Improving Schools' Partnership Programs in the National Network of Partnership Schools

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Abstract
The current wave of educational reform includes an emphasis on family and community involvement as a strategy for school improvement. Yet, to effectively engage families and communities in the educational process, educators need assistance and support. In 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) was established to build the capacity of educators to work collaboratively with families and community members to develop comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships that focus on students' success. Using survey data collected from 603 schools that are members of NNPS, this paper examines whether particular structures, processes, and services positively influence schools' capacity to implement and maintain high quality partnership programs over time.

Introduction

Programs of school, family, and community partnerships are increasingly seen as critical elements of educational reform. Many popular whole school reform strategies include a focus on parent and community support and involvement (Desimone, 2002; Legters, 2000; MacIver, MacIver, Balfanz, Plank, & Ruby, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). National, state, and local educational reform policies also are directing schools to actively engage parents and communities in students' learning (Mitchell, 2000; Mitchell & Raphael, 1999; Public Law 107-110, 2002). This emphasis reflects extensive research that shows the importance of parent involvement for students' achievement and other indicators of school success (Christenson, 2004; Edwards, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Epstein &

Sheldon, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Sheldon, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; 2005a, 2005b; Simon, 2004; Van Voorhis, 2003). Furthermore, families and communities are viewed as resources on which "resource-poor" schools can draw to provide students with the socio-emotional and academic supports that positively influence school outcomes (Boyd & Crowson, 1993; Heath & McLaughlin, 1987).

Whether schools can develop effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships rests largely on teachers' and administrators' knowledge about partnerships, and their capacity to work collaboratively with adults in students' families and communities (Floden, Goertz, & O'Day, 1995; Johnson, Jr. & Ginsberg, 1996). Successful partnership programs also depend on the capacity of district and state educational leaders to support the efforts of school faculty and staff (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). According to McLaughlin (1992), districts have a facilitative role to play in building schools' individual and organizational capacity for reform. She argues that through the provision of direct support, the facilitation of on-going dialogue and feedback about educational practice, and the celebration of professional commitment, engagement, and progress, district leaders can significantly influence the quality with which school reforms are implemented. Similarly, Mitchell and Raphael (1999) found that state departments of education, through policy creation, direction, and guidance can impact school and district implementation of reform strategies.

These and other authors suggest that building the capacity of school leaders requires more than the occasional workshop or other conventional staff development activities (Floden et al., 1995). One alternative to such activities is professional networks (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992), or extended groups of individuals with similar professional interests or concerns who interact for mutual assistance or support. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) state, "In this period of intensive school reform, when traditional inservice training and staff development have been shown to be inadequate, networks can provide fresh ways of thinking about teacher learning" (p. 677). Effective networks can broaden educators' views on practice and leadership, expand their professional communities, and engage them in the construction and dissemination of field-based knowledge.

This paper examines whether and how membership over time in one

such network, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University, increased schools' capacity to develop high-quality partnership programs. [1] To answer this question, survey data were collected from 603 schools that were members of NNPS. Data analyses compared partnership program implementation and quality for two cohorts of NNPS school members: those that had been in NNPS for up to one year, and those that had been in NNPS for two years or longer. These cohorts were compared to determine which structures, tools, and guidelines influenced schools' capacity to develop and maintain partnership programs that included activities for multiple types of involvement, focused on school goals for students' learning, and were accessible to the families and communities of all students.

National Network of Partnership Schools

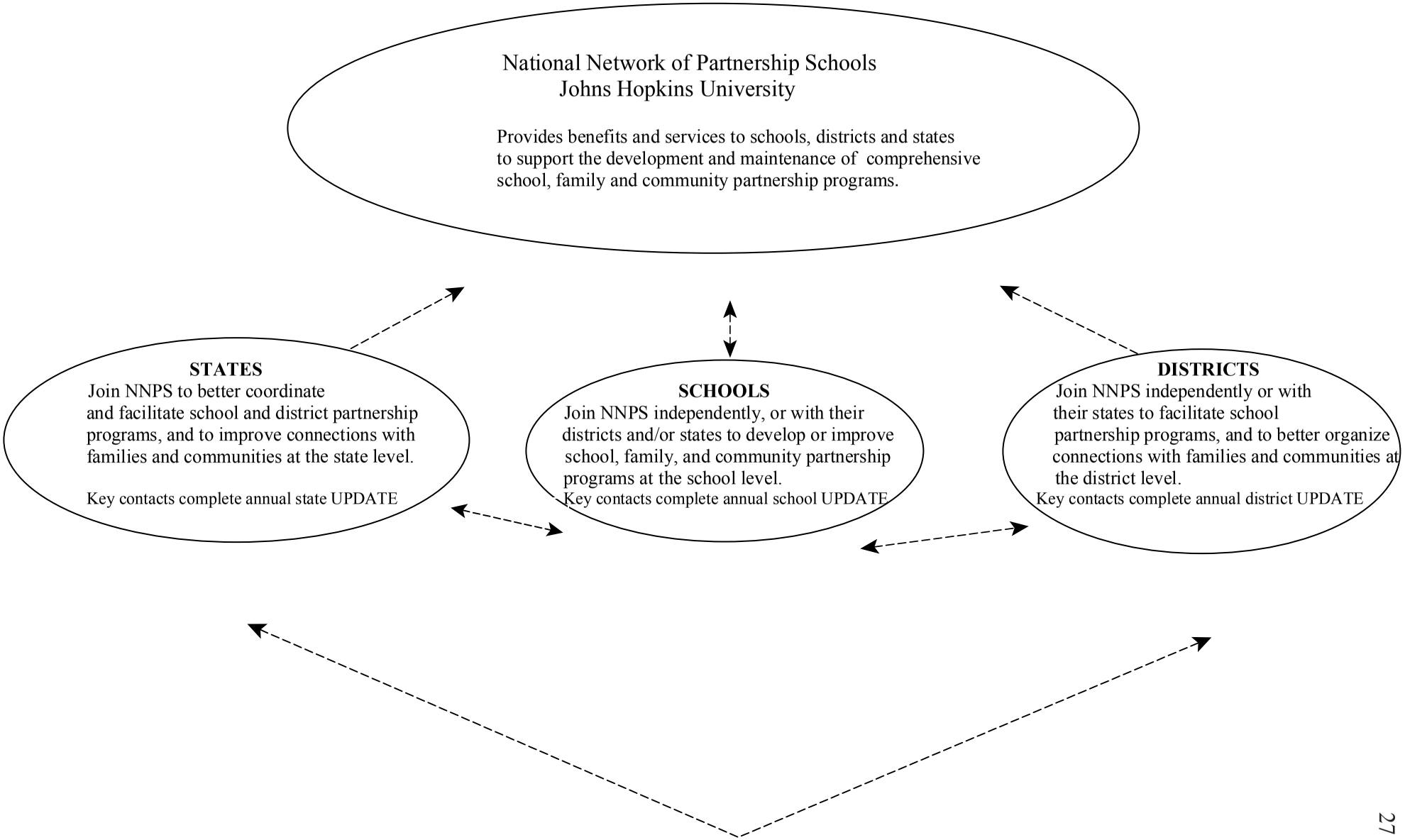
NNPS Structure

NNPS was established in 1996 to build the capacity of school, district, and state educational leaders to develop comprehensive and permanent school, family, and community partnership programs at their respective levels (Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Although NNPS guides and supports district- and state-level partnership program development, its primary goal is to help develop partnership programs at the school level. This focus is reflected in the NNPS organizational structure shown in Figure 1 (see following page).

As stated, schools can join NNPS independently, or with their districts and/or states. When districts and states join NNPS, in addition to coordinating partnership programs at their respective levels, they are required to facilitate and support the development of school-level partnership programs. This may include activities such as leadership training workshops, small incentive grants, and end-of-year partnership celebrations. District facilitators also conduct regular meetings with school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs), which are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating school-level partnership programs (Epstein et al., 2002; Sanders, 1996). The NNPS structure increases the likelihood that schools are provided with the

1 This research was supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. The opinions expressed are the authors' and do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the funding agency. The authors gratefully acknowledge Kenyatta Williams and Laurel Clark for their assistance with data analyses.

FIGURE 1: *How states, districts, and schools link to the National Network of Partnership Schools*



multiple layers of support necessary to prioritize family and community involvement in their school improvement efforts.

Requirements for School Membership

When schools, districts, and states join NNPS, they agree to meet basic membership requirements. Since the focus of this paper is on school-level partnership program development, only school membership requirements are discussed.[2] There are four requirements for school membership in NNPS. First, each school agrees to create an ATP to coordinate its partnership program (Epstein et al., 2002). ATPs consist of six to twelve members, including parents, teachers, an administrator, other school staff (i.e., counselor, secretary, nurse, parent liaison), community representatives, and students and at the high-school level. The ATP chairperson acts as the key contact to NNPS.

Second, each school agrees to use a framework of six types of involvement (Epstein, 1995) to develop a comprehensive program of partnerships that reaches out to the families of all students. The six types of involvement are: (a) parenting - helping all families understand child and adolescent development, and establish home environments that support children as students; (b) communicating - designing and conducting effective two-way communications about school programs and children's progress; (c) volunteering - recruiting and organizing help and support for school programs and student activities; (d) learning at home - providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and curricular-related decisions and activities; (e) decision-making - including parents in school decisions, and developing parent leaders; and (f) collaborating with the community - identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families. Schools commit to conducting and improving practices for all six types of involvement over time.

In addition to implementing practices for the six types of involvement, schools are encouraged to meet "challenges" (see Epstein, 1995) for each type of involvement. These challenges encourage schools to go beyond traditional practices and understandings of school, family, and community partnerships in order to be more responsive to *all* families, including those under social

2 For district and state membership requirements for the National Network of Partnership Schools, visit the web site at www.partnershipschools.org

and economic stresses, those with physical handicaps, and those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002).

As a third requirement for membership, each school agrees to allocate an annual budget for activities planned and implemented by the ATP. Because schools are encouraged to develop context-specific partnership programs, NNPS does not stipulate a minimum budget amount, but does require that schools identify some funds for their planned partnership activities. Data from over 300 NNPS schools in 1998 indicated that, on average, schools spent just over $5,700 per year on their partnership activities, or about $12 per pupil per year. The median school expenditure was $2,000 per year (Epstein et al., 2002).

Finally, each school agrees to allocate time for initial training of the ATP and at least one hour per month for ATP meetings to review, evaluate, and continue planning partnership program activities. ATP training is generally conducted by school, district, or state members who have attended one of the "trainer of trainers" leadership conferences held at Johns Hopkins University, or when needed, by an NNPS staff member who visits the district to provide a training workshop for several school teams. Schools that cannot meet the basic requirements described above are encouraged to postpone joining NNPS until they reach the necessary level of readiness.

NNPS Services and Benefits

Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) identified four features of successful professional development networks. According to the authors, successful networks have (a) a clear focus, (b) a variety of professional development activities, (c) exchange among network members, and (d) opportunities for leadership development. NNPS possesses the qualities of a successful network as evidenced by its member services and benefits.

NNPS benefits and services are provided immediately and regularly throughout the school year. School members pay a nominal processing fee ($100) to join the Network. If a school communicates with NNPS by providing information on its annual progress and challenges at the end of each year, NNPS waives the renewal fee ($100) for the school to continue as a member. NNPS subsidizes members' renewal fees through research and development grants. The reasons for this approach are two-fold. First, it reflects NNPS' philosophy that universities have a role to play in guiding and supporting

school improvement, and that researchers and educators can work together to increase knowledge on effective reform strategies. Second, it enables schools to use their limited funds to invest in their own staff and activities in order to build and maintain their partnership programs.

On joining the NNPS, each member receives a copy of *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition* (Epstein et al., 2002), which contains the research-based information and tools needed to build and facilitate partnership programs at school, district, and state levels. Members also are issued certificates of membership to display as one symbol of their commitment to school, family, and community partnerships. NNPS members receive a semi-annual newsletter, *Type 2*, which spotlights members' accomplishments, shares current research, and guides work on partnerships. Members also receive an annual collection of promising partnership practices for schools, districts, and states that are gathered from NNPS members (Salinas & Jansorn, 2003). In addition, NNPS members are provided technical assistance from network staff via phone, e-mail, and web site at www. partnershipschools.org. The web site includes features that encourage sharing and exchange among NNPS members (Simon, Salinas & Epstein, 1998).

Members also have the option of attending semi-annual leadership development conferences conducted by NNPS in Baltimore, Maryland. At these conferences, school, district, and state key contacts to NNPS are instructed on the framework of six types of involvement and the action team approach to partnerships. Key contacts also are guided in how to help their schools, districts, and states use and adapt NNPS' research-based structures, processes, and tools to develop or improve partnership programs that address their specific school improvement goals. The conference is interactive and designed to prepare participants to become local, state, and national leaders on school, family, and community partnerships.

In return for NNPS assistance and support, members provide annual information about factors that influence the implementation and outcomes of school, family, and community partnerships, thereby contributing to research that influences practice in the field. For example, NNPS members complete an end-of-year survey (*UPDATE*) that serves to renew membership for the school year. The survey also helps NNPS learn about members' progress and challenges in their work on partnerships, and how to improve support

for members with useful services. In addition to completing the end-of-year surveys, NNPS members are invited to participate in annual research studies that examine the effects of school, family, and community partnership activities on student outcomes, including attendance, mathematics and reading achievement, and school behavior. All NNPS requirements, services, and benefits aim to increase the capacity of educators to develop effective programs of partnership. This study examines the Network's success in meeting this goal.

Methods and Analyses

Participants

Between 1996 and 1999, school membership in NNPS grew from about 200 schools to 815 schools.[3] These elementary (75%), middle (15%), and high schools (10%) were located in about thirty states in all regions of the country. Nearly half were located in large cities (46%), about 21% were located in suburban areas; 18% were located in small cities, and about 14% were located in rural areas. Over three-fourths (78%) of the schools received Title I funds, indicating that a significant portion of their students lived in low-income households.

This paper analyzes *UPDATE* data collected from 603 schools that completed the 1999 *UPDATE* survey (74% return rate). The surveys were completed by school key contacts to the NNPS. Respondents primarily identified themselves as school principals and assistant principals (40%), family/community involvement coordinators, including Title I coordinators and liaisons (25%), teachers (17%), school counselors, social workers, and nurses (4%), and parent leaders and school resource personnel (8%). Nearly two-thirds of the respondents who completed the survey (64%) were assisted by other members of their schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP).

Measures

Analyses reported in this paper compare partnership program development of two school cohorts in NNPS: (a) schools that have been members of NNPS for up to one year (201 schools), and (b) schools that have been members of NNPS for 2 to 3 years (402 schools). Using Chi Square and Ordinary Least

3 The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) is an open network that continues to grow, presently with about 1,000 active school members.

Squares (OLS) regression analyses, these cohorts were compared to determine if length of membership in the Network has a positive influence on schools' partnership program development. Regression analyses were conducted to identify factors that predict the quality of schools' partnership program implementation and the overall quality of schools' partnership programs.

Dependent variables. The first dependent variable, *quality of partnership program implementation*, measured the presence of five research-based components of good practice (Sanders & Epstein, 2000): (a) writing a One-Year Action Plan for partnerships; (b) implementing partnership activities for each of Epstein's six types of involvement; (c) conducting regular ATP meetings; (d) evaluating partnership program effectiveness; and (e) reporting progress on partnerships to the school's improvement team or leadership council. Each component was measured with a "no/yes" item. The five items were summed, giving the variable a range from 0 to 5.

The second dependent variable, *schools' overall program quality*, was a single item using a Likert-type scale to measure whether schools rated their partnership programs: (0) not yet started, (1) start-up program, (2) fair/average program, (3) good program, (4) very good program, or (5) excellent program. On the basis of full descriptions of these categories, a range of ratings distinguished among programs without full ATPs and minimal partnership activities at the low end of the scale to programs at the high end of the scale with well-functioning ATPs that replace members as needed; activities for the six types of involvement that are linked to school improvement goals; strategies to meet key challenges for the six types of involvement; regular evaluations of progress; and formal communications with school improvement councils or teams. School reports followed a normal distribution curve with 6% not yet started; 9% start-up programs; 24% fair/average programs; 35% good programs; 19% very good programs; and 8% excellent programs.

Independent variables. Explanatory variables included school program variables, external support variables, NNPS variables, and school context variables. School program variables were: ATP engagement, defined as the quality of teamwork (1 = no engagement; 2 = a little engagement; 3 = some engagement; 4 = high engagement); general support for partnership program development provided by teachers, family representatives, and community members who are not members of the ATP, school board members, and school improvement team members (1 = no support; 2 = a little support; 3 = some

support; 4 = high support); and adequacy of funding for partnership program development (0 = not enough funds; 1 = adequate funds; 2 = well funded).

It is important to note that the last of these school program variables did not measure a specific amount of funding for effective partnership program development. Previous studies showed that schools vary widely in their budgets for partnership program development based on factors such as school and district size, and presence and level of Title I funding (Sanders, 1999a; Sanders & Simon, 2002). This range reflects the diversity of NNPS schools and their partnership programs. The variable, adequacy of funding, was included to capture respondents' perceptions of whether they had the funds necessary to successfully implement their schools' partnership program.

External support variables in the regression models were district help and state help for schools. These variables were summations of the support respondents reported receiving from district and state educational leaders for strengthening their schools' partnership programs (0 = little to no district or state assistance to 6 = high levels of assistance). Examples of district and state assistance included conducting workshops, providing grants and other funding, disseminating information on partnerships, and recognizing and rewarding effort and progress.

Contextual variables included: school location in urban (1) or non-urban areas (0); Title I status, whether schools received Title I funds (1) or not (0); and school level, whether an elementary school (1) or not (0). NNPS variables included in the equations were: years in NNPS, and the sum of reported use of NNPS' newsletters and handbook. Responses included 0 (use of neither tool); 1 (use of one tool); 2 (use of both tools).

The means and standard deviations for key variables explored in this study are shown in Table 1 (see following page). Analyses explored whether membership in NNPS influences schools' partnership program development over time by addressing the following question: Do schools that were members of NNPS for 2 to 3 years report better implemented and higher quality partnership programs than schools that have been members for one year or less?

Findings

Cohort Comparisons

Initial comparisons of NNPS school cohorts were conducted using Chi Square analyses. These analyses revealed that the school cohorts differed in the implementation of their partnership programs. Schools in NNPS for 2 to 3 years (2+ year cohort) were significantly more likely than schools in NNPS for 1 year or less (1 year cohort) to have successfully completed each of the key steps for effective partnership program implementation (see Figure 2 on next page).

TABLE 1: *Descriptive statistics for key variables measuring partnership program development*

	N	*Min.*	*Max.*	*M*	*SD*
Dependent Variables					
Quality of Implementation	594	.00	5.00	3.46	1.50
Overall Program Quality	582	1.00	6.00	3.76	1.24
School Program Variables [a]					
ATP Engagement	524	1.00	4.00	3.64	.64
General Support	573	1.00	4.00	3.12	.58
Adequacy of Funding	560	.00	2.00	.58	.60
External Support Variables					
District Help	489	.00	6.00	2.00	1.75
State Help	389	.00	6.00	1.12	1.64
NNPS Variables					
Years in the NNPS	603	1.00	2.00[b]	1.66	.47
Use of NNPS tools	600	.00	2.00	1.54	.66
Contextual Variables					
School Location (Urban)	587	.00	1.00	.37	.48
Title I Status	535	.00	1.00	.67	.47
School Level (Elementary)	566	.00	1.00	.72	.4

[a] School measures on program implementation and meeting key partnership challenges, shown in Figures 3 and 4, are drawn from NNPS' 1999 *UPDATE* survey. Information on these measures can be obtained from the authors.

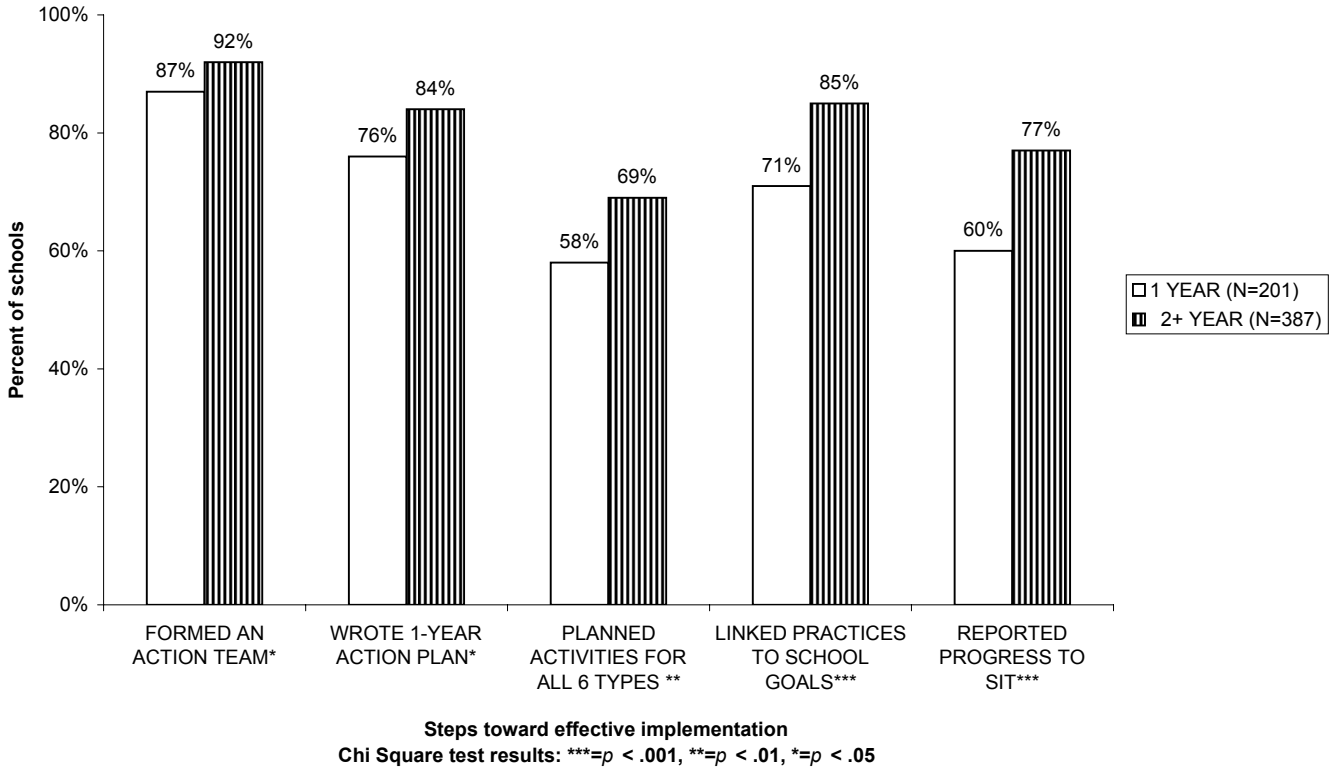
[b]Data coding resulted in a maximum value of 2.00 for the variable, Years in the NNPS. This value, however, represents schools that have been members of the NNPS for 2 or more years.

The 2+ year cohort was more likely to: have formed an Action Team for Partnerships ($\chi^2 = 4.6, p < .05$); written a one-year action plan for partnerships ($\chi^2 = 5.0, p < .05$); planned activities for each of the six types of involvement

($\chi^2 = 7.4, p < .01$); linked partnership practices to school improvement goals ($\chi^2 = 16.7, p < .001$); and reported progress on partnerships to their schools' improvement teams (SIT) or leadership councils ($\chi^2 = 18.6, p < .001$).

The 2+ year cohort also was significantly more likely than the 1 year cohort to have successfully met key challenges for the six types of involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). As shown in Figure 3 (on following page), the 2+ year cohort was significantly more likely than the 1 year cohort to have met all but one of the key challenges measured. Schools that worked with NNPS for 2 or more years were more likely to have planned strategies to: get information to families who cannot attend school workshops ($\chi^2 = 13.5, p < .001$); encourage 2-way channels

FIGURE 2: *Partnership Program Implementation*

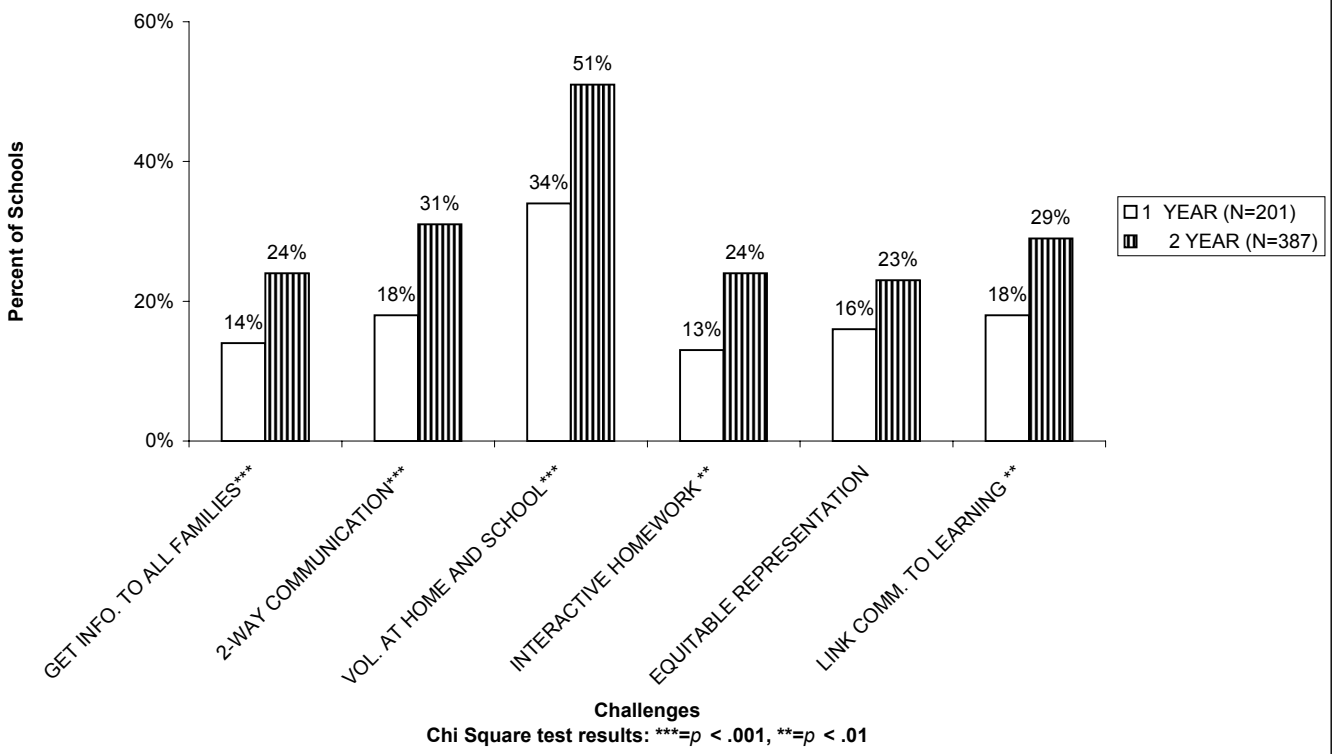


of communication from home-to-school and from school-to-home ($\chi^2 = 13.8$, $p < .001$); provide volunteering opportunities at home and at school ($\chi^2 = 15.1, p < .001$); assist teachers in implementing interactive homework ($\chi^2 = 8.6, p < .01$); and link community resources to students' learning ($\chi^2 = 12.3$, $p < .01$). School cohorts did not differ in whether they had met the challenge of ensuring that all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups of families were represented in leadership positions on school councils, committees, teams,

and parent organizations. This appears to be an on-going challenge in most schools.

These initial comparisons suggest that membership in NNPS over time assists schools in carrying out key steps to organize and implement successful partnership programs and in developing activities that meet challenges for the six types of involvement. Below, we present findings on the impact of length of membership in the NNPS on schools' partnership program development, controlling for other programmatic and contextual variables.

FIGURE 3: *Meeting Challenges for the Six Types of Involvement*



Quality of Partnership Program Implementation

Well-implemented partnership programs follow the steps described above. Case studies show that when school ATPs write One-Year Action Plans for partnerships that include meaningful activities for multiple types of involvement, meet regularly, and report their plans and progress to their schools' improvement teams or leadership councils, they increase the likelihood that their partnership programs will benefit students, families, and schools (Sanders, 1996; 1999a). Table 2 (on following page) shows results

for the regression models predicting the quality of partnership program implementation.

TABLE 2: *Factors Influencing the Quality of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Program Implementation*[a]

VARIABLES	*β*[b]	*T*	*β*	*T*	*β*	*T*	*β*	*T*
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
School Program Variables								
ATP Engagement	.34	6.28***	.34	6.20***	.30	5.50***	.31	5.63***
General Support	.15	2.69**	.12	2.09*	.12	2.12*	.12	2.13*
Adequacy of Funding	-.01	-.10	-.02	-.42	-.02	- .37	.00	.04
External Support Variables								
District Help			.16	3.17**	.16	3.21***	.15	3.03**
State Help			.01	.15	-.03	-.55	-.01	-.24
National Network Variables								
Years in the NNPS					.08	1.80	.08	1.68
Use of NNPS Tools					.16	3.31***	.17	3.41***
Contextual Variables								
School Location (Urban)							.08	1.50
School Level (Elementary)							-.03	-.60
Adjusted R^2	.18		.20		.23		.23	

Note: Number of Respondents: 361.
***p<.001;**p<.01;*p<.05.

[a] Pairwise methods were used in the regression analyses. Separate analyses show that when the *Title I* variable was included in the regression equation, it reduced the N to 233, but was not statistically significant and did not substantively change the results of the analyses. Thus, to preserve a greater portion of the total sample, *Title I* was not included as a background variable in the final model shown here.

[b] β= Standardized beta coefficient.

As indicated in Model 1 of Table 2, ATP engagement was the strongest predictor of the quality of program implementation ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$). In other words, the stronger the teamwork, the better planned and conducted the partnership programs. General support for partnerships from teachers, parents, and others ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) was also a significant predictor of the quality of partnership program implementation. Respondents' perceptions of funding adequacy were not a significant predictor of quality of partnership program implementation.

Of the external support variables tested, only district-level help for schools ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor of the quality of schools' partnership program implementation (see Model 2 of Table 2).

Model 3 of Table 2 shows that schools benefited from using the NNPS handbook and semi-annual newsletters ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$) that are provided to guide members' work on partnerships. Controlling for the number of years in the NNPS, schools that reported using these professional development tools were more likely than schools that did not to effectively implement their partnership programs by following the steps shown in Fig. 2. Model 3 explains 23% of the variance in schools' basic program implementation.

Model 4 of Table 2 includes the contextual variables measured, neither of which had a significant effect on the quality of schools' partnership program implementation. The results suggest that widespread collegial and family support for partnerships, engaged ATPs, sufficient district help, and research-based tools and information (such as that provided by the NNPS) can assist schools in developing well-implemented partnership programs, regardless of the age or grade levels of the students they serve or their geographic location.

Quality of Overall Partnership Program

High-quality partnership programs are those that are well-implemented, meet challenges for the six types of involvement, and are moving toward permanence, or "naturalization," as part of good school organization (Sanders, 1999b). Table 3 (on following page) presents the results of the models tested to identify the independent variables that contribute significantly to the overall quality of schools' partnership programs. Model 1 of Table 3 shows the effects of the programmatic variables examined. As in Table 2 on implementation, ATP engagement ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$) was a significant predictor of overall program quality. An even stronger predictor of overall partnership program quality was the support for partnerships provided by the general school community, including other teachers, parents, and community partners who are not on ATPs ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). Schools, then, are more likely to have high quality partnership programs when they have broad support from key stakeholders.

Model 2 of Table 3 indicates that state support for partnership program development was significantly related to the overall quality of schools' partnership programs ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$). This suggests that state departments of education can play an important role in schools' partnership program development that is different from the facilitative role played by district leaders, which was associated in Table 2 with specific steps in program implementation.

TABLE 3: *Factors Influencing the Quality of School, Family, and Community Partnership Program Implementation*[a]

VARIABLES	β[b]	*T*	β	*T*	β	*T*	β	*T*
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
School Program Variables								
ATP Engagement	.23	4.32***	.22	4.05***	.17	3.30***	.18	3.34***
General Support	.29	5.38***	.26	4.70***	.25	4.75***	.25	4.71***
Adequacy of Funding	.06	1.33	.05	1.13	.06	1.27	.06	1.33
External Support Variables								
District Help			.06	1.31	.06	1.24	.05	1.06
State Help			.14	2.93**	.11	2.21*	.12	2.36*
National Network Variables								
Years in the NNPS					.14	3.00**	.13	2.80**
Use of NNPS Tools					.16	3.44***	.16	3.47***
Contextual Variables								
School Location (Urban)							.03	.70
School Level (Elementary)							.07	1.45
Adjusted R^2	.21		.23		.27		.27	

Note: Number of Respondents: 361.
***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.
[a]Pairwise methods were used in the regression analyses. Separate analyses show that when the *Title I* variable was included in the regression equation, it reduced the N to 233, but was not statistically significant and did not substantively change the results of the analyses. Thus, to preserve a greater portion of the total sample, *Title I* was not included as a background variable in the final model shown here.
[b] β= Standardized beta coefficient.

Model 3 of Table 3 shows the effects of measures of schools' connections with NNPS on overall partnership program quality. Both length of time in NNPS ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$) and the use of planning and evaluation tools provided to all members ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of overall program quality. The significance of these variables suggests that NNPS materials, support, professional development activities, and other exchanges of information help to build schools' capacity to develop high quality partnership programs, and that this capacity increases with the number of years in the

Network. Model 3 explained 27% of the schools' variance in overall program quality.

Model 4 of Table 3 shows that the contextual variables measured were not significant predictors and did not add to the variance explained. This indicates that NNPS high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas can establish high quality programs of partnership if they have the requisite guidance and leadership. (See Table 3 on following page).

Discussion

The OLS analyses clarified and extended the results of the descriptive Chi Square analyses. For example, Figure 2 showed that schools that have been NNPS members for 2 to 3 years did more to organize the basic steps in planning and conducting a partnership program than did schools in the first year of work with NNPS. Table 2 revealed, however, that schools did more to organize the "basics" of a partnership program if they had an active, engaged ATP, support from school, family, and community colleagues, district facilitation to help strengthen their program components, and if their ATPs used NNPS planning and evaluation tools. Thus, time, alone, was not the main influence on the organization and implementation of a basic partnership program. Indeed, all schools in NNPS, even those just starting their work on partnerships, are expected and guided to complete the basics as soon as possible. The regression analyses showed that more schools fulfilled these expectations if they developed the underlying influential components.

Figure 3 showed that schools that were NNPS members for 2 to 3 years were more likely to go beyond the basics to meet important challenges for involving families in the six types of involvement than did schools that were members for up to one year. Table 3 confirmed that sustained work for two years or more is important for producing high-quality partnership programs, which include activities to reach all families. The analyses in Table 3 extended the information in Figure 3 by showing that an active and engaged ATP, support from school, family, and community colleagues, encouragement from the state department of education, use of NNPS tools, *and* years of work on partnerships all contribute significantly to the quality of schools' partnership programs. Here, time is an important independent influence because most schools are not able to address serious challenges to reach all families in the

first year of their work on partnerships. The OLS analyses clearly show why it is important to go beyond descriptive, categorical analyses to test increasingly well-specified models in order to identify essential components for improving partnership program quality over time.

Of further note, district facilitation as reported by schools had a positive effect on the quality of program implementation, whereas state support had a positive effect on the overall quality of schools' partnership programs. The finding that district help is more significant than state help as a predictor of implementation quality is not surprising. Research has shown that, traditionally, districts, more often than states, provide schools with the site-based facilitation that is beneficial for effective program implementation (McLaughlin, 1992; Mitchell & Raphael, 1999). On the other hand, a state's ability to set school reform priorities through policy and offer support through monetary grants or awards and recognition (Mitchell & Raphael, 1999) may affect schools' general commitment to addressing family and community involvement and, thereby, influence overall partnership program quality as defined in this study. These new contrasting findings suggest that, although their guidance and assistance may differ, both districts and states have roles to play in building schools' capacity to implement and sustain effective partnership programs.

The results in Tables 2 and 3 support and extend other studies with NNPS data that indicate that schools have higher quality partnership programs and greater outreach to more families if they have developed the essential structures and processes of teamwork, collegial support, use of NNPS tools and guidelines, and other important elements (Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). In this study, we learn more about the distinct effects of district and state leadership on the implementation and overall quality of schools' programs of family and community involvement.

Conclusions

In the current high-stakes school reform environment, educators and policy makers are looking for innovative forms of professional development to increase the capacity of educators to become agents of positive change in U.S. schools. The traditional approach to professional development, which consists of periodic workshops chosen from a menu of eclectic, sometimes "fashionable" educational topics is not sufficient to prepare teachers and administrators to

implement meaningful, standards-based reforms. What is required is an approach to professional development that incorporates opportunities for "deep learning" on relevant topics, professional exchange, and shared leadership. Current research suggests that well-organized professional networks are one promising way to build the capacity of teachers and administrators to implement important reform strategies. One such network, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University, allows educators to receive, exchange, and disseminate information and skills on the topic of school, family, and community partnerships. Because the focus of this aspect of reform is family and community involvement, NNPS also guides educators to work with parents and other partners in new ways and to share leadership in conducting activities to create a welcoming school environment and increase student success.

The findings of this study suggest that the services and benefits provided by NNPS are effective in building schools' capacities to develop comprehensive partnership programs that link to goals for students' learning. The array of tools, guidelines, and communications that NNPS offers have evolved over time as members provided feedback on their needs and challenges. NNPS materials, such as the handbook and semi-annual newsletter, include research summaries and examples of practices from schools across the U.S. These resources broaden the professional community and increase exchanges among educational leaders committed to school, family, and community partnerships as a reform strategy. These aspects of NNPS membership would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate relying solely on traditional professional development approaches.

Schools that continue to work with NNPS on developing their partnership programs over time tend to increase their use of NNPS services and participation in leadership activities. Additional analyses indicate that schools in the 2+ year cohort were significantly more likely than schools in the 1 year cohort to have ordered additional materials on partnerships from the NNPS ($\chi^2 = 11.3$, $p < .01$), attended the leadership conferences held at Johns Hopkins University ($\chi^2 = 7.0$, $p < .05$), and contributed promising partnership practices to the NNPS annual collections that are distributed nationally ($\chi^2 = 11.0$, $p < .01$).

More active membership may explain, in part, the positive effect of years in NNPS on overall partnership program quality. This effect supports case study findings that suggest effective partnership program development

is an incremental process that requires time and commitment (Sanders, 1996; Sanders, 1999a). Future analyses with longitudinal data will determine if the relationship between length of time in NNPS and schools' partnership program quality remains consistent and significant.

NNPS' structure, which encourages the "nested" memberships of schools with their districts and states, also appears to positively influence school partnership program development. Most NNPS schools in this study joined with their districts (69%) and/or states (78%). There is a statistically significant correlation between schools' membership with their districts and the amount of district help schools reported receiving ($r = .27$, $p < .001$). Similarly, there is a significant correlation between schools' membership with their states and the amount of state support that schools reported receiving ($r = .16$, $p < .01$).

NNPS assists districts and states in understanding their distinct, yet complementary, roles in schools' partnership program development and how these roles can be effectively organized and delivered. Future research using NNPS data will further clarify the relationships among district and state leadership and school teams for enabling all schools to implement high-quality partnership programs. Findings from such research will, in turn, enable NNPS to better guide district and state leaders in their independent and collaborative efforts to assist schools at various stages of partnership program development.

The findings of this study suggest that the quality of NNPS schools' programs of partnerships depend on teamwork, collegial support, district and state facilitation, and use of research-based tools, materials, and on-going guidance from a national resource, such as NNPS. It may be that this kind of multi-layered support system will be key to all school reform initiatives, including the improvement of programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Despite the significance of these findings, many questions remain unanswered about school-wide partnership program development. These questions highlight areas for future research, and their thorough investigation requires a variety of designs and methods. For example, both in-depth qualitative and longitudinal quantitative studies are needed to explore the relationships between program implementation, program quality, and student outcomes. Potential research questions include: Which district-level activities

have the greatest impact on the quality of schools' partnership programs? Which factors affect the ability of district leaders to conduct such activities? How do schools select and implement activities that link family and community involvement to school goals for student achievement and success? How does partnership program quality affect change in student achievement?

Additionally, although the data in this study were drawn from schools that are diverse in size, student population, and location, more focused studies on partnership program implementation and progress in challenging contexts are needed, such as urban high schools, rural schools, and schools serving students and families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Such studies will help to further clarify the kinds of services and supports that schools, districts, and states need to ensure that school, family, and community partnerships progress from an innovative reform initiative to widespread best practice in education.

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