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ABSTRACT
                This paper outlines a process for rebuilding the
educational partnership among schools, communities, and homes. The
process is based on community education, which is both a philosophy
of education and a model for the systematic development of community
and educational partnerships. The process has four major components:
(1) provision of diverse educational services; (2) development of
interagency cooperation and public-private partnerships; (3)
involvement of citizens in participatory problem solving and decision
making; and (4) encouragement of community-improvement efforts. This
paper describes seven strategies, based on community-education
partnerships, for rebuilding the educational partnership and
nurturing cooperative ventures among families, schools, and
communities. The model views community as a process, not a program.
It is recommended that educational leaders and policy makers:
recognize the interconnections among the home, school, and community;
define the role of the school in relation to the community; and use
democratic principles and practices to connect educational systems to
communities. One figure is included. (LMI)

REBUILDING THE HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

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REBUILDING THE HOME-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

Family...Community... Schools ... are the three "pillars" of public education. From them, public schooling draws its strength, received its mission, and developed its unique character as an institution in our society. The three have formed a collaborative partnership over the years, resembling at its best moments a reciprocal giving-getting compact. Schools prepare our children to assume their place within communities as productive workers and responsible, able citizens. Historically, schools have transmitted the cultural values that undergird our family structure and unify our society. In turn, families and communities have supplied the financial, moral, and practical support our schools rely upon to fulfill their mission.

As we approach the end of the 20th Century, a series of crises is besetting industrialized society which has weakened public schools. Distinct but related social, economic, and cultural upheavals have changed the face of our communities, undermined the structure of our families, and unravelled the fabric of our society. In their wake the schools have been left struggling to carry out a mission whose methods and goals are no longer clear, and whose feasibility is in question. With the weakening of the traditional partners in public education, the compact among schools, community, and family must be rebuilt.

The Challenge

The challenge is how to rebuild the educational partnership so that families and communities can reassert their legitimate interests in schools and become constructively involved in the education process.

In a recent article, "School Reform Versus Reality," Harold Hodgkinson concludes that the question of how schools should be restructured is in reality a two-part question: "What can

educators do that they are not already doing ... to get [children] achieving well in a school setting? And how can educators collaborate more closely with other service providers so that we all work together toward the urgent goal of providing services to the same client?"

The key to answering these questions lies in the definition of "we." We suggest that the "we" is the home, school, and community working together in the framework of a global democratic society. As Guthrie and Guthrie (1991) accurately point out, the challenge is not to divide up responsibilities, but to reconceptualize the role of the schools and relationships among the school, the family, the community, and the larger society.

Schools are providing more services than they did only a few years ago, but they alone cannot do what is needed. Changes in our society have forced us to recognize and acknowledge the interrelationships not only among the home, school, and community, but also among public and private enterprises. This acknowledgement in turn has had a profound impact on public education.

The interconnection between education and economic growth and development is a documented reality. The bottom line is that no advanced society can be economically competitive or economically stable without an effective education system for all of its members.

A second source of impact is recognition of the vital role education plays in helping members of all societies understand and discharge their global responsibilities. Global interconnections and mutual interdependence grows daily and was evident in historic proportions during the 1991 Gulf War and its aftermath, the tearing down of the Berlin wall, and the breakup of the Soviet Union.

A third area of impact on public education is the world movement toward institutionalizing democratic values and practices in local, state, national, and world communities. The incorporation of democratic practices is as evident in the restructuring of the political systems of entire countries, notably in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as it is in school-based management initiatives and industrial quality-improvement strategies designed to involve both the providers and the recipients of services.

In the field of education, the global and local interrelationship suggests the need to broaden the perspective of our education system. In spite of a wide diversity of factors that influence learning, many of today's educational reports and reform initiatives are narrowly

2

4

focused. Across all types of educational institutions and among the various philosophical frameworks of educational experts, one finds few generalists who advocate the integration of diverse areas of specialization in order to enhance learning.

There are two primary causes for this narrow perspective. One is an increased emphasis on discrete bodies of knowledge, or "discip!'nes," and the tendency of individuals to promote and protect a particular perspective or interest. This tendency is very evident in higher education; for a demonstration of turf protection, one need only observe a faculty debate on some minor curriculum modification. Other examples may be found throughout the education delivery system, especially in state and local education agencies.

Another cause of this narrowness of perspective is the way we think about education. We tend to view learning as a series of steps, not as a continuum, grouping students by age and by academic ability as measured on standardized tests. An example is the plan in *America 2000* to develop a set of American Achievement Tests to be given in five core academic areas in the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades. Steve Parson (1990) summed up our test orientation:

> *Learning to learn is not often high on the list of priorities in our schools. The focus is on certain quantities of subject matter that must be consumed by the learner, especially those subject areas that will later appear in national examinations that are used to measure the quality of schools.*

Harold Hodgkinson (1985) also points out that narrowness of perspective results in a system in which "almost everyone who works in education perceives it as a set of discrete institutions working in isolation from each other. People working in each institution have virtually no connection with all the others and little awareness of educational activity provided by the total." He (1989) urges the integration of education, health care, transportation, housing, and corrections services, asking educators:

> *... to begin to become familiar with other service providers at their level, as they are serving the same children and families as clients. It is painfully clear that a hungry, sick or homeless child is by definition a poor learner, yet schools usually have no linkage to health or housing organizations outside those run by the schools themselves. There are .. interlocking effects of deprivation.*

3

5

Although the need for the home, school, and community to work together is underscored in almost all educational reform initiatives, a real barrier to creating such a partnership arrangement is the fact that many people perceive schools and school systems as remote, bureaucratic institutions that are unresponsive to society's changing needs. Community educators are changing this perception and serving as the catalyst in developing a wide variety of collaborative efforts. The result of their talent for successfully involving the home, school, and community in school reform efforts is the reconceptualization of the role of schools and relationships among the school, the community, and the larger society.

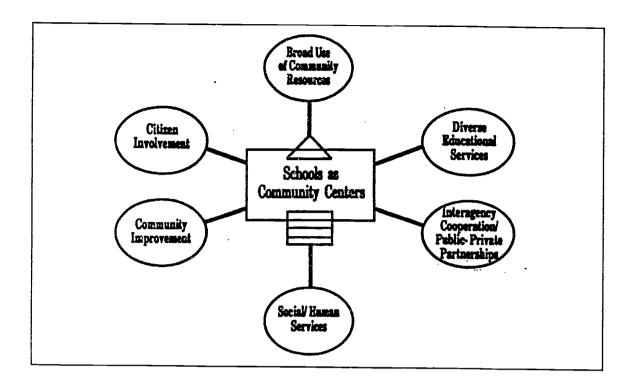## A Successful Process for Rebuilding The Educational Partnership

Community education is both a philosophy of education and a model for the systematic development of community and educational partnerships. The process has four major components:

1. Provision of diverse educational services to meet the varied learning needs of community residents of all ages;

2. Development of interagency cooperation and public-private partnerships to reduce duplication of efforts and improve effectiveness in the delivery of human services;

3. Involvement of citizens in participatory problem solving and democratic decision making; and

4. Encouragement of community improvement efforts that make the community more attractive to both current and prospective residents and businesses.

In the community education model, the school functions as a support center for a network of agencies and institutions committed to meeting community needs and expanding learning opportunities for all members of the community. The concept stresses broad-based community participation in problem solving and democratic decision making. This focus on involvement is grounded in a well-known trait of human nature—people develop commitment to, and a sense of ownership in, causes, organizations, and activities for which they have some responsibility.

The following graphic portrays the community education model.

4

Diagram: Schools as Community Centers — surrounded by: Broad Use of Community Resources, Diverse Educational Services, Interagency Cooperation/ Public-Private Partnerships, Social/Human Services, Community Improvement, Citizen Involvement.

The restructuring of schools and education using the community education process is underway in many localities and states (Decker and Romney 1992).

The Framework

To accomplish their restructuring goals, communities and schools need an action plan. The following are a set of strategies, based on community education principles, that are being used to rebuild the educational partnership and to nurture cooperative ventures between families, schools, and the community (Decker and Decker 1988).

> Strategy 1.   *Encourage and increase the use of community resources and volunteers to augment the educational curricula in kindergarten through 12th grade.*

Every community has a unique set of human, physical, and financial needs and resources that can be used to enrich and expand traditional educational programs. This strategy takes advantage of a fact of community life: Everyone can be both a learner and a teacher. Numerous programs have been developed to use community resources and volunteers, including school

5

volunteer programs, field and study trips, peer tutoring, student-based enterprises, and experiential learning.

> *Strategy II.*   *Develop educational partnerships between the school system and schools and public and private service providers, business and industry, and civic and social service organizations.*

Today's complex and interrelated social and economic problems create a broad array of service needs in a community. Effectively meeting the variety of educational needs requires more resources than any single agency or organization can provide. This strategy encourages the development of educational partnerships that cooperate in the efficient and effective use of available resources and avoid unnecessary duplication. Such partnerships might focus on childcare and latchkey programs, anti-drug and substance abuse efforts, minority assistance, literacy and academic competencies, at-risk youth, and community economic development, internships and work-study programs, and career awareness.

> *Strategy III.*   *Use public educational facilities as community service centers for meeting the educational, social, health, cultural, and recreational needs of all ages and sectors of the community.*

Economic and demographic changes have turned educators' attention to the needs and concerns of non-parents in the community. This strategy encourages opening school buildings on a planned, organized basis at hours other than the regular school day. It is designed to take advantage of the strong support that community centers generally receive in addition to the cost benefits of more efficient use.

> *Strategy IV.*   *Encourage the development of an environment that fosters lifelong learning.*

This strategy advocates the promotion of learning as a continuous, lifelong process for all people and the understanding of education as more than a series of terminal behaviors and unrelated experiences. It takes advantage of the fact that much learning takes place without formal instruction, both inside and outside the school setting. It encourages the development of lifelong education programs to meet learning needs as they change over a lifetime, including the need for new skills and knowledge. Possible programs and activities include early childhood

6

8

education, extended care and enrichment programs, adult education, vocational training and retraining programs, le'sure time pursuits, and intergenerational programs.

Strategy V.   *Establish community involvement processes in educational planning and decision making.*

The total community has a responsibility in the mission of educating all of its members. The rationale for involving the community in planning and decision making is based on the belief that citizens have a right and a duty to participate in determining community needs, in deciding priorities, and in selecting the most appropriate allocation of resources. Moreover, this is a cyclical process, concerned with evaluation and change as well as initial planning. The strategy is designed to take advantage of one of the most basic facts in human relationships: Individuals who participate in planning and decision making develop feelings of ownership in the outcome.

The encouragement of broad-based involvement capitalizes on another principle. Generally, the greater the number and diversity of people involved in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of educational opportunities, the greater the likelihood that needs will be met and that support for education will be developed and maintained. Involvement and participation opportunities range from ongoing community advisory councils to ad hoc advisory task forces and special issue study committees.

Strategy VI.   *Provide a responsive, community-based support system for collective action among all educational and community agencies to address both current quality-of-life issues of all citizens and specialized needs.*

This strategy recognizes the complexity of many of today's problems and underscores the fact that the resolution of problems requires more resources than any single agency or organization can provide. Seeking out the involvement of other agencies can help address social, health, educational, and economic issues as drug and substance abuse, housing, public safety and crime prevention, at-risk youth, violence and vandalism, teen pregnancy and parenthood, the elderly, and racial and minority concerns.

Strategy V.   *Develop a system that expedites home-school-community communication.*

Because public schools draw upon public resources, they must make a concentrated and systematic effort to communicate with all members of the community. Research shows that schools that involve all their publics and keep them informed have community support; those that

7

fail to reach beyond their parent public do not. Effective home-school-community communication goes beyond news releases, speeches, newsletters, and open houses to include media coverage, home visitation by teachers and administrators, meet-the-community programs, school displays, and programs conducted away from the school site.

With these strategies as a framework, schools can use the community and the community can use the schools for mutual synergism and growth. The ultimate goal is to provide a responsive, community-based support system for collective action among the educational partners—families, schools, and communities.

In *Community Education Across America*, Decker and Romney cite a variety of state-wide initiatives and local community education efforts to address specific concerns, including:

- Adults with disabilities ·
- At-risk youth
- Crime
- Collaborative delivery of human services
- Community service and volunteerism
- The elderly
- Educational reform
- Extended-day programs
- Family and early childhood education
- Health and human services
- In-school volunteerism

- K-12 achievement
- Literacy and adult basic skills
- Literacy and lifelong education
- Parental involvement
- Parent/citizen involvement in education
- Problems associated with rapid population growth
- School-age child care
- School-community partnerships
- Youth community service and development

Leadership for Action

In terms of leadership, community education requires an individual or group who recognizes the opportunity and acts as a catalyst in bringing together representatives of community agencies, organizations, businesses, and neighborhoods to talk about community problems and to devise solutions. Because the complexity of our ethnic, environmental, and educational experiences affects both our perceptions and our attitudes, community education leadership must find a way to overcome what has been called the "terrible t's"—tradition, turf, and trust-level—which can negate community involvement initiatives.

8

If community education is to be successfully implemented, schools must be afforded the autonomy and flexibility to respond to diverse learning needs. The school's dependence on its community in the lifelong teaching/learning process must be recognized. Some power must be shifted from the central office to local schools. Efforts must be made to strengthen home-school-community linkages. Teachers and community members must be involved in democratic decision making and in activities designed to provide instruction for learners of all ages.

Community education must be viewed as a process, not as a program. Its major components must continue to change as community conditions change. Over time, learning and human service needs change. Cooperative ventures and partnership activities will have to be modified or refocused. Community improvement efforts may have to be redirected and new participatory problem-solving efforts initiated. For long-term effectiveness, community thinking and action must be based upon a broad perspective whose goal is the nurturing of human growth in a learning community.

Educational leaders and policy makers must recognize the interconnection between the home and school and between the school and community and define the role of the school in relationship to its community and the larger society. Finally, they must use democratic principles and practices to connect educational systems to communities. Their role is critical. As Richard Miller, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, points out in *Restructuring America's Schools* (Lewis 1989):

> *... the future rests on their leadership, their vision, their openness to ideas, their knowledge of how students learn and organizations work, their commitment to involving staff and community in the improvement process, and their ability to develop and sustain structures that work for the benefit of each and every person who wants and needs to learn.*

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9

11

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10