

# The LSS Review



a catalyst for merging research, policy, and practice

Volume 2 • Number 1 • March 2003

## School–Family Partnerships

### Promoting the Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth of Children

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School–family partnerships (SFPs) have been the focus of research, policy, and practice efforts for several years. Increasing the interest in SFPs has been the finding that when schools and families cooperate closely, children benefit. The more supportive links there are between settings, the more potential there is for healthy development. Such strong findings have been reflected in major legislation implemented by the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

For example, in 1990, the National Education Goals Panel proclaimed increased parental participation in education as a key goal. The panel proposed that state and local education agencies work together to develop partnership programs to meet the needs of children and parents. Programs would support the academic work of children at home, promote shared decision making at school, and hold schools and teachers accountable for high standards of achievement. In the years since the panel's proposal, the goal has not been fully met, making parent participation still a largely untapped resource.

Most recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the

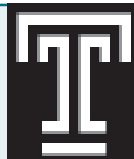
centerpiece of ED education strategy, included parent participation. For the first time in major education legislation, parent involvement was defined: It consists of “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication.” NCLB acknowledged that parents are integral to children’s learning and should be able to act as full partners in education. However, the precise roles that parents can assume within NCLB programs were far from clear, and that has caused school personnel and parents to be perplexed about the resources and types of support available to enhance school–family ties.

Interestingly, most discussion and policy about parent involvement and SFPs have focused on their impact on academic performance. The fact that parents and teachers should also support children’s social and emotional development seems overlooked. However, in light of rising school violence and increasing concerns among parents and teachers regarding children’s social and emotional growth, SFPs should be considered as a valuable force for children’s general success. Strong partnerships can expand children’s schooling to encompass social and emotional learning, helping them develop

and apply the skills necessary to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally at school and in life.

National attention has increasingly focused on reforms aimed at boosting academic standards and accountability. Yet SFPs are more important now than ever. With underachievement, the academic gap between advantaged and disadvantaged youth, and high rates of social and emotional problems still major concerns of the educational system and society, SFPs can act as a critical mediating factor for educational improvement and positive youth development. To increase implementation of SFPs and foster the integration of parent involvement with social and emotional learning, we must understand the complicated context in which partnerships develop and function. School–family partnerships are influenced and defined by dynamically interacting psychological, sociological, and policy factors, such as students’ developmental level, the culture of the home and community, and local and broader legislative initiatives.

To increase understanding of this context and enhance communication



The LSS Review is a product of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), one of ten regional educational laboratories funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education. LSS seeks to provide research-based information to significantly improve the educational capacity of the region, including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, and the nation. Inquiries about the work of LSS should be sent to the Outreach and Dissemination Unit, Temple University, 1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19122-6091, [lss@temple.edu](mailto:lss@temple.edu). Copyright © 2003.



mong educators, parents, and policymakers about strategies for enhancing collaboration between schools and families, a national invitational conference, "School-Family Partnerships: Promoting the Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth of Children," was held in Washington, DC, on December 5-6, 2002. Sponsored by the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University, the conference featured an ecological approach encompassing elements that impact parent-teacher interactions, which in turn affect academic, social, and emotional aspects of school success. Papers were commissioned to address SFPs and academic, social, and emotional learning within three levels of the social-ecological context of learning: the microsystems of schools, families, and peers; the mesosystems of SFPs and other interactions; and the macrosystems of culture, economy, and ideologies. Science-based research on SFPs and the learning of children was thus integrated within a broader structural framework.

To frame discussion, the conference organizers provided copies of conference papers in advance to all participants, so that all could be fully involved. Administrators, teachers, researchers, policymakers, parents, and other stakeholders convened to explore the implications of the papers and to reflect on their experiences, concerns, and lessons learned. General discussion centered on topical areas addressed by the papers. Topics discussed included critical issues affecting partnerships, barriers to parent-school collaboration, and motivation and parental involvement. Also considered were parental involvement in early childhood and student outcomes, continued parental involvement for adolescent students, intercultural contact and partnerships, and the role of families in facilitating learning in urban settings. Participants examined policy issues such as teacher

preparation for partnerships and federal and state parental-involvement initiatives. Participants also met in small work groups to generate next-step recommendations for building knowledge of SFPs and for improving the links between research and practice.

This issue of *The LSS Review* synthesizes the work-group recommendations and conference papers. The conference organizers hope that this information will outline directions for research and practice that enhance children's academic, social, and emotional success. The findings of this conference make it clear that SFPs do improve children's education and development and that such partnerships should play an important role in national education reform.

### Next-Step Recommendations

Conferees achieved considerable consensus on next-step recommendations, although not all work-group participants agreed on all points. The recommendations can be organized in the following broad categories.

#### RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATION

Conferees suggested ways to promote wider transfer of research showing the benefits of SFPs into practice. Researchers should take a more interdisciplinary approach to designing evidence-based partnership practices. Investigations of SFPs should consider the diversity of individuals and communities. Researchers and practitioners from multiple backgrounds should continue to share findings in venues such as LSS conferences. Moreover, researchers should develop more partnership tools aimed at hard-to-reach parents; staff training tools should be current and comprehensive. Research and tools should focus on student, school, and district improvement.

Research evidence must be more widely disseminated to indicate how to achieve individual and school improvement through family involvement. Information about innovative

and effective strategies, including Parent Centers, should be disseminated to relevant audiences in accessible forms geared to group needs. Centralized marketing strategies and networking among research organizations should be implemented. Disseminators should focus on teachers, who are often unaware of partnership benefits and especially of resources for promoting partnerships. Teachers can assist in communicating research through inservice panels or community outreach. Researchers should disseminate information about teacher training for SFPs and about state certification requirements.

#### TEACHER TRAINING

Conferees recommended that teacher preparation programs be reformed to increase teachers' skills in working with families and communities, since most colleges of education do not train teachers well for this work. Education curricula could include such training as a separate course or integrate it into existing courses. A separate course should not be added at the cost of other important courses. Preservice training should present family involvement as a process and not just as an occasional event. Training should provide significant content related to social and emotional development and address the complexity of partnerships in our diverse society.

Teacher education programs should also make teachers advocates for students and families; expertise gained from parent information resource centers and expert teachers should be shared to that end. Support for family advocacy should come through changing state certification requirements to include family-teacher relationship issues like cultural differences and role construction.

Teacher competency in SFPs requires ongoing professional development delivered by teachers with success in building partnerships. Inservice trainers should acknowledge

the varying competencies of teachers. Training should extend to parents and administrators and should focus on building all partners' social and emotional skills. Training should encourage partner buy-in by emphasizing benefits, clarifying roles, and making research-based strategies available.

#### SCHOOLS

To build SFPs, schools must establish trust between families and educators and facilitate sharing of fears and development of respect. School communities should convene partners to discuss barriers to collaboration. A troubleshooting guide for partnerships could result from this work. Significant difficulties resulting from culture and class differentials between partners can be reduced by working toward shared understandings. To overcome barriers, schools should consider using third-party mediation: family advocates who coordinate contact between schools, families, and community resources.

To encourage SFPs, schools should include family involvement and social and emotional learning in mission statements and improvement plans. Mission statements should define partnerships precisely. Structural reforms should be implemented, including assigning teachers to facilitate partnerships, allowing teachers more time for partnership work, and providing parental supports. Where resources are limited, reforms should focus on transition points like entry to kindergarten and middle school. Also important to building partnership capacity are reflection on and clarification of the roles and responsibilities of individuals and integration of institutional components.

Schools should also help parents relate grade-level standards to homework and create individualized plans aligned with school involvement plans. School compacts between educators and families should identify expectations, create commitment, and guide discussion at parent-teacher

conferences. To extend opportunities for parents and teachers to meet as coeducators, schools should institute opening-of-year celebrations to invite new parents into partnerships and provide resources. Follow-up could include family nights to discuss curriculum, home support, and families' concerns. Also important to sustaining parent-teacher communication is providing flexible meeting times, alternative means of communication, and adequate information about involvement. Schools should regularly assess implementation of these practices.

#### FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Families and community partners like faith-based initiatives should ensure that schools acknowledge community needs. This work requires collaboration with schools on tailoring family-involvement expectations to family needs and differences. Families and schools must also distinguish between levels of involvement so that involvement as such is not confused with effective partnerships. Families should urge schools to involve all significant relatives in children's lives. The more inclusive term "family" should be preferred to "parents" in discussing SFPs.

Families should also urge schools to include them as coeducators in professional development activities. Families should inform schools about family life in different cultures and advocate including the community's cultural context in school curricula. Finally, parents should use informed parental choice to improve their school partnerships.

#### EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Effective leadership at all levels is critical to forging better partnerships. Education leaders should lobby for legislative action to support partnerships. Leaders should work with researchers and policymakers to increase the national visibility of parent involvement issues. To build government support, leaders should use evidence-based research connecting

partnerships with measurable academic and behavioral gains. Moreover, LSS, as the lead regional educational laboratory in the area of educational leadership, should continue its efforts to promote SFPs by providing leaders nationwide with procedural knowledge on effective partnerships.

To prioritize family involvement, states should pass employer incentives for facilitating employees' involvement in their children's schooling. To help schools meet Title I family-involvement requirements, states should monitor school policies more closely. State education departments should also provide schools and families with information on effective partnership strategies.

School boards should take proactive funding actions that foster SFPs. Superintendents should consult with colleges of education about ways to prioritize partnerships. Districts should make *specific* allocations of family-involvement resources; family involvement could be a line item in district budgets. Districts should coordinate partnership resources for professional development and balance raising academic performance with involving families to benefit the whole child.

Principals should make SFPs a priority by facilitating inservice training and dedicating resources to family involvement. Districts should hire principals with commitment to successful partnerships. Principals should coordinate school and community assets in a strategic framework aligned with partnership goals.

#### CONCLUSION

Increasing educators' knowledge of family involvement practices and of social and emotional learning is both necessary and achievable. Strengthening links between evidence-based research and partnership activities can improve schools, and enhanced understanding between schools and families can increase the capacity of those coeducators to help all students succeed. ☞

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# Influences and Barriers to Better Parent–School Collaborations

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Schools and families are partners in healthy child development. In no other contexts do children spend more time than at school and home. Research suggests that high-quality links between teachers and parents promote children's school success. These two central contexts should interact often to manage children's academic and personal growth. However, such interaction is rare. Both teachers and parents desire more interaction, but it is often difficult to achieve, especially as children move to secondary school. This article examines barriers to school–family partnership and suggests how they can be reduced. It reviews characteristics leading to barriers, describes a developmental model—executive function—for collaboration between families and schools, and recommends policy changes to foster collaboration.

## **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Characteristics of parents, communities, children, and schools combine to influence parental involvement in schooling. Parents' education and workforce participation affect involvement, with more highly educated parents more involved and those in the workforce less involved. Other characteristics that promote or prevent involvement include parents' psychological resources and their beliefs about their role in children's education. Parents may not have confidence that their participation can influence their child's achievement. Parents' language difficulties may cause difficulty in understanding participation opportunities. If schools have involvement activities limited to school hours, working parents may lack the time for participation.

Community characteristics also affect involvement. In high-risk

neighborhoods, parents may concentrate more on protecting children from danger than on supporting schools. In disadvantaged communities that afford parents few resources for helping their children, schools must work to overcome barriers to involvement by showing parents that schools provide their children with safe, positive experiences to counter community dangers.

Children's age also influences parental participation in schooling. Parents may feel that older children want less participation and may feel inadequate when schoolwork becomes complicated. Parents of older children often find fewer avenues for contribution because schools offer fewer involvement opportunities and children grow more autonomous. As children grow older, parents become uncertain how they should participate in the important matters of course, college, and occupational choice.

Schools also play a strong role in determining parental involvement. Crucial factors include teachers' beliefs about parents' role in the classroom, availability of involvement opportunities, school policy regarding parental interaction, and accessibility of classrooms and personnel. Barriers to involvement may stem from teachers' low sense of efficacy, from limits to their knowledge about getting parents involved, and from administrators' low level of support. Schools can help parents decide to become involved by offering many options for interaction and taking parents' needs into account.

## **The Executive Function Model**

Children learn in a rich set of social contexts. Early in life, parental practices are primary for children's learning. As children mature, other

figures—from teachers to peers to religious leaders—offer children resources for learning. Throughout childhood, multiple significant others shape each child's knowledge, socioemotional development, and skill repertoire.

In preschool programs, children's developmental transitions are negotiated between school and home. Most preschools encourage conversations with families about home issues that influence children's school day. In elementary schools, such regular communication rarely takes place unless academic or behavior problems arise; opportunities for parent–teacher interaction are limited to infrequent conferences. Nevertheless, elementary-age children are as affected by home issues and developmental changes as are preschoolers. Addressing socioemotional development in elementary school, before socioemotional problems become resistant to change, is vital to children's long-term outcomes. Moreover, the transition to secondary school, when children with lower social skills and self-esteem begin to flounder, is a critical period for good parent–school communication. Schools and families should coordinate their management of children's developmental issues at the crucial points of entry to elementary and secondary school.

Cognitive research provides an integrative framework for school–family collaboration on meeting children's developmental needs. The interaction of those responsible for child rearing is analogous to the smooth coordination of the subsystems in the brain, which cognitive psychology terms the executive function. This function manages and monitors the performance of brain subsystems to allow effective

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performance of required tasks. Children become better executive functionaries as they mature, learning how to solve problems and how to regulate their behavior independently. Initially, the executive function needs to be modeled by adults to help children acquire the knowledge and skills needed to survive. The executive function is particularly important for children's management of emotions.

Parents, teachers, and other adults interpret emotional and social situations and model appropriate responses that children learn. If these adults do not coordinate their efforts, children may become dysfunctional in socioemotional intelligence. They may also develop psychological and behavior problems. Effective executive functioning requires that the individuals and institutions that influence children during their development collaborate closely so that all involved have sufficient information to act as children's executive functionaries. Effective functioning involves the entire system affecting each child; the elements in this system interact dynamically.

At the heart of the system is the child receiving information and processing this input cognitively and emotionally. Beyond the child stand the parents and other significant adults who must provide the child with accurate information on social skills and self-management. The parents or primary caregivers provide initial executive functioning, gradually shifting some management activities to school personnel. For this collaboration to succeed, the two groups must have shared goals against which to evaluate progress and identify problems.

As children mature, the number of potential individuals who act as social executive functionaries increases, as does the number of contexts in which executive-function modeling is needed. As a

consequence, the demands on the functionaries and on the child's own growing executive function increase, and with it a need for even stronger coordination among the executive functionaries. Unfortunately, the independence of the contexts through which growing children navigate makes such coordination difficult. Moreover, community contexts vary in the support that they give to executive functionaries. Resource-rich, safe communities share executive functioning with primary caregivers, while caregivers may be unsupported and threatened in disadvantaged communities.

When the social system providing executive functioning fails, children may develop problems obtaining the resources needed to develop into self-regulating adults. However, resources that are unavailable in one social setting can and should be provided in others. Schools, for example, can provide resources, from free lunches to social-skill training, not available in homes or communities. Schools can also connect families with other organizations offering such resources. Conversely, if schools are not teaching children adequately, parents can furnish supplemental education.

Barriers like lack of access to information and communication problems can lead to inadequate coordination of the executive functioning endeavors of parents and schools. Minority parents may not know which courses are required for admission to universities and may not recognize that their children are unprepared for higher education. Language differences can also pose a barrier to school-family coordination. A strong predictor of lack of parental involvement in schooling for some immigrant children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, is parental language difficulty.

## **Policy Recommendations**

This article outlines a model for partnership between families and schools to promote the academic and personal development of children. Programs to develop such partnership must stress the need for better communication between parents and teachers, which should begin with changes in teacher training. Teachers should learn to see teaching as one element of a system in which all members must be informed about children's development. Teachers should also learn that academic and social skills are equally predictive of adult success and that those skills can be fostered by improving the coordination among children's social executive functionaries.

Additionally, parents should be encouraged to bring schooling into the home through activities like research-project assistance, computer-skill teaching, and promotion of extracurricular activities. Because parents influence children's attitudes toward education, parents must view schools positively. Exchange of information about a child can promote a positive view. To that end, teachers and parents should create educational and developmental plans for children and meet often to implement those plans.

Finally, school administrators must facilitate parent-teacher communication. Administrators should promote parental involvement opportunities at classroom and school levels. Schools should have parent-resource rooms featuring information on curriculum and child development. Parents of different cultures and language ability should be able to obtain information on schools' academic expectations. Once such means for communication and coordinated activity between parents and educators are established, successful outcomes for children will become more likely. ☘

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# What Motivates Parents to Become Involved in Their Children's Education

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Many schools, educators, and policymakers have collaborated to develop programs that encourage parental involvement in students' schooling. Educators are often frustrated, however, when parental involvement initiatives are not as successful as hoped. One key to developing productive school-family partnerships lies in understanding the beliefs and perceptions that underlie parents' decisions about becoming involved in their children's education.

Four specific psychological constructs that influence parents' decisions about involvement in their children's education are discussed in this article: (a) parental role construction for involvement, (b) parental sense of efficacy for helping the child learn, (c) parental perceptions of invitations to involvement from the school, and (d) parental perceptions of invitations to involvement from the child. The article also discusses the relation of parental involvement to student outcomes and recommends school actions to increase involvement.

## Role Construction

Parents' ideas about appropriate roles in their children's education are constructed both by the social contexts of family and school and by parents' ideas about child development and parenting. Parents' role construction for school involvement is created through the interaction of parents' (a) beliefs about desirable student outcomes, (b) beliefs about who is responsible for those outcomes, (c) beliefs about what they should do in relation to those desired outcomes, and (d) their behaviors related to these beliefs.

Research suggests that role construction for involvement appears in two forms, active and passive. Active role construction reflects the belief that parents bear primary responsibility for children's educational outcomes and that parents should actively address that responsibility. This form can appear as a parent-focused orientation to involvement based on belief in sole parental responsibility or a partnership-focused orientation based on belief in responsibility shared by parents and schools.

Passive role construction reflects the belief that schools bear primary responsibility for educational outcomes and that schools should initiate contact if parental help is needed. The relative predominance of active or passive role construction for parents in a school year is linked to parents' perceptions of the school context, parents' perceptions of a child's developmental and learning needs, and parents' judgments about their ability to help the child learn. While productive school-family partnerships are most likely enhanced by an active, partnership-focused orientation, parents' ability to enact that role depends on school contexts that enable partnership.

## Sense of Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capacity to act in ways that will produce desired results. Parental self-efficacy for helping children learn requires experiences of success, opportunities to observe other adults helping their children, and encouragement from family members and school personnel. Research suggests that parents who have a strong sense

of self-efficacy for involvement tend to be active in their children's education and to work through difficulties to successful results. A weak sense of self-efficacy may not deter parents who believe they should be involved, but it may lead to low persistence in the face of difficulties and, in the absence of intervention, to the adoption of a passive parental role.

## Perceptions of Invitations to Involvement From Schools and Children

Invitations to involvement from schools and children influence parents' decisions to become involved. Invitations from schools convey to parents that their involvement is welcome and valuable in supporting student learning. Invitations—such as a welcoming school climate, user-friendly newsletters, and practical suggestions for home-based support of learning—make it clear that schools want parental involvement at home and school.

Children's invitations to parental involvement may include explicit requests for help or implicit demonstrations of need (for example, low test grades). Moreover, evidence shows that both schools' and children's invitations can foster active role construction and self-efficacy and thus increase the likelihood of positive parental involvement. School and child invitations are also susceptible to explicit intervention on the part of schools.

## Parental Involvement and Students' Academic and Social Outcomes

While most attention to parental involvement has focused

on its potential for improving student achievement, research shows that involvement is likely to exert influence not primarily on achievement but on proximal outcomes that support achievement, including attendance, attentiveness, ability beliefs, and strategy knowledge and use. More distal achievement outcomes depend ultimately on student beliefs and behavior, which lie beyond direct parental control. Further, parents tend to have somewhat more difficulty influencing their children's achievement in subject-matter learning as students move into adolescence.

Parental involvement also fosters interpersonal competencies associated with school success. Students who pursue the goals of academic and social success have a more productive approach to learning than do students who pursue exclusively academic or social goals. Additionally, research shows that students' beliefs about both their academic abilities and about their ability to relate effectively to their peers and teachers contribute to their success in learning.

Moreover, parents with partnership-focused role construction tend to model the skills of communication and cooperation that are valuable in classroom learning. Actively involved parents are also likely to reinforce students' valuing of active engagement in learning and to teach them to engage effectively.

### **Recommendations for School Action**

To improve parental involvement and school-family partnerships, schools should focus their efforts on fostering the psychological constructs that are conducive to desired student outcomes. Schools can take the following research-based steps to be more

supportive of parental psychological constructs.

To facilitate role construction, schools should demonstrate positive assumptions about the importance of parental involvement in education. Schools can offer parents specific information about active involvement and maintain an environment that values parental presence and suggestions. Schools should invite parental involvement through two-way communications in which educators offer information and listen to parents' ideas. Schools should provide interactive communication tools, such as classroom telephones and Internet connection to support e-mail.

To strengthen parents' sense of efficacy, schools need to inform them about the positive influences of involvement on desirable student attributes, including positive attitudes about school, persistence in learning tasks, and use of learning strategies. Schools should also give parents specific feedback on the benefits of their involvement, linking parental behaviors to student progress and recounting similar parents' success.

To improve parents' perceptions of invitations to school involvement, schools should develop a welcoming climate, for example by constructing welcoming visual displays in school entryways and promoting schoolwide friendliness to parents. Schools should invite parents to confer with teachers about children's progress and the usefulness of school suggestions for involvement.

Further, a full range of home- and school-based involvement opportunities should be offered to families. Standard approaches to involvement like conferences should be included, but activities can be expanded to include less

traditional ones like co-learning and shared decision making. Expanding the range of involvement activities often helps to engage more of a school's families and parents.

To increase parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from their children, schools should develop interactive homework assignments. Students may be asked by teachers to request parental input as part of assignments, and schools may offer parents suggestions for skill-related involvement like reviewing homework problems together. Such suggestions can increase parent-student interaction and help parents understand student learning.

Teachers should also encourage students and parents to discuss school activities with each other, since findings show that at-home discussion of school activities is strongly related to student achievement. While developmental differences in children across grades shape the content of such discussion, parental involvement remains important throughout students' school years.

### **Conclusion**

By acting as partners in the social construction of beliefs and behaviors that influence parental involvement, schools can increase the effectiveness of involvement, the productivity of school-family partnerships, and the quality of students' learning. While increasing involvement will require greater allocation of resources (such as time, energy, and money), the benefits make even small investments worthwhile. Implementation of steps to motivate parental involvement can offer important support for student success throughout the school years and beyond. ☘

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# Critical Issues Facing Families and Educators

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Pressing nonacademic issues like school violence and drug abuse reveal the overwhelming importance of constructive school–family partnerships (SFPs) for the academic, social, and emotional learning of youth. Partnerships between schools and families should be prominent in efforts to promote learning and development, yet many critical issues face families and educators striving to build relationships. This article examines the circumstances partnerships must address, including the family–student–school context, student benefits of partnerships, broad issues that SFPs must consider, and avenues for strengthening partnerships.

## **The Family–Student–School Context**

Recent statistics suggest the supports needed for families and educators to help children succeed. An important trend affecting children is the population’s growing diversity. In 2001, 19% of children had at least one foreign-born parent. Such parents frequently need better knowledge of the social system to provide their children with economic academic opportunities. Family composition and parental working arrangements are also increasingly diverse. In 2001, 22% of American children resided with only their mothers. The number of unmarried partners grew 71% during the 1990s, while 33% of all births in 2000 were to unmarried women. Children who live in one-parent families are more likely to live in poverty, and children living in poverty are more likely than others to have difficulty in school, bear children while teenagers, and as adults earn less and suffer from unemployment. Related to family income are poor health and housing conditions

that make it hard for children to achieve academically and develop into productive adults. Moreover, children today are likely to have the custodial parent or both parents in the workforce, affecting parents’ ability to support education.

Clearly, additional supports for the nation’s children are needed. Existing resources are often underfunded or unavailable to those needing them most. For example, Head Start serves only three of five eligible children. High-quality childcare is too expensive for numerous families, and the need for childcare does not end when children enter school. With many parents working, countless children are left unattended after school, when they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors. In this context, it is challenging but necessary to create positive working relationships between families and educators.

## **Benefits of School–Family Connections**

Parent involvement in education significantly correlates with student learning. When parents are involved, students’ grades, test scores, and participation in the classroom improve. Additional benefits include fewer special education placements, greater postsecondary enrollment, higher attendance, lower dropout rates, and a reduced likelihood of engaging in high-risk behaviors. Benefits extend to students’ social and emotional learning and engagement. Research shows that enhancing cognitive engagement (e.g., self-regulated learning), behavioral engagement (e.g., participation), and psychological engagement (e.g., identification with school) correlate significantly with academic achievement. Full engagement—requiring a high level of parental involvement—is needed to meet the demands of

schooling. Youth perform better in school when both home and school actively provide the support and opportunities that promote student engagement.

## **Broad Issues Facing Families and Educators**

Several issues influence the ability of school–family connections to enhance students’ academic learning, relationships with others, and regulation of emotions.

### SYSTEMIC EFFECTS

When a systemic orientation is adopted, the quality and equity of family–school interactions become the focus. Children are educated in low-risk circumstances when family and school systems are integrated, and when home and school provide children with congruent messages about learning. Children’s school competence cannot be fostered without focusing on the relationships among the multiple systems that affect children. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how resources are organized systemically to help children meet academic and developmental challenges. The goal of SFPs is to enhance performance on tasks that family and school systems can directly influence. However, to establish shared goals, contributions, and accountability between families and educators, SFPs must also recognize macrosystemic influences, such as legislation, school reform, and poverty. To address concerns about children’s learning related to such broad influences, SFPs need to track student performance early and carefully.

### EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Educators and families must recognize individual and cultural diversity and foster dialogue about it.



If diversity is embraced as an opportunity for helping children develop learning competencies and for building partnership capacity, gaps in educational performance for some students can be altered. To make parents coeducators, schools must understand differing purposes of education, self-efficacy, and role construction among parents of diverse groups. Additionally, research stresses that socialization practices in homes and schools are crucial in developing students' identities as learners; parental messages and cultural context can help students maintain positive attitudes and expectations. Parents adapt their cultural attitudes to educational goals in complex ways. How can educators help if they do not understand these perspectives?

#### PRIORITIZING EDUCATION

Just as government and society sometimes undervalue education, families sometimes fail to make it a priority. Parents can enhance academic performance through both academic support that is directly related to children's schooling and through motivational support, which involves fostering attitudes to learning that are indirectly but essentially related to school success. Motivational support may be most important for preparing children for learning; it can be highlighted in coordinated home-school interventions. Emotional support—getting children to believe they are competent and important—is also critical to school success.

#### Strengthening School-Family Partnerships

School-based family involvement is typically activity-driven, though we know that gaining parental cooperation is not primarily a function of the activities provided. Offering involvement activities without forming healthy SFPs has yielded low parental participation, especially for families most alienated by traditional

schooling practices. Families responding positively to school-proposed activities often match the schools' culture and staff. In selecting activities to enhance students' learning, it is crucial to achieve a good fit among parents, teachers, and students. Yet multiple demands on school staff combined with attitudes that devalue families limit opportunities for building SFPs. Rather than the current activity-driven orientation, a partnership orientation is needed to emphasize and value the interface between families and school personnel. Necessary for high-quality partnerships are attitudes conducive to collaboration that view families and educators as socialization agents. Defining features of families and schools working successfully as partners include a student-focused philosophy, belief in shared responsibility for education, and a preventive, solution-oriented focus. When schools collaborate to include families as coeducators, families respond by becoming more involved. Outcomes associated with a partnership orientation include improved learning opportunities, circumvention of blame for school difficulties, and pooled home-school resources.

Also important to strong SFPs are structural and psychological factors. Providing the structure to allow frequent family-school interactions and paying attention to macrosystemic pressures on schools and families are crucial. Psychological influences, such as parental attitudes, also influence SFPs. While frequency of school-family contact fosters relationships, the quality of contacts makes the largest difference. Educators must recognize that parents want contact that includes them as equal partners. Moreover, although a 2001 meta-analysis revealed that the strongest aspect of parental involvement concerned parents' attitudes towards their children's success,

educators seldom ask parents about this, indicating that parental beliefs remain an underutilized influence in strengthening SFPs. Engaging parents in strong partnerships requires schools to solicit and heed parents' suggestions and concerns. Schools must ask what they can do to make parents feel more confident and comfortable with involvement and to provide the activities and resources parents desire to feel empowered.

#### Conclusion

Without connection with families, schools will miss opportunities for enhancing learning environments. When families and schools are uncertain about how to maintain effective contact, misunderstandings hamper the development of strong relationships. Limits to school resources demand efficient, cost-effective strategies for welcoming families as coeducators. If schools consider broader contextual issues underlying SFPs, they can identify strengths and weaknesses in engaging families and develop research-based interventions. Consensus is emerging that a new partnership-oriented contract between families and schools is needed. To foster strong contracts, it is essential to synchronize home and school systems, heed macrosystemic influences, embrace diversity, and prioritize education.

Nurturing personal qualities and preferences through relationship building can significantly improve SFPs. Strengthening SFPs requires much time, leadership, and cooperation. Nevertheless, educators and policymakers should commit to this work. It can help students—especially those facing the greatest barriers—meet established educational standards and learn socially and emotionally. As different SFP practices are implemented, clearer understandings should emerge that can empower partnerships to help all students succeed. ☘

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# Parental Involvement and Children's School Success

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Parental involvement is widely regarded as a fundamental contributor to children's school success. Empirical validation of the impact of parental involvement on educational outcomes has emerged recently. In response, enhancement of parental involvement has become integral to many educational programs and policies. Parental involvement is important for several reasons. First is the great amount of time children spend with families during the first decade of life. Small changes in parental involvement can have cumulative benefits for many types of behavior. Second, parental involvement is open to influence by educators through many avenues for encouraging participation in education at home and school. Third, encouraging parental participation in education may provide parents with social support and personal empowerment.

This article focuses on the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS) of urban children. The article describes the CLS and examines key findings on short- and long-term effects of parental involvement from this and similar studies. The article discusses limits to this evidence and implications for strengthening parental involvement to improve achievement.

## **Chicago Longitudinal Study and Child–Parent Centers**

The CLS follows the progress of 1,539 low-income children (93% African American) who participated in the Chicago Child–Parent Center (CPC) program beginning in 1983–84 and a matched comparison group enrolled in alternative intervention. The CLS examines the effects of parental participation and other factors on children's academic progress and social adjustment. Over

the 17 years of the study, extensive information on involvement has been collected, providing a unique opportunity to investigate links between involvement and children's outcomes.

Guided by the idea that the school readiness of children can be enriched through systematic learning activities and parental involvement, the CPC program offers comprehensive educational and family-support services to economically disadvantaged parents and their children from preschool to early elementary school. The program operates in 23 centers affiliated with schools across the city. Each center is directed by a Head Teacher and an elementary school principal. Other primary staff include a parent-resource teacher and a school–community representative. Chief program features are early intervention, parent involvement, structured language learning, social services, and program continuity between preschool and school years.

Unlike many programs, the CPCs make substantial efforts to involve parents in education. At least a half a day of parent involvement weekly is required. A unique program feature is the parent-resource room organized to facilitate parents' education and interactions with children and other parents. Areas of training include consumer education and personal development. Parents may attend GED classes and serve on the School Advisory Council that assists in center planning. Parent activities emphasized in the program include classroom volunteering, participating in school activities, and engaging in training. Activities are designed to accommodate parents' diverse needs.

## **Children's Outcomes and Family Involvement**

The CLS has shown CPC participation beginning in preschool to be consistently associated with better educational performance and social adjustment. The program had the largest impact immediately. About half the program group scored at or above national norms on the ITBS composite at school entry, while only a quarter of the comparison group did. Substantial differences continued through the school years, including positive program effects on delinquency and high-school completion. Evidence shows that CPC intervention continuing into elementary grades contributes to children's later success. For example, children with 4 to 6 years of intervention had higher achievement than children participating for 1 to 4 years. Findings from other intervention research corroborate CPC results on parental involvement. Early-childhood programs with family-support components tend to provide more long-term benefits than programs without them, though not all programs enhance parental involvement. Many programs have shown enduring effects only when parents continued to be involved after the programs' official end.

## **Parental Involvement and Long-Term Effects**

Investigation of CPC participation indicates that parental involvement in education has a mediating influence on children's outcomes. In addition to involvement, intervention effects may be mediated by cognitive advantage, social adjustment, motivational advantage, and school support. To identify the contribution of involvement to the long-term effects of program participation,

involvement measures must be considered along with these alternative factors to yield the value added by involvement. In an analysis of the role of involvement measured through teacher and parent ratings of parents' school participation and through reports of child abuse and neglect, involvement accounted for 28% of the contribution to the effect of preschool on high-school completion and 21% of the contribution to lower juvenile arrest. After the other mediating factors were controlled for, CPC participation was associated with higher parental involvement, which was linked to long-term school completion and social adjustment.

### **Parental Involvement Predicts Children's Learning and Development**

Research shows that higher parental involvement is associated with higher academic performance for young children and adolescents. This predictive relation usually remains after controlling for background variables like socioeconomic status. Variables like maternal education and child motivation also work through parental involvement to influence academic performance. Involvement also predicts high-school dropout, child self-regulation, and child self-concept.

A cumulative measure of parental involvement in the CLS is the number of years between first and sixth grades that teachers rate parental participation in school as average or better. Findings show a functional relation between the positive ratings and high-school completion and juvenile arrest rates. Measures of parental expectations for educational attainment also correlate with higher completion levels.

In other studies of CPC families, parental involvement is a predictor of academic success in first grade, increased reading achievement,

and lower grade retention. Separate studies support the CPC findings of a predictive link between measures of involvement and children's success in school. One meta-analysis found that parental expectations for academic achievement had the largest effect size in relation to measures of academic achievement. Parental commitment and volunteer behavior had smaller effects.

### **Limitations**

Three limitations remain in the knowledge base on parent involvement in relation to student outcomes. First, the link of involvement to children's outcomes should not be regarded as causal. The quality and amount of parent involvement may be key ingredients rather than involvement per se. Moreover, involvement may be an effect of children's performance as much as a cause. Second, the definition and measurement of involvement varies greatly among studies. Findings vary with children's age and circumstances, with report sources, and with type of family support. These differences can lead to unreliable results and hinder integration of knowledge for policy decisions. Third, researchers and educators erroneously assume that parental involvement is necessarily positively associated with children's adjustment. Often, parental involvement that takes place in response to child problems is not associated with positive outcomes.

### **Implications**

The policy implications of these findings are important for early-childhood programs, schools, and families. Greater investments in programs that provide intensive resources for parental involvement are needed. Findings from the CPC program demonstrate long-term benefits of involvement, while some initiatives that receive more public

funds—like reduced class size, remedial education, and grade retention—demonstrate few benefits. To expand effective programs such as the CPCs, legislators should increase Title I program expenditures beyond the 5% currently dedicated to preschool programs.

Evidence reveals several elements critical to the success of early education programs. A coordinated system of early care and education should span the first 5 years of a child's life. Public schools should lead in developing community partnerships in such systems. Preschool teachers should be trained and compensated well. Educational content should be responsive to all of children's learning needs, with special emphasis on literacy skills. Finally, intensive and comprehensive parental-involvement services and activities should be available, especially for special-needs and low-income children.

To enhance parental involvement, school communities must provide a variety of ways for parents to get involved. Instead of reacting to children's difficulties, schools should implement proactive strategies like those used in the CPC program. Further, teachers need better training in working with families. Existing teacher training overlooks parent-teacher collaboration. Areas needing attention include overcoming barriers to involving parents, promoting effective communication with families, and resolving conflicts.

Finally, because evidence shows that parents' expectations for children's education are crucial to success in school, greater emphasis on promoting those expectations is needed. Schools and programs that provide ways for families to raise their expectations for their children's education are likely to improve parental involvement experiences and increase student success. ☘

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# School–Family Partnerships for Adolescents

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When schools and families cooperate, children benefit. Experimental and correlational studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between parent involvement and student academic, social, and emotional outcomes. School–family partnerships (SFPs) are especially important for adolescents, who are entering a developmental period filled with physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes. The challenges that they face require them to navigate social and emotional choices. Helping teenagers deal with these choices while trying to succeed academically requires a systematic collaboration between parents and schools.

However, as children move into adolescence, parent involvement and teacher outreach decline. In middle and high schools, structure and curriculum become more complicated and difficult, often discouraging participation. Additionally, as children enter adolescence there is a host of developmental challenges for families to face; these make parent involvement in schooling harder. Finally, parents and teachers may have perceptions about their abilities, each other's attitudes, and the adolescents' needs that limit parent–teacher interaction. Under these circumstances, understanding how to establish and maintain SFPs becomes even more imperative. This article discusses benefits of SFPs for adolescents, parent and teacher practices that influence SFPs, effective partnership strategies, and recommendations for future research and practice.

## Benefits of Partnerships in Middle and High School

In SFPs, families work *with* teachers and schools to build positive relationships through a wide variety of activities that benefit adolescents. Some activities like monitoring

homework completion involve parents in working directly for a child's benefit, while others like volunteering at school involve supporting the school as well. Benefits of parent involvement can be academic, social, and emotional. For example, home discussion and school participation are positively related to reading and math achievement, and parent–child discussion correlates with decreased truancy and dropout. Additionally, when parents convey high academic expectations to their adolescents, the children have high expectations for themselves. Positive attitudes about schooling and education in general can further help keep students engaged in school and away from problem behaviors.

## Parent and Teacher Practices

Unfortunately, SFP practices are significantly less frequent in secondary schools than in elementary schools. One analysis found that 70% of parents of adolescents were never asked to volunteer at school, and 80% never volunteered. Further, 56% rarely or never helped with homework, and 46% neither belonged to parent organizations nor attended school activities. These findings may reflect factors that render parent–teacher contact difficult in secondary schools. Each teacher has more students than an elementary teacher, and each student has more teachers. Parents may not know all their children's teachers and may be unsure to whom to turn if problems arise, and teachers, having many children to instruct, may feel unable to work effectively with families.

When parents perceive that teachers are not actively trying to involve them, they are less involved. Similarly, when teachers believe

that parents do not want to be involved, they may use fewer strategies. Parents perceiving this may become less involved. Teachers may then think parents do not *want* to be involved and make no changes in involvement. Interrupting this vicious cycle is an important step in developing partnerships for adolescents.

The decline in communication between parents and teachers coincides with increasing academic demand on students. Without support from teachers, parents may feel ineffective at influencing children's academic success. When feeling less effective, parents may become less involved. Like academics, the social issues that adolescents face get increasingly complex. Parents and teachers can promote healthy social development by acknowledging and fulfilling important needs. As they form their identities, teenagers need to know that they are appreciated and that they are part of an accepting group. They need to develop confidence in new social, emotional, and academic competencies and feel that they are making meaningful contributions to their world.

Sensing their declining influence and changing role, parents may limit involvement in school and personal life to intervening in serious problems. But involvement is necessary to guide adolescents toward healthy development. Although adolescents do not want parents to be visible or intrusive, they do want parents to remain involved in their lives. Schools need to assist parents' efforts by providing them with strategies to support teens' academic and nonacademic development.

## Partnership Strategies for Adolescents

It is possible to develop strong SFPs in middle and high schools.

Promising school-level partnership strategies develop communication and parent involvement at home and at school. Through positive communication between parents and teachers in the form of notes, phone calls, informal interactions, and formal conferences, parents and teachers can share comments about adolescents' accomplishments. When adolescents know about and can participate in these communications, they gain confidence. It is important to facilitate this communication as students enter middle school. One promising strategy in this area is the development of partnership committees comprised of educators, parents, and community members. Committees initiate activities like school visits, letter exchange between elementary- and middle-school students, and panel discussions for students. These activities can help ease parents and students into the new environment.

Parents can help in developing academic and social competencies at home by encouraging good study habits and having teens contribute to their community through volunteering. Homework assignments that prompt family participation can also increase parental involvement. Students who feel that parents are able to help with participatory homework assignments report enjoying the interaction. Recognizing that parents cannot always help with adolescents' homework, researchers developed Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), which asks students to share their work with a family member and allow families to comment and request further information from teachers.

Despite structural difficulties in involving adolescents' parents at school, some schools have succeeded in this area. In the action-team approach to middle- and high-school SFPs, a team comprised of families (including students), educators, and community members collaborates regularly to plan and implement strategies to increase parental involvement.

An evaluation of this approach found that teams help schools and families organize partnerships so that yearly progress can be made, and it also indicated that progress comes in incremental steps. It is important to note that including students in this process helps them develop their sense of belonging and increase their contribution to the school community.

### Recommendations

We can build on correlational research on SFPs for adolescents through more experimental, especially longitudinal, studies that consider academic and nonacademic SFP practices and outcomes. Evaluation of existing programs is important in this work. Research should also investigate students' perspectives. Few studies ask students how they feel about parental involvement and what ideal involvement would look like. By examining the student perspective, we can define roles that students can play in establishing and maintaining meaningful home-school relationships.

Although some federal and state initiatives target parent involvement generally, secondary-school SFP practices and policies have not been emphasized. The following recommendations create a practice-oriented framework for increasing parents' participation in schooling.

- *Coordinated efforts.* Since it is often difficult for teens' parents to communicate with all their child's teachers, schools need coordinated plans for teachers to communicate effectively with all parents, not just those whose children are having trouble. A partnership coordinator or action team can facilitate communication and coordinate schoolwide efforts.
- *Teacher training and support.* Teachers often do not receive sufficient preservice or inservice training or consistent administrative support in working with families. Periodic training on

concrete ways to involve parents in teenagers' education is important. Additionally, encouraging coordination and cooperation among teachers at each grade level can give teachers more support and provide collaborating educators with a fuller picture of student progress.

- *Focus on both academic and nonacademic involvement.* Schools can provide parents with strategies for helping children who are struggling academically by informing parents of resources for free homework help or tutoring. Schools' suggestions for encouraging effective study habits can also help parents support teens' achievement. Additionally, guidance on discussing peer pressure, drugs, and the importance of education can help parents support adolescents' success in school and in life. To accommodate the varying needs of parents, this information should come in various formats, including written information as well as workshops.
- *Involve adolescents in partnerships.* Adolescents have ideas about what amount and type of parental involvement would be most helpful. Their views taken together with those of parents and educators can lead to SFPs that are developmentally appropriate and helpful to all involved.

In their quest to become knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and productive members of society, adolescents need support from both parents and teachers. When founded on the developmental and relational realities of adolescents' lives, SFPs can provide a solid framework for parents and educators to support each other's efforts to promote adolescents' healthy development. ☞

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# Intercultural Transitions, Socioemotional Development, and Intersections Between Families and Schools

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The rapid demographic changes transforming the nation's population raise complex questions concerning the relationship between family and schooling. An increasing range of cultural and linguistic groups hold varied and sometimes conflicting beliefs about the proper roles of families and schools as agents of socialization and learning. Moreover, while the student population grows more diverse, the nation's teachers and education policymakers remain relatively homogeneous.

Current policy debates about cultural or linguistic diversity in education typically center on one question: How wide should be the scope of acceptance of cultural or linguistic differences? Typically, policy recommendations for addressing these issues focus on (a) the training of educators to recognize and respect differences and to use students' cultural or linguistic strengths to improve instruction, and (b) the inclusion of representatives from various cultural groups in educational planning and implementation. Such recommendations identify urgent needs and should be followed, but they are often put into practice without a sufficient understanding of the cognitive, social, and emotional issues that accompany contact, or encounters, between cultures. In formulating, analyzing, and evaluating educational policies, especially policies bearing on school-family relationships, attention should be paid to the processes and dynamics of intercultural contact. The rise in tension among this country's ethnic groups following the September 11 terrorist attacks is a reminder of the need for attention to these concerns.

This article focuses on the experiences that children and their families face in intercultural

encounters—such as those between families and schools—and on the changes that these interactions can bring about in individuals, families, and schools. The article examines social, psychological, and educational issues intricately connected to these themes. It aims to increase awareness of the processes and outcomes that occur in the context of cultural continuities and discontinuities between families and schools. Such knowledge and understanding can inform the development of effective partnerships among schools, families, and communities. It can also foster positive relations among the nation's diverse cultural groups.

## Life Changes and Transitions

In all societies, individuals are required or expected to undergo some major life changes—normative transitions—such as school entry, graduation, and marriage. In addition to these normative transitions, there exist other major life changes, which are less visible, less prevalent, and less predictable and usually lack prescribed guidelines and supports. These alterations include intercultural transitions, the subject of relatively little research.

An *intercultural transition*, or *intercultural change*, is a process through which an individual or social system bridges two different cultures. (The distinction between an intercultural *transition* and an intercultural *change* is a theoretical issue that awaits formulation; for present purposes, the two terms are used interchangeably.) An intercultural transition can be *subtractive* (an element of one's culture is lost when an element of the other culture is acquired), *additive* (no loss occurs), or *transcending* (the intercultural contact brings about the development of a characteristic typical of neither culture). A

transition can also be *unilateral* (a change occurs in only one of the parties in contact) or *bilateral* (both parties change). Finally, a transition can be *adjustive* or *maladjustive*; it is adjustive if it meets the individual's needs and expectations and most of the demands that the environment places on the individual.

## Intercultural Change as Individual Experience

A child (or adult) may suffer considerable stress when the demands or expectations for intercultural change lack sensitivity to such experiences. For example, there may arise issues of loyalty to the primary group, intergenerational conflict, threat to one's identity, the sheer difficulty of the task, fear of failure, fear of rejection, and ambivalence regarding the worth of change. Conflict between real or perceived pressure to acculturate (e.g., "Americanize") and the individual's need to preserve a primary cultural identity can threaten psychological integrity. If the person cannot solve this conflict, then the tension may find expression in maladjustive change (e.g., depression or misconduct). Educational research tends to focus on cognition rather than on such socioemotional issues as these that can accompany intercultural change. Further research is needed to illuminate the cognitive, social, emotional, and environmental processes and dynamics of intercultural contact and to guide the design of supportive and preventive practices to help individuals successfully meet the challenges of acquiring a new culture.

## Goals, Trajectories, and Options for Intercultural Transitions

In intercultural contact, individuals and groups develop stable patterns of relation that become

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difficult, but not impossible, to modify. The goals, motivations, trajectories, options, and opportunities for intercultural contact and change differ among cultural groups and among individuals within each group. For instance, two students from one group may differ concerning which outgroup characteristic they wish to emulate. In addition, an individual's goal for intercultural change may alter over time and differ across domains. For example, a student may seek linguistic integration through bilingualism and ingroup dating. Successful intercultural transitions depend, however, on a cultural group's willingness to accept members from another group. It is important that educators keep this variation and potentially conflicting goals in mind when supporting intercultural transitions in schools.

### Interpreting We–They Distinctions

Human arrangements are universally characterized by differentiation into ingroups and outgroups, we–they distinctions that define boundaries of group identification and loyalty. Individuals tend to view all others from the perspective of the ingroup, shaping attitudes and values, but this normal tendency can easily turn into harmful *ethnocentrism*, an individual's tendency to use his or her own group as the frame of reference against which all other groups are judged negatively. An expression of ethnocentrism with implications for school–family relations is the widespread tendency in the United States to view cultural or linguistic characteristics of “nonmainstream” groups as deficits or as pathological. This tendency dominates much education policy and practice. Such deficit/pathology thinking stigmatizes individuals who are different, ignores or denies their strengths, and adds to the psychological burden in intercultural contact.

As a point of view, *cultural relativism* opposes ethnocentrism.

Cultural relativism means *not* assuming that one's own culture is superior. It also means that one must expect persons from cultures different from one's own to show attitudes and behaviors that one may find surprising. In addition, it means that behaviors that members of one culture view positively, including skills they regard as social competencies, may be ineffectual, neutral, or even offensive in the context of a different culture. Misunderstandings between cultural groups can easily occur because many cultural characteristics are subtle and therefore difficult to identify or articulate, even by native members of the culture. Awareness of these differences and difficulties is a key to establishing constructive and harmonious school–family relations across cultures.

### Cultural Discontinuities and Continuities

Cultural discontinuities between the home and the school can affect a child's academic achievement. A *cultural discontinuity* between home and school is said to occur when some culturally determined discrepancy exists between the home and the school. How can children, families, and educators successfully navigate the largely uncharted gulf between the culture of the home and that of the school? The research literature offers several conceptual approaches to issues of cultural discontinuity. From the stance of approaches that consider cultural discontinuities as *deficiencies* in the child or home, the solution is to modify, suppress, or eradicate those cultural practices (for example, culturally determined parental teaching strategies). From perspectives that see cultural discontinuities as *differences* between the culture of the home and that of the school, the solution is to modify school practices to make them compatible with home practices. A variation on these approaches recognizes that

home–school discontinuities may be accompanied by continuities. In this view, a search for both discontinuities and commonalities may produce more possibilities for enhancing achievement than a focus on only one.

Discontinuities between generations within a family can affect a child's likelihood of scholastic success. During intercultural contact, conflicts often arise between parents and children over the adoption of a cultural outgroup's values and behaviors that are inconsistent with the family's ancestral culture. Such conflict can trigger processes that seriously affect the student's academic learning and socioemotional development. The complexity of discontinuities and continuities among families, schools, and generations presents challenges to researchers and educators. Research is needed to shed additional light on this complexity and its linkages to scholastic success. A challenge to educators is to use the research findings to create or adapt educational approaches so that successful learning and development can occur equitably and effectively for students from all cultures.

### Conclusion

To prepare every child to function as a competent, productive, responsible, and caring adult in this nation's increasingly complex, diverse, and changing society, formal education must encompass not only the cognitive but also the social and emotional domains. Efforts and resources at the same level as those dedicated to learning an academic subject should be dedicated to developing students' intercultural competencies. Success in this endeavor for students from all cultural and economic backgrounds will require coordinated and comprehensive approaches that involve schools, families, and communities in long-term, collaborative efforts. ☘

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# Economic and Social Correlates of the Socioemotional Adjustment of African American Adolescents

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Renewed attention has recently been devoted to the school achievement of African American adolescents, who fare poorly in comparison with White adolescents on a variety of indicators. Although African American and White students complete high school at similar rates, African Americans have significantly lower grades and SAT scores. African American students also take longer to graduate and leave college without completing degrees more often than White students. The underachievement of African American students poses a serious problem, since these students represent an increasing part of the school-age population and thus of the nation's future workforce.

This article examines correlates of achievement in African American adolescents' family relations and processes. Findings suggest that changes in parent practices may help reduce the achievement gap, since links exist between these practices and students' school performance. Examined are factors affecting family functioning, including economic resources, neighborhoods, social networks, and the relations of these factors to parents' child-rearing practices. Also explored are links between parenting and racial socialization practices and adolescents' behavior and school achievements as well as implications of the correlations examined for school policy and practice.

## Economic Resources

A substantial portion of African Americans (33%) are poor, particularly families with children under 18 (46%). The absence of a parent significantly influences African American children's exposure to poverty. Of African American

families maintained by a woman with children, 60% are poor. Moreover, research shows clear links between families' economic resources and adolescents' behavior and well-being. Low income and economic hardship have been linked to adolescent depression, school problems, low self-esteem, and delinquency. Recent work shows a link between African American mothers' reports of inadequate family resources and adolescents' reports of depression. Research also shows that children's problems tend to grow the longer they are poor, and that for African American children, poverty tends to be of long duration.

## Neighborhoods

African American families, particularly those with fewer resources, have limited residence options and typically reside in the most impoverished neighborhoods in cities. The effects of neighborhoods on children tend to increase as children grow older and move beyond the home. Numerous neighborhood factors, including the proportion of high-status workers, male joblessness, and neighborhood impoverishment, correlate with rates of adolescent pregnancy, school dropout, delinquency, and depression. Further, African American mothers' reports of neighborhood social resources are associated with higher self-esteem and lower problem behavior in adolescents.

## Social Support

For African American adults, lack of economic resources is associated with interactions with individuals' social networks. In particular, economic strain is associated with economic support from

kin. The more that African American mothers report insufficient family resources, the more financial and emotional support they report receiving from extended family. Kin support is positively related to indicators of African American adolescents' well-being, including school engagement, grades, self-reliance, and independence. Kin support is negatively related to problem behavior.

## Mediation of Parents' Functioning and Parenting

Economic resources, neighborhood factors, and social support affect adolescents' adjustment through association with parents' psychological functioning and child-rearing practices. Economic distress, including insufficient resources to meet family needs and unemployment, is related to parental depression, pessimism about the future, and marital problems. Such parental distress seems likely to affect child-rearing practices negatively. Research indicates that parents experiencing economic hardship offer their children less emotional support, more punitive discipline, and less family routine. For African American parents, such child-rearing problems are mediated by parental depression and pessimism linked to economic hardship.

Neighborhood conditions also affect parents' functioning and parenting practices, since parents adopt practices to insure their children are safe and can use neighborhood resources. Researchers have argued that African American parents may adopt a harsh, restrictive parenting style in order to encourage behaviors and attitudes valuable for growing up in unsafe, exploitative urban neighborhoods. Evidence shows that while parents



report high levels of control of youngsters' behavior when their neighborhoods are deteriorated, they report offering more emotional support when their neighborhoods are safe and have accessible resources.

Social support also correlates with parents' functioning and child-rearing practices. Support from kin is associated with mothers' emotional well-being, and mothers' functioning is in turn associated with emotional support and acceptance of adolescent children. Kinship support is also associated with positive practices like maintenance of structure in the home. Moreover, social support may suppress negative parenting practices, since support is negatively associated with severe maternal punishment and negative perceptions of the maternal role.

### **Links of Parents' Behavior With Adolescent Adjustment and Achievement**

Research indicates that African American parents' functioning and child-rearing practices are linked to adolescents' adjustment and to school achievement and engagement. When their mothers report optimism about the future, African American adolescents in working-class families report fewer symptoms of depression. On the other hand, mothers' reports of psychological distress link positively with adolescents' problem behaviors and negatively with self-reliance. Connections between parental and adolescent socioemotional adjustment tend to be mediated by child-rearing practices. For example, maternal depression correlates with harsher punishment, which in turn correlates with adolescents' cognitive distress (e.g., difficulty with decisions and memory).

Acceptance and support from kin are associated with higher grades and achievement-test scores,

and maternal monitoring of adolescents is associated with lower delinquent behavior. For low-income African American adolescents, positive family management practices (regular family routines and schedules) correlate with high academic engagement and achievement. Parent involvement in homework and school functions also correlates with high achievement.

Considerable evidence links authoritative parenting with social competence, psychological well-being, reduced risk for problem behaviors, and school achievement. However, the impact of authoritative parenting on the academic achievement of African American adolescents is unclear. Although strict parenting may have socioemotional benefits for these youngsters, research has found no significant connection between such parenting and achievement for African American teens. The lack of correlation between parenting style and achievement in African American youth may indicate that peers have greater influence than parents on their school performance. However, peers themselves can influence parenting style. Evidence indicates that African American parents alter their practices in response to perceived peer influence, exerting more control when they feel peers are negative and more freedom when peers are positive. Peers thus complicate the relationship between authoritative parenting and school achievement in ways that are difficult to determine.

### **Racial Socialization**

Another aspect of parenting associated with the adjustment of African American adolescents is parents' racial socialization: the degree to which parents teach and discuss matters of race (e.g., culture, history, heritage) with their youngsters. It has been argued that

parents who engage in racial socialization prepare children for the experience of racial discrimination. By bolstering children's racial self-regard, parents buffer them from hostility and negativity about their race that they will encounter in schools, the community, or the media. Evidence shows that African American parents' emphasis on racial matters is indeed associated with children's self-esteem and that parental discussion of racial barriers to success and the need to overcome them is associated with adolescents' grades and feelings of efficacy.

### **Implications**

The correlations examined here indicate that for future policy and practice, improving the economic well-being of African American families is important to increasing the chances for success of African American adolescents. Important steps include augmenting employment opportunities and improving the skills of parents to match the increasingly advanced skills needed for higher paying jobs. It is also important to improve neighborhoods through changing policing practices and fostering business incentives in the poor and working-class communities in which many African Americans reside. Further, it is crucial to build the social networks of African American families to help buffer adolescents from environmental stressors. Schools can help in this effort by locating important social services like child and health care on school grounds and by using school practices to reinforce the emotionally supportive and structured parenting practices that teens need. When policymakers and schools support parental efforts to counter negative socioeconomic circumstances, the achievement gap has a better chance of narrowing for African American adolescents. ❀

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# Preparing Educators for School–Family Partnerships

## Challenges and Opportunities

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School–family partnerships (SFPs) are popular with the public, and family involvement is an integral part of education today. Most schools expect family collaboration in support of programs, and most families expect involvement in their children’s schooling. Furthermore, research has repeatedly demonstrated the academic and social-emotional learning benefits of partnerships between schools and families. Yet few universities prepare educators to work with SFPs. To understand more about this lack of preparation, this article examines the background of SFPs, surveys of higher education institutions, state certification policies and national standards, curriculum models, promising programs that train educators for SFPs, and the challenges and opportunities arising from this problem.

### Background

Families and schools have collaborated from the beginning of public education in America, when parents were children’s primary educators, to today, when parents and schools join to face issues like drug abuse and school violence. A 1995 review of studies of families and education concluded that the most accurate predictors of student achievement are family involvement, a home environment that supports learning, and high family expectations for students. Other research showed that family participation in education is twice as predictive of academic learning as is socioeconomic status. Family involvement also helps produce increased school attendance, decreased dropout, and improved behavior. In a 2001 survey, American teachers reported that strengthening parents’ roles in education

should have the highest priority in education policy.

In support of these findings, the U.S. Department of Education has established a Partnership for Family Involvement in Education program and website. The department has also supported initiatives for promoting partnerships like the National Center for Family and Community Connections at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL).

### Higher Education Surveys

Despite a strong research base and government support, few educators receive formal training in working with families, according to higher education surveys. A 1988 SEDL survey of teacher educators revealed that only 4% of institutions surveyed had a course on preparing teachers for parent involvement, only 15% had part of a course, and only 37% had a class period. A 1997 survey of teacher education programs in the 22 states that mentioned family involvement in certification requirements indicated that only 37% of respondents offered a course on family involvement. A national survey of public and private colleges and universities showed that while family involvement was discussed in at least one course, only 8.7% offered more than two courses on working with families. In a 2001 survey of department chairs and deans nationwide, 23% replied that their institutions offered a course in family involvement but that it was not required. An earlier SEDL survey showed that most principals expected teachers to have more experience working with parents than teachers reported having.

As to content, surveys indicate that the most frequently addressed

topics include theories of partnership, parent–teacher conferences, parent teaching at home, and parents as volunteers. The definition of involvement, teaching methods, and mode of delivery are traditional. Little attention seems devoted to developing innovative definitions and practices or to examining complex integrations like interactive homework assignments or school-linked social-service programs. Early-childhood programs cover family involvement most often; the topic has only recently been added to curriculum at higher levels.

### Certification and Standards

Research examining teacher education requirements nationwide demonstrates that very few states require courses or skills related to parent involvement. In a 1994 study, only 15 states required most teachers to study or develop abilities in this area, mostly for early-childhood and special-education certification. The 1997 survey mentioned earlier showed only 22 states with specific standards related to work with families. Many states did not mention the topic or define it precisely. Exceptions to this dismal picture are requirements in California, which mandates teacher–parent partnership, and New York, which will require training in collaborative partnerships for all certified teachers by 2003. Because the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education has included partnerships in its standards, more states will likely add such requirements in coming years.

### Curriculum Models

Using comprehensive input from parents, practitioners, administrators, and teacher educators as well as research findings, SEDL

created a model for preparing educators to involve parents. The plan consists of four interrelated frameworks: personal, practical, conceptual, and contextual. The personal framework focuses on teachers' knowledge and beliefs about the school and community. The practical framework contains information about models of parent involvement, effective methods, and potential problems. The conceptual framework highlights theories and research on parent involvement. The contextual framework, including both physical and attitudinal environments, is developed after guidelines and strategies have been field-tested to show specific circumstances where family involvement should occur.

Other models include The Harvard Family Research Project, which features curriculum recommendations in key knowledge areas, including home-school communication, family involvement, and families as school change agents. The project presents four approaches to teaching these areas: a functional approach describing school and parent roles, a parent empowerment approach, a cultural approach, and a social capital approach building on community and parent investment in education. Another model, Lueder's Self-Renewing Partnership Model, emphasizes changing educator training from the traditional single-dimensional model, in which parent involvement simply means parental support of the school, to a multidimensional model for reaching out to families to create learning communities. Finally, Joyce Epstein has developed a model for SFPs whose major focus is good practice. Training follows a framework of six types of involvement.

### **Promising Current Initiatives**

To support preservice preparation in working with families, The

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the MetLife Foundation have established competitive grants for teacher education programs to develop and evaluate new approaches to such preparation. Five national sites have become partners in this initiative. First, Parents Only Deepen Education, Making Our Students Succeed (PODEMOS) uses activities like parent retreats and research projects to prepare preservice teachers to work with parents. Second, The Texas Partnership for Parent Engagement is developing online problem-based learning experiences that reflect curricular goals in parent engagement for teacher candidates. Third, Northern Illinois University has partnered with four school districts to help teachers construct a home-school communication system, and it has infused parental engagement practices into curriculum. Fourth, the University of North Florida has developed a Family as Faculty program in which parents collaborate with teachers to design teaching modules and promote parent involvement. Fifth, the University of South Florida fosters parent involvement through courses, a web-based resource center, and guest lectures by accomplished teachers.

Also promising are the Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) and the Peabody Family Involvement Initiative (PFII) programs. The FINE project strengthens the visibility of promising family involvement programs and training models by producing a monthly electronic newsletter and website devoted to increasing teacher and school administrator preparation in family involvement and community partnership. The PFII emphasizes key themes about building on family strengths and shows preservice teachers that the family is the child's most important teacher. This program features a required course on

parents and developing children, and students implement innovative strategies such as interviewing parents at home.

Some universities infuse preparation for family collaboration into many courses, where it seems likely to work faster, since mandating a course takes time and tends to isolate content. Whether isolated or infused, various family-involvement training methods have proven successful. Effective have been classroom-based methods such as case studies and role-playing, home-based methods such as autobiographical work and class webpages, and field experiences such as parent interviews and observing parent-teacher conferences.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Several comprehensive models and promising practices present new opportunities to prepare educators for SFPs. Current educators may be reluctant to gain additional preparation because they feel overburdened by responsibilities. Yet educators must be informed about SFPs and provided with materials to enable them to work successfully with families. It is unfair to make teachers responsible for family involvement without offering them assistance. Inservice education can help the large cadre of practitioners who have not taken a course on developing SFPs.

The evidence for increasing educator preparation for SFPs is clear. When will we accept the challenge to unite families and schools to improve the education of America's children? A multilevel approach that includes preservice and inservice training gives our teachers a chance to learn to make SFPs happen and to affect the education of all students, especially those poor and minority students whose families have often felt unimportant and powerless in the educational process. ☞

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# School–Family Relations and Learning

## Federal Education Initiatives

*Oliver Moles, Jr., U.S. Department of Education*

School–family partnerships create information exchange and shared responsibility for children’s education. Such partnerships can contribute to children’s social and emotional competencies, including relationship skills and responsible decision making. While most federal education programs focus on academic achievement, some encourage school–family relationships. This article analyzes major programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that include provisions for parent involvement and children’s academic, social, and emotional growth. Discussed are the nature of the legislation, the scope of required activities, recent evaluations, and how the activities may affect learning.

### **NCLB and Title I**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) amends the long-standing Title I program and aims to improve the education of children in high-poverty schools so they can meet challenging academic standards. In 2002, over 10 billion dollars were spent for this program. Unlike the original 1965 version of Title I, later amendments required parent involvement. The 1994 Improving America’s Schools Act stipulated that school districts receiving over \$500,000 annually in Title I funds had to reserve at least 1% for parent involvement activities and to develop with parents a compact describing responsibilities for supporting learning. NCLB strengthens these requirements and defines parent involvement for the first time: “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication” on education that ensures that parents play an “integral role.” NCLB also requires training for parents on teaching their children and for educators on working with parents.

### **Research on Title I**

Research exists on some parent involvement provisions of earlier Title I programs. School–parent compacts, used in 75% of Title I schools by 1998, showed only initial enhancement of parent involvement in one study, but a national longitudinal study of 300 schools showed that compact schools produced higher student achievement. Another study found no connection between student achievement and school-based parent involvement. But parents reported more home-based involvement when schools offered comprehensive program components like home learning materials and learning compacts. Since stronger home-based learning is linked to Title I student reading achievement, the study concluded that Title I may influence achievement indirectly. However, research shows that building comprehensive programs is difficult. Barriers to greater parent and educator participation, such as lack of time and training, have been widely reported.

### **Safe and Drug-Free Schools**

In response to increasing awareness of youth drug abuse, in 1987 Congress enacted the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act to strengthen drug education programs and safety provisions were added in 1994. The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act was reauthorized in Title IV of NCLB, with 746 million dollars appropriated for 2002. School districts must consult with parents in implementing these programs. National programs include innovative prevention activities, training, and widely disseminated guides to creating safe and drug-free schools. Evidence for program effectiveness has not been encouraging. School-based drug

prevention programs were shown in 1997 to suffer from inconsistent delivery, weak effects, and disregard for the research base. This led ED in 1998 to establish program effectiveness principles like setting measurable objectives and basing programs on research. Whether these principles, now incorporated into NCLB, will improve programs remains to be seen.

### **Character Education**

Character education grants to local education agencies and collaborators were initiated in 1994 and continued in NCLB. The grants aim to promote elements of character like caring, citizenship, and responsibility. Under NCLB, current annual funding is about 16 million dollars. This program requires student, parent, and community involvement in design, implementation, and evaluation of local projects. Some initiatives show evidence of effectiveness, for example the Child Development Project. To foster social relationships and commitment to prosocial values, this project includes cooperative learning, literature with ethical implications, and parent involvement in home activities linked to schoolwork. The project has shown positive effects on student social skills and problem behaviors.

### **After-School Programs**

A federally funded after-school program, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, began in 1997 and has grown to be funded at one billion dollars in 2002. Under NCLB, both community organizations and schools can run centers. About 6,800 schools participate. Centers provide academic tutoring for students in schools with low-income families, drug and violence prevention programs, and counseling.

Students' families must be offered family literacy and parent involvement opportunities. Principles of effectiveness similar to those for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools program are enunciated in the NCLB legislation.

### **The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education**

In the 1990s, ED developed a Partnership for Family Involvement in Education with over 7,000 family, education, and community organizations. Aiming to increase family involvement in education at home and school, the partnership held conferences, provided partnership-building tools, and used research findings to mobilize partners. It developed activities like back-to-school kits, materials to train teachers to work with families, and a report on improving fathers' participation in children's learning. With the advent of NCLB, the partnership has receded, but its ED parent agency still disseminates research-based materials for parents on early learning and on ways to help children academically.

### **Parent Information and Resource Centers**

In 1994, the Goals 2000 Act established state-based Parent Information and Resource Centers that NCLB reauthorized. These centers aim to strengthen school-family partnerships and to promote children's academic and personal development. At least half of each project's funds must serve areas with many low-income families, and 30% or more must be used in the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), which helps parents of 4- to 5-year-olds foster home learning, or the Parents as Teachers program, which features home visits by parent educators for parents of 0- to 3-year-olds. Both programs have positively affected parent and child

behaviors. Services frequently offered by the programs include parent and school personnel workshops and parent support groups.

### **English Language Acquisition**

Title III of NCLB authorizes local programs serving children with limited English proficiency (LEP). These programs, now numbering about 700, aim to develop the English language skills and academic achievement of LEP children. Programs are required to offer family education that is culturally appropriate. School districts must inform parents about programs, explain why their children were selected, and obtain their consent for participation.

### **Even Start**

In 1,400 local projects, the Even Start Family Literacy Program of NCLB serves low-income families with children from 0 to 7 years and parents eligible for adult education activities. The program integrates early childhood education, adult education, and parenting education. Programs must include screening procedures, flexible service delivery, supports like child care, and research-based instruction. Required local evaluations have shown consistent gains in child and adult development. A review of better designed national evaluations showed that Even Start students and families gained in academic and support measures, but control groups gained comparably. Only for kinds of home reading material did Even Start families gain more than controls.

### **Special Education**

Special education is designed to meet the needs of children with disabilities that affect educational performance. Special education usually takes place in regular classroom settings. In 2002, this program received 8.6 billion federal dollars. An

Individualized Education Program (IEP) for eligible children sets learning goals and identifies the services to be provided. Parents have the right to be involved in developing and approving the IEP. In a national survey of parents, about a third, who tended to be minority and low-income parents, said they would like to be more involved in the IEP process. Some states provide joint training of parents and educators, and states must now offer a mediation system to resolve conflicts with parents.

### **Conclusion**

Some ED programs offer parents involvement through planning, implementation, and review. Family involvement also appears in program provisions for outreach to strengthen home learning and to coordinate parents' efforts with schools'. Such partnership activities should occur in all ED programs in order to fully respect and utilize parent resources. School-family partnerships are most fully developed in Title I provisions for training. Not all NCLB programs convey partnership ideals of shared power and responsibility. Fortunately, whenever parental involvement is even mentioned, the partnership-oriented definition in NCLB can be invoked.

Local projects are often required to evaluate their activities regularly, and most national programs have overall statistics. Yet most current initiatives for parent involvement do not provide strong evaluations of benefits. Rigorous evaluations are essential in order to provide convincing evidence on which to base program improvements. Moreover, barriers to parent and family participation need to be addressed more widely. Full parent involvement in federally funded programs is necessary if the nation is to see that all its children achieve to high standards. ☘

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# Grassroots From the Top Down

## The Role of States and Large Districts in Family–School Relationships

*Sam Redding and Pam Sheley, Academic Development Institute*

State and district policies to improve parental involvement in schooling must consider numerous concerns, including the place of parents in school governance, the equitable distribution of educational resources, and parents' role in education within the context of accountability-based reform. States and districts must ask how schools can take full advantage of the different levels of economic, human, social, and emotional capital of the families and communities they serve; how schools can compensate for inadequate capital; and how school communities can be constructed to use the capital optimally. To explore the role of states and large districts in family–school relationships, this article reviews the background of that role, relevant state legislation, and representative parental-involvement programs in three states.

### Background

#### GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL CONTROL

As school districts have grown, so has the distance between parents and school boards. Consequently, some states and districts have established school-based councils to give parents a greater role in school decision-making. Chicago was an early leader in transferring urban school control to school sites. The city's 1988 school reform law required every public school to elect a local school council that would consist mostly of parents. A 1998 study of the Chicago councils found that schools making progress on reading assessments tended to have strong councils. Charter schools, which have been another popular vehicle for reengaging parents in school governance, typically operate with school-based governance. Local

control is also enhanced through school choice initiatives.

#### SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Parental participation in schooling has long been an unrealized goal of community builders. Schools, stubbornly bureaucratic, are not easily transformed into communities, which thrive on personal relationships and collaboration. Sometimes it takes considerable rain from above, in the form of state and district resources, to make the grassroots of school community grow. In distressed communities, families require much support in educating their children, and the demands on schools are as high as in positive communities, where parents expect excellent schools. Yet schools in distressed areas do not enjoy high levels of community and parental contributions to education. The ideal is that the school itself can create a community of its constituents that encourages parental involvement and improves learning.

#### PREPARING CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

Evidence shows that a child's capacity to learn is strongly influenced by life conditions during the critical years until schooling begins. Responses to this evidence have been to extend schooling to reach younger children and to provide programs to improve home environments in the preschool years. Research shows that home support of schooling correlates with student success. States and school districts have begun to heed this finding by including provisions for family learning in school reforms. However, with so much national attention on student learning, one might expect more interest in family influences on learning. One obstacle is lack

of evidence that school intervention alters family behaviors constructively. Thirty years' evidence suggests that parental involvement at home and school is strongly associated with school learning, but increasing parental involvement through top-down policies that mandate school interventions is challenging. Research offers guidance. Early-childhood programs that train parents to teach children at home have proven effective in preparing children for school. For school-age children, comprehensive efforts to engage parents seem most productive. A 2002 federal study showed that broad-based school outreach to parents was strongly related to gains in reading and math achievement of low-performing students. Such outreach can be implemented systemically only when parental involvement receives significant state and district support.

### State Legislation Relevant to Families and Schools

A policy search showed that from 1996 to 2002, of 85 pieces of proposed state legislation relevant to school–family relations, 53 became law. New legislation for parents of special education students included incorporation of parents into advisory councils. Some bills promoted family literacy; for example, Virginia included literacy activities among parental-involvement components of programs for at-risk 4-year-olds. Two states passed bills encouraging employers to provide time off for parents to participate in school programs. Several states enacted legislation concerning parental rights, including the right to review curricular material. States also moved to increase schools' legal responsibilities. For instance, Arkansas mandated parental notification

of student involvement in criminal conduct.

Parental-involvement legislation also included a South Carolina act establishing a framework for enhanced parental involvement in education through training and increased parent-teacher contacts. Indiana passed a bill encouraging school improvement plans to involve parents. Some legislation involved family resource centers, with Connecticut mandating cost-effective and accessible facilities. Other legislation promoted parents as the child's first teacher.

### Programs in Three States

#### MISSOURI

In 1984, Missouri became the first state to mandate parent education and support in school districts. The state developed the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program to address the mandate. The program aimed to increase parents' knowledge of child development and to improve children's cognitive and social development. PAT children have scored higher than others on kindergarten readiness tests and on standardized tests of reading and math through third grade. Their parents have demonstrated high levels of school and home involvement. The success of PAT can also be measured in its spread to school districts statewide and to over 2,000 other sites worldwide. The PAT program works largely through parent educators who model interactions with children that promote learning. The relationship between parent and parent educator is the strongest indicator of success for a child in PAT.

#### KENTUCKY

In 1990, Kentucky established both family resource and youth service centers. Funded by state education dollars, centers are based in schools that have 20% of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. Currently, 83% of state public schools have a center. Family resource centers

serve primary schools with age-appropriate services like childcare and parent training, while youth centers serve secondary schools with services like drug and employment counseling. Advisory councils provide local governance; one third of council members must be parents. The centers reflect the state's realization that school success depends on younger children coming to school with social and emotional skills that families teach and on older children having school resources to cope with problems like violence and stress management. A 1999 study of centers found them effective in helping students and families address nonacademic problems related to negative academic outcomes.

#### ILLINOIS

In 2000, Illinois dedicated funds to establish a parental-involvement program administered by the state department of education and the Illinois Family Education Center (IFEC). The program focused on schools with low test scores, largely in high-poverty areas. IFEC established regional centers statewide to provide training, materials, and technical assistance for parental involvement. The heart of this initiative, Solid Foundation, strives to build school capacity for engaging parents in ways that enhance children's reading habits, study habits, and responsible behavior. Chief aims are to build school structures able to sustain initiatives established during the 2-year period of close IFEC support and to forge a network of participating schools. Solid Foundation includes school support teams, home visits, parent training, and interactive reading activities. In the 167 schools that began implementation in 2001, results were broad and successful. Over 1,000 parents completed a course on reading at home, and 164 schools improved parent-teacher conference procedures. The first year of Solid Foundation imple-

mentation demonstrated that a critical mass of constructive school-home activity can be generated quickly in schools that most need to engage parents in schooling.

### Discussion and Recommendations

States and school districts have addressed parent-school relationships in various ways. Some states have established systems to help parents enhance children's academic success. As states experiment with such systems, the right blend of approaches will emerge. Large-scale programs with adequate supports for implementation, evaluation, and correction in course will provide the best evidence to guide further program development; such programs should be strongly supported. In the national effort to boost children's learning, parents are often blamed for disappointing results. It seems fair, then, that states and districts channel reasonable resources to help parents guide children toward academic success. ☘

### *The LSS REVIEW*

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*Editor*

This publication is supported in part by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory, the Laboratory for Student Success. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the supporting agencies, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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