parents become increasingly discouraged about teachers, school, and their child's progress, whereas other parents remain or become more positive about upper grade teachers who are responsive to the needs and interests of their older children.

The more serious discipline problems there are in a classroom (reported by the teachers), the more variation there is in parents' estimates of teacher quality. Some teachers deal with discipline problems in ways that do not interfere with most students' learning. Other teachers' programs are disrupted by the number of disciplinary incidents or by the way the teacher deals with discipline problems. Parents may vary in their ratings of teachers according to their children's experiences in troubled classrooms.

Overall, the correlates in Table II suggest that parents achieve greater consensus about teachers' merits when the teachers are hard at work at parent involvement, when the parents know more about the ways schools and classrooms work, and when the teachers are responsive to more students.

Tables I and II show that certain

variables are strongly associated with principals' or parents' ratings. Some of these may be especially important, independent determinants of principals' and parents' judgments of teachers' merits.

#### *Influences on Principal and Parent Ratings*

Table III presents the independent influences of family and student factors on principal and parent ratings. The top panel examines the effects on principals' ratings of teachers. Principals give higher ratings to teachers who are in urban schools, are recognized by the principal as leaders in parent involvement, and are rated highly by the parents in that classroom, with all other variables taken into account. Grade level, the number of discipline problems in the class, and traditional communications with parents such as notes, memos, or conferences do not independently influence principals' ratings of teacher quality. Principal ratings are especially sensitive to the conditions under which teachers teach and the extra work teachers add to their regular duties that establish their leadership and distinguish them from other teachers.

The bottom panel shows the effects of school and family factors on parents' ratings of teachers. Parents give high marks to teachers who frequently request them to be involved in learning activities at home, frequently use traditional communications with families, have few classroom discipline problems, and are in suburban schools. Parent ratings are sensitive to the connec-

tions teachers make with families and to the qualities of calm and ordered classroom environments.

Each of the significant effects is independent of the other variables in the model. That is, after teacher practices that involve parents are taken into account, good classroom discipline influences parents to rate teachers higher in overall teaching quality. Parent involvement and communication with teachers are the most important determinants of parent ratings—contributing over 30% to the explained variance in parents' evaluations of teacher merits.

Although grade level initially has a significant effect on parent ratings, the importance of grade level disappears after teacher practices are taken into account. Thus, the grade level correlations reported in Tables I and II are attributed in Table III to differences in teachers' approaches to parent involvement.

The importance of school location

becomes more prominent after teacher practices are accounted for. That is, teachers—both city and suburban—are given higher ratings if they use parent involvement techniques, but suburban teachers are rated higher by parents for other qualities, after accounting for parent involvement practices.

In other analyses, it was found that teachers' interpersonal skills were very important for parent ratings of teacher quality. Teachers whose contacts with parents were high in cooperation, friendliness, respect, trust, and warmth, and low in conflict, misunderstanding, distance, lack of concern, and tenseness, were considered better teachers by parents (Epstein, in press). The interpersonal qualities of teachers that parents experienced did not influence principals' ratings, although principals' ratings were influenced by parent reports of teachers' hard work and overall teaching quality.

These data do not permit as detailed analysis of the influences on principals' ratings as on the parents' ratings. The lower percent of variance explained by these measures for principals' evaluations of teachers is due, in part, to the absence of specific measures that underlie the principals' rating scheme. For example, we cannot tell how principals estimate the level of teachers' knowledge of subject matter or how they judge creativity. Other measures not included in this study—such as principals' personal friendship with the teachers, or the principals' estimate of teacher-pupil relationships, or teachers' responsiveness to students' individual differences—will be important additions to new research. Despite the limitations of these data, we can conclude with conviction that the principals' ratings of teachers are not explained by teachers' advanced education or by years of teaching experience—indicators that are cur-

TABLE III  
Factors That Influence Principals' and Parents'  
Ratings of Teachers (N = 77)

PRINCIPALS' RATINGS							
Variables in Model	Urban Location	Discipline Problems	Grade Level	Observed Leadership in Parent Involvement	Traditional School to Home Communications	Parents' Evaluations	R <sup>2</sup>
Sch/Class Factors	.294* (.649)	-.110 (-1.020)	-.014 (-.009)				.091
Principal Observation	.268* (.592)	-.065 (-.603)	-.043 (-.027)	.277* (.250)			.164
Reports from Parents	.271* (.598)	-.013 (-.117)	.008 (.005)	.228* (.206)	-.030 (-.017)	.247* (.526)	.210
Zero-order Correlation	.280	-.074	-.006	.303	.107	.274	
PARENTS' RATINGS							
Variables in Model	Urban Location	Discipline Problems	Grade Level	Frequent Requests for Parent Involvement	Traditional School to Home Communications	Principals' Evaluations	R <sup>2</sup>
Sch/Class Factors	.000 (.0003)	-.235* (-1.027)	-.241* (-.071)				.112
Parent Experiences	-.223* (-.232)	-.228* (-.996)	.030 (.009)	.439* (.119)	.347* (.092)		.441
Principals' Ratings	-.250* (-.280)	-.213* (-.928)	.019 (.006)	.401* (.109)	.338* (.090)	.160 (.075)	.463
Zero-order Correlation	-.034	-.233	-.238	.466	.529	.274	

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are shown first; unstandardized coefficients in parentheses.

\* = unstandardized coefficient is at least twice the standard error, or contributes more than 3% to explained variance.

rently a common basis for teachers' yearly increases in pay. Others, too, have reported that excellence in teaching is curiously unrelated to years of teaching experience or accumulated credits (Corwin & Wagenaar, 1976; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984).

### Discussion

We need to know more about the

interests, competencies, and biases of multiple judges and the contributions or problems they add to teacher evaluation. The conclusions we draw from this initial study may be useful in plans for practice and research on new forms of teacher evaluation.

1. *Parents and principals emphasize different aspects of teaching in judging teachers' merits.*

Principals may know when teachers add extra duties to their teaching load but may not be aware of more subtle changes in classroom teaching that affect individual students. Extra responsibilities that teachers undertake are often more visible and more dramatic than classroom teaching, or they directly assist the principal in administrative tasks. The findings suggest that teachers earn higher ratings from principals when they work under difficult school conditions or assume leadership roles.

Parents may know when teachers make special efforts to help children attain basic or advanced skills. Children's homework and talk of classroom activities provide a running commentary to parents about the subtle changes in teaching that affect children day by day. The data in this article indicate that teachers earn higher ratings from parents when they use parent involvement activities with more parents, send more communications home, and maintain good classroom discipline. Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Pease (1983) suggest that parents have a stake in the "bottom line" of teaching—the effects on student learning and development. This study shows that, when given an opportunity to evaluate teachers, parents relate teacher performance to the children's experiences in the classroom and to the resources and ideas that some teachers offer parents.

2. *The fairest evaluations may involve multiple judges rating those aspects of teaching for which they have proven competence and special interest.*

Teacher performance can be judged in many ways, and no one way is likely to be wholly satisfactory. Principals' ratings alone are not necessarily the best or the only way of evaluating teachers' excellence. Achievement test scores are not the only way of judging teachers' talents and successes with children. Parents' ratings are not the only way to identify responsive teachers. Because there is no single set of skills that perfectly define effective teaching, measures of many aspects of teaching by multiple judges are likely to yield the fairest and most comprehensive evaluation of teachers.

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Teachers are not opposed to fair evaluation by competent evaluators. Over 60% of teachers in one survey agreed that teacher evaluations should be based on how well they perform in class (Rist, 1983). But teachers are aware that serious problems occur when one judge rates teachers on few occasions and on few teaching skills and practices (Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983; Natriello & Dornbusch, 1981; Shavelson & Dempsey-Atwood, 1976; Stodolsky, 1984). These problems will not be solved simply by using multiple judges, but they might be mitigated by thoughtful designs of different formats that make appropriate uses of multiple judges. If the teachers in our study were evaluated by principals and by parents using the data discussed here, more teachers would be recognized as good teachers for different skills and teaching abilities than if only principals rated the teachers.

Including all parents systematically in evaluation procedures may remove some of the bias in the reports principals typically receive from parents. Principals often hear from a small number of parents—parents with complaints, or the few parents who are very active at school. This survey shows that all parents can provide principals with assessments of teachers' efforts that principals may overlook.

Unfair evaluations result from the lack of stability and generalizability in ratings by individual judges who see few examples of each teacher's lessons and classroom management (Shavelson & Dempsey-Atwood, 1976; Stodolsky, 1984). When the reports from many parents in one classroom are aggregated, they provide one relatively stable rating of teachers. The grouped data from parents can balance the contributions of other, individual ratings. The variation in observations tells how consistent or generalizable the ratings are among parents.

*8. Tests are needed of alternate forms of teacher evaluation that use multiple judges.*

We have no practical examples of how multiple judges, including parents, are involved systematically in the evaluations of teachers. Parents can be involved directly, as in periodic surveys along with other

judges, or they can be involved indirectly, as in preliminary surveys that are used to help design the evaluations that principals or other educators will conduct. Tests are needed of direct and indirect evaluations by parents and their uses in programs for professional advancement and improvement. These exploratory tests could be conducted at experimental sites for merit,

master, and other career development plans that states or localities have established.

Where they remain the sole evaluators of teachers, principals should supplement their broad-based, bureaucratic concerns with deeper examinations of the day-to-day instructional practices of teachers that are important to parents. But we suggest that principals should *not* re-

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main the sole evaluators of teachers. Both principals' and parents' judgments may be needed in a comprehensive system of evaluation because these raters have interests in different educational processes and products, different competencies to judge particular aspects of teaching, and different cumulative experiences with teachers and students. For example, among multiple judges, parents may be well qualified to rate teachers on their responsiveness to individual students, but poorly qualified to rate teachers on how they promote equality of opportunities and divide attention among all students in class.

This study begins to identify factors that influence principals' and parents' ratings of teachers. Other competent and appropriate judges of teachers are interested in other aspects of teaching that may be important for identifying good teaching or master teachers. We need studies on the factors that influence teacher self-evaluations, teacher peer review, supervisors' and school board members' evaluations, and students' ratings of teachers. Research on the components of teacher evaluation should help educators build practical systems of evaluation that fulfill two functions: to identify strong and weak teachers and to help all teachers improve specific teaching skills.

### Conclusion

The next few years should see dramatic changes in the way teachers are recruited, motivated, evaluated, and rewarded. The recent surge of activity on career development plans in states and school systems across the country suggests strongly that neither the public nor the teaching profession will continue to support the lock-step salary schedules that pay the worst teachers as much as the best. In addition, competent individuals will not enter a profession that continues to limit challenge, compensation, and advancement. This study suggests that the fairest evaluations will result when teachers are rated by multiple judges, including parents, who have clear interests in effective teaching, and when teachers are judged on multiple criteria that

are important for the education of students.

Principal and teacher-peer judgments will and should be more central and be given more weight than parents' ratings in the evaluation of teachers in merit pay, master status, and other pay and promotion plans. But parents' judgments may contribute importantly to more effective teaching and to more effective school organizations.

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THIS WE BELIEVE AND NOW WE MUST ACT

## Improving School-Family-Community Partnerships in the Middle Grades

Joyce L. Epstein

**T**his *We Believe*, the position paper of the National Middle School Association, discusses 12 characteristics of responsive middle level schools. The beliefs set high expectations for good people, good places, and good programs in the middle grades. They are presented as important goals to improve the quality of life in schools and the quality of education for all young adolescents.

One characteristic of a responsive middle level school is "family and community partnerships." This goal is on every list for school improvement, but few schools have implemented comprehensive programs of partnership. This article addresses three questions to help middle level educators move from their beliefs to action: (a) What is a comprehensive program of school-family-community connections in the middle grades? (b) How do family and community partnerships link with the other elements of an effective middle level school? (c) How can schools answer the call for action to develop and maintain productive programs of partnerships?

### A Framework for a Comprehensive Program of Partnerships: Six Types of Involvement

For decades studies have shown that *families are important* for children's learning, development, and school success across the grades. Research is accumulating that extends that social fact by showing that *school programs of partnership are important* for helping all families support their children's education from preschool through high school. Left on their own, few families continue as active partners in the middle grades. Currently, few families understand the ins and outs of early adolescence, middle level

education, school and community programs and activities available to their children, the school system, and other issues and options that affect students in the middle grades. Studies show that *if* middle level schools implement comprehensive and inclusive programs of partnership then many more families respond, including those who would not become involved on their own.

*What is a comprehensive program of partnerships?* From many studies and activities with educators and families, I have developed a framework of six types of involvement that helps schools establish full and productive programs of school-family-community partnerships. This section summarizes the six major types of involvement with a few sample practices that may be important in the middle grades. Also noted are some of the challenges that must be met for good implementation of partnership practices and examples of the results that can be expected from each type of involvement in the middle grades.

#### Type 1—Parenting

Assist families with parenting skills, understanding young adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Obtain information from families to help schools understand families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for their children.

*Sample practices* for middle level schools. Conduct workshops for parents; provide short, clear summaries of important information on parenting; and organize opportunities for parents to exchange ideas on topics of young adolescent development including health, nutrition, discipline, guidance, peer pressure, preventing drug abuse, and planning for the future. Provide information in useful forms on children's transitions to the middle grades and to high school, attendance policies, and other topics that are

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important for young adolescents' success in school. Offer parent education and family support programs. Design activities that teachers use at the start of each school year or periodically to ask parents to share insights about their children's strengths, talents, interests, needs, and goals.

*Challenges.* One challenge for successful Type 1 activities is to *get information to those who cannot come to meetings and workshops at the school building.* This may be done with videos, tape recordings, summaries, newsletters, cable broadcasts, phone calls, and other print and non-print communications. Another Type 1 challenge is to *design procedures that enable all families to share information about their children with teachers, counselors, and others.*

*Expected results.* If information flows to and from families about young adolescent development, parents should increase their confidence about parenting, students should be more aware of parents' continuing guidance, and teachers should better understand their students' families. Specifically, if practices are targeted to help families send their children to school on time, then student attendance should improve.

## **Type 2—Communicating**

Communicate with families about school programs and student progress with school-to-home and home-to-school contacts such as notices, memos, conferences, report cards, newsletters, phone and computerized messages, open houses, and other innovative communications.

*Sample practices* for middle level schools. Provide clear information on each teacher's criteria for report card grades, how to interpret interim reports, and, as necessary, how to work with students to improve grades. Conduct conferences for parents with teams of teachers, or conduct parent-student-teacher conferences to ensure that students take personal responsibility for learning. Organize class parents, block parents, or telephone trees for more effective communications. Set up the equivalent of a welcome wagon for education for families who transfer to the school during the school year. Improve school newsletters to include student work and recognitions, parent columns, important calendars, and parent response forms.

*Challenges.* One challenge for successful Type 2 activities is to *make communications clear and understandable for all families*, including parents who have less formal education or who do not read English well, so that all families can process and respond to the information they receive. Other Type 2 challenges are to *know which families are and are not receiving the communications* in order to work to reach all families, *develop effective 2-way channels of communication* so that families can easily contact and

respond to educators, and *make sure that young adolescent students understand and participate* in all school-family-community partnerships.

*Expected results.* If communications are clear and useful and 2-way channels are easily accessed, home-school interactions should increase: more families should understand the school's programs, follow their children's progress, and attend parent-teacher conferences. Specifically, if computerized phone lines are used to communicate information about homework, more families should know more about their children's daily assignments. If newsletters include respond and reply forms more families should offer ideas, questions, and comments about school programs and activities.

## **Type 3—Volunteering**

Improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve parents and others as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

*Sample practices* for middle level schools. Collect information on family members' talents, occupations, interests, and availability to serve as volunteers to enrich students' subject classes; improve career explorations; serve as language translators; conduct attendance monitoring and phone calls; work on "parent patrols" for safety; organize and improve activities such as clothing and uniform exchanges, school stores, fairs, and many other activities. Create opportunities for mentors, coaches, tutors, and leaders of after-school programs to ensure that middle grades students have important and safe activities that expand their skills and talents. Establish a Family Center at the school where parents may obtain information, conduct volunteer work for the school, or meet with other parents (Johnson, 1996).

*Challenges.* Challenges for successful Type 3 activities are to *recruit volunteers widely so that all feel welcome, make hours flexible for parents and other volunteers who work during the school day, provide needed training, and enable volunteers to contribute productively* to the school, classroom curricula, and after-school programs at the school and in the community. Volunteers will be better integrated in a school program if there is a coordinator who matches volunteers' times and skills with the needs of teachers, administrators, and students. Another Type 3 challenge is to *change the definition of "volunteer" to mean any one who supports school goals or students' learning at any time and in any place.* A related challenge is to *aid young adolescents in understanding how volunteers help their school, and to volunteer themselves to help their school, family, and community.*

*Expected results.* If schedules and locations are varied, more parents, family members, and others in the community should become volunteers that support the school and students as mem-

bers of audiences. More families should feel comfortable and familiar with the school and staff, more students will talk and interact with varied adults, and more teachers should be aware of and use parents' and other community members' talents and resources to improve school programs and activities. Specifically, if volunteers conduct a "hall patrol" or are active in other locations, student behavior problems should decrease due to a better student-adult ratio. If volunteers serve as tutors, students should improve their skills in that subject; if volunteers discuss careers, students should be more aware of their options for the future.

#### **Type 4—Learning at home**

Involve families with their children in academic learning activities at home that are coordinated with students' classwork and that contribute to success in school, including interactive homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions about courses and programs.

*Sample practices* for middle level schools: Provide information to students and to parents about the skills needed to pass each course and each teacher's homework policies. Implement activities that help families encourage, praise, guide, and monitor their children's work using interactive homework, student-teacher-family contracts, long-term projects, summer home learning packets, student-led conferences with parents at home about their writing, goal setting activities, or other interactive strategies that keep students and families talking about schoolwork at home. (See for example *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)* by Epstein, Salinas, & Jackson, 1995.)

*Challenges.* One challenge for successful Type 4 activities is to *implement a regular schedule of interactive work* that requires students to take responsibility for discussing important things they are learning, interviewing family members, recording reactions, and sharing their work and ideas. Another Type 4 challenge is to *create procedures and activities that involve families regularly and systematically with students on short-term and long-term goal setting* for attendance, achievement, behavior, talent development, and future plans.

*Expected results.* If Type 4 activities are well designed and implemented, student homework completion, report card grades, and test scores in specific subjects should improve; more families should know what their children are learning in class and how to monitor, support, and discuss their schoolwork. Students and teachers should be more aware of family interest in students' work.

#### **Type 5—Decision making**

Include families in developing school vision and mission statements, and other policies and school decisions as participants on

school improvement teams, committees, PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, Title I school and district councils, and advocacy groups.

*Sample practices* for middle level schools: Organize and maintain an active parent association; and include family representatives on all committees for school improvement such as curriculum, safety, supplies and equipment, partnerships, and career development. Train parents and teachers in leadership, decision-making, and collaboration. Identify and prepare information desired by families about school policies, course offerings, student placements and groups, special services, tests and assessments, and annual results for students of their experiences and evaluations. Include family representatives along with teachers, administrators, students, and community as members of the Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships.

*Challenges.* One challenge for successful Type 5 activities is to *include in leadership roles parent representatives from all of the race and ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, and geographic communities* that are present in the middle level school. A related challenge is to *help parent leaders serve as true representatives* to obtain information from and provide information to all parents about decisions that are made. Another Type 5 challenge is to *include middle grades student representatives in decision-making groups* and leadership positions. An ongoing challenge is to *help parent and teacher members of committees to trust, respect, and listen to each other* as they work toward common goals for school improvement.

*Expected results.* If Type 5 activities are well implemented, more families should have input to decisions that affect the quality of their children's education, students should increase their awareness that families have a say in school policies; and teachers should increase their understanding of family perspectives on policies and programs for improving the school.

#### **Type 6—Collaborating with community**

Coordinate the work and resources of community businesses, agencies, cultural, civic, and religious organizations, colleges or universities; and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Enable students, staff, and families to contribute their services to the community.

*Sample practices* for middle level schools: Inform students and families about the existence of programs and resources in their community such as after-school recreation, tutorial programs, health services, cultural events, service opportunities, and summer programs. Design processes that increase equity of access for students and families to community resources and programs. Collaborate with community businesses, groups, and agencies in

ways that strengthen the other types of involvement such as conducting parent education workshops for families at community or business locations (Type 1); communicating about school events via local radio, TV, churches, clinics, supermarkets, and laundromats (Type 2); soliciting volunteers from businesses and the community and organizing activities such as "gold card" discount programs with local merchants (Type 3); enriching student learning with artists, scientists, writers, mathematicians, and others whose careers link to the school curriculum (Type 4); and including community members on decision-making councils and committees (Type 5).

**Challenges.** One challenge for successful Type 6 activities is to solve the problems associated with community/school collaborations such as " turf" problems of funding and leadership for cooperative activities. Another Type 6 challenge is to recognize and link students' valuable learning experiences in the community to the school curricula (such as lessons for nonschool skills and talents, club and volunteer work). A major challenge is to inform and involve the family in community related activities that affect their children.

**Expected results.** Well implemented Type 6 activities should increase the knowledge that families, students, and schools have about resources and programs in their community that could help them reach important goals and increase the equity of access to those opportunities. Coordinated community services should help more students and their families solve problems that arise in early adolescence before they become too serious. Type 6 activities also should support and measurably enrich school curricula and extra curricula programs.

The six types of involvement create a comprehensive program of partnerships, but the implementation challenges for each type must be met in order for programs to be effective. The results expected are directly linked to the design and content of the activities. Not every practice to involve families will result in higher student test scores. Rather, practices for each type of involvement can be selected to help students, families, and teachers reach specific goals or results. The summary above offers a few of hundreds of suggestions that can help middle level schools build good partnerships. Details for middle level schools about the framework of six types of involvement, practices, challenges, and results are provided in Epstein (1995); Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, and Simon (1996); Epstein and Connors (1995); Palanki, Burch, and Davies (1995); Rutherford (1995); and Sanders (1996).

### **Linking Partnerships to Other Recommended Middle Level Characteristics**

The twelve characteristics of responsive middle levels schools

in *This We Believe* are interrelated: Educators who want to work with young adolescents contribute to a shared vision that stipulates high expectations for all. The school program ensures high support with an adult advocate for every student and partnerships with all students' families and communities. Academically, the curriculum for each subject is challenging, integrative, and exploratory. Teachers use varied instructional approaches, assessments, and evaluations within a flexible instructional organization. Students are offered good guidance and programs that promote their health and safety. These elements combine to promote all students' learning in a climate that is inviting, challenging, and joyful.

Each element also can be linked to all others. It is particularly important for middle level educators to understand how school-family-community partnerships are linked to the other recommended elements so that parent involvement is not something extra, separate, or different from the "real work" of a school. Consider the following family and community connections to other recommendations in *This We Believe*:

#### **Educators committed to young adolescents.**

To understand young adolescents, educators need to understand their students' families—their cultures, hopes, and dreams. In a good partnership program, families are helped to understand young adolescents, middle level schools, peer pressure, and other topics of importance; and educators are helped to understand students' families. Indeed, middle level educators serve as role models for students by the way they talk about, talk with, and work with students' families. Many young adolescents are trying to balance their love for their family, need for guidance, and need for greater independence. Middle level educators who understand students' families can help students see that these seemingly contradictory pressures can coexist.

#### **A shared vision.**

Along with educators and students, families and community members must contribute to the shared vision of a responsive middle level school. Structures, processes, and specific practices are needed that enable parents and community members to provide input to a new vision or mission statement and to periodic revisions of these documents. Vision and mission statements should be presented and discussed each year as new families and students enter or transfer to the middle level school.

#### **High expectations for all.**

National and local surveys of middle grades students and their families indicate that they have very high expectations for success in school and in life. Fully 98% of a national sample of eighth grade students plan to graduate from high school; and 82% plan at least

some post secondary schooling, with 70% aiming to complete college (Epstein & Lee, 1995). Responsive middle level schools must incorporate students' and families' high aspirations into the school's high expectations for all. This means helping students take the courses they need to meet their goals, and assisting students when they need extra help by coaching classes, offering extra elective courses and summer classes, and using other responsive practices.

#### **An adult advocate for every student.**

School-based advocates and teacher advisors need to know each student's family. In some schools, students have the same advisor/advocate every year. This makes it possible for the advisor and students' families to get to know each other well. The advocate can serve as a key contact for the family should questions or concerns arise, facilitating two-way channels of communication before problems become too serious to solve.

#### **A positive school climate.**

A safe, welcoming, stimulating, and caring environment describes a school for students, educators, families, and the community. In a school with good partnerships, family and community members are more likely to volunteer to help ensure the safety of the playground, hallways, and lunchroom; to share their talents in classroom discussions; and lead or coach programs after school to create a true school community.

#### **Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory.**

Families and communities need to know about all of the courses, special programs, and services that are offered to increase student learning in the middle grades. Good information about the curriculum helps families know that their children's schools are hard at work and helps them discuss important academic topics with their young adolescents. Families also need good information about how their students are progressing in each subject, how to help students set and meet learning goals, and how to work with students to solve major problems that threaten course or grade level failure. Some middle level schools create student educational plans based on conferences with students and parents (Lloyd, 1996). If schools are serious about student learning, school-family-community partnerships must include information and involvement on the curriculum.

#### **Varied teaching and learning approaches.**

Families need to know more about the varied instructional approaches that middle grades teachers use in all subjects, including group activities, problem solving strategies, prewriting strategies, students as historians, and other challenging innovations to promote learning. Many new approaches are unfamiliar to families so they may

not understand the varied ways that students learn different subjects. Some instructional approaches can be designed to involve parents as does the *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork* (TIPS) interactive homework process that asks students to share, show, and demonstrate not only what they are learning in class but how they are learning math, science, and language arts in the middle grades.

#### **Assessments and evaluations that promote learning.**

Families and community members need to know about the major tests, new or traditional assessments, report card criteria, and other standards that schools use to determine children's progress and paths. In Maryland, for example, many schools conduct evening meetings for parents to learn about and try items on new performance-based assessments. Students and families also can help set learning goals and strategies for reaching goals. They can rate progress in parent-teacher-student conferences, on student self-report cards, and family-report cards. Project Write in Massachusetts asked students to share their writing portfolios with a parent and obtain reactions and suggestions. Middle grades educator Ross Burkhardt extended this family review by asking students to reflect on their families' reactions and write about their next steps for improving their writing. Students and families also should have opportunities to rate the quality of school programs each year. There are many ways to include students and families in important assessments and evaluations that make those measures more meaningful.

#### **Flexible organizational structures.**

Families need to understand "interdisciplinary teams" and "houses," schedules, electives or exploratories, and other arrangements that define middle level school organizations (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). Every middle level school should have annual group meetings and individual meetings of parents, teachers, and advisors to ensure that families understand how classes are organized and have input to the decisions that affect their children's experiences and education.

#### **Programs and policies that foster health and safety.**

Family responsibilities for their children's health and safety out-of-school link directly to what happens in school. Students, families, and community members must help develop and review safety policies, health policies, dress codes, lunch menus, facilities and equipment, and other policies and conditions that concern children's health and safety. If schools refer students for special services, families must be part of those decisions.

### Comprehensive guidance and support services.

Families need to know about formal and informal guidance programs at the school. This includes knowing the names, phone numbers, e-mail, or voice-mail of their children's teachers, counselors, advocates, or administrators in order to reach them with questions about their children's life or work at school. In some middle level schools, guidance counselors are members of interdisciplinary teams and meet with teachers, parents, and students on a regular schedule and in other meetings as needed.

School-family-community partnerships must link with all of the elements of effective middle level schools to ensure that families will remain important, positive influences in their young adolescents' education as well as in their daily lives.

### Call to Action: The National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools.

Most middle level educators want to build strong school-family-community partnerships, but most have not reached this goal. Indeed, developing good connections among homes, schools, and communities is an ongoing process that takes time, organization, and effort. Based on research and the work of many educators, parents, and students, I have initiated a program to help all elementary, middle, and high schools build positive, permanent programs of partnerships with families and communities.

Schools, districts, and state departments of education are invited to join the *National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools* at Johns Hopkins University to obtain assistance in improving school-family-community connections by the year 2000. There are no membership fees to join the National Network, but states, districts, and schools must meet a few requirements. Each Partnership-2000 School agrees to strengthen its program by using an *action team approach and by addressing the six major types of involvement*. Each school tailors its plans and practices for the six types of involvement to the needs and interests of its students, parents, and teachers. Each school starts with an inventory of present practices, develops a three-year outline, and annual action plans. District and state leaders are helped to organize their leadership activities to assist increasing numbers of schools to conduct these activities.

The National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools is not an "extra" program but is part of every school improvement plan. To obtain an invitation and membership forms for schools, districts, or states, write to: Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, Director, National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships & CRESPAR, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. Or contact Karen Clark Salinas: tel: 410-516-8818 fax: 410-516-8890.

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