

Beyond the Building:

.....
A Facilitation Guide for
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School, Family, and
.....

Community Connections
.....



National Center for
**FAMILY &
COMMUNITY**
Connections with
SCHOOLS

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School, Family, and

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Community Connections
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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
How To Use The Materials	3
National Center Resources Included in the Materials	5
Section 1	Introducing Family and Community Connections With Schools7
Activity 1: What’s Your Experience	8
Handout 1: <i>What’s Your Experience</i>	11
Handout 2: <i>Types of Involvement</i>	12
Activity 2: Who? What? How?	13
Handout 3: <i>Who? What? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools</i>	15
Section 2	Exploring the Syntheses 23
Activity 1: Pre-Assessment 24	
Handout 4: <i>Pre-Assessment: A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement</i>	27
Handout 5: <i>Pre-Assessment: Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections</i>	28
Handout 6: <i>Pre-Assessment: Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections</i>	29
Activity 2: Establishing a Context for the Findings and Recommendations 30	
Handout 7: <i>Scenario – Supporting Learning Outside of the Classroom</i>	35
Handout 8: <i>Scenario–Taking a Collaborative Team Approach</i> 36	
Handout 9: <i>Scenario–Developing Connections at the Secondary Level</i> 37	
Handout 10: <i>Scenario–Building Relationships to Foster Involvement</i> 39	
Handout 11: <i>Scenario–Focusing on Involvement With Families Representing Diverse Populations</i>	41
Handout 12: <i>Scenario–Developing Strategies to Ease Transition to School</i> 43	
Activity 3: Jigsawing the Findings and Recommendations 45	
Handout 13: <i>Set 1, Findings and Recommendations, Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections</i> 50	
Handout 14: <i>Set 2, Findings and Recommendations, A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of Family and Community Involvement on Student Achievement</i>	53
Handout 15: <i>Set 3, Findings and Recommendations, Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections</i> 55	
Handout 16: <i>Set 4, Findings and Recommendations, Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections</i> 58	

Section 3	Investigating the Research	61
	Activity 1: Walk and Talk.....	62
	Handout 17: <i>Walk and Talk Cards</i>	67
	Activity 2: Making the Case	72
	Handout 18: <i>Making the Case: Research Report Worksheet</i>	77
Section 4	Moving Into Practical Application.....	79
	Activity 1: Maximizing Your Use of the Strategy Briefs.....	80
	Handout 19: <i>Learning Outside of the School Classroom</i>	85
	Handout 20: <i>Developing a Collaborative Team Approach</i>	89
	Handout 21: <i>Engaging Families at the Secondary Level</i>	97
	Handout 22: <i>Organizing Family and Community Connections</i>	103
	Handout 23: <i>Reaching Out to Diverse Populations</i>	111
	Handout 24: <i>Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten</i>	123
	Activity 2: Maximizing Your Use of the Interactive Learning Modules.....	131
	Activity 3: Assessing Your Plan	136
	Handout 25: <i>Planning Assessment Worksheet</i>	140
Section 5	References.....	143
Section 6	Index	145



Introduction

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. . . . When schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns and honor their contributions, they are successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement.

(Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7)

As schools, families, and communities begin to come together, everyone benefits. A mother who teaches her son's class about traditional uses of native plants passes on important cultural knowledge and builds her own public speaking skills. A business that gives family members time off work—with pay—to participate in school conferences and events is better able to hire and keep qualified employees. A science class that tests the water quality at a nearby reservoir learns about local environmental issues, while contributing to the overall health of the community. And most importantly, as these school, family, and community connections start to happen, students receive the support they need to succeed in school and in life. Current research has shown that these efforts can positively impact student attendance, student performance, family-school relationships, and community support of school needs (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Boethel, 2003 & 2004).

The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (the Center) located at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has designed this product to help practitioners, family members, teacher preparation faculty, professional development staff, community members, and other interested individuals to integrate information from current research into new and existing involvement efforts. To accomplish this goal, these materials foster an approach that is aligned to the findings, recommendations, and strategies included in the Center's four syntheses and other related products (see page XX). However, these materials also provide suggestions for accessing and using other research-based texts to strengthen programs. The activities incorporate interactive tools, simulations, and practical frameworks that can be used with role-specific groups or mixed stakeholder groups.

This approach is not a how-to kit for creating family and community involvement programs. Instead, it provides practical activities to integrate research-based concepts, strategies, and processes to strengthen school, family, and community connections. These materials will help you introduce and explore key issues and strategies found in the Center's syntheses and align efforts to characteristics and actions common to effective family and community involvement programs.

There are Four Sections in this product.

SECTION 1

Introducing Family and Community Connections With Schools

includes two activities that provide an overview of the key issues and raise central themes found in the four syntheses and other Center products.

SECTION 2

Exploring the Syntheses includes three activities that engage participants in building awareness and deeper understanding of the findings and recommendations contained in the four syntheses.

SECTION 3

Investigating the Research includes two activities that engage participants in identifying topics for further study related to successful family and community connections with schools and in exploring research reports on these topics. Additionally, these activities provide a framework for participants to review primary and secondary research.

SECTION 4

Moving to Practical Application includes four activities that help participants apply the knowledge gained in the activities in Sections 1, 2 and 3.

How to Use the Materials

As stated, these materials are not intended to be a step-by-step guide for creating a family and community involvement program. However, the activities in this product are designed to help align school, family, and community involvement efforts to characteristics and actions common to effective programs. The activities will engage participants in exploring research-based materials, discussing key concepts, identifying relevant strategies to improve efforts, linking new knowledge and skill to other involvement efforts, and assessing the quality of new or existing efforts.

The activities are not arranged in any specific time order; however, certain activities are more useful as introductory activities, while others are more appropriate for later stages of the work. For this reason, the activities cover four levels of use:

1. Establishing Prior Knowledge or Skills:

These activities assist you, as a facilitator, in gauging the participants' past experiences in this area in order to determine next steps. They will also help the participants determine their own levels of knowledge and skills and areas of personal need. These activities will also help to direct activities at a level that is comfortable for the audience, so you can build a scaffold of knowledge and experience that will foster later independent practice

2. Building Awareness:

These activities help build a collective understanding of key concepts that promote family and community involvement at an introductory level. While this level of knowledge and skills will not support application, it is the foundation for more extensive learning in other activities that will.

3. Deepening Knowledge and Skill:

These activities help participants gain a level of understanding deep enough for them to apply new knowledge in a meaningful way. Not only do these activities create opportunities to go beyond awareness and into application and synthesis of new learning, but they also help determine where more knowledge and skill is needed. Additionally, these activities suggest other resources to go even further in acquiring new knowledge and experience.

4. Applying New Ideas:

These activities provide tools for applying and integrating effective strategies to increase family and community connections with schools and align those efforts to the needs of the school community. Using a framework grounded in recommendations from the syntheses, these tools will provide guidance in assessing whether efforts are aligned to characteristics and actions that are common to effective school, family, and community involvement efforts.

In the introductory description for each section, suggestions for use are included to help you choose and order the activities that correlate to new or existing efforts. You should use a few activities at the *Establishing Prior Knowledge or Skills* and *Building Awareness* levels before using activities at the *Deepening Knowledge and Skills* and *Applying New Ideas* levels. The table below lists the level of use you might consider as you choose appropriate activities to increase family and community involvement in your school community. Some activities cover more than one level of use.

Levels of Use			
Establishing Prior Knowledge or Skills	Building Awareness	Deepening Knowledge and Skills	Applying New Ideas
<p>SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 1 What's Your Experience?</p> <p>SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 1 Pre-Assessment</p> <p>SECTION 3 ♦ ACTIVITY 1 Walk and Talk</p>	<p>SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 2 Who? What? How?</p> <p>SECTION 3 ♦ ACTIVITY 1 Walk and Talk</p>	<p>SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2 Findings and Recommendations</p> <p>SECTION 3 ♦ ACTIVITY 2 Making the Case</p> <p>SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1 Maximizing Your Use of the Strategy Briefs</p> <p>SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 2 Maximizing Your Use of the Interactive Learning Modules</p>	<p>SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1 Maximizing Your Use of the Strategy Briefs</p> <p>SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 2 Maximizing Your Use of the Interactive Learning Modules</p> <p>SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 3 Planning Guide</p> <p>SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 4 Developing Evaluation Indicators</p>



The CD included with these materials contains electronic files for all handouts and resources developed by the Center.

About the Research Studies Discussed in the Materials

The research studies used in the syntheses developed by the Center represent a wide array of research methodologies. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help contextualize important issues. As you use these materials, you will need to consider which reports are supported by rigorous evidence and which ones use methodologies that are more appropriate to help deepen contextual understanding but do not offer strong evidence for practice. Each synthesis contains charts that list the studies by type of design. Use these charts and the summary abstracts to help weigh the evidence of each study used in the activities included in this product.

National Center Resources Included in the Materials

In addition to detailed facilitation notes for using these materials, the following resources are included in print or on CD:

Four research syntheses:

- ◆ *Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections* (2001) explores over 160 publications to highlight critical areas of work in family and community connections with schools; defines promising new directions; and identifies areas needing clarification, agreement, and further development.
- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (2002) examines the impact of different family and community connections on student achievement by synthesizing the findings from 51 studies exploring the kinds of school, family, and community connections; results from varied approaches; and effective strategies.
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections* (2003) discusses 64 research studies related to the roles that families can play in improving academic achievement among minority, immigrant, migrant, English language learner, culturally diverse, and economically disadvantaged students.
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family & Community Connections* (2004) describes 48 studies about the contextual factors associated with children's transition into kindergarten, as well as parent involvement in children's skill and performance levels in the early grades, and implications of these factors on children's later school success.



Seven briefs:

- ◆ *What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections with Schools?* (2002) introduces a framework for defining family and community involvement in schools.
- ◆ *Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction* (2004) examines strategies that can be used with families and community members to support classroom learning.
- ◆ *Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do?* (2005) explores ideas for involving families actively in the decision-making and implementation efforts needed for school improvement.
- ◆ *Engaging Families at the Secondary Level: What Schools Can Do to Support Family Involvement* (2005) introduces strategies for successful family involvement at the middle school and high school levels.
- ◆ *Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?* (2005) examines proactive strategies schools can use to help them build strong relationships with family and community members.
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?* (2005) outlines strategies schools can use to promote involvement of families from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness* (2005) discusses the importance of and a structure for school-family connections to ensure successful transition from preK to Kindergarten.

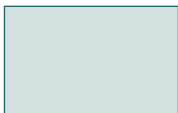
Three interactive Web-based learning modules:



- ◆ *What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?* (2005) introduces eight types of involvement, possible benefits, and planning strategies for increasing or developing family and community connections in your school community.



- ◆ *What Structures Can Help Schools Create Effective Family and Community Involvement That Supports Learning Outside of School?* (2005) introduces a research-based framework for promoting effective strategies that involve families and partner organizations in supporting learning outside of the school.



- ◆ *How Can Families and Community Members Support Children's Readiness for School?* (2005) explores strategies for increasing children's readiness for school in order to create a solid foundation for their future academic success.

SECTION 1

Introducing Family and Community Connections With Schools

Many people assume that teachers, administrators, family members, community members, and students share a common understanding of how family and community members can and should be involved with schools. However, the Center's syntheses reveal that various stakeholders hold numerous viewpoints and beliefs. This section is designed to provide activities that will open a dialogue on what it means for families and community members to be involved with schools in a meaningful way. These discussions can lead to a shared understanding on which successful family and community connections with schools can be built.

These activities are not intended to result in deeply rooted understandings. However, they are intended to raise awareness of key concepts in this field and to allow participants to do the following:

- ◆ Explore possible benefits for each group of stakeholders.
- ◆ Explore eight types of family and community connections with schools.
- ◆ Explore a framework for developing and evaluating effective family and community connections with schools.

Suggested Use

These activities can be used to introduce basic concepts that underlie family and community involvement with schools. Ensuring that everyone involved has a shared understanding of the concepts will create a solid foundation for other activities in this product.

Activities in Section 1

PAGE 8 ♦ SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

What's Your Experience?

This icebreaker activity uses a survey tool to foster conversation about participants' past experiences and creates shared knowledge as it begins to lay a foundation to advocate a reciprocal approach to family and community involvement.

Estimated time: 30 minutes.

PAGE 13 ♦ SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

Who? What? How?

This text-based activity engages participants in exploring key issues and a framework for effective family and community involvement programs. The framework is used in other activities in the guide.

Estimated time: 90 minutes.

What's Your Experience?

We often say “Families and community members are a vital part of our school community,” yet we seldom check to see if we share the same understanding of this idea with others. One of the first steps in building momentum for any effort is to build shared understanding on key issues and concerns.

For family and community involvement efforts to reach their maximum potential, everyone involved needs to develop shared understandings of the important issues, aspects, and considerations that are inherent to successful programs.

In this activity, participants will discuss their personal experiences with family and community connections with schools and answer the following questions:

- ◆ What are the participant's experiences with this type of involvement?
- ◆ What type of involvement will produce the desired impact?

When to Use This Activity:

This activity will begin the process of developing a shared experience and understanding among all participants. As the groups begin to talk about their experiences with family and community involvement, they will take the first steps in developing a shared understanding of what family and community involvement means to them.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will have an understanding of the two approaches that are taken with family and community involvement, traditional and reciprocal, as well as familiarity with the eight types of involvement.

Sources for This Activity:

Synthesis:

A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement

Interactive module:

What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?

What's Your Experience?

SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: What's Your Experience?

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Pass out Handout 1, *What's Your Experience*. Depending on your preferences, the last section of text on the handout (starting with the word "Traditional") can be folded over or blocked out in order for you to make a stronger point without participants getting a hint of the punch line. You can also make an overhead transparency of Handout 1 and cover the lower portion for the beginning of this activity and then reveal the bottom section at the appropriate time as described below.
2. Give all participants a copy of Handout 1 and ask them to check off the items as described in the worksheet's directions. Be sure to tell them to stop working at the horizontal line.
3. Ask the participants to count their checks and record the number in the appropriate blanks on the handout.
4. Ask for volunteers to share the type of experiences they have had.
5. Ask the participants, by show of hand, whether most of their answers fell in the right column or the left column.
6. Direct attention to the bottom of the sheet and explain:

Traditional family and community interactions are essentially one-sided requests that tell the family or community members what school staff want done or expect. Generally, the school staff benefit the greatest from these types of activities.

Reciprocal family and community interactions benefit the school, family, students, and community equally. Each group is honored for their role in supporting student learning.
7. Ask participants to talk with others who are sitting around them in groups of three or four about the implications of using of traditional or reciprocal interactions on family and community involvement with schools
8. Ask for volunteers to share important ideas from their group discussions. Record their answers on chart paper and post sheets as a tool to verify and capture what has been said.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper/pens

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One copy per participant

Handout 1, p. 11
What's Your Experience?

Handout 2, p. 12
Types of Involvement

ESTIMATED TIME

45 Minutes

SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

What's Your Experience?

9. Give each participant a copy of Handout 2, *Types of Involvement*. Review the handout with them. Use questions such as the following to encourage discussion about the types of family and community involvement:

What relationship do you see between these types of involvement and the definitions for traditional and reciprocal involvement that you've just discussed?

Do any of these types of involvement relate specifically to the benefits you have already discussed?

10. Record their responses on chart paper and post near previous sheets.
11. End the session by summarizing their comments and learnings from the session. Explain how the ideas and thoughts that have been generated in the meeting will be used in future work in this area.

What's Your Experience?

What is your experience with school, family, and community connections at your school, your children's school, or schools in your community?

Check the box beside the action that represents the kinds of activities you have experienced with schools in your community.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attended a school open house. | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteered as a tutor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attended a parent organization meeting. | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteered as a program coordinator or organizer. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attended a meeting regarding student's classroom behavior or achievement. | <input type="checkbox"/> Attended a college preparation meeting. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in a parent-teacher conference. | <input type="checkbox"/> Attended strategy session for helping students with homework. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contributed funds or materials for school fund raiser or booster program. | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in a parenting class. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voted in a school election or bond issue. | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in an adult ESL class. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talked via phone about student's behavior or achievement. | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in an adult literacy class. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessed information about student's assignments via e-mail, Internet, or phone. | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in an adult enrichment class. |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated as a guest speaker or instructor. |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in facility planning or building meeting. |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in school-parent <i>decision-making activity</i> . |

What is your total number of experiences? _____

How many checks are in each column? Left? _____ Right? _____

Traditional

Typically, takes the form of a request from the school for family or community member to act.

Reciprocal

Typically, has equal benefit for schools, families, and community members.

HANDOUT 2

SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

Types of Involvement

The key to creating a successful culture for involvement rests on choosing involvement strategies that best meet the needs of the students and the school community.

Eight types of involvement were identified in Henderson & Mapp's 2002 synthesis, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Though it is possible for a school to adopt all eight of these types, school staff may want to begin their work by focusing on one or two and then phasing in the remaining types of activities over a longer period of time.

Text for this handout has been taken from *What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?*, Interactive Module 1.

Types of Involvement	Definition . . .
Fostering Parenting Skills	Strategies that assist families with parenting skills and help create home conditions to support student academic achievement.
Promoting Shared Decision Making	Strategies that include families and community members as partners in school decisions.
Expanding Family, Community, and School Communication	Strategies that help to promote effective two-way communications among schools, families, and community members or groups.
Coordinating Resources and Services	Strategies that unite efforts and programs to provide services for families, students, school, and community.
Fostering Volunteer Support	Strategies that organize and support family and community members in their efforts to support the school and its students.
Supporting Youth Development	Strategies that provide services for students, such as health and physical development, creative expression, and leadership development.
Supporting Learning Outside School	Strategies that involve families and their children on homework and other curriculum related activities and decisions and create education partnerships to support learning in a variety of settings.
Expanding Community Development	Strategies that involve the school in community planning and decision-making as a community institution as well as create opportunities for the community to utilize the school's resources.

Who? What? How?

At integral aspect of the effort to develop shared understanding is having a clear understanding of common traits in effective involvement efforts. With this knowledge and understanding, they can begin to integrate concepts and strategies into their programs that have a record of success.

In this activity participants will explore the following three questions about family and community involvement:

- ◆ What benefits will school staff, families, communities, and students derive from these efforts?
- ◆ What types of involvement will best meet the needs of the school's students?
- ◆ What qualities are common to effective school, family, and community involvement programs?

When to Use This Activity:

This activity should be used in the early phases of determining the focus and outcomes for an involvement effort. Applying the framework, presented in this activity, can strengthen an involvement program. As participants engage in this activity, they will begin the process of creating a deeper understanding of the possible benefits of this type of program for each group of stakeholders, the eight types of family involvement, and a framework for developing, and evaluating effective family and community connections with schools programs.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will be able to talk about what benefits might result from these efforts and will gain an awareness of the structures inherent to a well-designed program.

Sources for This Activity:

Syntheses:

- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*

Strategy briefs:

- ◆ *Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?*
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*

SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

Who? What? How?

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Who? What? How?

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Divide the participants into groups of three or four and give each person a copy of Handout 3, *Who? What? How?*
2. Ask each person to read Handout 3.

Note: The research studies used in the syntheses represent a wide array of research methodologies. The concepts presented in this document are derived from the syntheses. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help you to contextualize important issues. Throughout this activity, you will need to consider which concepts are supported by rigorous evidence and which ones use methodologies that are more appropriate to help deepen your contextual understanding but do not offer strong evidence for practice. In the syntheses, the authors provide charts that list the studies by type of design. Use these charts and the summary abstracts to help you weigh the evidence in each study.

3. Ask each group to distill important information from the article by creating statements in answer to the following questions:
 1. What kinds of involvement can be included in these types of efforts?
 2. What benefits can come from family and community connections with schools?
 3. What characterizes an effective family and community involvement effort?
 4. How should schools design their family and community involvement efforts?
4. Post the statements on the wall.
5. Use the following question to promote discussion on their statements:

Take a moment to review the statements that have posted on the wall. Before reading Handout 3 and answering this question, are there aspects about family and community involvement that you had never considered?

MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper/pens

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One copy per participant

Handout 3, p. 15
Who? What? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools

ESTIMATED TIME

90 minutes

6. Use the following question as a first step in helping the participants to come to a consensus on important issues to consider as they foster increased family and community involvement. Be sure to keep this discussion focused on concepts they have learned from the handout.

As you consider the concepts introduced in Who? What? How?, what are the primary concerns for this community?

7. Record their ideas on chart paper without validating or valuing their statements. Post the chart sheets on a wall for everyone to see. Allow individuals to pass if they don't have a response. Continue until all ideas are exhausted.
8. Ask participants to review the posted list. Ask if they see any patterns or trends of ideas that are important to their school community. Record the patterns or trends on chart paper or mark and label them on the already posted list. You can use matching or grouping strategies to help the participants identify patterns or trends if needed.
9. Ask the participants to identify four important issues for their school community from their identified patterns and trends. These issues should be related to the information in the handout. Make sure that you, as the facilitator, keep the discussion focused on identifying the four issues. It is not always easy to keep a group focused. There are many interesting side tracks they can follow that will keep them from accomplishing the goal of this activity. Facilitators will need to refocus the discussion on identifying important patterns or trends if the discussion gets off track.
10. Post the final list of four on the wall for all to see.
11. Use the following question to ensure that the group is in consensus about the identified issues:

Why do you feel that the primary issues you have identified are valid for your school context?

12. Redirect the conversation by returning to the trends and patterns step and the question above if the group is not in consensus. Repeat the process until a consensus is achieved.
13. End the session with a summary statement, based on their comments, that ties to the following three key areas introduced in this activity:
 1. Benefits to all stakeholders
 2. Types of involvement
 3. Framework for effective programs

Who? What? How?

Family and Community Connections With Schools

In the last 20 years, many schools have adopted practices and procedures common to high-performing schools by fostering a school culture that

1. builds shared understanding of goals and expectations for everyone involved in the school system,
2. establishes high academic standards that clearly define what students are to know and be able to do,
3. develops a strong cadre of leaders that provide support for the goals and expectations of the school and the school community,
4. formalizes procedures for the purposeful collection and analysis of data on students, programs, and staff, and
5. builds strong relationships with family and community partners.¹

While schools often focus multiple resources on the first four qualities, they commonly overlook the importance of building strong relationships with families and community members, neglecting a powerful set of resources that can help them maximize their school improvement efforts. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002),

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and throughout life (p. 7)².

When schools, families, and community members partner to support student learning, children tend to perform well in school, stay in school longer, and have a more positive educational experience. Schools themselves also see benefits from these efforts through greater support for their improvement efforts.

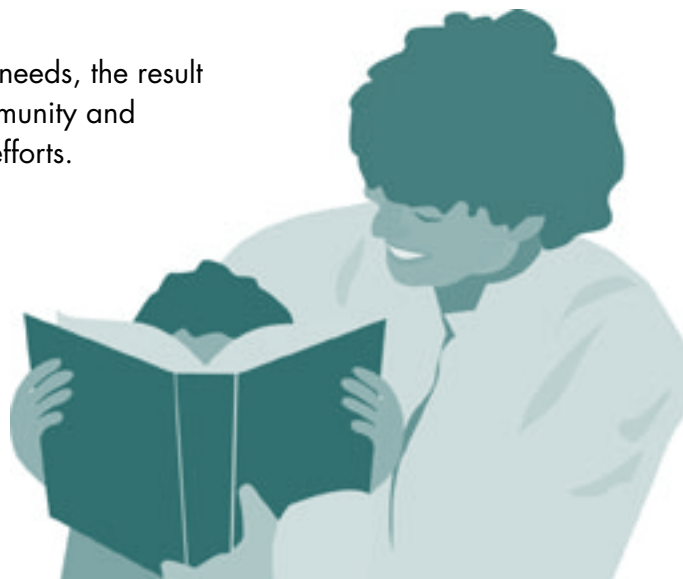
While family and community involvement is not seen as a stand alone improvement strategy to support student performance, there is growing evidence that family and community involvement can provide needed support for school improvement efforts. For family and community connections with schools to be effective, schools, in collaboration with families and community members, have to create a structure that encourages and supports family and community members in their efforts to support student academic performance.

-
- 1 Cuban, L. (1988). A fundamental puzzle of school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70(5), 341–344.
Elmore, R. F., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1988). *Steady work: Policy, practice and reform in American education*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.
Fullan, M. G. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.
Griffin, G. A. & Barnes, S. (1984). School change: a craft-derived and research-based strategy. *Teachers College Record*, 86(1), 103–123.
 - 2 Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement, annual synthesis 2002*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Benefits

For many schools, the idea of involving families actively in the decision-making and implementation efforts needed for school improvement is intimidating. Staff have had negative experiences; they find that families just don't come to activities when invited, or they think, they know how to teach and parents only interfere. It is not uncommon for staff to balk at any suggestion that they proactively engage families in supporting student learning. However, the research reveals that schools with successful and effective family involvement programs often see one or more of the following benefits³:

- ✓ **For students,**
When programs focus tightly on academic needs, the result can be better support for student academic efforts, leading to increased achievement gains.
- ✓ **For families,**
When outreach programs address specific family needs, the result can be successful parent involvement in student learning, positive family-school staff interactions, and improved individual skills and knowledge.
- ✓ **For schools,**
When programs focus on key learning targets, the result can be higher student achievement, positive teacher-student interactions, and additional resources.
- ✓ **For the community,**
When programs seek to address family needs, the result can be additional resources for the community and its families and more efficient outreach efforts.



3 Boethel, M. (2003). Diversity: School, family & community connections, annual synthesis 2003. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
Boethel, M. (2004). Readiness: School, family & community connections (annual synthesis 2004). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement, annual synthesis 2002. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
Jordan, C., Orozco, E., and Averett, A. (2001). Emerging issues in school, family, and community connections (annual synthesis 2001). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Types of Involvement

To achieve these benefits, involvement efforts can take many forms. There is no one type of involvement that brings about the greatest impact. However, aligning the types of involvement to the goals and needs of the school community is a vital aspect of all effective programs. The following types of involvement have been identified in the syntheses:

Fostering Parenting Skills

Strategies that assist families with parenting skills and help create home conditions to support student academic achievement

Promoting Shared Decision Making

Strategies that include families and community members as partners in school decisions

Expanding Family, Community, and School Communication

Strategies that help to promote effective two-way communications among schools, families, and community members or groups

Coordinating Resources and Services

Strategies that unite efforts and programs to provide services for families, students, school, and community

Fostering Volunteer Support

Strategies that organize and support family and community members in their efforts to support the school and its students

Supporting Youth Development

Strategies that provide services for students, such as health and physical development, creative expression, and leadership development

Supporting Learning Outside School

Strategies that involve families and their children on homework and other curriculum related activities and decisions and create education partnerships to support learning in a variety of settings

Expanding Community Development

Strategies that involve the school in community planning and decision-making as a community institution as well as create opportunities for the community to utilize the school's resources



Framework for Effective Efforts

The research also shows that school leaders play an integral role in fostering successful programs to engage families in supporting their children's education⁴. When leaders support and promote these programs, they will have greater success. However, simply mandating a family involvement program does not mean that staff or families are ready to participate in these efforts. Both staff and families need assistance in order to create a school culture that fosters effective family and community connections with schools programs.

Across the four research syntheses⁵, the Center found that effective family involvement programs share the following three characteristics:

1. **Relationships** among family, community members, and school staff that foster trust and collaboration. Staff members engage families and community members in specific activities that encourage relationships among all three groups that foster trust and collaboration through carefully crafted interactions and over an extended period of time.
2. **Recognition** of families' needs and class and cultural differences that lead to greater understanding and respect among all involved. As staff work to build these relationships, they stress the importance of recognizing families' needs and the class and cultural differences. Regardless of socio-economic status or culture, all families want their children to succeed and are willing to support schools. However, a family's perception of how to do this is often in conflict with how school staff perceive the role of families. It is through the recognition of differences and similarities that all stakeholders can find common ground on which to build structures that will support the learning of all students.
3. **Involvement** of all stakeholders in a shared partnership of mutual responsibility for student learning. It is the involvement of all stakeholders in a shared partnership and mutual responsibility for student learning that provides the structures that are necessary to support student learning. The most successful endeavors adopt processes that encourage and advocate shared decision making and responsibility for learning outcomes.

4 Birch, T. C., and Ferrin, S. E. (2002). Mexican American parental participation in public education in an isolated Rocky Mountain rural community. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(1), 70–78.

Johnstone, T. R., & Hiatt, D. B. (1997). Development of a school-based parent center for low income new immigrants. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. ED407156.

López, G. R., Scribner, J. D., & Mahitivanichcha, K. (2001). Redefining parental involvement: Lessons from high-performing migrant-impacted schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 253–288.

Wynn, J., Meyer, S., and Richards-Schuster, K. (2000). Furthering education: The relationship of schools and other organizations. In M. C. Wang & W. L. Boyd (Eds.), *Improving results for children and families: Linking collaborative services with school reform efforts* (pp. 53–90). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

5 Boethel, M. (2003). *Diversity: School, family & community connections* (annual synthesis 2003). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Boethel, M. (2003). *Readiness: School, family & community connections* (annual synthesis 2004). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*, annual synthesis 2002. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

HANDOUT 3, page 5 of 7**SECTION 1** ♦ **ACTIVITY 2**

These syntheses also reveal the following specific actions that will allow these characteristics to emerge:

- ◆ **Prepare** all of those involved, staff, families, and community members, to do the work.
- ◆ **Focus** the work on meaningful outcomes and purposes that related directly to what students are expected to learn.
- ◆ **Advocate** an inclusive educational culture that involves all stakeholders in the work to support students in their academic pursuits.



Prepare all those involved, staff, families, and community members, to do the work

Too often, we assume that participants in a project understand their role and the planners' expectations without any preparation. If we want these efforts to be successful, everyone involved needs to be given the opportunity to learn about what they are expected to do and how they are expected to reach the desired outcomes. The preparation process should include staff as well as all others who are involved or who have a stake in the outcome. School leaders can help prepare all those involved in this work by doing the following:

- ◆ Developing the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members. For example, school leaders can attend a special training on developing strategies on how to foster positive interactions with families.
- ◆ Assisting families in building their capacity for meaningful involvement. For example, family members can meet with teachers at a local community center to learn how to help children build a stronger vocabulary.
- ◆ Building strong connections between schools and community organizations. For example, school staff might involve family or community representatives in small group discussions about the role each group or person has in ensuring the success of every child.

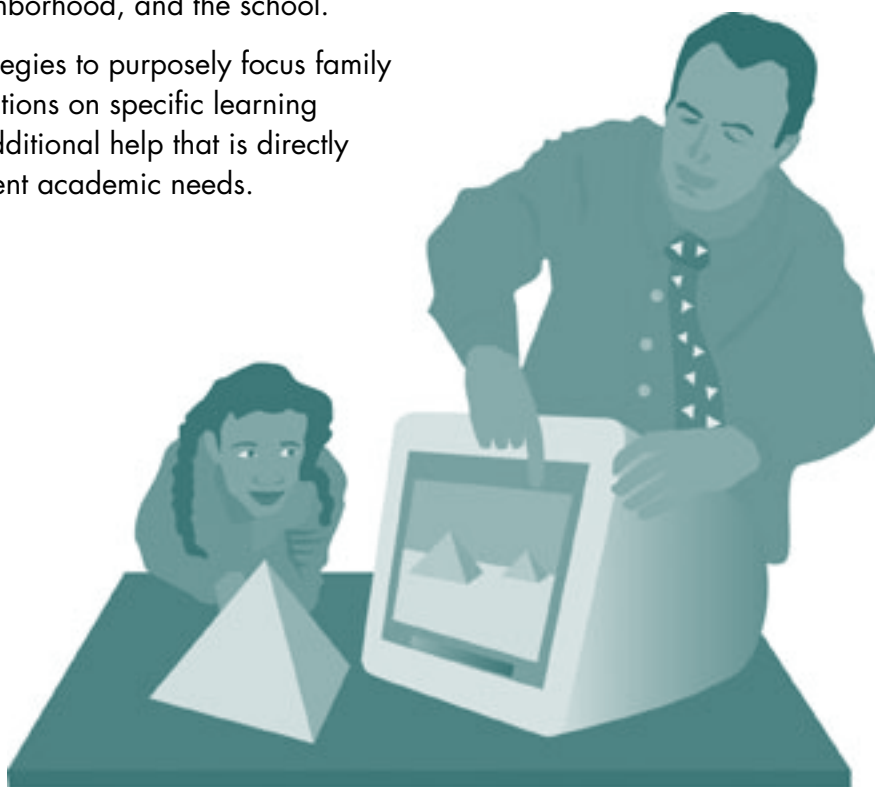
When school staff, families, and community members prepare for their roles by participating in activities to define the work and foster relationships and meaningful partnerships, they can access and create new resources to support increased student performance.

HANDOUT 3, page 6 of 7**SECTION 1** ♦ **ACTIVITY 2****Focus the work on meaningful outcomes and purposes that relate directly to what students are expected to learn.**

In creating family and community support for learning outside of school, the process should be intentional: Participants—school staff, students, families, and community members—need to have a shared focus on supporting student learning for all students. For family and community connections to be successful, school leaders need to work with staff and families to clearly define the goals and then develop activities specifically linked to those goals. To do this, all stakeholders need to view the students' needs and all resources from multiple perspectives. School leaders can help focus family and community involvement efforts by doing the following:

- ◆ Directing all planning and actions, whether based at school or in the community, on what they want students need to learn. For example, the local library can work with school staff and families to design a summer kite building program that ties to grade-level science and math content standards, including measuring angles, gravity, and air currents.
- ◆ Designing programs that will support families in guiding their children's learning, from preschool through high school. For example, school counselors can hold college planning nights at a community center to help families work with their children to select courses that will help them get into college.
- ◆ Including family involvement processes in strategies to reduce the achievement gap among all students: white, middle-class students, low-income students, and students of color. For example, school staff can meet with families at community centers, libraries, and other public places to engage families in discussing what's keeping students from succeeding in the home, the neighborhood, and the school.

When schools use strategies to purposely focus family and community connections on specific learning outcomes, they gain additional help that is directly tied to supporting student academic needs.



Advocate an inclusive educational culture that involves all stakeholders in the work to support students in their academic pursuits.

Successful programs use strategies that expand traditional understandings of what family and community connections with schools are and advocate a more inclusive culture that welcomes and encourages all stakeholders to be involved. Many times these efforts are stifled by who is represented in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Successful programs use teams that have a membership that includes all stakeholders—school staff, students, families, and community members. To do this, staff need to view the students' needs and available resources from multiple perspectives and invite and encourage the participation of a wide array of stakeholders in all steps of the process. School leaders can help all stakeholders embrace an inclusive educational culture by

- ◆ Concentrating efforts on developing trusting and respectful relationships with family and community members that foster meaningful partnerships to support student learning. For example, the school improvement team can participate in a study circle or discussion group activity to share each person's views or feelings about education.
- ◆ Promoting a philosophy of partnership and willingness to share power with families. For example, family and community members can participate as equals with school staff to plan and implement monthly family math nights that support classroom instruction focusing specifically on raising student achievement.
- ◆ Building strong connections between schools and community organizations. For example, a local service club can work with school staff, students, and families to offer activities that encourage girls to reach high academic expectations and plan for their futures.

When staff use strategies that advocate a more inclusive and broader understanding of family and community connections with schools, students gain additional support for learning.



SECTION 2

Exploring the Syntheses

Each of the four annual syntheses describes and distills current research on a chosen topic related to family and community connections with schools. Each synthesis includes

- ◆ an overview of the research on the topic,
- ◆ explanations of the study selection process and the types of studies included,
- ◆ findings and recommendations based on the studies, and
- ◆ summaries of the studies included in the syntheses.

The activities in this section provide insight and practical suggestions to engage general audiences in meaningful discussions about the research reported in the syntheses. These activities will allow you to do the following:

- ◆ introduce the concept of using current research in planning, implementation, and evaluation of family and community involvement efforts,
- ◆ familiarize participants with current research findings and recommendations, and
- ◆ use the information provided in the syntheses to create new or improve existing family and community involvement programs in your school community.

Suggested Use

These activities can help you ground family and community involvement efforts in current research reported in one or more the syntheses. Also, remember these activities are not intended to be used as step-by-step directions to develop a program; instead, they should be used as supplemental activities to strengthen your planning and implementation of family and community connections with schools efforts.

Activities in Section 2

PAGE 24 ◆ SECTION 2 ◆ ACTIVITY 1

Pre-Assessment

This icebreaker activity engages participants in assessing the range of their family and community involvement experiences by asking them to respond to statements that are aligned to recommendations from one or more of the syntheses.

Estimated time: 30 minutes.

PAGE 30 ◆ SECTION 2 ◆ ACTIVITY 2

Establishing a Context for the Findings and Recommendations

This activity uses school-based scenarios that are correlated to syntheses findings and recommendations in order to promote discussion on concepts and strategies that have been explored in current research.

Estimated time: 90 minutes.

PAGE 45 ◆ SECTION 2 ◆ ACTIVITY 3

Jigsawing the Findings and Recommendations

This text-based activity engages participants in reading, reviewing, and shared learning of the findings and recommendations listed in each synthesis.

Estimated time: 90 minutes.

Pre-Assessment

All improvement efforts, including those pertaining to family and community involvement, should be grounded in research. While research reports are unlikely to provide a one-size-fits-all process or step-by-step directions for these efforts, they can provide guidance to those who are organizing this work.

In this activity participants will engage in an exploration of the following questions:

- ◆ What are the common involvement experiences of the participants?
- ◆ What common experiences are associated with current research?

When to Use This Activity:

There are three pre-assessments to help determine the experience of the participants. Each pre-assessment survey item is aligned to the recommendations from one of the syntheses. Therefore, the pre-assessments are helpful tools to focus participants before introducing the findings and recommendations of the syntheses. In fact, this exploration activity is designed to create common ground on which participants can build deeper understanding of the findings and recommendations.

Before you choose a pre-assessment, you should consider the following question:
Which synthesis provides information vital to the implementation of family and community involvement efforts in your school community?

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will have an awareness of the focus of the findings and recommendations that are threaded into the pre-assessment surveys and a shared understanding of the types of experiences the participants have had with family and community involvement with schools.

Sources for This Activity:

Synthesis:

- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*

Strategy briefs:

- ◆ *Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?*
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Pre-Assessment

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Choose the appropriate pre-assessment survey for the synthesis that matches the needs of your school community:

Handout 4

A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement

Use this synthesis to foster discussion on family and community involvement efforts related to supporting student achievement such as:

- ◆ possible types of involvement
- ◆ benefits that come from involvement
- ◆ strategies that have been used effectively in the field

Handout 5

Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections

Use this synthesis to open discussion on a school's contextual needs related to diverse populations and family and community involvement such as:

- ◆ cultural and contextual issues that impact family and community involvement efforts
- ◆ relationship of cultural and contextual issues to student achievement
- ◆ impact of personal perspective on type and level of involvement
- ◆ strategies that have been used effectively in the field

Handout 6

Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections

Use this synthesis to open a discussion on family and community involvement and students' needs related to child readiness for school such as:

- ◆ contextual factors related to child readiness
- ◆ strategies that have been used effectively in the field
- ◆ relationship of child readiness to child's successful transition throughout the early grades

2. Ask the participants to quickly mark their experience as indicated on the pre-assessment survey handout.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper/pens

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One copy per participant of the pre-assessment for the selected synthesis

Handout 4, page 27

Pre-Assessment: A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community on Student Achievement

Handout 5, page 28

Pre-Assessment: Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections,

Handout 6, page 29

Pre-Assessment: Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections,

ESTIMATED TIME

30 Minutes for each pre-assessment

3. Use the following questions to prompt discussion:
 1. Let's look at how you rated yourselves. How many of you marked most of your responses on the left-hand side, indicating that you have had little experience with family and community connections with schools? (Pause for answers.) How many of you have more middle-of-the-road responses? (Pause for answers.) How many of you marked more of your responses on the right-hand side, indicating you have had a lot of experience? (Pause for answers.)
 2. (If most of the participants have some experiences.) That's great. Most of you seemed to have had _____ experience in this area. Could some of you share your experiences?
Or
(If few of the participants have experiences.) Because, as a group, you rated that you had little experience in this area, which of the topics on the pre-assessment survey draw your attention and why?
 3. Do any of the descriptors in this section reflect your personal experience with family and community involvement with schools?
 4. As you look through your responses, what were your strengths and weaknesses or the strengths and weaknesses of your school community?
4. Conclude this activity with a general statement about the themes and concerns you have heard the participants express and how this assessment will help you in working with them because it gives you a better understanding of their experience. Remember that each of the items on the survey can be correlated to one of the recommendations from the selected synthesis. If appropriate, you can use their experiences to transition to one of the two activities that introduce the findings and recommendations from the selected synthesis (Section 2, Activities 2 and 3).

HANDOUT 4**SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 1****PRE-ASSESSMENT**

A New Wave of Evidence:

The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement

Please rate your school, district, or educational institution in the following areas.

Your institution...

- 1.** Recognizes that all parents, regardless of income, educational level, or cultural background, want their children to do well in school and are involved in their children's learning

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
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- 2.** Creates policies and programs that will support families to guide their children's learning

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 3.** Works with parents to build their social and political connections

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 4.** Develops the capacity of school staff to work with families

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 5.** Links family and community engagement efforts to student learning

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 6.** Focuses efforts to engage families on developing trusting and respectful relationships

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 7.** Embraces a philosophy of partnership and shares power with families and communities

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 8.** Builds strong connections between schools and community organizations

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
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HANDOUT 5

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

PRE-ASSESSMENT

**Diversity:
School, Family, and Community Connections**

Please rate your school, district, or educational institution in the following areas.

Your institution...

1. Recognizes that regardless of race or ethnicity, culture or income most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children’s success

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

2. Understands and accepts that families from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds are involved with their children’s education in meaningful ways that differ from the ways “mainstream” families are involved

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

3. Develops the capacity of school staff to reach out effectively to families of different races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

4. Works to help minority and low-income families overcome barriers to their involvement with their children’s school

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

5. Links all families to student learning and improved academic achievement

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

6. Focuses efforts to engage families from diverse backgrounds in developing trusting and respectful relationships with school personnel

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

7. Embraces a philosophy of partnership and shares power with families and communities

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

8. Builds strong connections between schools and the diverse communities they serve

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

HANDOUT 6**SECTION 1 ♦ ACTIVITY 1****PRE-ASSESSMENT****Readiness:****School, Family, and Community Connections**

Please rate your school, district, or educational institution in the following areas.

Your institution...

- 1.** Provides children with early educational experiences before they enter preschool

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 2.** Provides children with transitional educational experiences between preschool and kindergarten

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 3.** Provides children with supplemental educational experiences throughout the early grades

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 4.** Helps families provide learning resources and experiences for their young children

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
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- 5.** Works to ensure fidelity in implementing model interventions

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 6.** Builds kindergarten teachers' awareness of the long-term impacts of differences in children's pre-academic skills when they enter school

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 7.** Encourages families to maintain their contact and involvement as their children move from child care to preschool settings to kindergarten

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

- 8.** Provides a variety of supports to help ease children's transition to kindergarten

1 Rarely	2 Sometimes	3 Regularly	4 Always
-------------	----------------	----------------	-------------

Establishing a Context for the Findings and Recommendations

Most research reports have a findings and recommendations section that gives the author an opportunity to make statements about how to apply conclusions to real-life situations. In each synthesis (located on the CD), the authors outlined key findings and recommendations and provided summary descriptions of the studies.

In this activity, participants will engage in a series of activities that explore the following questions:

- ◆ How do findings and recommendations from current research apply to efforts to promote family and community involvement?
- ◆ Which family and community involvement strategies will foster school improvement? Increased support for student achievement? Better school-teacher-family relations?

When to Use This Activity:

This is an ideal activity to begin the process of exploring one form of research text. It is also a first step in building deeper levels of knowledge in this field. Through this process, participants will gain a wider perspective of the research base provided in the syntheses as well as explore scenarios where findings and recommendations from the syntheses have been applied. To establish a deeper level of knowledge, you should combine this activity with Section 2, Activity 4. To take this process to an application level, you need to use primary research reports; Section 3, Activity 2 describes a way to do this. Within this activity, you have a choice of six scenarios. Your choice of which scenario or scenarios should be based the needs of your school community and which findings and recommendations address those needs.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will gain a deeper knowledge of effective family and community involvement strategies and their use in a school setting.

Sources for This Activity:

Syntheses:

- ◆ *Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*

Strategy briefs:

- ◆ *Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction*
- ◆ *Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do?*
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*
- ◆ *Engaging Families at the Secondary Level: What Schools Can Do to Support Family Involvement*
- ◆ *Organizing Family and Community Connections with Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?*
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

Establishing a Context

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Establishing a Context for the Findings and Recommendations

To prepare yourself, take the following steps:

1. Review the findings and recommendations for each of the syntheses. Electronic copies of each synthesis can be found on the CD. Determine which findings and recommendations are most relevant to the needs in your school community. The following chart may help you decide which synthesis provides information that best serves the needs of your school community:

Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections	Use this synthesis if you want to introduce information about what family and community involvement means in your school context and important issues you should consider.
A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement	Use this synthesis if you want to introduce issues related to supporting student achievement through family and community involvement efforts.
Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections	Use this synthesis if you want to explore a school's contextual needs related to family and community involvement and diverse populations.
Readiness: School, Family & Community Connections	Use this synthesis if you want to discuss family and community involvement in terms of issues related to child readiness for school.

Note: The research studies used in the syntheses represent a wide array of research methodologies. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help you contextualize important issues. As you prepare to become an expert on the findings and recommendations, you will need to consider which findings and recommendations are supported by rigorous

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One copy per participant of the selected scenario

Handout 7, page 35
Scenario—Supporting Learning Outside the Classroom

Handout 8, page 36
Scenario—Taking a Collaborative Team Approach

Handout 9, page 37
Scenario—Developing Connections at the Secondary Level

Handout 10, page 39
Scenario—Building Relationships to Foster Involvement

Handout 11, page 41
Scenario—Focusing on Involvement With Families Representing Diverse Populations

Handout 12, page 43
Scenario—Developing Strategies to Ease Transition to School

OPTIONAL HANDOUTS

Appropriate finding or recommendation Handout from Section 2, Activity 4 (13–16)

Presentation slides or transparencies for the selected synthesis from the CD

Handout created by facilitator

ESTIMATED TIME

90 Minutes

evidence and which ones deepen your contextual understanding but do not offer strong evidence for practice. As you read the syntheses, you will notice the authors provide charts that list the studies by type of design. Use these charts and the summary abstracts to help you weigh the evidence in each study.

For further information on rigor and quality research design, the US Department of Education Website (www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousetid/index.html) provides free access to a research guide called *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported By Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide*. This resource provides a detailed explanation on how to gauge the quality of the research report's design.

2. Read through the six scenarios on Handouts 7–12. Choose one of the scenarios that aligns to findings and recommendations that you have determined are important to your school community. To help you make your choice, the table below lists the topics for each scenario included in this section:

Scenario Handout	Focus
Handout 7 Supporting Learning Outside of the Classroom	School staff develop support for classroom instruction by working with family members to provide additional learning outside of the school.
Handout 8 Taking a Collaborative Team Approach	Stakeholder group draws on a variety of resources to support school efforts through collaborative interactions.
Handout 9 Developing Connections at the Secondary Level	School staff at the secondary level investigate family involvement.
Handout 10 Building Relationships to Foster Involvement	School staff use several strategies to build positive relationships between school staff and families and community members.
Handout 11 Focusing on Involvement With Diverse Populations	Teachers address the needs of a highly diverse student population by drawing on family and community resources.
Handout 12 Developing Strategies to Ease Transition to School	School teams reach out to families and community members to ease young children's transition to school.

For example, choose Handout 12 if transition and readiness are a concern for your school community.

3. Choose one of the following methods to introduce (review) the findings and recommendations to the participants and prepare the needed handouts:
 1. Introduce the finding and recommendation handout from Section 2, Activity 3
 2. Create a handout that you create to introduce the findings or recommendations from the appropriate synthesis

Note: If you have completed Section 2, Activity 3 before doing this activity, you will not be introducing the findings and recommendations but reviewing them.

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Distribute a copy of the scenario to the participants and ask them to read it.
2. Ask questions such as the following to focus the discussion on topics related to the synthesis:
 - What actions are being taken in this scenario to impact student needs or achievement?
 - What are the successes?
 - What are the challenges?
3. Validate each response to the questions by making a statement that reflects how the response relates to the following:
 - ◆ Research you've read
 - ◆ Experiences that someone else in the room has had
 - ◆ Possible impact on student achievement

As you listen, you will need to pay special attention in order to connect their responses to the findings and recommendations that you will introduce in the next step. However, the scenarios were written to include rich details and information that connect to the findings and recommendations.
4. Introduce (review) the findings and recommendations to the participants:
 1. The appropriate finding and recommendation handout from Section 2, Activity 3
 2. A handout that you create to introduce the findings or recommendations from the appropriate synthesis
5. Ask the participants how their observations about the scenario reinforce what is said in the findings and recommendations. Please note you will need to listen carefully as you will be making a summative statement based on these comments in the next step.
6. Conclude the meeting with a summative statement about what they have discussed and what they have identified as important ideas to consider as they continue their work.

HANDOUT 7

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

SCENARIO

Supporting Learning Outside of the Classroom

Scenario taken from *Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Ms. Farley has 26 students in her classroom. These students are at different ability and maturity levels; there are regular students, second-language learners, special education students, struggling students, and highly motivated achievers. She has to meet the needs of each of these students, simultaneously, every day. At times she feels completely overwhelmed with this task. Though her school has implemented a new sequenced curriculum, tutorial programs for low-performing students, and new instructional strategies, her students are still not mastering the content quickly enough. Many of the students simply need more individualized instruction.

Her students performed better on the district's first semester benchmark exam than the previous year; however, only 57 percent mastered all of the objectives. She had been hoping the new curriculum alignment and instructional strategies would raise the passing percentage on all objectives to at least 70 percent by the end of this school year, but now she is questioning if that can happen.

After talking to the other seventh-grade teachers, Ms. Farley realizes they are having the same problems. The question they keep asking is, how can they arrange for more one-on-one learning sessions for their students?

During a team meeting, one teacher stated that she wished the students could get help at home that was coordinated with the efforts at school. Unfortunately, she said, there wasn't a way to help the parents assist the students with their lessons.

Everyone paid attention when one of the other staff members asked, "Why not? Why can't we involve family members in efforts to address the needs of each of our students?"

As they began to discuss the issue, some of the teachers expressed doubts as to whether these kinds of efforts would be successful. After all, it was also getting harder every year to get parent volunteers to plan school parties.

Ms. Farley asked, "Do our students really benefit academically from school parties? Is this how we should involve family members? Shouldn't we focus on involving parents in activities that actually support what we do in the classroom?"

Another teacher asked, "What is it we want parents to do?" The teachers all agreed they needed the family members to provide individualized help to students that reinforces the learning activities occurring in the classroom, sort of an at-home tutorial program.

The teachers began to discuss what they needed to consider in creating a process for encouraging learning outside of the school classroom that would support what was happening in the classroom.

HANDOUT 8

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

SCENARIO

Taking a Collaborative Team Approach

Scenario taken from *Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do*

Mr. Simon is the administrator of a 6–8 middle school campus located in a midsize community. The students in his school are performing adequately, but not exceptionally, on the state-mandated tests. In fact, they narrowly met their goal for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the year. Knowing that he needs to develop new strategies to strengthen academic efforts to meet the school's AYP, Mr. Simon and his staff have initiated several strategies to address student performance needs:

- 1) Instructional staff meet regularly to discuss and align curriculum and instructional practices.
- 2) Staff have begun to use benchmark exams as a tool to determine if instruction has been effective.
- 3) Staff have begun a process of ongoing achievement data analysis to determine student and staff needs.

Mr. Simon feels that these efforts will help his staff assist every child in reaching academic success, but he knows he needs to include parents in this improvement process, not only as part of the mandated NCLB School-Parent Compact, but also to garner support for this work. However, he is concerned about the commitment his staff will give to activities that promote positive interactions between school staff and the families of the students.

He has just met with his instructional staff to introduce the concept of actively communicating with the students' families and inviting them to be involved in the improvement of their children's education. The meeting was rocky and tense.

His staff expressed doubts about involving families. In fact, only a few staff members were receptive to the idea of reaching out to the schools' family members. After all, at their last open house, they had only 12 family members show up. The families of their

students did not seem to show their support of the school. Instead, parents often called to complain but seldom volunteered to help or support the teachers. Additionally, the staff expressed concern that if they allowed family to get "too involved," the family members would try to tell the teachers how to teach. For most of the staff, parent involvement equated to classroom interference. In general, the staff felt that the parents just needed to make sure the kids came to school prepared for learning, did their homework, and behaved well in school. His staff did not see a need for anything more.

Mr. Simon was not surprised by the concerns and fears expressed by the teachers. In fact, after reflecting on the events of meeting, he knew that airing these issues was an important step in getting his staff to engage with this new concept. However, he also knew that he needed to get his staff past their griping and worrying and raise their awareness of the possible benefits of increased family involvement when all stakeholders come to the table in a meaningful process.

He decided to use a process called Collaborative Action Teams to help move the staff forward in their acceptance of families as partners in their children's education. In this approach, all stakeholders—school staff, students, family, and community—are involved in activities to identify pressing issues in the school community, share their perspectives on school improvement, and take action together to address those issues. This strategy will help him change his school culture from one where school staff and family interactions are devalued to one where they are common elements of the school day. As his staff becomes more accustomed to collaborative interactions, Mr. Simon plans to involve staff in exploring how family connections with schools can directly support classroom instruction and student learning. However, one thing is abundantly clear to him: a successful collaborative action team process will require multiple steps to build the relationships needed to accomplish his goals.

SCENARIO

Developing Connections at the Secondary Level

Scenario taken from *Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do*

Mrs. Cortez, the principal of a large urban high school, and her lead counselor, Mr. Thomas, have just returned from a meeting at the central office with the district's family involvement coordinator. At the urging of a special community task force created by the superintendent, the district's school board has just adopted a new policy regarding family involvement at the high school level. All the high schools in the district are to develop an approach that will involve families in supporting student learning and draw on the resources that families can provide to schools. It is to be fully implemented the following school year. It is now early spring.

When Mrs. Cortez and Mr. Thomas discuss this new mandate with the school's lead teacher cadre the next day, the teachers are not opposed to the idea, but they aren't sure where to begin. Mrs. Cortez asks if anyone has read an article or attended a conference presentation lately that addresses this subject. Mr. Thomas says that he has just read an article about family involvement at the high school level. The article states that secondary schools have to think about parent involvement in a very different way. They need to help families provide support for student learning and make continued education a goal for all students. All of this is to be done while working with rebellious teenagers! One of the teachers asks if they think they can make staying in school as important as a new pair of name-brand tennis shoes. They all laugh, but they all agree with her statement.

One of the teachers tells a story about helping a student earlier in the week by answering her questions about how her parents should fill in

a section of her college application. The group agrees that students need more help with college preparation.

Mr. Thomas states that he and the other counselors have been telling the students to get their college visits done early because narrowing their choices to a few colleges makes the process much simpler than completing a larger number of applications and then choosing one. However, this information has not been reaching the parents. After a few more minutes of discussion, the group agrees—the students and their families need more information on applying to college and for financial aid. One of the staff members asks, "Wouldn't this be a good place to start a meaningful collaboration with families, students, and school staff?"

Within minutes, the group drafts a beginning outline of a plan. The group is working intensely and excitedly when Mrs. Cortez asks, "Do you think we ought to involve the families and the students if this project is supposed to be a collaborative one?" There is laughter. One of the teachers comments that there is nothing like giving a bunch of teachers a problem to solve: "We tend to just jump to the solution, don't we?"

Mr. Thomas suggests they start again. This time they brainstorm a different topic: Who should be involved in planning a program to support families and students as they plan for the future? They decide they want a diverse list of students, family representatives, school staff, and community members who could serve on a task force to explore the possibilities. They narrow their number to a list of 15 names and

HANDOUT 9, page 2 of 2

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

then divide the names among the teachers to spread out the work of calling everyone.

The next question is what to do at the first meeting. The group quickly reaches consensus on two issues. First, they need to get everyone at the meeting to value the importance of family involvement in future planning for secondary students. Second, they need to interest family members in participating in the effort.

Several of the staff members volunteer to work on an activity to illustrate the need for family involvement at this level. Their school now requires that all new programs be research-based. Before moving this process forward, they need to look for research in the area and identify other schools that might provide examples of this kind of program.

Another staff member offers one other issue for consideration in their planning. She states that when someone personally invites her to share or partner in a project, she always feels good about giving her time and energy. Other staff

members agree. Soon, the group decides to adopt specific strategies in order to create a welcoming culture for parents:

1. Respect them as equal partners.
2. Recognize their potential contributions.
3. Welcome them to the school and this new effort.

As they build their initial activity and begin their contact with families, they keep these three strategies in mind. Their plan may have started with the school staff, but they intend for it to become the school community's plan.

Mrs. Cortez is impressed and pleased with the positive responses from her staff and their willingness to meet with parents as equal partners. However, she also knows that this is only the beginning. She, her staff, and the families of her students have a lot of work to do before they will be able to implement a successful family involvement program for the high school.

SCENARIO

Building Relationships to Foster Involvement

Scenario taken from *Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?*

Ms. López is the family involvement coordinator for an elementary school, serving grades 3–6, in a large city school district. During the last 6 years, an influx of immigrants has changed the school’s demographics significantly. While the community is accepting of these changes on the surface, an obvious cultural rift is developing among population groups. Comments such as “We used to be able to. . . but now. . .” have become prevalent in the community and the school. Moreover, the staff are unfamiliar with the home context of these new students. Little effort has been made to connect with these families.

Ms. López and her principal talk about this situation after attending a family and community involvement conference during the summer. They decide that the school staff should refocus family involvement efforts to create the “joining process” that had been introduced at the summer training. Their previous efforts included having parents help with class parties, partnering with parent organizations for fund raising, hosting a mother to school day, and holding an open house. While Ms. López and her principal want to continue many of these efforts, they also want to develop new kinds of family-school interactions.

They meet with the staff in the early fall and share the information they have learned during the summer. The staff agree that efforts to establish this deeper relationship or “joining process” may possibly provide greater resources to their students. Their kickoff for this new effort will be the school’s

fall festival. They plan to create an opportunity for the staff and families to get to know one another on a more personal level in order to foster common understandings on which they can build productive relationships.

During previous fall festivals, each class organized a game in order to raise money for the school’s library. For this year’s festival, they will continue this effort and add a new dimension—making meaningful connections between family and school staff. Each class will again host a game to raise funds for the library, and Ms. López will work with teachers to set up two information booths that all families will be asked to visit while at the festival:

- ◆ In the first booth, *High Stakes Hut*, teachers will offer family members the opportunity to work sample test items from the state-mandated tests that students take and explore teacher-prepared informational brochures on the state’s accountability system. A large number of staff members will be asked to rotate working in this booth so that, instead of having one person lecturing to parents, staff members can form small discussion groups at tables. Staff will provide each person with a brochure that explains specific aspects of the state’s system that parents would need or want to know about such as how to review grade levels and expectations for testing, yearly school report cards, and the importance of attendance.
- ◆ In the *What Do You Remember?* booth, each person will be greeted by a staff

HANDOUT 10, page 2 of 2

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

member who will explain that the purpose of the booth is to collect the stories from students, school staff, and family members about their experiences in school. The greeter will explain that the teaching staff feel it is important that they know more about their students and the students' families in order to meet their needs, and they also want the students and families to know more about the teachers as well. Each person will be asked to share a story that relates to their educational experience and will be given the opportunity to participate in a project to place the stories on the school's Web site. A local news reporter has agreed to write a feature article for the local newspaper; therefore, she will sit in on these sessions and take notes

A few days after the event, Ms. López talks to the staff to see if the festival had been successful as a first step in relationship building. The teachers who worked the What Do You Remember? booth admit that they are astounded by what they had learned about the families of the students. One teacher, who has been sending notes home with a child about the child's failure to write down assignments from the whiteboard, describes how the parents of this child have never seen whiteboards before they visited their child's classroom earlier in the week. Another parent had talked about how she and her siblings had practiced their writing on the dirt of their "porch" as children. This family was very enthusiastic about providing its children with opportunities they didn't have. The father of another student drove a cab in the city but had once been an attorney and had attended prestigious schools. The teachers had assumed that the parents of the students were all poorly educated. The

teachers who had talked with family members in the High Stakes Hut were surprised at the things the family members had not known. The teachers had thought that everyone in the entire state understood what the state was requiring of schools. No matter which booth they worked, all the teachers learned something new about the students' families.

The next week Ms. López invites a few parents to eat lunch with her at school to gauge their experience in the process. The family members are eager to learn about the accountability system. One parent states that she did not realize that the school lost money when the average attendance fell. She now knows that letting her daughter stay home from school hurts the school's ability to provide resources to the children. Another parent talks about how she had learned that one of the teachers is a first-generation American just as he is. Several parents are also enthusiastic about the article that the newspaper had printed about their interactions. It makes them feel as if their experiences are important. In general, the parents are excited about this first chance to exchange information with the staff.

Ms. López and her principal feel that the two information booths provided a forum for families to engage in meaningful discussion and build personal relationships among staff and families. They are very excited! However, they also know that this event is just the beginning. It will take more time and many more interactions in order for the school to foster successful family and community connections with school built on trusting relationships. It is simply a first step toward establishing the "joining process."

SCENARIO

Focusing on Involvement With Families Representing Diverse Populations

Scenario taken from *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*

Mr. Han is in his first year of teaching and has chosen to work in a high-poverty community in the Southwest that has a high percentage of Hispanic and American Indian students. He has been assigned to teach sixth grade science to 125 students.

Though Mr. Han graduated from an innovative and well-respected teacher preparation program, he worries that he is not prepared to meet or understand his students' needs. He knows that a common concern in many schools in the United States is that the ethnicity and culture of the students rarely matches the teachers. In his case, he and his parents were born in the United States, but his grandparents emigrated from Asia as teenagers. His family has always observed the culture of his grandparents' native country as they assimilated into their new country. While he is not "White," he is still different from his Hispanic and American Indian students.

As recommended in his teacher preparation program, Mr. Han has created a letter to send home to parents communicating the way he plans to conduct his class, explaining his grading procedures and inviting them to visit his class to observe his teaching. He wants the families to know that they have a stake in and can make a contribution to their children's education. Each week, he plans to send an announcement communicating the topics to be covered in classes and assignment due dates.

As he is photocopying this letter, one of the more experienced teachers, Mr. Atkins, asks him what he is doing. After listening to his explanation, Mr. Atkins tells him that inviting the families to school could lead to big problems. He also adds that because many

of the parents of his students are not likely to be able to read the letter or will ignore it if they can read, sending the letter is useless.

Shocked, Mr. Han asks what kinds of problems can come from contacting families. Mr. Atkins replies that the school staff have always felt that the less contact families have with the school, the better. The idea is to keep them happy and keep them distant. Mr. Atkins goes on to say that there is no pleasing parents and families anyway, so it's best to avoid them.

Mr. Han stands with his copies in hand for a few moments and reflects on what he has just been told. It is in conflict with what he learned in college about best practices and the possible benefits of family and community connections with schools, but he doesn't want to be at odds with the other teachers. He takes a few moments to think about the possible consequences of going ahead and contacting the parents. Though he feels torn between what he has been taught and the cautioning words of an experienced teacher, he decides to continue with this project.

However, Mr. Han feels that Mr. Atkins might have a point about whether the families can or will pay attention to the letter. He has had little experience with either the Hispanic or American Indian cultures. If he was in his home community, he would go through one of the neighborhood elders to reach out to the families. He isn't sure what is appropriate for the families of his students. He decides to let his students help him determine the best way to get their parents to read the letter.

After introducing himself to his students on the first day of class, Mr. Han tells them that he

HANDOUT 11, page 2 of 2

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

wants their help on something. He explains that he has a letter to send home to their parents and asks the students for their help getting it to them.

At first, the students resist, saying their parents don't need this information. Typical of adolescents, they say they don't want their parents involved in school. They aren't babies. However, Mr. Han points out to the students that their families will probably ask them for this information anyway, so they might as well work with him to plan a way to communicate with their families. After more discussion and some careful encouragement from Mr. Han, the students decide to help him. He repeats this process in each of his classes. Each time, the students resist, say their parents aren't interested, but then, after more discussion and encouragement, agree to help.

Mr. Han says that there are always parents in a community that don't read, don't read very well, or possibly don't read English. He asks if this is true in this community? His students answer yes.

He then asks the students what they would do to get this information out to the families?

After much discussion, Mr. Han decides that he will get out of the school and onto the families' turf by

1. Visiting the reservation of the American Indian students on Saturday: It is market day, so nearly everyone in the community will be in one place. Several students have volunteered to help him connect with the families of his students. The students also share that there is not a written language for their tribe. While Mr. Han can still give the family members the letters, he will need to explain everything as well. The students don't feel that a translator will be needed, but they will help out if any parents aren't able to communicate in English.
2. Going to see the Hispanic families in their neighborhoods over the next week:

Five students volunteer to be his guides and translators. One of the students says his mother translates documents for her boss at work. Mr. Han says he will call her at home tonight and see if she can help translate the letter so that he will have both English and Spanish versions.

Later, while talking to Mrs. Rand, another teacher with only a couple of years of experience, about this effort, Mr. Han realizes there is a vast difference in what he learned about family involvement in his teacher preparation program and the reality of making this happen in the school community. He certainly hadn't been prepared for Mr. Atkins' reaction. He had thought since experts said this kind of action would prove beneficial, it would happen almost automatically. He also had no idea that his students would actually be the key to contacting the parents.

Mrs. Rand is so impressed with his efforts that she wants to accompany him on his visits, as they teach many of the same students. In fact, she thinks they should ask the other sixth-grade teachers to join them. She isn't sure that every teacher will participate, but she figures it won't hurt to ask.

The next morning, the school principal tells Mr. Han that he has heard about his plan to reach out to the students' families. Mr. Han braces himself for a possibly negative response, but is surprised instead. The principal praises his efforts. He has been talking to a principal from another school who had initiated a similar program the previous year. It has been a great success. He asks Mr. Han to keep track of what they learn this first semester, so they can form a committee to explore expanding the idea next year.

Mr. Han realizes that this effort is only a first step in his goal, but he feels great about discovering that his students could be such a powerful resource. More importantly, he learns that not all of the teachers are reluctant to reach out to the families of their students.

SCENARIO

Developing Strategies to Ease Transition to School

Scenario taken from *Easing the Transition from PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*

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Mr. Basheer is the kindergarten lead teacher at a small preK–4 elementary school in the Northeast. In this school, there are approximately 125 students at each grade level with the preK students attending half day, and the K–4 students attending full day. In the spring of the school year, Mr. Basheer is asked to organize a summer program for the students transitioning from preK to kindergarten to help them “get ready” for the next school year. The administration hopes that addressing readiness issues during the summer will result in increased achievement for these students not only at their current grade-level transition, but as they continue through school.

Though he is very aware of the importance of preparing students for the transition from grade to grade, Mr. Basheer does not feel that he knows enough about transition to lead this effort without some investigation. Therefore, before jumping into the planning work, he begins by reviewing his professional journals and magazines for topical articles on the latest strategies in this area. As he reviews these articles, he lists other references that appear to have promising information on the latest research in this area. Since he has no way to access some of the journals referenced, he asks a colleague who is in graduate school to use her college library privileges to obtain copies of some articles for him.

Based on his study, Mr. Basheer finds that numerous programs reported successful outcomes by including a component or a complete focus on family involvement strategies. These programs create a strong

collaborative partnership between the school and families that is ideal for enabling schools to gain additional resources to support and address child readiness issues.

Since he had never been personally involved with a family-school program in which families were a significant part of the school improvement process, he decides to consult his principal, Ms. Blair. This is her first year at his school, but he has been very impressed with her leadership. After telling Ms. Blair what he has discovered through his research, he asks her what she thinks of involving families in a program to ease children’s transition from home to preK and from preK to kindergarten.

Ms. Blair shares her experiences from her previous school with him. That faculty had fostered extensive collaborative efforts between home and school and had good results. She says that she would strongly support the inclusion of family involvement in the program. However, she also notes the importance of not limiting this type of program to the summer once families feel comfortable with this type of involvement. She expects that if the program is successful, it will lead to more family involvement at the school. Both Mr. Basheer and Ms. Blair agree that they would welcome more family involvement at the school and this effort will be a great first step. She asks him what he needs to get started.

Mr. Basheer asks her, “Based on your experiences, where would you begin?” She responds, “With the data.” She suggests that he set up an exploratory task force with

HANDOUT 12, page 2 of 2

SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

several teachers, the central office staff member in charge of assessment, and four or five of the students' family members. At their meeting, they should work to identify the content or skill areas in which the students have not been achieving as expected. She suggests this exploratory task force focus the project.

The next week, Mr. Basheer and the exploratory task force wade into the data. After a 3-hour session, they find that when students begin kindergarten, they are successful in general phoneme awareness but are not demonstrating mastery in phonic recognition; additionally, they have very low levels of vocabulary. One of the parents on the task force speaks up and asks what can be done to address these problems.

One of the teachers says that she thinks they should see what other schools are doing and adopt one of their programs. A parent says that her cousin told her about a reading readiness program at her daughter's school where parents participated in a program where school staff help parents learn to support reading at home. Her cousin really enjoys working with her daughter and the school staff, and her daughter's grades have improved greatly. Mr. Basheer says he also thinks this might be a good solution, but suggests they should investigate the benefits and potential problems more before making a decision.

Mr. Basheer suggests that the group break into pairs. Some pairs will find and call schools with successful reading readiness programs and talk to both staff and families about what made these efforts successful. The others will look at the research in this area. They all agree to the action plan.

Before leaving, one of the parents, Mr. Havlin, says, "I really enjoyed this meeting. I think we should involve others in the process—staff and parents." Everyone agrees with this statement. They decide that each pair will invite two more people to join their efforts. The group adjourns after setting a meeting date for reports.

Mr. Basheer and Ms. Blair meet later to talk about the meeting and the concept of home-based reading support. They both feel the meeting was productive. Mr. Basheer is amazed and enthusiastic about the reaction of the staff to the inquiries and perspectives of the families. Everyone seems to be looking at the problem through a wider lens.

Ms. Blair, who was actually a member of a home-based reading support team earlier in her career, is pleased that the group has chosen to investigate a quality, research-based process. However, she cautions Mr. Basheer that just because the two of them felt the strategy is a solid solution, they are a long way from implementation. Mr. Basheer agrees, but he is pleased with the progress and ready to continue the work.

Jigsawing the Findings and Recommendations

Most research reports have a findings and recommendations section that gives the author an opportunity to make statements about how to apply conclusions to real-life situations. For each synthesis, the authors included an executive summary, outlined key findings and recommendations, and provided summary descriptions for the studies referenced. You will be using the executive summary sections in this activity.

In this activity, participants will engage in a series of activities that explore the following questions:

- ◆ How do findings and recommendations from the syntheses apply to their school context?
- ◆ What family and community involvement strategies will foster school improvement? Increased support for student achievement? Better school-teacher-family relations?

When to Use This Activity:

This is an ideal activity to begin the process of exploring research text. It is a first step in building deeper levels of knowledge. Through this process participants will gain a wider perspective of the research base provided in the syntheses. To establish a deeper level of knowledge, you should combine this activity with Section 2, Activity 3. To take this process to an application level, you need to engage with actual research reports; Section 3, Activity 2 describes a way to do this. Your choice of activities should be based on the needs of your school community.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will have developed deeper knowledge of the findings and recommendations for the chosen synthesis.

Sources for This Activity:

Syntheses:

- ◆ *Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*

Strategy briefs:

- ◆ *Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction*
- ◆ *Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do?*
- ◆ *Engaging Families at the Secondary Level: What Schools Can Do to Support Family Involvement*
- ◆ *Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?*
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Jigsawing the Findings and Recommendations**To prepare yourself, take the following steps:**

1. Choose the synthesis that best fits your school context and needs. Electronic copies of each synthesis can be found on the CD.

Note: The handouts included in this section contain short portions of text taken from each synthesis. If you are concerned with the ability of your participants to engage in the text because of its length or vocabulary, use these abbreviated-text handouts. While the vocabulary is not changed, the amount of text for each section is smaller. If you want your participants to go as deep as possible, use copies of the text from the PDF files located on the CD.

The following chart may help you decide which synthesis provides the best information for your school community:

Set 1, Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections	Use this synthesis to focus your study on what family and community involvement means in your school context.
Set 2, A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement	Use this synthesis to explore issues related to supporting student achievement through family and community involvement efforts.
Set 3, Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections	Use this synthesis to raise issues related to family and community involvement and diverse populations.
Set 4, Readiness: School, Family & Community Connections	Use this synthesis to discuss family and community involvement in terms of issues related to child readiness for school.

2. Review the chosen synthesis, paying special attention to the findings and recommendations sections. Remember you will be the expert on the findings and recommendations to be discussed. If you need more preparation, select key studies referenced in the synthesis and read the study reports.

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One copy of the selected handout for each participant

Handout 13–Set 1, page 50
Findings and Recommendations for Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections

Handout 14–Set 2, page 53
Findings and Recommendations for A New Wave of Evidence: School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement

Handout 15–Set 3, page 55
Findings and Recommendations for Diversity: School, Family, and Community Connections

Handout 16–Set 4, page 58
Findings and Recommendations for Readiness: School, Family, and Community Connections

ESTIMATED TIME

90 minutes per set

Note: The research studies used in the syntheses represent a wide array of research methodologies. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help you contextualize important issues. As you prepare to become an expert on the findings and recommendations, you will need to consider which findings and recommendations are supported by rigorous evidence and which ones deepen your contextual understanding but do not provide strong evidence for practice. As you read the syntheses, you will notice the authors provide charts that list the studies by type of design. Use these charts and the summary abstracts to help you weigh the evidence in each study.

For further information on rigor and quality research design, the US Department of Education Website (www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorous/vid/index.html) provides free access to a research guide called *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported By Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide*. This resource provides a detailed explanation on how to gauge the quality of research design.

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Divide the participants into “home” groups that match the number of findings or recommendations you plan to introduce at this meeting. You may choose to introduce all of the findings or recommendations or select a few that might apply to a specific contextual need in your school community. If you choose to include a larger number of findings or recommendations, give each person two or more rather than just one in order to keep the “home” groups smaller. The chart below provides a count of how many findings and recommendations are contained in each synthesis.

Set 1, Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections	4 findings called “issues”
Set 2, A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement	3 findings 9 recommendations
Set 3, Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections	7 findings 11 recommendations
Set 4, Readiness: School, Family & Community Connections	7 findings 6 recommendations

For example, the Emerging Issues synthesis has four findings that are called “issues.” If you chose this synthesis, use “home” groups with four members in each group. Each of the four members of the “home” group will be assigned one of the four findings from the synthesis.

2. Assign each person in the “home” group the number of the findings or recommendations that you have decided each person will explore.
3. Ask the participants to break away from their “home” groups and join the others who have been assigned the same finding or recommendation number that they’ve been assigned. For example, all of those assigned finding number 2 will meet with each other. All with recommendation number 6 will meet with each other, and so forth. These new groups will become the “expert” groups.
4. Ask the “expert” groups to work together as a team to review the findings or recommendations they’ve been assigned and help each other become the “experts” on that topic. Be sure to tell them that they will be expected to teach the others in their “home” group about the assigned findings or recommendations once they return to their “home” group. Allow approximately 10–15 minutes for this part of the activity.
5. Ask all the “experts” to return to their “home” groups once they have become “experts.”
6. Ask each person to take 3–5 minutes to share what they have learned about their assigned finding or recommendation. After each group member has spoken, ask each small group to discuss what they have learned about family and community involvement from each other. Allow approximately 20–25 minutes for this step.
7. Engage all participants in a whole group discussion once this is completed. Use a question such as the following to begin the discussion:

How does this information resonate with your school community?
8. Conclude this session with a summation of what has been discussed. Be sure to tie your summation to the findings and recommendations that have been explored.

Emerging Issues

This research synthesis is the first in a series that will examine key issues in the field of family and community connections with schools. The issues highlighted in this synthesis represent critical areas of work in family and community connections with schools where clarification, agreement, and further development are needed, as well as promising new directions that are emerging. By continuing to strengthen the research in the field we can help ensure that schools, families, and communities can come together to produce positive outcomes. After reviewing and examining a body of literature that included more than 160 publications, four key issues emerged.

Issue 1

Clarifying the Concept of Family and Community Connections with Schools

The field of family and community connections with schools does not have consistent agreement on what is meant by the terms *connections*, *parent involvement*, and *community involvement*. The need to clarify these concepts comes not from a desire for universally acceptable, all-encompassing definitions, but from a need to be clear in our language so that researchers and practitioners can more effectively implement and measure the impacts of these connections. Current research reveals that there are many different activities that connect families and schools. Often these activities are quite different from each other, yet they are lumped together as “parent involvement” or “school-family connections.” Some researchers emphasize activities that take place at the school, such as parent attendance at school events and participation in parent-teacher organizations (PTOs). Others include activities that take place in the home, such as parental homework help and discussions about school issues between parents and children. Still others include abstract concepts as well as actual involvement behaviors in their definition, such as parent aspirations for a child’s education. These activities have very different impacts on students, schools, families, and communities.

The variety of definitions make it difficult to compare studies and models of parent involvement to one another. They also make the analysis of the findings of multiple studies a challenge. For practitioners, these multiple definitions may lead to difficulties in making judgments about what kinds of activities to implement, how to implement them, and what results to expect from them.

Similarly, many different kinds of activities fall under the heading of “community connections with schools.” One researcher may define a school-community connection as a formal partnership between the school and another local organization. Another may highlight learning opportunities for students that take them out of the classroom and into the community for real-life experiences. Still other researchers may look at the role of the school in the larger community—as a community center or a community institution that can play a role in community development efforts. There is also variation in the very way the term “community” is defined. The challenge of defining school-community connections in a comprehensive way has similar consequences to the challenge of defining the full range of school-family connections. The multiple

definitions make it difficult to compare studies with one another and to synthesize the results across studies. Multiple definitions also create challenges for practitioners as they attempt to select, implement, and evaluate different connection activities. In addition to the general problem of multiple and overlapping definitions, two important factors have affected how family and community connections are currently defined in research and practice. First, there are the differences in perceptions of appropriate roles of family and community members in connections with

schools. Second, there has been an emphasis on school-centered definitions of family and community involvement. Family and community involvement frequently means helping reach goals defined by the schools (administrators and teachers) that reflect only school values and priorities. There is a need for the field to consider expanded definitions that move beyond narrow definitions of family and community involvement to include theories, concepts, and ideas from outside the field of education, as well as culturally appropriate definitions and family centered practices.

Issue 2

Measuring the Outcomes of Family and Community Connections with Schools

Parent and community connections have been measured inconsistently across studies, and research has not yet captured the full picture of these connections and their results. There is a need to be precise in how we are measuring outcomes, in order to avoid faulty generalizations and conclusions and to clarify the sometimes conflicting evidence about the impact of connections. The field must continue to explore new methods for capturing the processes and out-comes of these complex interactions between schools, families, and communities. We must also capture the different outcomes of the connections for the various stake-holders—students, parents, schools, and communities—to gain a full picture of the impact of the connections. It is evident that connections can have a broad array of outcomes, ranging from increased student achievement and improved school climate

to enhanced civic capacity for a variety of stakeholders. The multifaceted results of these connections lead to measurement challenges for both researchers studying the connections and practitioners evaluating the impact of their efforts.

While there is evidence that family and community connections can result in positive outcomes for all stakeholders, we must continue to clarify the relationships between the different kinds of connections and the outcomes they produce. A redefinition of terms and rethinking of research tools in order to measure the effects of all types of family and community connections with schools is needed to help the field progress. There is also a need to better understand and document how various school, family, and community connections create conditions that support a variety of results.

Issue 3**Advancing the Research Base for Family and Community Connections with Schools**

Research about the process and effects of family and community connections with schools is evolving and does not yet provide clear directions for practitioners. There is a critical need to take the body of research we have and build theory that can propel us into the next stage of research. Family and community connections frameworks can help research test the relationship between different components of the concept of family and community connections with schools, address the problem of unclear and overlapping definitions of the concept, and gain greater understanding of the predictors and impacts of these connections. In our review, we also observed that researchers face numerous methodological challenges,

including choice of design, sampling, measurement, and internal/external validity. New developments in research design and methodology that better link quantitative and qualitative research and more and improved conceptual models can move the field toward a stronger research base. Funding allocations to applied educational research and program evaluations must increase, a new level of partnership must be forged between practitioners and researchers to enable the use of experimental procedures in service settings, and program staff concerns related to random assignment and potentially intrusive data collection procedures must be addressed.

Issue 4**Critical Areas for Research in Family and Community Connections with Schools**

Our review of the literature revealed a number of critical research areas that surfaced repeatedly. Within each of the critical areas listed here, both promising directions and research needs are discussed. These areas are

- ◆ Forging connections with families from culturally diverse backgrounds
- ◆ Connecting families with schools in homework help
- ◆ Connecting school, family, and community for effective school reform
- ◆ Connecting school, family, and community through developmental approaches and integrated service delivery
- ◆ Connecting school, family, and community to support student transitions through out the education system

- ◆ Developing process-based approaches to make connections
- ◆ Preparing educators and other school personnel to make connections between schools, families, and communities.

Our charge as a field is to come together to address the issues highlighted in this document—to clarify the concept and outcomes of family and community connections with schools and to improve the quantity and quality of the research base available. In so doing, we will better understand these connections and create the knowledge needed to realize the potential of family, school, and community connections for student learning and students' lives.

New Wave of Evidence

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. This fourth edition of *Evidence* confirms that the research continues to grow and build an ever-strengthening case. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. How are the many ways that families are engaged in their children's education related to achievement? Many studies found that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to:

- ◆ earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs.
- ◆ be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits.
- ◆ attend school regularly.
- ◆ have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.
- ◆ graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Strategies of community organizing are different from traditional parent involvement and are openly focused on building low-income families' power and political skills to hold schools accountable for results. A new group of studies found that community organizing contributed to these changes in schools:

- ◆ Upgraded school facilities.
- ◆ Improved school leadership and staffing.
- ◆ Higher-quality learning programs for students.
- ◆ New resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum.
- ◆ New funding for after-school programs and family supports.

Findings

1. Impact of Parent and Community Involvement on Student Achievement

- ◆ Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.
- ◆ The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through our complex education system. The more families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.
- ◆ Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, all families can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children's learning.

- ◆ Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.

2. Effective Strategies to Connect Schools, Families, and Community

- ◆ Programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs.
- ◆ Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.
- ◆ Effective programs engage families and communities and embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.

3. Family and Community Organizing Efforts to Improve Schools

- ◆ Organized initiatives to build family and community leadership to improve low-performing schools are developing in low-income urban areas and the rural South. These community organizing efforts use strategies that are aimed at establishing a power base to hold school and school districts accountable for low student achievement. They have contributed to changes in policy, resources, personnel, school culture, and educational programs.

Recommendations

How can we put these findings into action?

1. Recognize that all parents—regardless of income, education, or cultural background—are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well.
2. Design programs that will support families to guide their children's learning, from preschool through high school.
3. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families.
4. Link efforts to engage families, whether based at school or in the community, to student learning.
5. Build families' social and political connections.
6. Focus efforts to engage families and community members on developing trusting and respectful relationships.
7. Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families. Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise.
7. Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.
8. Include families in all strategies to reduce the achievement gap among white, middle-class students and low-income students and students of color.

Diversity

This research synthesis is the third in a series of reports to help local school, community, and family leaders obtain useful research-based information about key educational issues. This synthesis addresses diversity as it relates to student achievement and school, family, and community connections.

The literature on diversity includes a wide range of student and family characteristics and affiliations. This synthesis focuses specifically on three categories: race or ethnicity, culture (including language), and socioeconomic status. The need to improve academic achievement among “diverse” student populations—notably African American, Latino, Native American, immigrant and language minority students, and students from poor families—is one of the most persistent and challenging issues that education faces. This research synthesis looks at the roles families can and do play in addressing that issue. The report also explores barriers to involvement for minority and low-income families, strategies that have been used to address those barriers, and recommendations that local educational leaders can adapt to address their specific needs.

We identified 64 studies with focuses and methodologies that met our basic criteria. From the array of information among these studies, we identified seven broad findings that summarize the overall knowledge base related to family, community, and school connections among minority and low-income populations:

Findings

1. No matter their race, ethnicity, culture, or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children’s success. However, there are limited findings as to whether minority and low-income families’ high aspirations for their children have a positive impact on students’ school achievement.
2. Families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities are actively involved in their children’s schooling, although their involvement may differ somewhat from those of White, “mainstream” U.S. families. The extent and types of involvement among low-income families may be linked to poverty and economic stressors.
3. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families.
4. Research studies have identified barriers to minority and low-income family involvement in their children’s schooling—barriers that schools often can help overcome. These barriers include contextual factors (particularly time constraints, childcare needs, and transportation problems); language differences; cultural beliefs about the role of families in their children’s schooling; families’ lack of knowledge and understanding of U.S. educational processes; and exclusion and discrimination issues.

5. Research findings are limited and inconsistent regarding the extent to which increased family involvement is linked to improved academic achievement among minority and low-income student populations. Findings specifically addressing the effectiveness of family involvement programs in boosting student achievement are also inconsistent. Although some research findings are encouraging, too little high-quality research has been conducted to support a firm conclusion.
6. The research base is thin, but some intervention strategies appear to be promising in strengthening family-community-school connections among minority and low-income student populations.
7. Some studies suggest that, in seeking to close the achievement gap, it is necessary to address the complex interactions among families, communities, and schools. Focusing on only one of these factors is not enough.

As these findings reflect, much more rigorous, high-quality research needs to be done before it is possible to draw firm conclusions about the ways in which families, communities, and schools can and do influence achievement among specific student populations.

Recommendations

From the 64 studies, we were able to make some recommendations that may help to strengthen local diversity programs and practices. Because the research base is so thin, these recommendations should be taken as tentative, subject to the need for both local wisdom and further research.

Recommendations for building relationships among schools, communities, and families include:

1. Adopt formal school- and district-level policies that promote family involvement, including an explicit focus on engaging families who reflect the full diversity of the student population.
2. Demonstrate active and ongoing support from the school principal.
3. Honor families' hopes and concerns for their children.
4. Acknowledge both commonalities and differences among students and families.
5. Strengthen school staff capacity to work well with families.
6. Provide supports to help immigrant families understand how schools work and what's expected of both families and students.
7. Make outreach a priority; take the extra steps necessary to make it possible for families to get involved at school, as well as at home.
8. Recognize that it takes time to build trust.

Recommendations for helping families strengthen academic achievement among minority and low-income students include:

1. Provide families with training and resources to support early literacy.
2. Help families use specific communication and monitoring strategies to support their children's learning.
3. Encourage and support student involvement in a range of school- and community-sponsored extracurricular and after-school activities.
4. Help low-income families obtain the support and services they need to keep themselves safe, healthy, and well fed.

Readiness

Readiness has been theorized as a particular chronological age, as a stage or level of development in children, as a set of skills and competencies, as a process, and as a set of relationships. Each of these conceptions has different implications for the roles and responsibilities of children, families, and schools. Among advocates and policy researchers, readiness is discussed more and more as an interactive process or set of relationships in which the child, her or his family, the community environment, and the school interact in ways that support, or fail to support, the children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development.

Until relatively recently, children's readiness typically was considered a function of reaching a certain age or of progressing through specific stages of development that were influenced almost entirely by chronological growth and children's inherent characteristics. However, a strong body of research has cast doubt on assumptions that children tend to progress in some lockstep fashion through specific stages of development and that they must reach a particular age or maturity before they are "ready to learn."

More recent research points to readiness being associated with a set of constructs or factors that determine when a child is ready to accomplish specific tasks, skills, or learning. These constructs or factors have a direct impact on whether the child is ready to learn. Factors that may influence children's readiness for success in school include

- ◆ socio-economic status (which often interacts with race or ethnicity)
- ◆ child's health
- ◆ family background characteristics, particularly the mother's education, single-parent status, and mental health
- ◆ home and community environment, including risk factors and literacy-related factors, and
- ◆ participation in some type of preschool program.

Findings

What is known about differences in children's skills and performance at kindergarten entry and the contextual factors associated with those differences?

1. Young children enter kindergarten with a range of cognitive and social skills that appear to make a difference in their achievement during the kindergarten year. This seems to be of long-term importance; children who get off to a good start in kindergarten tend to maintain that advantage as they progress through school.
2. Young children's home environment—including both family background factors and interactions between children and other family members—is strongly associated with their relative skills and abilities upon entry to kindergarten. Other significant correlations exist as well, including participation in early child care and education.

What is known about early childhood or preschool interventions that include family or community components?

3. Early care and education programs that include family components can boost children's educational success, both short-term and long-term. However, the impacts of specific features of such programs, including family components, remain largely untested and unknown. In addition, significant issues of cost, quality, and context complicate this finding.
4. Specific strategies for helping parents support their young children's emerging literacy and numeracy skills can produce gains among children from both low- and middle-income families. However, the research base is limited to only a handful of strategies.

What is known about children's transition to kindergarten, including transition beliefs and practices and patterns of family-school interactions?

5. Families and teachers tend to have somewhat different perceptions about what matters most in children's readiness for kindergarten. The impact of these different perceptions, if any, on children's readiness and their kindergarten achievement has not been documented.
6. Although families of all types of backgrounds are often involved in their children's preschool educational or child care programs, their involvement tends to decline when the children enter kindergarten. Both the types and frequency of family-school contact tend to change from preschool to kindergarten.
7. Although a growing body of research describes schools' transition practices, little to no research assesses the effectiveness of specific school supports for children's transition to kindergarten. Descriptions of transition practices and barriers indicate that the most individualized, relationship-building activities tend to be the least used and that differences in transition practices are associated with school characteristics.

Recommendations

As these findings suggest, we still have much to learn about the roles and relationships among children, schools, families, and communities that can help to ensure an effective fit between young learners and the school environment. Research-based knowledge as to "what works" remains limited. For that reason, we are able to make only a few concrete recommendations for local policy and practice—and those we do make should be taken as tentative, subject to the need both for local wisdom and for further research:

1. Provide children with early educational experiences. Perhaps the strongest conclusion that can be drawn from this research base is that early education for children—including programs for children in poverty who are most seriously at risk for school failure—can make a difference when those children reach kindergarten and beyond. Yet, a significant minority of children still lack ready access to early education.

HANDOUT 16, page 3 of 3**SECTION 2 ♦ ACTIVITY 3**

- 2.** Help families provide learning resources and experiences for their young children. Parent-training strategies that are targeted specifically to strengthen young children's pre-academic skills have shown good promise in terms of both early literacy and early mathematics skills.
- 3.** Work to ensure fidelity in implementing model interventions. Ensuring that model strategies are actually implemented as intended is a key, but often overlooked, factor in the effectiveness of interventions.
- 4.** Build kindergarten teachers' awareness of the long-term impacts of differences in children's pre-academic skills when they enter school. Studies suggest that many kindergarten teachers tend to downplay the importance of children's pre-academic skills at kindergarten entry, emphasizing instead social-emotional traits and capabilities. However, children's earliest school performance, including their early kindergarten performance, generally sets a pattern for their future success or lack of it.
- 5.** Encourage families to maintain their contact and involvement as their children move from child care or preschool environments to kindergarten. No matter what their backgrounds are or how involved they are in their children's preschool or early care settings, parents' at-school involvement diminishes when their children start kindergarten. The consistency of this pattern suggests that schools must take the initiative to alter families' perceptions of the roles and levels of involvement expected of them.
- 6.** Provide a variety of supports to help ease children's transition to kindergarten. Schools can take specific steps to increase teachers' use of in-depth transition activities, including providing training, providing supplemental funds for teachers' transition-related activities during the summer, and providing teachers with class lists as early as possible before the start of school. Particularly in urban schools and schools with substantial populations of low-income and racial or ethnic minority students, school administrators need to emphasize transition activities as a priority and to provide the necessary supports for kindergarten teachers.

SECTION 3

Investigating the Research

While it is common for school staff and other individuals to say “We have based this effort on research,” it is unlikely that they have fully explored the research findings and recommendations on which they are grounding their statements. Due to time constraints and lack of resources, they often rely on others for the information they need. These activities are designed to encourage participants to be “smart consumers” of research statements and learn to look across studies for additional insight. These activities are not extensive enough for participants to develop an expert level of research use, but they are a first step in that process.

These activities will work best with the following syntheses:

- ◆ A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement
- ◆ Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections
- ◆ Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections

These activities will allow participants to engage the following processes:

- ◆ Using a hands-on approach to exploring research text.
- ◆ Using study abstracts to glean important information and determine information needs.
- ◆ Exploring research text.
- ◆ Applying learnings to their school communities.

Suggested Use

As you meet with interested groups who developing new or improving existing family and community involvement programs, these activities are an ideal strategy for making the exploration of research documents a common component in the work. As your school community begins to interact with the various research texts, participants will become more sophisticated in their choices of which strategies to include in the school’s program.

Activities in Section 3

PAGE 62 ◆ SECTION 3 ◆ ACTIVITY 1

Walk and Talk

This icebreaker activity uses an active discussion strategy to engage participants in exploring key issues taken from one or more of the Center’s syntheses. This activity will help ease the participants into reviewing research-based statements.

Estimated time: 30 minutes.

PAGE 72 ◆ SECTION 3 ◆ ACTIVITY 2

Making the Case

This activity uses school-based scenarios that are correlated to synthesis findings and recommendations in order to promote discussion on concepts and strategies that have been explored in current research.

Estimated time: Several sessions of 90 minutes each

Walk and Talk

One of the first steps in making research accessible is to help users find value in actually reading the research text themselves. Many times, participants are intimidated by the idea of reading research-based text, assuming they need the short version rather than the “real stuff.” This activity engages participants in exploring statements drawn directly from research text in a risk-free process. These statements also serve a second purpose: illustrating the need to rely on many sources rather than one source alone. When efforts are grounded in a larger body of literature, the result can be even more powerful.

To add higher interest to this activity, you may want to add additional cards with other quotations or statistics or demographics that are unique to your school community. For example, you might include statements that contain local demographic information or local family-community-school participation facts.

In this activity, participants will discuss statements that answer the following questions:

- ◆ What benefits might come from increased family or community involvement in schools?
- ◆ What factors impact a child’s future success?
- ◆ What factors contribute to the achievement gap?
- ◆ What roles do families and community members play in a child’s educational experience?

When to Use This Activity:

This activity will engage participants in discussions of general research conclusions or recommendations that can be correlated to their school communities. These statements naturally lead to a focus on issues related to family and community involvement. This activity can set up a framework or process for more in-depth analysis of research text, such as Section 3, Activity 2.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will have experienced a glimmer of the insight unique to synthesizing information from multiple sources.

Sources for This Activity:

Synthesis:

- ◆ *Emerging Issues: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*

Interactive modules:

- ◆ *What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?*
- ◆ *What Structures Can Help Schools Create Effective Family and Community Involvement That Supports Learning Outside of School?*

SECTION 3 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

Walk and Talk

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Jigsawing the Findings and Recommendations**To prepare yourself, take the following steps:**

1. Review the quotations on Handout 17, Walk and Talk Cards, and the facilitation directions below.
2. Decide whether using all of the cards for this activity will best serve your purpose or if using select cards is best. You may also use the blank template to add cards with additional quotes from one of the syntheses or another source or appropriate community statistical or demographic information.

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Follow the directions on the handout to make copies of the cards from Handout 17. Use one card for each participant. More than one participant may have the same card.
2. Divide the participants into two groups and ask them to stand in two circles. One group will form the outer ring; the other will form an inner ring.
3. Give each person one of the activity cards and ask them to take a moment to read it and consider its implications in their school community.
4. Use directions such as the following to start the activity:

Each of you has been given a card with a quotation that comes from one of syntheses created by the National Center for Family and Community Connections With Schools, located at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. (If you have added cards, you will need to modify this statement to include other sources used.) You will notice that the source is listed on the card. Each of the statements reflects a finding or conclusion from current research on family and community involvement in schools.

Alone each of these statements provides insight into why we should be promoting a specific strategy or concept in family and community involvement. However, when we consider all of the statements on all of the cards, we gain a greater understanding of the enormous scope of this work. It is the synthesis of information from a variety of sources that has the greatest value for us.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Upbeat music such “On the Road Again” by Willie Nelson

Chart paper/pens

Note: This activity requires open space

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One card per participant (master card template or facilitator added cards)

Handout 17, page 67
Walk and Talk Cards

ESTIMATED TIME

30 minutes

I would like you to review the statement on your card. When I play the music, you will walk around your circle. In the inner circle, you will walk clockwise. In the outer circle, you will walk counter-clockwise.

When I stop the music, please partner with the person across from you. Please take turns talking about your statement by reacting one of the questions listed on the bottom of the card.

Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?

Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?

How do you see this information as important in your school community?

(If the participants do not know one another, add a comment here about introducing themselves to each other before beginning their discussion).

When I start the music, you will stop your discussion and walk. When the music stops, we will repeat the discussion process.

I will be starting and stopping the music several times, so you'll have the opportunity to talk to several people about your statement. Be sure you have a different partner each time. Okay, let's walk and talk.

(Begin the music.)

5. Begin to play and stop the music. Play the music for 10–20 seconds, watching a couple of pairs to make sure you don't stop the music when participants who have already paired are across from each other.
6. Allow each pair to talk for 3–4 minutes. You need to walk through the pairs as they talk to monitor the discussion and determine when pairs appear to be ending their conversation. Not all pairs will need the same amount of time, watch to make sure pairs are engaged in sharing. If pairs are not engaged, that is an instant signal to start the music. Generally, the formula is to use shorter times the first one or two rounds and longer times the later rounds. This allows them to get used to format of the activity and to build a set of thoughts or reactions to the statements as they go through each iteration. It is normal that individuals will have more to say with each round since each conversation stimulates ideas. Repeat the process for four or five rounds.
7. Ask the participants to take their seats. Use questions such as the following to prompt a whole group discussion. Record their responses on chart paper and use the recorded statements to help you find several intersections of ideas (points of synthesis) that you will need at the end of the activity.

Would someone like to share something significant that they have learned?

Be sure to make a point of tying their learnings to issues related to family and community involvement.

For example, card #2 can lead to a discussion about how different subgroups see the role of families in schools differently than the mainstream population. Their conversation might involve some of the following issues:

SECTION 3 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

Walk and Talk

A teacher with no experience or special training is meeting with students' families who are different from the teacher. The teacher is expected to know how to interact with these family members about a student's need.

A student's family members do not feel competent to help the child because the family members have limited education. Therefore, they are hesitant to work with children on homework or other home-study activities.

Many of the adults in student's families are doing shift work and are not home at the right times to read to children?

and so forth.

Would any of you like to share a thought about an intersection of ideas—a moment when the statement on your card and the statement on someone else's card caused you to come a synthesis of ideas?

If we look across our experiences with these statements, what have we learned?

(Pointing to comments on the chart paper will help illustrate connections among their ideas.)

7. Be sure to make comments that illustrate connections among participant responses in order to reinforce the concept that strength is gained from synthesized knowledge.
8. Summarize their statements and describe what the next steps will be.

Walk and Talk Cards

Choose cards that align to your purposes, make copies of the pages, and cut them apart. Make enough copies so that each participant has one card. You may also add cards to this set.



“The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life . . . Research continues to grow and build an ever-strengthening case. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”

(A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, 2002, p. 7)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

1



“Connecting with families from diverse backgrounds has been a subject of interest, debate, and research. The importance of reaching out to diverse families has become even more evident as greater accountability policies are implemented and schools are held responsible for ensuring that all children are educated to high standards. However, we are only beginning to understand the ways that diverse families are already involved in their children’s education and how to engage them in new ways.”

(Emerging Issues in School, Family, and Community Connections, 2001, p. 36)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

2

Choose cards that align to your purposes, make copies of the pages, and cut them apart. Make enough copies so that each participant has one card. You may also add cards to this set.



“As Johnstone and Hiatt (1997) concluded, ‘Relationships are the foundation of parent involvement in schools’ (p. 9). When programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staffs, families, and community members, they are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that can support student achievement.”

(Diversity: School, Family & Community Connections, 2003, p. 71)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

3



“Until relatively recently, children’s readiness typically was considered a function of reaching a certain age or of progressing through specific stages of development that were influenced almost entirely by chronological growth . . . However, a strong body of research has cast doubt on assumptions that children tend to progress in some lockstep fashion . . . There is a strong evidence that children, when they have accumulated substantial knowledge, have the ability to abstract beyond what is ordinarily observed’ (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 5) . . . The focus on learning opportunities places responsibility on families, schools, and communities to ensure that children are exposed to the experiences and cognitive stimulation they need to flourish . . . A child who is ready to learn will not learn unless he or she is taught or unless the conditions are propitious for the child to learn on his or her own.”

(Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections, 2004, p. 13–14)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

4

Choose cards that align to your purposes, make copies of the pages, and cut them apart. Make enough copies so that each participant has one card. You may also add cards to this set.



“When students report feeling support from both home and school, they tend to do better in school. They say that they have more self-confidence and feel school is more important. Data indicate that they also are less disruptive, earn higher grades, and are more likely to go to college (Gutman and Midgley, Sanders and Herting, Shumow and Lomax, Trusty).”

(New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, 2002, p. 33)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

5



“Schools have largely been in the position to define what family and community involvement ‘is’ and what the outcomes should be . . . Honig et al (2001) contend that ‘the focus of many school-linked services efforts has been on ‘fixing’ students so teachers can ‘really teach’ and removing barriers to learning, rather than rethinking the learning and teaching that occurs for students—all day, in and out of school—and the conditions, resources and supports that enable it’ (p. 9) . . . A continued emphasis on school-centered connections can limit the development of the entire field and its ability to identify and forge new directions for greater impact on student outcomes.”

(Emerging Issues in School, Family, and Community Connections, 2001, p. 13–14)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

6

Choose cards that align to your purposes, make copies of the pages, and cut them apart. Make enough copies so that each participant has one card. You may also add cards to this set.



“It is important for schools and community organizations not to simply ignore issues related to diversity or to act as if differences don’t exist . . . Think of school as a small country, with its own patterns of behavior and unwritten, as well as formal, rules and expectations. This might make it easier to find helpful ways to familiarize families with the ins and outs of that culture. This is particularly true for immigrant families, who likely have experienced a different kind of school culture. Use both formal and informal strategies to help families get oriented, from conversations in the parking lot to formal meetings and classes. Organize volunteers to meet with other families and to offer guidance in negotiating the schools system. In addition, find resource people who can help orient school staffs to the backgrounds of students and families that may not be familiar to them.”

(Diversity: School, Family & Community Connections, 2003, p. 73)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

7



“Barnett, Young, and Schweinhart (1998), using structural equation modeling, found that children’s early achievement gains were the strongest predictor of their academic performance later in school. However, they also noted the ‘mother’s participation in the child’s education, academic motivation, and personal behavior were all found to be powerful influences on achievement and educational attainment’ (p. 180).”

(Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections, 2004, p. 27)

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

8

Use this template to add additional quotes or demographics to the set. Type or write the quote in the blank space and add a citation, so participants will know the source.



.....

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

9



.....

Focus Questions:

- Does the information or idea on the card match your experience?
- Had you considered this idea before today? Why? Why not?
- How do you see this information as important in your school community?

10

Making the Case

The next step in exploring your own school community is investigating specific qualities from other programs or efforts and determining how they apply to your community. In this activity, participants do this by reviewing summaries of research reports about family and community connections with schools. These summaries are taken from the Center's syntheses.

Please note that many times individuals are resistant to or feel they don't have the ability to personally explore actual "research." Sometimes beginning with a secondary source may make the research text more palatable. However, an important aspect of this activity is your ability to make research accessible and interesting to each participant.

As you use the syntheses for this activity, remember each one is intended to be read and used by those who are experts in accessing research as well as those who have little experience in reading research text. As a result, the advanced user may feel the materials are easily digestible, while inexperienced users may need to stretch their abilities.

In this activity, participants will engage in activities that will answer the following questions:

- ◆ What types of efforts are being done in other schools?
- ◆ What insights do these efforts provide that can improve family and community involvement efforts in a school community?
- ◆ What areas or topics related to the ideas and concepts expressed in the studies need further investigation?

When to Use This Activity:

This activity should be used to foster a deep exploration or assessment of what is currently being done or what experiences and knowledge participants have to promote this work. Use several of the activities from Sections 1 and 2 before attempting this activity. Also remember this activity is intended to focus exploration on what types and impacts efforts have in the community. This activity will be a great precursor to the activities in Section 4.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will have a deeper understanding of what constitutes family and community involvement in their school community as well as where their strengths or weaknesses are.

Content Sources for This Activity:

Synthesis:

- ◆ *Emerging Issues: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Making the Case**To prepare yourself, take the following steps:**

1. Choose three to five of research report summaries from any of the syntheses on a topic that is of importance to your school community. As you choose the summaries, keep in mind that you will be using these summaries to surface topics that are important to your school community. Choose studies that all relate to single theme. For example, if you wanted to focus on raising the achievement of minority students, you might choose the summary for the Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, and Sims (2001) study located on page 183–185 of *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. If you want to expand that focus to include the relationship of family income to family involvement and student achievement, you might also use Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel's (2001) study described on page 51 in *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*.
2. Remember that though these summaries describe studies and provide insight into what each study involves, they do not provide enough information for you to draw valid conclusions. They do, however, communicate key points about the study and what was investigated.
3. Pre-determine key learnings from the summary abstracts as you review them in order to prepare for participants' possible responses.

Note: Research studies used in the syntheses represent a wide array of research methodologies. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help you contextualize important issues. As you prepare for your participants' responses on your chosen topic, you will need to consider if the study information is supported by rigorous evidence or if it provides contextual explanations that deepen your understandings on this topic but does not offer strong evidence for practice. The US Department of Education's *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide* can also provide guidance on this issue. This document is available to download at no cost at <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousetid/index.html>. If you would like to become even more familiar with studies described in the summaries, you should read the primary study reports for each of the summaries. FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: *Making the Case*.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper/pens

HANDOUTS NEEDED

One copy per participant for each summary

Summaries taken for the summary section from one or more of the syntheses located on CD

Handout 18, page 77
Making the Case Worksheet

ESTIMATED TIME

90 minutes

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Ask the participants to read the selected summaries and answer the following questions:

Note: The answers to these questions and the way you direct your reactions to their responses will direct the discussion to topics you want the participants to explore.

In what ways do the summary findings and recommendations resonate with your experience?

How does the information in the abstracts reflect on practices common in family and community involvement efforts in your school community

2. Use chart paper to capture the participant's responses, and post these sheets around the room.
3. Make comments that recognize that the participants have drawn important ideas from the summaries of research studies. Use their responses to point out important issues and needs in the school community. Record these points on chart paper.
4. Use text such as the following to introduce any important issues or needs (key learnings you identified in your preparation) that they did not bring up:

Each of these issues and needs are very important in our school community, each of us, and particularly to our students. I want to expand our thinking a little more. As I read the summary abstracts, I saw another issue (or need) that is of importance to us. As you can see in ___(name a study) and ___(and name a many studies as needed), _____ was found to be important in _____. This is something we need to consider as well. Would anyone like to add to my thoughts?

5. Allow discussion to follow from your introduction of this issue or need. Repeat the process as needed until all the important issues or needs that you pre-determined as important have been introduced.
6. Divide the participants into groups of two or three. Ask each group to write down (on chart paper) two issues based on their discussions that are important as they continue their work to increase family and community connections with schools.

One statement should introduce the following:

A resource, experience, or knowledge that currently exists in the school community that correlates to the discussion they've had about the summaries

The other statement should introduce the following:

A resource, experience, or knowledge that is greatly needed that correlates to the discussion they've had about the summaries

Post these descriptions so all can see them as they create their statements.

7. Ask each group to post their two statements on the wall, grouping the responses to the same question together.
8. Ask all participants to review what has been posted and then ask for volunteers to voice any important ideas that are communicated in the comments. This step should create an opportunity for participants to find value and generate interest in increasing family and community involvement. Keep this in mind as you respond to their comments.
9. Ask the participants to divide into small groups of two or three, or use the groups established earlier and ask them to do the next step in those groups.
10. Introduce Handout 18, *Making the Case Worksheet* as a tool to help them organize their ideas about family and community involvement. Ask each group to fill in one sheet.
11. Ask if anyone would like to share any reactions to what was recorded on the worksheets. Use a transparency made of Handout 18 to record their responses. At the end of this sharing, ask the following question.

How can we use this document we have created today to further our work?

Help the participants create a list or description of what they will do to further this work.

12. Ask the participants to volunteer to make a statement about something they have learned about transitioning research to practice based on their experience with these activities. Summarize what the group has done and learned about **making the case** for family involvement. Include what steps will be taken to continue the work that has been started in the session. Be sure to encourage them to continue their exploration of these ideas independently or as a group.

HANDOUT 18

SECTION 3 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

Making the Case Worksheet

Consider the discussion you have had today and the statements you have created, answer each of the following questions with that experience in mind.

What have you learned about how family and community involvement can help support?	▶ Students? Schools? Communities?
--	---

▼ What strengths do you see in your school community?	▶ What are the most important needs a family and community program could address in your community?
---	---

What one idea have you discussed today needs to be shared with everyone in your community?	▼
--	---

What additional information do you need to help support increased family and community connections with schools?	◀
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SECTION 4

Moving Into Practical Application

While it is important for those working to promote family and community connections with schools to ground their work in research, they also need practical suggestions for how to improve practice. For this purpose, the Center has developed two different resources that distill information on select topics from one or more of the syntheses and provide practical suggestions for using this information. The activities in this section are designed to help you use these resources. One set of resources is text-based; the other is computer- or Web-based. In the second set, the Center has developed two tools to assist those who plan, implement, and evaluate programs to assess whether their work is aligned to characteristics actions common to effective programs.

These resources will provide insight and suggest practical actions that will allow participants to do the following:

- ◆ Engage in hands-on interaction using text- and web-based material
- ◆ Target specific concerns in family and community involvement in schools
- ◆ Learn about strategies that are linked to effective family and community involvement programs
- ◆ Assess the alignment of their current work to characteristics and actions common to effective family and community involvement programs

Suggested Use

Family and community involvement program facilitators should use the ideas in this section to support their own learning in relation to these efforts and as a source for practical suggestions for activities to use with their stakeholders.

These activities are not intended to be stand-alone events, but rather to be incorporated at key points as you work to plan, implement, or develop evaluation indicators for your family and community involvement efforts.

Activities in Section 4

PAGE 80 ◆ SECTION 4 ◆ ACTIVITY 1

Maximizing Use of the Briefs

This activity describes ways to use the briefs as tools for promoting effective strategies for family and community involvement efforts.

Time: 60–90 minutes per approach

PAGE 131 ◆ SECTION 4 ◆ ACTIVITY 2

Maximizing Use of the Interactive Learning Modules

This activity describes ways to use the interactive learning modules for developing shared understanding among stakeholder groups.

Time: 60–90 minutes per module

PAGE 136 ◆ SECTION 4 ◆ ACTIVITY 3

Assessing Your Plan

This activity provides a tool to help assess whether your plan for increasing family and community involvement is aligned to the characteristics and actions common to effective family and community involvement programs.

Time: 90 minutes

Maximizing Your Use of the Strategy Briefs

The briefs listed below communicate specific strategies that are recommended in one or more of the syntheses to address an issue or concern related to a select topic:

- ◆ Learning Outside of the School Classroom
- ◆ Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools
- ◆ Engaging Families at the Secondary Level
- ◆ Building Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders
- ◆ Reaching Out to Diverse Populations
- ◆ Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten

Each of the strategy briefs contains the following types of information:

- ◆ Concise information about the importance and impact of the brief's topic on family and community involvement
- ◆ Bulleted sections of contextual information to expand knowledge on the topic and to provide talking points to be used in meetings and events
- ◆ Practical suggestions for activities to address issues related to the strategy topic

When to Use This Activity:

As you determine the information needs of your school community, review these briefs and determine how using either the information or the suggested activities in one or more can improve your involvement efforts. Each described approach can be used by an individual for personal learning or with a group to plan new efforts, refine existing programs, or create evaluation indicators. The activities should be used after you have conducted several of the introductory activities. These activities can follow the work done in Section 3 or can precede it.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will move the knowledge they have developed in the previous sections to practical application.

Sources for This Activity:

Strategy briefs:

- ◆ *Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction*
- ◆ *Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do?*
- ◆ *Engaging Families at the Secondary Level: What Schools Can Do to Support Family Involvement*
- ◆ *Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders?*
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*
- ◆ *Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness*

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Learning Outside of the School**To prepare yourself, take the following steps:**

1. Find a colleague and engage, in a peer-to-peer discussion to help you cement your understanding of the concepts presented in the brief. Although these briefs are not intended to be difficult to read or use, the nature of this field creates an innate complexity. A study partner will help you process and internalize the concepts presented in the brief.
2. Access the resources suggested in the strategy brief section titled *For More Ideas on This Strategy*. Many of these resources may be downloaded from the Internet at no cost. They will provide additional perspectives and other information about the topic that will help you as you prepare activities based on the strategy briefs.
3. Read a few of the studies included in the *Related Research* section that address an issue of importance in your school community. While the annotations provided in the brief give you a hint about key points from the referenced studies, you will gain a much deeper understanding of the topic by reading the primary sources of research that ground the brief.

Note: The research studies used in the syntheses represent a wide array of research methodologies. The concepts presented in this document are derived from the syntheses. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help you contextualize important issues. As you complete this activity, you will need to consider which concepts are supported by rigorous evidence and which ones deepen your contextual understanding but do not offer strong evidence for practice. In the syntheses, you will notice the authors provide charts that list the studies by type of design. Use these charts and the summary abstracts to help you weigh the evidence in each study.

For further information on rigor and quality research design, the US Department of Education Website (www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousvid/index.html) provides free access to a research guide called *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported By Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide*. This resource provides a detailed explanation on how to gauge the quality of the research report's design.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Chart paper/pens

HANDOUTS NEEDED:

One copy per participant of chosen brief

Handout 19, p. 85
Learning Outside of the School

Handout 20, p. 89
Developing a Collaborative Team Approach

Handout 21, p. 97
Engaging Families at the Secondary Level

Handout 22, p. 103
Organizing Family and Community Connections

Handout 23, p. 111
Reaching Out to Diverse Populations

Handout 24, p. 123
Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten

ESTIMATED TIME

60–90 minutes for each approach

4. Select or develop activities to complete in your school community, based on the *Putting It Into Practice* section of the briefs. These activities should align closely to current events, actions, or needs that are important to the goals for family and community involvement in your school community.

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Use any of the following approaches to promote discussion and action based on the strategy briefs. You may choose to use the briefs one at a time or as a group depending on the context in your school community. Your choice of which brief to use should be determined by the needs of your school community.

Approach 1: Study Group

- ◆ Use one or more of the strategy briefs as source material for a study group process (formal or informal) that explores how family and community connections can support student needs.

Study groups can be a tool that is used simultaneously with existing efforts to develop more effective family and community involvement programs. For example, the brief can provide additional information and ideas to study group who has been asked to develop plans or implementation strategies.

If you have not had experience with study groups, use one of the following resources to learn more about this process:

Murphy, C. & Lick, D. (2001). *Whole-faculty study groups: Creating student based professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press.

Birchak, B., Connor, C., Crawford, K. M., Kahn, L., Kaser, S., Turner, S., & Short, K. G. (1998). *Teacher study groups: Building community through dialogue and reflection*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Approach 2: Promoting Buy-in

- ◆ Use the brief to generate interest through discussion among stakeholder groups. Divide the text into sections, giving a different section to each group. Use a pair-share or reporting-out process to share information. These discussions can result in identification of key issues and processes vital to a school context by exploring the array of perspectives that are inherent in any school community. Once these issues and perspectives have been raised, those involved in the process will also have additional information to guide their efforts.

Note: A significant role for you in the process is to promote a positive and receptive atmosphere, particularly if the participants have not yet coalesced into a collaborative team. These activities can raise participants' awareness of perspectives that they have never considered. When this happens, participants may be startled that others do not think the same way they do. You don't want this surprise to lead to discord. Instead, you will want to use this as an opportunity to build common

understanding and the strong relationships that are integral to effective family and community involvement programs.

- ◆ Ask participants to further explore key issues by investigating primary research on select topics. Obtain copies of studies described in the *Related Research* section of the briefs or use the *Connection Collection Database* at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/> to get a list of research documents related to the topic of interest.

Approach 3: Providing Additional Information on Suggested Practices

- ◆ Use the brief as a resource when you or a group develops planning or implementing strategies that align to the topic addressed in the brief. Each brief distills key concepts to bulleted points. Use these bullets as check points to help determine if the effort is aligned to the efforts of effective family and community involvement programs. Keep in mind that because each brief contains condensed information these documents reveal a limited scope of the current research.

Approach 4: Framing Actions

- ◆ Use specific activities that might support your school's family and community efforts from the *Putting It Into Practice* section of the brief. Each of these sections contains specific activity descriptions that can be used on their own or combined with other actions to support or foster quality programs.

When you use activities from the *Putting It Into Practice* section, remember to tie them to a specific need or focus that is important to the involvement efforts in your school community. They can have great value when used strategically.

STRATEGY BRIEF

Learning Outside of the School Classroom:

What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction

Teachers are a vital part of student achievement, a fact that is reinforced in the “Highly Qualified Teachers” section of the No Child Left Behind Act. However, in order to be effective and meet the needs of each student, teachers have to draw on all available resources. Though it is natural to think of these resources as school-based, in reality, family

and community members are also viable resources. Many teachers are like Ms. Farley in the situation described in the Classroom Snapshot: they are struggling to find ways to provide students the individualized instruction they need. One resource often left untapped is family involvement in learning outside of the school classroom.

CLASSROOM SNAPSHOT

Ms. Farley has 26 students in her classroom. These students are at different ability and maturity levels; there are regular students, second-language learners, special education students, struggling students, and highly motivated achievers. She has to meet the needs of each of these students, simultaneously, every day. At times she feels completely overwhelmed with this task. Though her school has implemented a new sequenced curriculum, tutorial programs for low-performing students, and new instructional strategies, her students are still not mastering the content quickly enough. Many of the students simply need more individualized instruction.

Her students performed better on the district’s first semester benchmark exam than the previous year; however, only 57 percent mastered all of the objectives. She had been hoping the new curriculum alignment and instructional strategies would raise the passing percentage on all objectives to at least 70 percent by the end of this school year, but now she is questioning if that can happen.

After talking to the other seventh-grade teachers, Ms. Farley realizes they are having the same problems. The question they keep asking is, how can they arrange for more one-on-one learning sessions for their students?

During a team meeting, one teacher stated that she wished the students could get help at home

that was coordinated with the efforts at school. Unfortunately, she said, there wasn’t a way to help the parents assist the students with their lessons.

Everyone paid attention when one of the other staff members asked, “Why not? Why can’t we involve family members in efforts to address the needs of each of our students?”

As they began to discuss the issue, some of the teachers expressed doubts as to whether these kinds of efforts would be successful. After all, it was also getting harder every year to get parent volunteers to plan school parties.

Ms. Farley asked, “Do our students really benefit academically from school parties? Is this how we should involve family members? Shouldn’t we focus on involving parents in activities that actually support what we do in the classroom?”

Another teacher asked, “What is it we want parents to do?” The teachers all agreed they needed the family members to provide individualized help to students that reinforces the learning activities occurring in the classroom, sort of an at-home tutorial program.

The teachers began to discuss what they needed to consider in creating a process for encouraging learning outside of the school classroom that would support what was happening in the classroom.

What to Consider

Learning Outside of School: Family Involvement

Like Ms. Farley, teachers often struggle to find ways to provide individualized learning activities for students. The reality of the classroom is that there is a tremendous amount of material to be taught with limited time and resources. Meeting the needs of all students in every classroom is a daunting task. For teachers to meet this demand, they need to draw on all available resources, including family.

The growing body of evidence that points to positive benefits from family and community connections with schools consistently emphasizes that effective efforts don't just happen by chance. In fact, current research stresses the need for school staff to engage family members in learning strategies and techniques to use at home to support classroom lessons. (See Related Research section for more details on these studies.)

Teachers sometimes assume that if they send work home with students, families can provide assistance that will align to what is actually being done in the classroom. Too often, this is not the case. In order for these efforts to work, teachers must use a two-way process that ties directly to classroom instruction. Teachers give assistance to family members in their efforts to provide additional support to student learning; family members support teacher instruction through learning activities outside of the school classroom.

This does not mean that parent-family organizations' fundraising and special-event planning efforts are not beneficial to students or to the school. These events can contribute positively to the school climate and help create an atmosphere of respect and trust. However, these efforts have little direct impact on meeting the learning needs of children.

To support classroom instruction, effective family and community involvement programs should be carefully designed to do the following:

- 1. Link with student achievement goals and school standards**
- 2. Engage families in activities that focus directly on issues related to student learning**
- 3. Use a variety of communication strategies to keep family members informed on what is happening in the classroom and what is needed to support student learning**
- 4. Build a school culture that is inclusive and supportive of family and community involvement**

For example, if teachers organize a potluck supper as part of a family math night where family members are engaged in sample classroom activity demonstrations, this effort is more likely to impact student achievement—particularly if it is designed specifically to encourage family members to engage in additional math activities with their children at home.

For More Ideas on This Strategy

The Center for School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University has developed an interactive homework program called TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) that includes sample assignments to involve family members with students and their homework. Each sample has clear learning goals and instructions. There is also a section where parents and students can give feedback to the teacher. For more information about TIPS, contact:

Dr. Frances E. Van Voorhis, TIPS Coordinator
National Network of Partnership Schools
3003 N. Charles St., Ste. 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
(410) 516-8061
www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/tips/TIPSmain.htm

Links to Learning: Supporting Learning in Out-of-School Time Programs is a 12-minute research-based video that illustrates the role after-school programs can play in student achievement and overall student development by identifying specific skills necessary to succeed in school. For more information or to order, contact:

National Institute on Out-of-School Time
Wellesley Center for Women
106 Central St.
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 283-2547
www.niost.org

Putting It Into Practice

Here are a few strategies for teachers that have been recommended by school, family, and community programs:

1 Engage parents in activities using role-playing about or demonstrations of how to work with children at home to reinforce classroom learning. This can be done during family-to-school events or home visits. When family members use a single well-understood strategy, it is much more effective than 10 scattered strategies.

2 Share key tools, rubrics, grading criteria, or strategies to help family members learn how to determine if a child is successful in learning the content or complete a homework or study assignment. Staff can share these instruments at open-house events, home visits, parent trainings during and outside of the school day, and class newsletters. Teachers should not assume that sending a document home for parents to read will result in automatic knowledge or understanding but rather should organize events to assist parents in learning how to use these instruments.

3 Engage family members and students in math and reading games at family nights where they can learn from one another. Traditionally, schools held one open house a year. Today, schools commonly invite family and community members to events several times each semester. Using these events to coordinate a school-wide effort on an academic theme or content area is a great way to focus the time for maximum benefit. Teachers should thoughtfully connect the activities at these events to classroom instruction.

4 Create special learning kits to lend to students for home use. These kits can be made of inexpensive materials and housed and organized for “check out” by individual teachers or the school librarian. Upper grade level school organizations, family-school organizations, or community service organizations can assemble and maintain these kits as one of their projects. To maximize utility, these kits should contain clear directions for use and be tied to key learning topics for classroom content.

5 Inform family members on standards in exhibits and other means. These efforts allow parents to see how their children’s schoolwork relates to state requirements. School staff can do the following:

- ◆ Develop a visual display at open houses and back-to-school nights that informs parents about content standards and how teachers must address them in the classroom
- ◆ Invite parent reactions to the standards during school gatherings
- ◆ Post information on the school Web site

When efforts are made in this area, teachers should give parents an opportunity to explore and define clear links between the school’s curriculum, instruction, and assessment and the state’s standards.

Find Research Related to This Strategy

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the National Center for Family and Community Connections resource Web page, The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database, at www.sedl.org/connections/resources/. If you are looking for information about involving family in learning outside of school, useful keywords to help narrow your search are homework, achievement, and standards.

Related Research

Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education): In this Minnesota-based program, educators provided parents with literacy activities to do at home that reinforced classroom learning. Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) found that 248 students whose parents participated in Project EASE showed greater gains in language scores than a control group of 71 students who were not involved in home literacy activities.

Jordan, G. E., Snow, C. E., & Porche, M. V. (2000). Project EASE: The effect of family literacy project on kindergarten students' early literacy skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 35(4), 524-546. EJ 616175.

HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters): In this program, trained paraprofessionals using role-playing and model lessons performed home visits and assisted parents in their efforts to engage children in learning at home. Baker, Piotrkowski, and Brooks-Gunn (1998) found as a part of a randomized controlled trial that students involved in a HIPPY program showed higher academic gains than students who were not involved in the HIPPY intervention. In a second study, Kagiticibasi, Sunar, and Bekman (2001) divided the students into three comparison groups: 1) children in home-based care whose mothers received HIPPY training, 2) children in custodial daycare where the mother was given no training, and 3) children in home-based care where the mother was given no training. They, too, found that students involved in the HIPPY program showed higher academic gains than those in the two comparison groups whose parents did not receive training.

Baker, A. J. L., Piotrkowski, C. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1998). The effects of Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) on children's school performance at the end of program and one year later. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13(4), 571-588. EJ580313.

Kagiticibasi, C., Sunar, D., & Bekman, S. (2001). Long-term effects of early intervention: Turkish low-income mothers and children. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 22, 333-361.

Title I Projects: In Title I projects, educators often use a variety of outreach efforts with parents to provide additional academic assistance to their students. Shaver and Walls (1998) found that gains in achievement were related to the quality of the family involvement in learning outside of the school in their evaluation of 71 Title I schools. Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) found that the amount of time parents participated in activities to support learning outside of the classroom was related to higher student achievement; this finding was based on a quasi-experimental study involving nine schools and 335 students.

Shaver, A. V., & Walls, R. T. (1998). Effect of Title I parent involvement on student reading and mathematics achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 31(2), 90-97. EJ561992.

Westat and Policy Studies Associates. (2001). The longitudinal evaluation of school change and performance in Title I schools. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Deputy Secretary, Planning and Evaluation Service. www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/esed/lescp_highlights.html.

TIPS (Teachers Involving Parents in

Schoolwork): In this Baltimore-based program, educators of students in grades 6–8 provided a structure for families to actively engage in supporting students in their schoolwork. Epstein, Simon, and Salinas (1997) studied eight teachers in 16 classes involved in the TIPS process. They found a strong correlation between improved student achievement and parent involvement. Van Voorhis (2001) studied students in six classes who received homework intervention strategies (TIPS) and students in four classes who did not receive homework intervention strategies. She also found a strong correlation between improved student achievement and parent involvement.

Epstein, J. L., Simon, B. S., & Salinas, K. C. (1997). Involving parents in homework in the middle grades. *Research Bulletin*, 19, 4.

Van Voorhis, F. L. (2001). Interactive science homework: An experiment in home and school connection. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85(627), 20-32. www.pdkintl.org/edres/resbul18.htm.

STRATEGY BRIEF

Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools:

What Can School Leaders Do?

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the most sweeping reform of federal education policy since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted as part of President Johnson's Great Society agenda. While NCLB presents state and local policymakers with an unprecedented opportunity to leverage new education reforms at their respective levels, it also challenges educators to comply with a considerable number of new and exacting federal requirements.

National Association of State Boards of Education, n.d.

These words from the home page of the National Association of State School Boards of Education illustrate the enormity of the task that school administrators face with the NCLB legislation. Schools are now publicly accountable for the achievement of each and every child. However, an often overlooked aspect of this legislation that is intended to help support student learning is the School-Parent Compact.

Schools are required to involve parents in a "jointly" developed written parental involvement policy that describes

- ◆ **the school's plan to ensure that all students reach academic achievement standards,**
- ◆ **processes for staff-parent communication, and**
- ◆ **ways parents can provide and support learning.**

For many schools, the idea of involving families actively in the decision-making and implementation efforts needed for school improvement is intimidating. As can be seen in the School Snapshot, school leaders play a key role in creating a school culture in which parental involvement is not only accepted but also valued.

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

Mr. Simon is the administrator of a 6–8 middle school campus located in a midsize community. The students in his school are performing adequately, but not exceptionally, on the state-mandated tests. In fact, they narrowly met their goal for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the year. Knowing that he needs to develop new strategies to strengthen academic efforts to meet the school's AYP, Mr. Simon and his staff have initiated several strategies to address student performance needs:

- 1. Instructional staff meet regularly to discuss and align curriculum and instructional practices.**
- 2. Staff have begun to use benchmark exams as a tool to determine if instruction has been effective.**
- 3. Staff have begun a process of ongoing achievement data analysis to determine student and staff needs.**

Mr. Simon feels that these efforts will help his staff assist every child in reaching academic success, but he knows he needs to include parents in this improvement process, not only as part of the mandated NCLB School-Parent Compact, but also to garner support for this work. However, he is concerned about the commitment his staff will give to activities that promote positive interactions between school staff and the families of the students.

He has just met with his instructional staff to introduce the concept of actively communicating with the students' families and inviting them to be involved in the improvement of their children's education. The meeting was rocky and tense.

His staff expressed doubts about involving families. In fact, only a few staff members were receptive to the idea of reaching out to the school's family members. After all, at their last open house, they had only 12 family members show up. The families of their students did

not seem to show their support of the school. Instead, parents often called to complain but seldom volunteered to help or support the teachers. Additionally, the staff expressed concern that if they allowed family to get "too involved," the family members would try to tell the teachers how to teach. For most of the staff, parent involvement equated to classroom interference. In general, the staff felt that the parents just needed to make sure the kids came to school prepared for learning, did their homework, and behaved well in school. His staff did not see a need for anything more.

Mr. Simon was not surprised by the concerns and fears expressed by the teachers. In fact, after reflecting on the events of meeting, he knew that airing these issues was an important step in getting his staff to engage with this new concept. However, he also knew that he needed to get his staff past their griping and worrying and raise their awareness of the possible benefits of increased family involvement when all stakeholders come to the table in a meaningful process.

He decided to use a process called Collaborative Action Teams to help move the staff forward in their acceptance of families as partners in their children's education. In this approach, all stakeholders—school staff, students, family, and community—are involved in activities to identify pressing issues in the school community, share their perspectives on school improvement, and take action together to address those issues. This strategy will help him change his school culture from one where school staff and family interactions are devalued to one where they are common elements of the school day. As his staff becomes more accustomed to collaborative interactions, Mr. Simon plans to involve staff in exploring how family connections with schools can directly support classroom instruction and student learning. However, one thing is abundantly clear to him: a successful collaborative action team process will require multiple steps to build the relationships needed to accomplish his goals.

What to Consider

Developing a Team Approach for Family and Community Connections With School

Current research in this field reveals that schools, families, and communities need strong leadership if they are going to shift away from the traditional models of involvement in which school personnel dominate the interactions. When school leaders create conditions that foster collaborative relationships among the school, families, and the community, the result can be a cohesive partnership among all of the schools' stakeholders. These partnerships can harness family, community, and school resources to ensure that all students have the support needed to succeed.

A first step in beginning to initiate collaborative efforts is to define the current status of school and family relations. What factors inhibit or foster family and community interactions with the school and its staff? Successful administrators are able to anticipate the inhibitors and soften their impact while promoting research-based strategies that encourage increased involvement. The following factors have been identified in the research on family and community connections with schools as key to promoting family interactions:

- ◆ Creating a family-friendly school
 - Is there a language barrier between school and family?
 - Are parents able to attend meetings at the times they are scheduled?
 - Do parents have transportation to attend events/meetings?
 - Do parents feel welcome at the school?
- ◆ Networking through community organizations
 - What community organizations actively support the school through service projects that impact learning?
 - How can these organizations help support student learning?
 - How can these organizations help communicate school needs?
 - How can these organizations help eliminate barriers to participation for family and community members?

- ◆ Listening actively to the concerns of individuals
 - Do staff have the skills that are needed to be active listeners?
 - Are the concerns of individual parents reflective of the needs of a larger issue the school should address?
- ◆ Influencing the creation of policies to encourage family and community involvement
 - Does the district or school have policies in place that foster and promote family and community connections with schools?
 - What mechanisms are in place to keep policymakers aware of involvement project progress and needs?
 - How can school staff reach out to those who make policy in order to develop supportive policies?

By paying careful attention to the factors that can derail or encourage family and community connections with schools, administrators can cultivate an inclusive culture that encourages the involvement of all stakeholders in school improvement.

Research also provides a list of actions that school administrators should take in order to support collaborative efforts with family and community members.

- 1. Foster formal school- and district-level policies that promote family and community connections with schools.**
- 2. Institute communication processes that reach out to family and community through multiple pathways, both informal and formal.**
- 3. Address barriers to involvement that inhibit participation because of culture or language.**
- 4. Create an environment that honors families' and community members' concerns and needs in their support of student learning.**

The question for administrators like Mr. Simon is, what actions can school leaders take as they begin these efforts?

Putting It Into Practice

Collaborative action teams (CAT) can be a powerful strategy in expanding family and community connections with schools. In a 5-year research and development project with 23 sites, SEDL (2000) found that collaborative action teams were a successful way to increase family involvement. Furthermore, Wynn, Meyer, and Richards-Schuster (2000) reviewed 249 family connections programs and found that collaborative processes were a key element in the success of family involvement efforts with schools. These researchers and others have found that it is the collaborative culture of these efforts that encourages family members to provide meaningful support for student learning. When school leaders, such as Mr. Simon, use an activity like the one described below, they are taking a first step in developing a collaborative approach to establish a “jointly” created *School-Parent Compact*.

Though educators tend to begin all improvement efforts with a visioning process, developing a deeper contextual understanding of the school’s culture can provide long-term benefits. This shared knowledge and experience about different stakeholders’ perspectives can ultimately support a visioning process done at a later date.

Again, as Mr. Simon noted, a collaborative action team process is multisteped. This activity is designed to be a foundation for future work. It is not a stand-alone activity that will instantly create a collaborative culture; it is the first of many steps that need to be taken. This activity has been modified to address the needs of a single school, rather than a district, and is taken from SEDL’s *Creating Collaborative Action Teams: Working Together for Student Success* materials, available through the SEDL catalog at <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/>. These materials are available in English and Spanish. For a copy of the original activity in PDF format, go to <http://www.sedl.org/connections/> and click on “Resources.”

Gather School Community Information: Define Your School Community

A school community consists of all the people and organizations that either affect or are affected by the school. How you define school community will determine how the team is formed and what actions the team will take.

1 Invite representatives from various community organizations, students’ family members, students, and school and district staff to attend a meeting to explore the idea of increasing family and community involvement in student success. When determining the best way to invite attendees, remember that the more representative the group is of the school’s neighborhood community, the more meaningful this process will be.

2 Begin a conversation with participants by introducing the following questions to help define the school community. Record the answers on chart paper and post within sight of all attending.

♦ History

- Does the school have a unique history?
- How long has the school existed?
- Has the student population always mirrored its present population?

♦ Geography

- How is the community around the school organized physically?
- Are there natural or man-made boundaries that people recognize?
- Are certain neighborhoods closely affiliated with the school?

♦ Administrative Organization

- How is the school administration organized?
- What is the administrative structure at this school?
- How are decisions made and communicated?

♦ Needs

- Who are the students served by this school? Does any sub-group of students within the school need more services or perform less well than others?

HANDOUT 20, page 5 of 8

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

- What individuals, groups, or organizations currently help meet the needs of the students in the school?

♦ **Common Interests**

- Does the school have issues in common with other schools in the area?
- Do people from different schools have overlapping interests?
- How do the feeder patterns impact this school?

3 Ask the group to scan the information recorded on chart paper. Next, ask them to create summary statements about the school community based on their answers to the questions. Record the summary statements on chart paper. Post these statements for later use.

4 Create labels for chart paper with "school," "home," "community," and "student" written on them. Lead the whole group in a discussion that identifies individuals, organizations, and institutions that connect with students and their families in the school community. Record their responses under the appropriate chart labels. Ask them to keep their summary statements about the school community in mind as they do this. Sample questions to help lead this discussion might include:

- ♦ Who has been in the media lately advocating for students and their families?
- ♦ Who addresses issues (before the school board, city council, etc.) concerning students and their families?
- ♦ Who focuses on students and their families as part of their mission?
- ♦ Who is most affected by the school's or district's programs and policies?
- ♦ Who affects the school's or district's programs the most?

5 Divide team members into small groups of 5–7 people. Assign each group one of the summary statements that was created in the third step. Ask the small group to review the summary statement based on the discussion they had in the fourth step. Ask them to redefine the summary statement on a new sheet of chart paper. Sample questions to help foster this step might include:

- ♦ Does this summary statement reflect the involvement of individuals, organizations, and institutions that connect with students in or out of school?
- ♦ Are there intersecting points of action and interest among individuals, organizations, and institutions as they work with students in or out of school?

6 Have each group report to the whole group. Post the new summary statements and ensure that everyone agrees to them. Modifications may need to be negotiated.

These summary statements describe the school community and can be used to further the process of developing a collaborative culture to support student success. Participants can take the summary statements and use them as a tool to help school staff and interested family and community members determine who needs to be involved in a collaborative action team in order to create a team that reflects the multiple perspectives inherent in a school community. This team can become the representative body that creates the written School-Parent Compact required by NCLB.

However, this single event cannot create a functioning collaborative action team. It is only a first step. By continuing to engage the school, families, and the community in further activities to build a collaborative action team, the school can create a stakeholder group that can begin to address the needs of its student population. As Mr. Simon notes, it is a many-faceted process with many steps. If Mr. Simon, or other school leaders, desires to create a collaborative culture, he will need to continue to explore and promote the inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders in all school efforts in an array of activities that span an extended period of time. It is the continued work that begins with an activity such as this one that can lead to powerful interactions and bring about quality school improvement.

For More Ideas on This Strategy

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has several products that school leaders like Mr. Simon can use to create a collaborative school culture.

The following products have been created for the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, part of SEDL's current regional education laboratory contract, and may be downloaded at no cost at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/>:

1. Research Brief: What Do We Mean by "Family and Community Connections With Schools?" (2002)

This research brief explores the variety of ways in which school staff, families, students, and community members define this type of involvement and provides strategies to promote these types of connections.

2. Learning Outside of the School Classroom: What Teachers Can Do to Involve Families in Supporting Classroom Instruction (2001)

This strategy brief explores the concept of involving families to support classroom instruction by presenting key research findings and strategies that teachers can use to promote family involvement in supporting classroom instruction.

The following products were developed under other contracts and can be purchased through the Web site or downloaded at no cost (<http://www.sedl.org/pubs/>):

3. Building Support for Better Schools: Seven Steps to Engaging Hard-to-Reach Communities (2000)

This practical guide is designed for educators, civic leaders, community organizers, or anyone else interested in involving traditionally hard-to-reach communities. Also available in Spanish.

4. Family and Community Involvement: Reaching Out to Diverse Populations (2000)

This book is geared toward teachers, principals, and superintendents who want to develop meaningful parent and community involvement with culturally and linguistically diverse community members. Also available in Spanish.

Related Research

There are numerous studies that support the development of a collaborative school culture in order to foster the type of family and community connections with schools that Mr. Simon wants for his school. For Mr. Simon and other school leaders, there are two areas of family and community involvement research that can provide valuable insight into the design of meaningful efforts: leadership support and organizational structure.

Leadership Support for Family and Community Connections With Schools

Several research studies have explored leadership issues in relation to family and community involvement with a specific focus on leadership strategies that support the involvement of diverse students and their families and communities. For this topic, no random control trial studies were found. Though the studies reported here are rich in description about issues and factors influencing leadership in family and community involvement, they do not provide empirical evidence as to what leadership interventions can produce the best results or what interventions foster effective leaders for these programs.

Based on their interviews with 20 family members from Mexican-American homes and 20 family members from Anglo homes, Birch and Ferrin (2002) suggest that school leaders who promote sensitive and deliberate listening strategies can assist their staffs in reaching out to parents successfully. For example, in the study school, the staff actively engaged family members on parent advisory committees, involved them in school board sessions, and encouraged their attendance and participation at other school reform meetings. Before each meeting, a family involvement coordinator contacted family members to explain what would be expected of them at the meeting and also arranged transportation to ensure that family members could attend.

Birch, T. C., & Ferrin, S. E. (2002). Mexican American parental participation in public education in an isolated Rocky Mountain rural community. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(1), 70–78. EJ646575.

Johnstone and Hiatt (1997), in an action research case study of a school-based parent center in a low-income Latino community, note that a family friendly school with an “open-door” policy that welcomes parents into the school is the strongest action in connecting families and schools. They state that the principal is the key to this open-door policy and to all efforts that encourage and support family involvement with schools. The principal, as the central advocate for a designated program, is able to marshal financial resources and to create inclusive opportunities as well as generate and enforce policy that supports these efforts.

Johnstone, T. R., & Hiatt, D. B. (1997). *Development of a school-based parent center for low income new immigrants.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. ED407156.

In their study of four successful migrant schools, Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) found that policy decisions at all levels of the system either created or eliminated barriers to parent participation by expanding the staff’s definition of family involvement. In this study, the authors looked at two types of involvement: 1) a traditional approach that was defined as a one-sided process dominated by a school staff member requesting action on the part of a family member and 2) a more inclusive process in which staff actively sought to engage and support parents in meeting the needs of students. In cases where staff were able to shift from a traditional to more inclusive processes, family involvement resulted in positive outcomes. However, it was not just that family and community friendly policies were adopted; it was the expectation set by the policy. In these schools, the staff “held themselves accountable” for the creation of positive and successful involvement efforts. They took a proactive role through activities such as home visits. Additionally, the schools hired key staff members who had personal and unique understandings of the population groups in the community in order to bring more of the community context into the school itself.

Lopez, G. R., Scribner, J. D., & Mahitivanichcha, K. (2001). Redefining parental involvement: Lessons from high-performing migrant-impacted schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 253–288.

Organizational Structures

Numerous studies have also explored the types of organizational structures school leaders use to support family and community connections with schools. For this topic, no random control trial studies were found. Though the studies reported here are rich in description about issues and factors about organizational structures and their relationship to leadership in family and community involvement, they do not provide empirical evidence as to what interventions foster the most effective organizational structures to support leaders in these programs.

From their study of 14 Spanish-speaking parents, Levine and Trickett (2000) developed a theoretical framework for collaborative school involvement processes in schools with high numbers of Hispanic and low-income families based on their finding that collaboration between school and family members was a critical aspect of successful family and community programs. For example, the authors illustrated the positive impact that can come from using translators for parents who do not speak English, offering childcare during meetings, utilizing non-school day meeting times and locations, and providing staff with professional development on the students’ cultural contexts.

Levine, E. B., & Trickett, E. J. (2000). Toward a model of Latino parent advocacy for educational change. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 20(1 & 2), 121–137.

Wynn, Meyer, and Richards-Shuster (2000) examined 249 “school connections” programs, tracing their origins, development, purpose, and patterns. They found that six factors significantly impact the quality of programs: motivations, relationships, organizations involved, common efforts, external influences, and results. They also found that school leaders who used innovative involvement strategies were able to create viable supports for instruction and curriculum content that came from outside the school. For example, schools in the study often drew on “guest” instructors from businesses, universities, civic associations, or art, music, or cultural organizations. Additionally, some programs were also successful in involving tutors from a variety of community groups to support instruction.

Wynn, J., Meyer, S., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2000). Furthering education: The relationship of schools and other organizations. In M. C. Wang & W. L. Boyd (Eds.), *Improving results for children and families: Linking collaborative services with school reform efforts* (pp. 53–90). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

In their comparison study of the Comer and Zigler Model for School Management and Collaborative Decision-making (CoZi), Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, and Henrich (2000) studied 53 teachers and 680 third- and fourth- grade students from one school and 23 teachers and 250 third- and fourth-grade students from a population-comparable school. They found that when school systems fostered a positive atmosphere for parent involvement with schools, teachers were more apt to find meaningful ways to bring parents into the schools. For example, the participants in the CoZi group planned several events each month that involved parents that focused on addressing the child's needs at school as well as at home.

Desimone, L., Finn-Stevenson, M., & Henrich, C. (2000). Whole school reform in a low-income African American community: The effects of the CoZi Model on teachers, parents, and students. *Urban Education*, 35 (3), 269–323. EJ612404.

Find Research Related to This Strategy

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools' publications database, "The Connection Collection," at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bibsearch.html>. If you are looking for information about involving family in learning outside of school, useful keywords to help narrow your search are leadership, collaboration, and relationships.

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Izzo, C. V., Weissberg, R. P., Kasprow, W. J., & Fendrich, M. (1999). A longitudinal assessment of teacher perceptions of parent involvement in children's education and school performance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 817–839.

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Sanders, M. G. (2001). The role of "community" in comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs. *Elementary School Journal*, 10(1), 19–34.

Wynn, J., Meyer, S., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2000). Furthering education: The relationship of schools and other organizations. In M. C. Wang & W. L. Boyd (Eds.), *Improving results for children and families: Linking collaborative services with school reform efforts* (pp. 53–90). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

STRATEGY BRIEF

Engaging Families at the Secondary Level

What Schools Can Do to Support Family Involvement

Commonly, when parents attempt to talk to their teenagers about school, the response is short and uninformative. Adults, whether teachers or family members, have taken this resistance as a sign of rejection. However, research in this field shows that, in fact, teenagers do want to interact with their parents, as well as other adults, and have them involved in their lives (Duffett & Johnson, 2004).

Educators have also assumed that parents aren't as involved or as interested in the progress of their adolescent children. However, Shaver and Walls (1998) have found that parents do have a desire to be involved in lives of their adolescent children, regardless of their economic status or ethnicity. Parents just aren't always successful in their efforts, so they tend to be more cautious in their actions. The crux of family-school involvement at the middle and high school level is determining the kinds of adult interactions that not only allow teenagers to have autonomy and respect but also meet the needs of families and schools.

At the elementary level, families commonly assist with homework, eat lunch at school, volunteer as reading tutors, and are a welcomed visible

presence. In contrast, successful involvement at the high school level might include special meetings to communicate test information or test preparation strategies; discussions on college planning; participation on a school improvement team; or workshops designed to teach homework strategies or methods to address adolescent issues. Involvement at the secondary level is often much less visible, though just as valuable. Research (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) demonstrates that family-based processes that successfully support teenage academic achievement include interactions where families

- ♦ **talk often with their teenagers about school;**
- ♦ **help them make plans for postsecondary education; and**
- ♦ **keep them focused on learning and homework during the school year.**

For school leaders like Mrs. Cortez in the School Snapshot, the issue is, how do schools support and encourage salient family engagement at the secondary level?

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

Mrs. Cortez, the principal of a large urban high school, and her lead counselor, Mr. Thomas, have just returned from a meeting at the central office with the district's family involvement coordinator. At the urging of a special community task force created by the superintendent, the district's school board has just adopted a new policy regarding family involvement at the high school level. All the high schools in the district are to develop an approach that will involve families in supporting

student learning and draw on the resources that families can provide to schools. It is to be fully implemented the following school year. It is now early spring.

When Mrs. Cortez and Mr. Thomas discuss this new mandate with the school's lead teacher cadre the next day, the teachers are not opposed to the idea, but they aren't sure where to begin. Mrs. Cortez asks if anyone has read an article or attended a conference presentation lately that addresses this subject.

HANDOUT 21, page 2 of 8

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT, continued

Mr. Thomas says that he has just read an article about family involvement at the high school level. The article states that secondary schools have to think about parent involvement in a very different way. They need to help families provide support for student learning and make continued education a goal for all students. All of this is to be done while working with rebellious teenagers! One of the teachers asks if they think they can make staying in school as important as a new pair of name-brand tennis shoes. They all laugh, but they all agree with her statement.

One of the teachers tells a story about helping a student earlier in the week by answering her questions about how her parents should fill in a section of her college application. The group agrees that students need more help with college preparation.

Mr. Thomas states that he and the other counselors have been telling the students to get their college visits done early because narrowing their choices to a few colleges makes the process much simpler than completing a larger number of applications and then choosing one. However, this information has not been reaching the parents. After a few more minutes of discussion, the group agrees—the students and their families need more information on applying to college and for financial aid. One of the staff members asks, “Wouldn’t this be a good place to start a meaningful collaboration with families, students, and school staff?”

Within minutes, the group drafts a beginning outline of a plan. The group is working intensely and excitedly when Mrs. Cortez asks, “Do you think we ought to involve the families and the students if this project is supposed to be a collaborative one?” There is laughter. One of the teachers comments that there is nothing like giving a bunch of teachers a problem to solve: “We tend to just jump to the solution, don’t we?”

Mr. Thomas suggests they start again. This time they brainstorm a different topic: Who should be involved in planning a program to support families and students as they plan for the future? They decide they want a diverse list of students, family representatives, school staff, and

community members who could serve on a task force to explore the possibilities. They narrow their number to a list of 15 names and then divide the names among the teachers to spread out the work of calling everyone.

The next question is what to do at the first meeting. The group quickly reaches consensus on two issues. First, they need to get everyone at the meeting to value the importance of family involvement in future planning for secondary students. Second, they need to interest family members in participating in the effort.

Several of the staff members volunteer to work on an activity to illustrate the need for family involvement at this level. Their school now requires that all new programs be research-based. Before moving this process forward, they need to look for research in the area and identify other schools that might provide examples of this kind of program.

Another staff member offers one other issue for consideration in their planning. She states that when someone personally invites her to share or partner in a project, she always feels good about giving her time and energy. Other staff members agree. Soon, the group decides to adopt specific strategies in order to create a welcoming culture for parents:

- 1. Respect them as equal partners.**
- 2. Recognize their potential contributions.**
- 3. Welcome them to the school and this new effort.**

As they build their initial activity and begin their contact with families, they keep these three strategies in mind. Their plan may have started with the school staff, but they intend for it to become the school community’s plan.

Mrs. Cortez is impressed and pleased with the positive responses from her staff and their willingness to meet with parents as equal partners. However, she also knows that this is only the beginning. She, her staff, and the families of her students have a lot of work to do before they will be able to implement a successful family involvement program for the high school.

What to Consider

Engaging Families at the Secondary Level

Mrs. Cortez was handed an incredibly large project to be completed in a very short period of time. To do this, she began by introducing the concept to a select group of staff, encouraging them to talk about what needs might be addressed through such a program, and, most importantly, helping them to see the importance of involving family members and students early in the process. It would have been much easier for her to have let the lead teachers plan and implement the project as they were ready to do before she asked if they needed to involve the students' families in the process. If she had taken the quicker and easier approach, the efforts would have represented the needs and perspectives of only the school staff and lacked buy-in by all the stakeholders who have an interest in student success.

By including students' families in the planning and implementation stages, educators can broaden the scope of the work and increase the resources available to the school and its students. In these more inclusive involvement efforts, the school takes responsibility for providing a balanced program while also ensuring that parents become engaged in ways that are meaningful to them and as their home and work life permit (Ritenour, 2004). Gutman and Midgley (2000) also found that although family involvement as a single factor in improved student performance may have little significance, when it is combined with support from teachers, a sense of belonging by students, and meaningful family involvement, there can be significant impact on the educational experience of the child.

Just as Mrs. Cortez focused on a specific target for her school, other schools will benefit from narrowing their scope of work, particularly when starting a new initiative. For instance, if student homework completion and grades are low, the school could focus on how to help parents work with students at home on their assignments. When parents know how to help with homework, the result can be higher student performance on these assignments (Balli, Deom, & Wedman, 1998).

If the school decides to target what students do after they leave high school, they might work with family members to encourage their children to plan for and attend college. When there is a joint effort between school and home to promote continued education after high school graduation, students are more likely to make plans for and

extend education past the high school level, regardless of family background (Fan & Chen, 2001).

A review of recent research (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) in the field advocates that middle and high schools should promote the following actions:

- ◆ Providing workshops or holding meetings on
 - topics that families suggest, such as developing positive discipline strategies and supporting children through crisis;
 - program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and education options after graduation and how to plan for them;
 - financing postsecondary education and applying for financial aid; and
 - courses students should take to be prepared for college or other education opportunities after graduation.
- ◆ Contacting families on a regular basis through
 - regular phone calls from teachers to discuss something positive their children are doing in class, not just when there are problems;
 - meetings with teachers to talk about their children's progress and what they're learning, particularly as it relates to future plans; and
 - phone calls, e-mails, or other methods to connect with parents during the summer about the next school year's expectations and activities and build a relationship with each family.
- ◆ Welcoming family involvement in the school through
 - family and student tours of the school or classroom visits and observations and
 - special visits at next grade-level feeder schools to meet with families about the new schools' programs and offer families and students an opportunity to ask questions.

Find Research Related to This Strategy

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools' publications database, The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database, at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bibsearch.html>. If you are looking for information on involvement at the secondary level, useful keywords to help narrow your search are middle school, high school, and secondary.

Putting It Into Practice

In each of the four syntheses created by SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, the authors include recommendations for building effective programs based on the studies included. In the 2002 synthesis, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Henderson and Mapp recommend the following strategies to help school staff develop effective family and community connections with schools.

1 To Assist Families in Helping Students Plan for the Future

Counselors or teachers can

- ◆ Hold monthly workshops for upper-grade-level students and their families. Each workshop topic could be devoted to a specific aspect of college planning.
- ◆ Plan a series of workshops for lower-grade-level students and their families during the spring when students are making their course selections for the next school year.
- ◆ Plan a series of events for freshmen and their families to explore future careers by working with local businesses. These events could involve job shadowing, job exploration, and course selection. Students have a limited understanding of what most jobs actually entail, so it is hard for them to make informed decisions about the future. These kinds of events help them gain a more "real" picture of the work they think they'd like to do.
- ◆ Coordinate with the middle school counselors to hold several planning events in the spring for 8th graders and their families. These events might focus on course selection and planning for the future.

Teachers can

- ◆ Create special assignments that require students to talk to family members, business owners, or others in the community about their futures. For example, students can create research reports for a history class about the difference in work requirements for a job that existed 30 years ago and a similar position today; in math, students can interview former students or older relatives or friends who are college graduates about the costs of college and create a budget for their own goals; or in English, students can create a special-edition newspaper featuring stories on former students who are now college graduates.

Families can

- ◆ Talk to their children on a regular basis to discover what is actually happening in school. Children often reply "Nothing" when their parents ask them "What did you do in school today?" But, if asked how a specific test, homework assignment, or special event went, the child will give a more informative answer.
- ◆ Work with their children to set goals each year. This will require that parents learn about graduation requirements and different graduation plans.

2 To Assist Families in Supporting Academic Instruction

Counselors can

- ◆ Conduct workshops for families on the information on the school's report card and explain other information that will provide families with an overview of the testing expectations for students.
- ◆ Work with teachers to provide course content information sheets for families so students can make better course selection choices.

Teachers can

- ◆ Invite family members to observe teaching strategies so they can assist students at home.
- ◆ Organize math, science, or other content area nights or events and invite families to attend. Generally, these events use a learning center approach, involving family members and students in collaborative problem solving or content exploration. This is a great opportunity to engage families in interactive processes and teach them what is being taught to the students.
- ◆ Call families and ask them if they need help with assisting their children with homework. These calls can be used to help determine workshops that could be offered to family members to assist them in supporting student learning.
- ◆ Post class assignments, timelines, and test dates electronically so families can keep track of when students should be studying or might need assistance.

Families can

- ◆ Monitor student progress daily to determine when students need assistance or when the family member needs to get help in order to provide the needed assistance to the student.
- ◆ Create a phone tree to help all parents stay informed on school events or activities.
- ◆ Participate on improvement teams that the school creates.

For More Ideas on This Strategy

The Coalition of Essential Schools provides resources via its Web site to assist educators and families in working with adolescents. Its journal, *Horace*, contains practical insights and hints on working with adolescents. This journal is available in paper; however, electronic copies can be obtained at <http://www.essentialschools.org>. Jill Davidson's article, "Show, Don't Tell: Strategies for Family Involvement in CES Schools," (http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/305), provides key strategies and practical examples for this work.

CES National

1814 Franklin St., Suite 700
Oakland, CA 94612
510-433-1451
<http://www.essentialschools.org>

Middle Ground, a publication of the National Middle School Association, contains anecdotes and suggested strategies for successful programs for middle schools. Though all of its issues relate to teaching at the middle school level, its August 2004 issue is dedicated to articles concerning family and community connections with schools.

National Middle School Association

4151 Executive Pkwy., Suite 300
Westerville, OH 43081
800-528-NMSA (6672)
614-895-4730
<http://www.nmsa.org>

The Parent Institute Web site houses two newsletters that provide insightful information that teachers can share with families or families can review themselves. One newsletter is written for middle school audiences; another for high school audiences. These documents are available in Spanish and English and may be downloaded at no cost from the Institute Web site.

The Parent Institute

P.O. Box 7474
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
800-756-5525
703-323-9170
<http://www.parent-institute.com/hcl/>

Related Research

There are numerous studies that explore successful family involvement at the secondary level. The studies reported here represent several research designs: comparison studies, random surveys, and other descriptive methods. While each study provides comparative data or is rich in description about issues and factors influencing family involvement at the secondary level, they do not provide empirical evidence on what intervention strategies can positively impact student performance and can be found in randomized control trials. Additionally, the studies described in this section not only present current research, they also help to define what is known about effective family and community connections with schools.

As stated in the introduction to this brief, educators and families have assumed that secondary students do not want their families involved in their schools and that families don't see a need to be involved at the secondary level. This study provides a clear picture of what students and their families want and need. In 2004, the Wallace Foundation commissioned a report by Public Agenda to explore the "voices" of the "consumers" of "out-of-school time"—parents and students (p. 7). Using random-digit-dialing technology, Duffett and Johnson conducted telephone interview surveys with 609 students in grades 6–12 and 1,003 parents or guardians of K–12 students from across the nation and collected questionnaires from 10 focus groups. Though the report covers a wide range of topics, two findings tie directly to ideas associated with this brief:

1. Most youngsters believe organized activities are good, and they acknowledge that they sometimes need a push to become involved (p. 10).
2. Activities and programs that focus on learning appeal to students and parents regardless of their low-income and minority status (p. 13).

Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2004). *All work and no play? Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time.* New York: The Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/WF/>

In two studies published by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR), researchers explored family involvement at the secondary level. Both studies used follow-

HANDOUT 21, page 6 of 8

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

up data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which was collected in 1992. In the follow-up study, researchers interviewed 13,580 parents of students in their last year of high school who had also participated in the original NELS:88 research project, which collected surveys from approximately 24,000 parents. Catsambis and Garland (1997) found that as students move from middle school and toward graduation, parents are not less involved in their children's school life, but instead shift their role from less attention to day-to-day student behavior to more concern about educational expectations for their children. In the second study report, Catsambis (1998) narrowed her focus to explore whether this evolved parental involvement had an academic impact as students progressed from 8th grade to 12th grade. She found a high correlation between high levels of communication on academic matters and course selection and the number of course credits a student earned as well as enrollment in higher-level courses. In a third study using the same NELS:88 and follow-up data from 1992, Catsambis (2001) reported that 8th graders benefited from family assistance with or supervision of home study; however, 10th graders did not gain as much from these types of interventions. This illustrates the necessity for families and school staff to use varied strategies for family involvement that are aligned to the needs and ages of children.

Catsambis, S., & Garland, J. E. (1997). *Parental involvement in students' education during middle school and high school* (CRESPAR Report 18). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University. ED423328. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/reports.htm>

Catsambis, S. (1998). *Expanding knowledge of parental involvement in secondary education: Effects on high school academic success* (CRESPAR Report 27). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University. ED426174. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/reports.htm>

Catsambis, S. (2001). Expanding knowledge of parental involvement in children's secondary education: Connections with high school seniors' academic success. *Social Psychology of Education*, 5, 149–177.

Van Voorhis (2003) studied 6 sixth- and eighth-grade classes that received homework intervention strategies through Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) and 4 classes that did not. Based on her comparison, she found that when schools use a formalized homework help model, there is an increase in supportive family involvement at home. She states that if schools desire an increase in effective parental involvement, they need to develop a formal structure that assists parents in developing strategies to support student learning.

Van Voorhis, F. L. (2003). Interactive homework in middle school: Effects on family involvement and science achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 96(6), 323–338.

References Cites

Within this document, the descriptions of concepts and recommendations come from both long-standing foundational research as well as more current studies. The references included in this section reflect both types of literature.

Balli, S. J., Demo, D. H., & Wedman, J. F. (1998). Family involvement with children's homework: An intervention in the middle grades. *Family Relations*, 47(2), 149–157.

Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2004). All work and no play? Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time. New York: The Wallace Foundation.

Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 27–61.

Gutman, L. M., & Midgley, C. (2000). The role of protective factors in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the middle school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29(2), 223–249.

Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). A new wave of evidence: Family and community connections with schools. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Ritenour, D. (2004). Beyond the booster club: Connecting schools, families, and communities at the secondary level. *SEDL Letter*, 16(2), 15–17.

Shaver, A. V., & Walls, R. T. (1998). Effect of Title I parent involvement on student reading and mathematics achievement. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 31(2), 90–97. EJ561992.

STRATEGY BRIEF

Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools

How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders

Twenty years of research on school performance has created a body of knowledge that grounds today's school improvement efforts and has resulted in a concise list of characteristics that are common to high-performing schools (Berman & Chambliss, 2000; McLaughlin, 1990; Cuban, 1988; Elmore, & McLaughlin, 1988; Fullan, 1993; Griffin & Barnes, 1984). As accountability becomes more and more important, educational leaders across the nation are actively attempting to foster these qualities in their schools:

- 1. A shared understanding of goals and expectations for all involved in the school system**
- 2. High academic standards clearly defining what students are to know and be able to do**
- 3. A strong cadre of leaders providing support for the goals and expectations of the school and the school community**
- 4. Procedures for purposeful collection and analysis of data on students, programs, and staff**
- 5. Strong relationships with family and community partners**

Unfortunately, schools and districts commonly expend most of their time and effort developing the first four qualities and neglect to build strong relationships with family and community. These relationships can result in additional support for improvement efforts, and with the ever-increasing demands on schools to continually improve, schools need to maximize every possible resource.

However, simply encouraging or even mandating that all schools enact strategies that

promote family and community connections is not as easily done as said. Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2004) describe a mother's feelings after she is asked by the school to help her child read at home:

The school has consistently advised her to read to her son and to get him to read to her. This advice has merit, but for this parent with a high-school education and employed in the service industry, the advice was somewhat vague and hollow. Unarticulated questions might have been, "How much do I read during each session? How do I structure these readings? How do I know he is making progress? How can I measure this progress? Would you show me how I should read to/with him?" (p. 16)

If school leaders desire to actively engage families in purposeful actions to support student learning, they need to design an effort that will provide parents with the tools and strategies to do this as well as work with them to insure that they understand how to use these tools.

One of the first steps in this process is to develop purposeful relationships between family members and school staff. The key to using this often untapped resource is what Mapp (2003) calls the "joining process," a systemic effort to meaningfully engage all stakeholders in a process characterized by common understandings and shared decision making. As can be seen in Ms. López's school in the School Snapshot (page 2), bringing families into the school is not enough; school staff need to initiate efforts to build a trusting relationship between the school staff and families so they can work as a team to meet student needs.

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

Ms. López is the family involvement coordinator for an elementary school, serving grades 3–6, in a large city school district. During the last 6 years, an influx of immigrants has changed the school's demographics significantly. While the community is accepting of these changes on the surface, an obvious cultural rift is developing among population groups. Comments such as "We used to be able to. . . but now. . ." have become prevalent in the community and the school. Moreover, the staff are unfamiliar with the home context of these new students. Little effort has been made to connect with these families.

Ms. López and her principal talk about this situation after attending a family and community involvement conference during the summer. They decide that the school staff should refocus family involvement efforts to create the "joining process" that had been introduced at the summer training. Their previous efforts included having parents help with class parties, partnering with parent organizations for fund raising, hosting a "mother to school" day, and holding an open house. While Ms. López and her principal want to continue many of these efforts, they also want to develop new kinds of family-school interactions.

They meet with the staff in the early fall and share the information they have learned during the summer. The staff agree that efforts to establish this deeper relationship or "joining process" may possibly provide greater resources to their students. Their kickoff for this new effort will be the school's fall festival. They plan to create an opportunity for the staff and families to get to know one another on a more personal level in order to foster common understandings on which they can build productive relationships.

During previous fall festivals, each class organized a game in order to raise money for the school's library. For this year's festival, they will continue this effort and add a new dimension—making meaningful connections between family and school staff. Each class will again host a game to raise funds for the library, and Ms. López will work with teachers to set up two information booths that all families will be asked to visit while at the festival:

- ◆ In the first booth, High Stakes Hut, teachers will offer family members the opportunity to work sample test items from the state-mandated tests that students take and explore teacher-prepared informational brochures on the state's accountability system. A large number of staff members will be asked to rotate working in this booth so that, instead of having one person lecturing to parents, staff members can form small discussion groups at tables. Staff will provide each person with a brochure that explains specific aspects of the state's system that parents would need or want to know about such as how to review grade levels and expectations for testing, yearly school report cards, and the importance of attendance.
- ◆ In the What Do You Remember? booth, each person will be greeted by a staff member who will explain that the purpose of the booth is to collect the stories from students, school staff, and family members about their experiences in school. The greeter will explain that the teaching staff feel it is important that they know more about their students and the students' families in order to meet their needs, and they also want the students and families to know more about the teachers as well. Each person will be asked to share a story that relates to their educational experience and will be given the opportunity to participate in a project to place the stories on the school's Web site. A local news reporter has agreed to write a feature article for the local newspaper; therefore, she will sit in on these sessions and take notes.

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT, continued

A few days after the event, Ms. López talks to the staff to see if the festival had been successful as a first step in relationship building. The teachers who worked the What Do You Remember? booth admit that they are astounded by what they had learned about the families of the students. One teacher, who has been sending notes home with a child about the child's failure to write down assignments from the whiteboard, describes how the parents of this child have never seen whiteboards before they visited their child's classroom earlier in the week. Another parent had talked about how she and her siblings had practiced their writing on the dirt of their "porch" as children. This family was very enthusiastic about providing its children with opportunities they didn't have. The father of another student drove a cab in the city but had once been an attorney and had attended prestigious schools. The teachers had assumed that the parents of the students were all poorly educated. The teachers who had talked with family members in the High Stakes Hut were surprised at the things the family members had not known. The teachers had thought that everyone in the entire state understood what the state was requiring of schools. No matter which booth they worked, all the teachers learned something new about the students' families.

The next week Ms. López invites a few parents to eat lunch with her at school to gauge their experience in the process. The family members are eager to learn about the accountability system. One parent states that she did not realize that the school lost money when the average attendance fell. She now knows that letting her daughter stay home from school hurts the school's ability to provide resources to the children. Another parent talks about how she had learned that one of the teachers is a first-generation American just as he is. Several parents are also enthusiastic about the article that the newspaper had printed about their interactions. It makes them feel as if their experiences are important. In general, the parents are excited about this first chance to exchange information with the staff.

Ms. López and her principal feel that the two information booths provided a forum for families to engage in meaningful discussion and build personal relationships among staff and families. They are very excited! However, they also know that this event is just the beginning. It will take more time and many more interactions in order for the school to foster successful family and community connections with school built on trusting relationships. It is simply a first step toward establishing the "joining process."

What to Consider

Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools

Fostering a culture of social trust is important to building family and community involvement with schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Boethel, 2003). However, there is no single best method to create this culture. As Ms. López and her principal noted, successful efforts to gain the trust of parents and assist them in learning how they can be supportive of their children's education take time and flexibility (Peña, 2000). Just as the education of children is a complex process, strategies to create purposeful interactions among staff and families are multilayered and ongoing.

The activities Ms. Lopez used at the fall festival are representative of efforts that schools can use to build meaningful relationships. These types of actions help staff to anticipate and address some of the typical reasons why family members choose not to be involved in school while also fostering a culture that encourages them to actively engage in their children's education. School leaders like Ms. Lopez should consider the common factors that impact if and how a family member chooses to become involved as they plan activities to build family connections with schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002):

1. **Adult's definition of educational role:** What role does the parent or family member see as important and appropriate?
2. **Beliefs about appropriate methods for child rearing:** What beliefs about their role as parents foster or inhibit involvement in the child's education?
3. **Feelings about their ability to help children based on family members' skills and knowledge level, belief in their ability to teach children, and their access to other resources for needed assistance:** Do the adults believe that they have the necessary knowledge or skills to provide students with the support needed?
4. **Feelings of being welcomed and invited to the school:** Does the family member feel that the school staff are open and receptive of family involvement?

When school staff use proactive communication strategies, they help family members believe that they can contribute to the child's education, find ways to participate even though demands from work and other sources strain involvement, overcome language barriers, and ameliorate negative prior experiences.

To support this evolving relationship, school leaders will need to initiate activities that

- ♦ help family members feel comfortable in interacting with school staff by creating a welcoming culture,
- ♦ assist staff to see the value and advantages of working with family members and in redefining what "involvement in school" means,
- ♦ help staff to see the importance of taking time to plan involvement strategies, and
- ♦ address barriers to family and community involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Boethel, 2003).

These strategies can lead to great family and community connections with schools and additional supports for student learning. The question for school leaders like Ms. López is, what strategies build viable relationships with students' families and the community?

Putting It Into Practice

In each of the four syntheses created by SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, the authors include recommendations for building effective programs that are based on the studies included. In the 2002 synthesis, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Henderson & Mapp) and the 2003 synthesis, *Diversity: Family and Community Connections with Schools* (Boethel), the authors recommend that schools promote activities that foster relationships among all stakeholders. These types of activities are common to schools that have effective family and community connections with schools programs.

This activity can be used as a first step in building relationships among schools and families as well as further defining the school's expectations for students.

This activity is helpful in gathering beliefs and information from the school community on a specific topic. This process can be used to

- ◆ explore the perceptions of the school community on a given issue,
- ◆ garner support for future improvement efforts, and
- ◆ open the door for inviting family and community members to participate as partners in later efforts.

Remember this activity is a starter event; you may not feel you have accomplished a measurable outcome once it is completed. However, months later, this event will become part of a culmination of events that can lead to successful involvement. If you need information or buy-in on a topic different from the one suggested, create new questions to refocus this activity.

1 Contact a well-respected family or community member from the school neighborhood and ask that person to cofacilitate a meeting to explore expectations for the students in the community. Discussion at this meeting should focus on *What we want for our students*.

2 Invite school staff, family members, students, and community members to attend the meeting. Be sure to take advantage of the contacts the cofacilitator has in the community.

3 Divide the participants into groups of four or five and give each group the following question to discuss *What does being educated mean to you?*

4 Ask each group of four or five to join a second group and again discuss this question.

5 Ask the larger group what they have heard in their smaller groups. Record these answers on chart paper and post.

6 Ask the large group if they have heard something that they would not have considered before this discussion. Record those responses on chart paper and post.

7 Ask the larger group if they heard any patterns or common threads across all of the discussions. Record these responses on chart paper and post.

8 Close the meeting.

9 Be sure to share a report communicating the key points of the responses to each question and the meeting in general with families and staff via a newsletter, Web site, newspaper story, or one-on-one contacts with families and staff.

This type of activity can provide information to a team that is beginning to explore the needs and varied perspectives of the school community. The responses of the participants will help those involved to determine long-term educational needs for the school community, what expectations the school community has for its students, and who should be involved in these efforts. Most importantly, it will help to create a feeling that the school is welcoming and interested in the experience and beliefs of all those who live and work in the school community.

Related Research

The studies chosen for this section relate specifically to the needs of educators like Ms. López, someone who needs ideas on how to build relationships among all stakeholders.

Numerous educational studies explore this topic; however, there are also many studies in other fields, such as sociology, history, and psychology that explore the concept of relationships. For this section, the selected educational studies include an intervention study with a randomized control trial, a comparison group design, a survey study, and a case study. While the intervention study provides the most empirical evidence on a viable strategy for building relationships, the other studies allow researchers to gather rich descriptive data that can be used to contextualize the topic. Additionally, the studies described in this section not only present current research, they also help define what is known about effective family and community connections with schools efforts.

In their comparison study of 129 high poverty elementary and corresponding control schools, Redding, Langdon, Meyer, and Sheley (2004) found a correlation between family attention to learning and student achievement. This correlation is attributed to the relationships that are established between school staff and family. They state that it is the cumulative effect of purposeful, regular, and timely interactions between teachers and families that creates a “greater reservoir of trust and respect, increased social capital for children, and a school community more supportive of each child’s school success” (p. 6).

Redding, S., Langdon, J., Meyer, J., & Sheley, P. (2004). The effects of comprehensive parent engagement on student learning outcomes. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/redding.html>

Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2004) studied two sets of teachers and parents in two different schools in order to determine how the collaborative approach the teachers used with the parents impacts the congruence of the teachers’ and parents’ perception of student achievement. They wanted to know what strategies and actions fostered meaningful family involvement in a child’s education. They found that a vital element in home-school relationships was

clear, consistent, and positive communication about student learning. This communication included two-way interactions about expectations, specific strategies, and outcomes of efforts.

Musti-Rao, S. & Cartledge, G. (2004). Making home an advantage in the prevention of reading failure: Strategies for collaborating with parents in urban schools. *Preventing School Failure*, 48(4), 15–21.

Comparing surveys from Chicago’s top 30 high-performing schools and bottom 30 low-performing (out of 210) schools, Payne and Kaba (1999) found that the relationships that schools are able to build within and outside of the school indicate a school’s viability for successful school improvement. In the high-performing schools, school staff understood and promoted the concept of relationship building on every level: staff-to-staff, staff-to-family, and staff-to-community. Within these schools, it was the relationships among the groups that fostered and promoted the collaborative efforts that resulted in shared support and responsibility for improvement. In the low-performing schools, there was limited, if any, appreciation for relationships at the schools or with the families and communities that surround the school. The lack of relationships and shared efforts appeared to inhibit or stall a cohesive or focused improvement effort. The authors determined that it was the social trust between groups and individuals that translated into capital, which in turn lead to school improvement and student achievement.

Payne, C. M., & Kaba, M. (1999). So much reform, so little change: Building-level obstacles to urban school reform. Working Papers Series #WP-98-26, Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.

Sanders (1996) identified key elements that resulted in increased school safety at the 6 schools involved in a school-family-community partnership program, designed to encourage the engagement of family and community to address this issue. Schools that used parent liaisons were able to build relationships with families through one-on-one interactions. These relationships resulted in the involvement of key individuals that contributed to increased school safety.

Sanders, M. G. (1996). School-family-community partnerships focused on school safety: The Baltimore Example. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 63(3), 369–374.

Scribner, Young, and Pendroza (1999) created case studies for 8 schools along the Texas-Mexico border that were involved in projects to increase family and community involvement. Faculty in these schools quickly determined that sending notes home with students was not a viable or successful method of communicating. Instead, they began to involve parents on committees and in information networks, made direct phone calls or visits with parents, initiated contact with family members, created parent centers, and conducted other personal interactions. They found that when schools and parents engaged in active two-way communication strategies, parents and teachers developed personal relationships that fostered a “durable structure for exchanging information” (p. 39). The result of these communication strategies was high levels of family member involvement in school improvement. In a later report of the same participants (2001), the authors state that high-performing schools serving Mexican American populations use the following strategies to support collaborative relationships with families and communities:

1. build on the cultural values of Mexican American families
2. stress personal contact with families
3. foster communication with families
4. create a warm environment for families
5. facilitate structural accommodations for parent involvement

Scribner, J. D., Young, M. D., & Pendroza, A. (1999). Building collaborative relationships with parents. In P. Reyes, J. D. Scribner, & A. Paredes-Scribner (Eds.), *Lessons from high-performing Hispanic schools: Creating learning communities*, (pp. 36–60). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Scribner, A. P., & Scribner, J. D. (2001). High-performing schools serving Mexican American students: What they can teach us. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED459048).

References Cited

Within this document, the descriptions of concepts and recommendations come from both long-standing foundational research as well as more current studies. The references included in this section reflect both types of literature.

Berman, P., & Chambliss, D. (2000). *Readiness of low-performing schools for comprehensive reform*. Emeryville, CA: RPP International, High Performance Learning Community Project.

Boethel, M. (2003). *Diversity: Family and community connections with schools*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Cuban, L. (1988). A fundamental puzzle of school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70(5), 341–344.

Elmore, R. F., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1988). *Steady work: Policy, practice and reform in American education*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Fullan, M. G. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

Griffin, G. A., & Barnes, S. (1984). School change: A craft derived and research-based strategy. *Teachers College Record*, 86(1), 103–123.

Henderson, A., & Mapp, K. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: Family and community connections with schools*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Mapp, K. L. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children’s learning. *School Community Journal*, 13(1), 35–64.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). The RAND change agent study revisited: Macro perspectives and micro realities. *Educational Researcher*, 19(9), 11–16.

Peña, D. C. (2000). Parent involvement: Influencing factors and implications. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94(1), 42–54. EJ615791.

Wynn, J., Meyer, S., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2000). Furthering education: The relationship of schools and other organizations. In M. C. Wang & W. L. Boyd (Eds.), *Improving results for children and families: Linking collaborative services with school reform efforts* (pp. 53–90). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

For More Ideas on This Strategy

The **Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)** has many resources on family and community involvement that can be used to help school staff support and engage the larger school community in school improvement efforts. In *Building Relationships for Student Success: School-Family-Community Partnerships and Student Achievement in the Northwest* (2002), Diane Dorfman and Amy Fisher draw from current research and school experiences to give teachers, parents, and administrators examples of successful partnership strategies. This document provides descriptions of successful programs and strategies that support activities on the following three themes:

- ◆ Using curriculum that makes connections between students' lives and their families and communities
- ◆ Giving families tools to support their children (such as teaching them strategies for enhancing learning at home, explaining school policies and expectations, and linking with human services organizations)
- ◆ Building mutual, respectful relationships

The examples for *building mutual, respectful relationships* can provide clear guidance to schools looking for information on how to foster relationships among all stakeholders. This document is available in print through NWREL's online catalog or may be downloaded at no cost as a PDF.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

101 SW Main St., Suite 500
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503-275-9500
<http://www.nwrel.org/partnerships/pubs/building.html>

The **Study Circles Resource Center** is dedicated to finding ways for all kinds of people to engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical and social and political issues. Their Web site provides step-by-step guides on how to conduct dialogue on such topics as *Organizing Community-Wide Dialogue for Action and Change*. The easy-to-use processes and guidelines help participants take advantage of this powerful strategy.

Study Circles Resource Center

PO Box 203
697 Pomfret Street
Pomfret, CT 06258
860-928-2616
<http://www.studycircles.org/>

Find Research Related to This Strategy

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools' publications database, *The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database*, at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bibsearch.html>. If you are looking for information about organizing school, family, and community involvement, useful keywords to help narrow your search are school-family interactions and relationships.

STRATEGY BRIEF

Reaching Out to Diverse Populations:

What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?

Contrary to the assumption of many educators, research on family and community connections with schools has revealed that parents are interested in their children's academic success regardless of ethnicity, culture, or economic status, although they may not know how to help their children or may feel incapable of assisting them (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Scribner and Scribner (2001) found that

Parent involvement encompasses a multitude of complex phenomena. Differences in the family structure, culture, ethnic background, social class, age and gender represent only a few of the factors affecting interpretations of or generalizations about the nature of parent involvement. (p. 36)

This statement reflects a few of the factors that complicate and sometimes inhibit family involvement with schools, particularly for those families representing diverse populations. In their report, Scribner et al. (2001) also say that the way a family defines support and interest is through their own perspective. Unfortunately, many times the school's perspective and definitions of the family involvement in school are not the same as those of the families.

These differing viewpoints can create barriers to meaningful participation. Schools that are successful in addressing these problems are able to

- ◆ build on the cultural values of families,
- ◆ stress personal contact with families,
- ◆ foster communication with families,
- ◆ create a warm environment for families, and
- ◆ facilitate accommodations for family involvement, including transportation, translators, and other similar services (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Boethel, 2003).

As illustrated in the Classroom Snapshot (page 2), teachers like Mr. Han who proactively reach out to parents rather than wait for them to come to the school are often successful in their efforts to foster effective family and community involvement in student learning.

HANDOUT 23, page 2 of 12

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

Mr. Han is in his first year of teaching and has chosen to work in a high-poverty community in the Southwest that has a high percentage of Hispanic and American Indian students. He has been assigned to teach sixth grade science to 125 students.

Though Mr. Han graduated from an innovative and well-respected teacher preparation program, he worries that he is not prepared to meet or understand his students' needs. He knows that a common concern in many schools in the United States is that the ethnicity and culture of the students rarely matches the teachers. In his case, he and his parents were born in the United States, but his grandparents emigrated from Asia as teenagers. His family has always observed the culture of his grandparents' native country as they assimilated into their new country. While he is not "White," he is still different from his Hispanic and American Indian students.

As recommended in his teacher preparation program, Mr. Han has created a letter to send home to parents communicating the way he plans to conduct his class, explaining his grading procedures and inviting them to visit his class to observe his teaching. He wants the families to know that they have a stake in and can make a contribution to their children's education. Each week, he plans to send an announcement communicating the topics to be covered in classes and assignment due dates.

As he is photocopying this letter, one of the more experienced teachers, Mr. Atkins, asks him what he is doing. After listening to his explanation, Mr. Atkins tells him that inviting the families to school could lead to big problems. He also adds that because many of the parents of his students are not likely to be able to read the letter or will ignore it if they can read, sending the letter is useless.

Shocked, Mr. Han asks what kinds of problems can come from contacting families. Mr. Atkins replies that the school staff have always felt that the less contact families have with the school, the better. The idea is to keep them happy and keep them distant. Mr. Atkins goes on to say that there is no pleasing parents and families anyway, so it's best to avoid them.

Mr. Han stands with his copies in hand for a few moments and reflects on what he has just been told. It is in conflict with what he learned in college about best practices and the possible benefits of family and community connections with schools, but he doesn't want to be at odds with the other teachers. He takes a few moments to think about the possible consequences of going ahead and contacting the parents. Though he feels torn between what he has been taught and the cautioning words of an experienced teacher, he decides to continue with this project.

However, Mr. Han feels that Mr. Atkins might have a point about whether the families can or will pay attention to the letter. He has had little experience with either the Hispanic or American Indian cultures. If he was in his home community, he would go through one of the neighborhood elders to reach out to the families. He isn't sure what is appropriate for the families of his students. He decides to let his students help him determine the best way to get their parents to read the letter.

After introducing himself to his students on the first day of class, Mr. Han tells them that he wants their help on something. He explains that he has a letter to send home to their parents and asks the students for their help getting it to them.

At first, the students resist, saying their parents don't need this information. Typical of adolescents, they say they don't want their parents involved in school. They aren't babies. However, Mr. Han points out to the students that their families will probably ask them for this information anyway, so they might as well work with him to plan a way to communicate with their families. After more discussion and some careful encouragement from Mr. Han, the students decide to help him. He repeats this process in each of his classes. Each time, the students resist, say their parents aren't interested, but then, after more discussion and encouragement, agree to help.

Mr. Han says that there are always parents in a community that don't read, don't read very well, or possibly don't read English. He asks if this is true in this community? His students answer yes.

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT, continued

He then asks the students what they would do to get this information out to the families?

After much discussion, Mr. Han decides that he will get out of the school and onto the families' turf by

1. Visiting the reservation of the American Indian students on Saturday: It is market day, so nearly everyone in the community will be in one place. Several students have volunteered to help him connect with the families of his students. The students also share that there is not a written language for their tribe. While Mr. Han can still give the family members the letters, he will need to explain everything as well. The students don't feel that a translator will be needed, but they will help out if any parents aren't able to communicate in English.

2. Going to see the Hispanic families in their neighborhoods over the next week: Five students volunteer to be his guides and translators. One of the students says his mother translates documents for her boss at work. Mr. Han says he will call her at home tonight and see if she can help translate the letter so that he will have both English and Spanish versions.

Later, while talking to Mrs. Rand, another teacher with only a couple of years of experience, about this effort, Mr. Han realizes there is a vast difference in what he learned about family involvement in his teacher preparation program and the reality of making this happen in the school community. He certainly hadn't been prepared for Mr. Atkins' reaction. He had thought since experts said this kind of action would prove beneficial, it would happen almost automatically. He also had no idea that his students would actually be the key to contacting the parents.

Mrs. Rand is so impressed with his efforts that she wants to accompany him on his visits, as they teach many of the same students. In fact, she thinks they should ask the other sixth-grade teachers to join them. She isn't sure that every teacher will participate, but she figures it won't hurt to ask.

The next morning, the school principal tells Mr. Han that he has heard about his plan to reach out to the students' families. Mr. Han braces himself for a possibly negative response, but is surprised instead. The principal praises his efforts. He has been talking to a principal from another school who had initiated a similar program the previous year. It has been a great success. He asks Mr. Han to keep track of what they learn this first semester, so they can form a committee to explore expanding the idea next year.

Mr. Han realizes that this effort is only a first step in his goal, but he feels great about discovering that his students could be such a powerful resource. More importantly, he learns that not all of the teachers are reluctant to reach out to the families of their students.

What to Consider

Reaching Out to Diverse Populations

Epstein (2001) notes that there are “overlapping spheres of influence” (p. 76) that create forces on the school, students, families, and community members. Time, experience, beliefs, and daily routines continually impact the work of all those involved with children. However, she also states that schools can use various activities to anticipate any negative impact from these factors, and can, in fact, turn the negative into positive.

Like Mr. Han, when teachers and other school staff actively work to identify and address barriers, they, too, can promote family connections with schools. The key is to change the circumstances that prevent involvement and initiate actions to promote engagement. Effective programs (Boethel, 2003) consider such issues as the following:

- ◆ **When childcare is provided, parents don’t have to worry about students’ siblings disturbing meetings or other gatherings.**
- ◆ **When staff help to arrange carpools, those families who don’t have adequate transportation can attend meetings and activities at the school or other community locations.**
- ◆ **When families are told that it doesn’t have to be a mother or father who attends activities, then all of those involved in rearing the child feel welcomed to participate.**
- ◆ **When schools create take home learning kits, families are not limited in helping students by their lack of supplies.**

Reviews of research (Boethel, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) on addressing the needs of the families of diverse populations suggest that if school leaders desire to increase family-school connections, school staff should take the following steps:

- ◆ **Adopt formal school- and district-level policies that address issues related to the involvement of families from diverse populations.** Schools should deliberately advance policies and actions that recognize the importance of finding and honoring the commonalities and differences among all population groups. To this end, staff in successful programs actively discover and adopt methods to bridge the gaps that inhibit the involvement of any stakeholder in supporting student learning.
- ◆ **Engage principals in active support of these programs.** Principals are critical to successful family and community involvement efforts. However, principals need professional development and adequate resources to implement and support these programs.
- ◆ **Help staff learn strategies for working with parents from all cultures.** Many times a small action or reaction can have significant cultural implications and result in disengagement or lack of participation of family or community members. School staff are commonly unaware of the impact of their actions. When staff are provided professional development and encouraged to explore contextual factors unique to a school setting, they will become more adept at discovering potential problems in participation and solving problems that have already blocked participation.

- ◆ **Help all families navigate the educational system.** Educators are very skilled at negotiating school environments; however, at times, they forget how foreign and difficult this system can be for new families. Providing parents with key questions to probe student understanding, information on school structures and policies, and other educational issues will help them to successfully work with the system to help meet the needs of their children.
- ◆ **Practice outreach rather than traditional approaches to involvement.** Traditionally, family and community involvement meant that schools asked families or community members or organizations to do specific tasks for them: raise money, supervise a school trip, or organize a party. This single dimensional process did not foster a collaborative or reciprocal process that benefits all of those involved. To change this traditional dynamic, school staff need to break the one-way flow of action and foster a two-way path of interaction. When school staff reach out to parents and invite them into the school to participate in collaborative efforts, and assist families in supporting their hopes and dreams for their children, a stronger family involvement program can result.
- ◆ **Practice trust- and relationship-building strategies and recognize that it takes time.** School staff have often avoided this “softer” side of involvement, even though the development of relationships in family-community-school programs is an important aspect of successful programs. Taking the time to conduct activities such as the one described below in the Putting It Into Practice section, can have a far-reaching impact on the viability and the quality of the effort.
- ◆ **Help families learn strategies to support students’ academic needs.** School staff commonly assume that their directions are clear and that family members have the skill and knowledge to perform the tasks they suggest. In reality, families often have limited experience with or skill for the tasks they are asked to perform. However, families can provide effective support for classroom instruction when school staff work with families to help them learn strategies that reinforce classroom learning.
- ◆ **Encourage the development of the total child as this greatly impacts academics.** School staff often state that it is not only the academic development of the child that is important to student success, but also the developmental readiness of the child to participate as an active learner. Sleep, food, health, and mental status are just a few of the important issues in this area. When the total child is not ready or able to participate in school, the academic development of the child will suffer.

The question for teachers like Mr. Han is, how can teachers involve families from diverse backgrounds to support classroom instruction?

Putting It Into Practice

In each of the four syntheses created by SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, the authors include recommendations for building effective programs that are based on the studies included. In the 2003 synthesis, *Diversity: Family and Community Connections with Schools*, Boethel recommends that schools engage in the following types of strategies that are common in programs that address student and family needs related to diversity.

1 Welcome family members to the school

Unfortunately, many schools and communities are starkly divided. This lack of positive interaction stifles family-school connections.

Strategies to promote positive interactions might include the following:

- ◆ Post welcoming signs in hallways that direct families to a staff member who will make sure their needs are met.
- ◆ Invite family members to eat lunch with their children.
- ◆ Invite family members to visit their children's classrooms during instructional time when a new concept or resource is introduced so that they can experience what the children are doing firsthand.
- ◆ Have staff personally distribute leaflets in the community concerning school events, meetings, or other activities.
- ◆ Have staff make phone calls to invite families to participate in special events, meetings, or other activities.

2 Meet on their turf

Though inviting family members to the school is important, school staff should also meet with families at locations away from the school campus to talk about ways they can foster home environments that support their children's learning.

Strategies to promote meeting on the families' turf might include the following:

- ◆ Conduct meet-and-greet walks in the students' neighborhoods.
- ◆ Offer classes to parents on strategies to improve home reading or other homework activities at a local community center, library, or church.
- ◆ Hold special meetings on parenting skills at a local community center, library, or church.

HANDOUT 23, page 7 of 12

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

3 Remember once is not enough

Once first contact is made, school staff need to continue to contact parents on a regular schedule.

Strategies to promote a continuous cycle of interactions might include the following:

- ◆ Let families know communication is not a one-time action. Give them a timeline of when to expect periodic documents or actions.
- ◆ Repeat key actions on a weekly or monthly basis. For example, if families know to expect communications every Friday, they will look for this information. These communications can be about the next week's assignments, upcoming events, or suggested learning strategies to use at home.

4 Make use of all communication channels

Though sending notes home is an easy strategy, many times these notes are not very effective.

Strategies to promote increased communication might include the following:

- ◆ Reinforce letters by placing additional announcements on local radio, community bulletin boards (paper and electronic), and other news sources. When using letters or other announcements, ensure they are translated into the home languages of the students. Schools can tap into local organizations, businesses, universities, or churches with translators who can provide these services at no cost.
- ◆ Create classroom phone trees or e-mail lists for announcements and ride sharing. If families don't have phones, create a phone/word-of-mouth communication system. Many public libraries have Internet capabilities that families can access for e-mail or Web browsing. Schools can work with these public agencies to make these services more available to families who are supporting student learning.

5 Avoid reliance on a select group of volunteers

Sometimes, when one parent is given too much authority or responsibility, other parents are shut out.

Strategies to promote a wide spectrum of involvement might include the following:

- ◆ Ask volunteers to bring "a friend."
- ◆ Involve students in presentations at community organizations that also support the school to raise awareness and support of special programs or instructional processes. Make contact and recruit new resources, partners, and participants at these meetings.
- ◆ Conduct focus groups with different combinations of family members, school staff, community members, and students on varied topics to determine student needs. For these efforts, make sure that every student group is represented. Gather names of potential participants from those attending the focus group meetings.

6 Take time to talk to parents about what they believe

One of those common assumptions in education is that everyone has the same beliefs or understandings about student learning. This is actually seldom true.

Strategies to develop shared beliefs might include the following:

- ◆ Meet with family members and talk about key classroom issues such as student learning and classroom expectations. These sessions can be formal or informal.
- ◆ Engage family members in an activity that explores the values that parents express about their children's future.

Schools or teachers may want to use these strategies one at a time, as a series, or as an idea bank for planning activities that are more contextualized to a specific location.

For More Ideas on This Strategy

The **Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)** has several products that teachers like Mr. Han can use to reach out to diverse populations. The following product was created by the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, part of SEDL's current regional educational laboratory contract, and may be downloaded from the Resources section at no cost at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/>:

Diversity: Family and Community Connections with Schools (2003)

This document is a synthesis of the research on family and community involvement with schools that relates directly to issues of diversity. It includes discussion of 64 research studies related to the roles that families can play in improving academic achievement among minority, immigrant, migrant, English language learner, culturally diverse, and economically disadvantaged students.

The following SEDL products were developed under other contracts and can be purchased through the Web site or downloaded at no cost at <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/>:

Building Support for Better Schools: Seven Steps to Engaging Hard-to-Reach Communities (2000)

This practical guide is designed for educators, civic leaders, community organizers, or anyone else interested in involving traditionally hard-to-reach communities. This guide introduces the seven steps for engagement: know your community, identify the issues, designate facilitators, train facilitators, recruit participants, locate a meeting site and handle logistics, and follow-up with participants. The explanation for each step includes suggested activities. Also available in Spanish.

Family and Community Involvement: Reaching Out to Diverse Populations (2000)

This handbook is designed for teachers, principals, and superintendents who want to develop meaningful parent and community involvement with culturally and linguistically diverse community members. This guide

introduces strategies for promoting meaningful dialogue with diverse populations, including

1. know your community, get smart about communicating with parents and community members; provide extra help for school staff and parents;
2. bridge the gap between families, communities, and schools; and
3. evaluate your public engagement efforts regularly.

Each strategy explanation includes questions for consideration and suggested activities. Also available in Spanish.

The Harvard Family Research Project has developed various studies and other helpful documents to assist private organizations and communities as they promote child development, student achievement, healthy family functioning, and community development. Teachers like Mr. Han can use the studies as discussion starters with other staff, families, or community members. These materials are a series of teaching cases related to class, culture, and gender dilemmas in family-school involvement and are designed so that groups of individuals can talk about possible solutions for these life-like situations. The *Class, Culture, and Gender Teaching Cases* are located at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/teaching-case/subjects/class.html>.

Related Research

There are many studies that provide insight into working with the families of students from diverse populations that would help Mr. Han in promoting family involvement. However, for this specific topic, no random control trials were found. Though the studies reported here are rich in description of issues and factors concerning diversity, culture, and economic status in family and community involvement, they do not provide empirical evidence as to what interventions can produce the best results or what interventions can foster effective practices with the families of culturally diverse populations. The studies described below utilize survey, case study, and comparison designs. Additionally, the studies described in this section not only present current research, they also help to define what is known about diversity issues related to family and community connections with schools.

Family Expectations for Their Children

Multiple studies have found that all families have high academic expectations for their children. The following studies, because of their diverse sources of data and focus, illustrate the wide support for this finding.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) collected survey data from approximately 24,000 parents for the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). Numerous researchers have used these data for a variety of studies. In Fan's (2001) NELS:88 research report, he found that parent involvement was a complex concept dependent on multiple factors, rather than single cause and effect processes. All parents, regardless of race, economic status, or culture, held high expectations for their children.

Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 70(1), 27–61. EJ642228.

Collignon, Men, and Tan (2001) conducted focus groups with 60 Southeast Asian community members, reviewed personal narratives from 4 educators, and conducted interviews with 85 Southeast Asian middle school students to explore the barriers that Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese families encounter as they participate in their children's education in the United States. They found that while the Southeast Asian parents state that education is important for their children, they find that they do not fully understand the US system of education or what their role is in that system.

Collignon, F. F., Men, M., & Tan, S. (2001). Finding ways in: Community-based perspectives on Southeast Asian family involvement with schools in a New England state. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 6(1&2), 27–44.

Using a longitudinal random sample of 81 Latino children's family members, Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001) interviewed an adult family member for each student by phone or in person 10 times, used home visits to conduct three extended interviews with an adult family member for each student, and conducted 12 additional informal home interviews with an adult family member for each child. The researchers found that these Latino immigrant parents held high aspirations for their children continuing their education past high school.

Goldenberg, C., Gallimore, R., Reese, L., & Garnier, H. (2001). Cause or effect? A longitudinal study of immigrant Latino parents' aspirations and expectations, and their children's school performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 547–582.

HANDOUT 23, page 10 of 12

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

Impact of Reaching Out to Diverse Populations

Each study in this section provides further insight into an array of strategies that school staff can use to develop and implement quality family and community involvement efforts with diverse populations.

Based on their interviews with 20 randomly selected Mexican American families and 20 Anglo families about their involvement in their children's schools, Birch and Ferrin (2002) note that the culture and economic status typically associated with each of these groups plays a role in student success and parental involvement in schools. They suggest that the difference in world views or beliefs held by each group—Mexican American and Anglo—illustrate why initial or superficial efforts rarely increase the involvement of Mexican American families in school events. Because school staff often act quickly on a solution rather than developing a deeper understanding of the context, many times these school efforts lead to limited, if any, increase in involvement. If school staff want to promote and expand the involvement of Mexican American families, they need to actively listen with sensitivity to the concerns and issues of these families. Programs that deeply explore the issues of race and culture raised through active listening can result in meaningful family-school involvement.

Birch, T. C., & Ferrin, S. E. (2002). Mexican American parental participation in public education in an isolated Rocky Mountain rural community. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(1), 70–78. EJ646575.

Rodríguez-Brown, Li, and Albom (1999) conducted interviews and collected surveys to determine the impact of the participation of 60 new immigrant Hispanic mothers who participated in the Parents as Teachers and Parents as Learners Program (FLAME) for 2 school years. These mothers engaged in four literacy enrichment areas had an impact on families' participation (not just the mothers' participation) in activities. The researchers found the increased understanding of the family's role in supporting student learning and strategies for helping their children in building literacy skills that came from interactions around these enrichment areas had an impact on families', not just mothers', participation in activities that promote student learning.

Rodríguez-Brown, F. V., Li, R. F., & Albom, J. B. (1999). Hispanic parents' awareness and use of literacy-rich environments at home and in the community. *Education and Urban Society*, 32(1), 41–57.

In a study of 5 low-performing students and their Puerto Rican parents, Lopez and Cole (1999) investigated whether the parents had the ability to implement an at-home strategy to address their children's academic readiness needs. The researchers found that each parent was willing to participate in the intervention strategy. After receiving appropriate training on what strategies to use during home visits, they were able to support student learning in the home environment effectively regardless of their personal educational experience or skills. All of the children in this project increased their academic performance following the intervention; however, the researchers were hesitant to state that the home-based intervention was the sole reason for their improvement. Instead, they felt it was likely that the home intervention complemented several other classroom-based strategies that were used with the children.

Lopez, A., & Cole, C. (1999). Effects of parent-implemented intervention on the academic readiness skills of five Puerto Rican kindergarten students in an urban school. *School Psychology Review*, 28(3), 439–447.

HANDOUT 23, page 11 of 12

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

Exploring the relationship between achievement-fostering beliefs and the actions of the parents of African-American, economically disadvantaged children, Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997) studied 41 African American third- and fourth- grade children and their caregivers. In their study, they found a significant correlation between the number of books read in the home and the reading achievement levels of students. When caregivers actively promoted reading these books, there was a higher correlation to reading ability. Therefore, the authors suggested that if schools found ways to make books accessible to students at home and provide help to parents in learning to practice reading strategies, there could be an accompanying rise in reading achievement for all tested subgroups.

Halle, T.G., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Mahoney, J.L. (1997). Family influences on school achievement in low-income, African American children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 527–537.

In her survey study of 451 randomly selected Navajo students from 11 schools in the Navajo Nation, Willetto (2001) explored the relationship between traditional culture and public education goals. Willetto stated that of all the tested students across the Navajo Nation, the Navajo students were the lowest-performing subgroup in the United States. Their lack of achievement is a grave concern for educators in the Southwest. At one time, educators and politicians assumed that the only way these Indian students could be educated was to remove them, sometimes forcefully, from a traditional culture that did not support the nation's educational goals. This action resulted in a pervasive feeling that public education was attempting to systematically destroy the Navajo traditional culture. The tension brought about by this conflict of beliefs led to discord between the tribes and educational and governmental institutions. It has become an historical as well as a current question: Do Navajo students need to shed their traditional culture in order to be successful in U.S. society? In her analysis, using a multivariate procedure, the researcher found that school success for Navajo students does not require that students "assimilate into the dominant society" (p. 19). Therefore, families of Navajo students did not need to discourage the development of a child's traditional culture in order for that child to be successful in the dominant culture or educational system. Many educators also thought that the Navajo matriarchal society led to a lack of substantial support for student achievement in the home. The researcher found no basis for this belief. In fact, she found that adolescents who performed well academically identified with and were greatly supported by their mothers. She concluded that a "more tolerant climate" that engages Navajo families in school activities could result in salient connections between Navajo family life and increased academic success (p. 20).

Willetto, A. A. A. (1999). Navajo culture and family influences on academic success: Traditionalism is not a significant predictor of achievement among young Navajos. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 38(2), 1–24. EJ605532.

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- Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Scribner, A. P., & Scribner, J. D. (2001). *High-performing schools serving Mexican American students: What they can teach us*. ERIC Digest. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED459048).

Find Research Related to This Strategy

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools' research database, The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database, at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bibsearch.html>. If you are looking for information about reaching out to diverse populations, useful keywords to help narrow your search are diversity, policy, and relationships.

STRATEGY BRIEF

Easing the Transition from PreK to Kindergarten:

What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Reading

Because it is right, because it is wise, and because, for the first time in our history, it is possible to conquer poverty. . .

Lyndon B. Johnson, Speech to Congress, March 1964

With these words President Johnson created Head Start, the first large-scale program to address child readiness. Over the next 40 years, researchers and practitioners continued to build on this work. They have shown that those early programs were a step in the right direction to ensure the transition of each child into school and from grade to grade throughout the early years of school. Through these efforts, we have learned the importance of preparing young children to enter school, for it is the educational foundation set in their early lives that determines the tone and the pace for

their long-term educational experience and academic success.

Family involvement is a viable strategy to address transition issues related to readiness (Boethel, 2004). The school-family connection can help ensure that the potential of each child is fulfilled as well as bridge the achievement gap. As illustrated in the School Snapshot, with careful planning, schools can engage families in helping children get ready for school and transition from grade to grade.

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

Mr. Basheer is the kindergarten lead teacher at a small preK–4 elementary school in the Northeast. In this school, there are approximately 125 students at each grade level with the preK students attending half day, and the K–4 students attending full day. In the spring of the school year, Mr. Basheer is asked to organize a summer program for the students transitioning from preK to kindergarten to help them “get ready” for the next school year. The administration hopes that addressing readiness issues during the summer will result in increased achievement for these students not only at their current grade-level transition, but as they continue through school.

Though he is very aware of the importance of preparing students for the transition from grade to grade, Mr. Basheer does not feel that he knows enough about transition to lead this effort without some investigation. Therefore, before jumping into the planning work, he begins by reviewing his professional journals and magazines for topical articles on the latest strategies in this area. As he reviews these articles, he lists other references that appear to have promising information on

the latest research in this area. Since he has no way to access some of the journals referenced, he asks a colleague who is in graduate school to use her college library privileges to obtain copies of some articles for him.

Based on his study, Mr. Basheer finds that numerous programs reported successful outcomes by including a component or a complete focus on family involvement strategies. These programs create a strong collaborative partnership between the school and families that is ideal for enabling schools to gain additional resources to support and address child readiness issues.

Since he had never been personally involved with a family-school program in which families were a significant part of the school improvement process, he decides to consult his principal, Ms. Blair. This is her first year at his school, but he has been very impressed with her leadership. After telling Ms. Blair what he has discovered through his research, he asks her what she thinks of involving families in a program to ease children's transition from home to preK and from preK to kindergarten.

HANDOUT 24, page 2 of 8

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT

Ms. Blair shares her experiences from her previous school with him. That faculty had fostered extensive collaborative efforts between home and school and had good results. She says that she would strongly support the inclusion of family involvement in the program. However, she also notes the importance of not limiting this type of program to the summer once families feel comfortable with this type of involvement. She expects that if the program is successful, it will lead to more family involvement at the school. Both Mr. Basheer and Ms. Blair agree that they would welcome more family involvement at the school and this effort will be a great first step. She asks him what he needs to get started.

Mr. Basheer asks her, "Based on your experiences, where would you begin?" She responds, "With the data." She suggests that he set up an exploratory task force with several teachers, the central office staff member in charge of assessment, and four or five of the students' family members. At their meeting, they should work to identify the content or skill areas in which the students have not been achieving as expected. She suggests this exploratory task force focus the project.

The next week, Mr. Basheer and the exploratory task force wade into the data. After a 3-hour session, they find that when students begin kindergarten, they are successful in general phoneme awareness but are not demonstrating mastery in phonic recognition; additionally, they have very low levels of vocabulary. One of the parents on the task force speaks up and asks what can be done to address these problems.

One of the teachers says that she thinks they should see what other schools are doing and adopt one of their programs. A parent says that her cousin told her about a reading readiness program at her daughter's school where parents participated in a program where school staff help parents learn to support reading at home. Her cousin really enjoys working with her daughter and the school staff, and her daughter's grades have improved greatly. Mr. Basheer says he also thinks this might be a good solution, but suggests they should investigate the benefits and potential problems more before making a decision.

Mr. Basheer suggests that the group break into pairs. Some pairs will find and call schools with successful reading readiness programs and talk to both staff and families about what made these efforts successful. The others will look at the research in this area. They all agree to the action plan.

Before leaving, one of the parents, Mr. Havlin, says, "I really enjoyed this meeting. I think we should involve others in the process—staff and parents." Everyone agrees with this statement. They decide that each pair will invite two more people to join their efforts. The group adjourns after setting a meeting date for reports.

Mr. Basheer and Ms. Blair meet later to talk about the meeting and the concept of home-based reading support. They both feel the meeting was productive. Mr. Basheer is amazed and enthusiastic about the reaction of the staff to the inquiries and perspectives of the families. Everyone seems to be looking at the problem through a wider lens. Ms. Blair, who was actually a member of a home-based reading support team earlier in her career, is pleased that the group has chosen to investigate a quality, research-based process. However, she cautions Mr. Basheer that just because the two of them felt the strategy is a solid solution, they are a long way from implementation. Mr. Basheer agrees, but he is pleased with the progress and ready to continue the work.

What to Consider

As Easing the Transition from PreK to Kindergarten

As shown in the School Snapshot, families are interested in participating in their children's education and can make significant contributions to support their learning. When schools and families collaborate to help young children transition from home to preK to kindergarten, the result can be measurable dividends for students (Rathbun & Germino-Hausken, 2001). In fact, the period of transition to kindergarten provides an optimal opportunity for school staff to capitalize on the higher levels of family-school connections common in preK and early child care programs.

However, if families are to be involved, school staff have to reach out to families and invite them to participate. According to Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999), research "emphasizes the important role that principals, policies, and school attributes play in predicting family involvement" (p. 27). Moreover, in urban schools and schools with high populations of low-income and racial or ethnic minority students, school administrators should make these activities a priority and work to provide the necessary supports for these transition practices, for these efforts help to bridge the achievement gap (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; Rathbun & Germino-Hausken, 2001). Although families commonly "cede" control of their children's education to schools when they begin formal education, schools can change this tendency by creating structures that encourage active family involvement.

Even though we commonly assume that the work to transition a child into school begins once the child starts school, utilizing specific transition activities before children start kindergarten or between lower grade levels can help boost families' at-school involvement and create expectations for continued family-school connections for the future. This requires school staff to make direct contact with parents before a child enters school and maintain that contact throughout the child's education.

In several of their studies Pianta et al. describe this process as a reaching-out effort: to families and preschools, backward in time to establish links with families before the first day of school, and intensively through personal contacts and home

visits. It is through direct contact and home visits that school staff have an opportunity to introduce themselves to families, start to get acquainted, and help orient children and families to the school's routines and expectations (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999).

Meetings, like the one Mr. Basheer held, are a first step in establishing productive relationships among all stakeholders. The four syntheses (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Boethel, 2003, 2004), created by SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, have explored a large number of studies about programs that have sought to develop family and community involvement as a strategy to support student learning. Within the studies, the Center has found common characteristics in effective family and community connections with schools programs: Staff in these schools deliberately create a culture that promotes

- ♦ **relationships** among family, community members, and school staff that foster trust and collaboration,
- ♦ **recognition** of families' needs and class and cultural differences that lead to greater understanding and respect among all involved, and
- ♦ **involvement** of all stakeholders in a shared partnership of mutual responsibility for student learning.

For these characteristics to emerge, school staff have to actively work, over a lengthy period of time, to

- ♦ **prepare** all of those involved—staff and families—to do the work,
- ♦ **focus** the work on meaningful outcomes and purposes that relate directly to what students are expected to learn, and
- ♦ **advocate** an inclusive educational culture that involves all stakeholders in the work to support students in their academic pursuits.

The question for school staff like Mr. Basheer is, what actions can school leaders take to involve families in efforts to support student transition from home to preK to kindergarten?

Putting It Into Practice

In each of the four syntheses created by SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, the authors include recommendations for building effective programs, based on the studies included. In the 2004 synthesis, *Readiness: Family and Community Connections with Schools*, Boethel recommends the following strategies to help school staff develop effective family and community connections with schools.

1 Recruitment and organizational activities that school staff can use to initiate the involvement of all stakeholders:

- ◆ Invite families and school staff to participate in focus groups to explore families' and the school's expectations for students, families' needs in supporting their children's transition to school, or other related topics.
- ◆ Hold informational sessions with community members and families to share the school's approach to meeting the needs of all students and the school's goals for students and staff.
- ◆ Ask family members of older elementary school students to participate in discussion groups that will provide the families of preK and kindergarten students with insight into how to prepare the children for school, including ways that families can support classroom instruction.
- ◆ Involve families of 3 and 4 year olds in No Child Left Behind (NCLB)-mandated School-Parent Compact initiatives.

2 Transition activities that schools can initiate before children start kindergarten:

- ◆ Make direct contact with families by phone or at community activities in order to share grade-level expectations and school contact information.
- ◆ Visit students at home before they enter school, to help establish a positive relationship with families.
- ◆ Host open houses or pre-enrollment classroom visits for parents and children in order for them to gain experience in what the school day is like.
- ◆ Host parent orientation sessions off the school grounds at community centers or local churches to provide family members with forms and insights to help children transition to the next grade level.
- ◆ Provide helpful pamphlets for families on what the school will expect of them and tips on things they can do at home to prepare their children for school.

3 Professional development activities that school leaders can initiate to provide specific supports to facilitate and increase teachers' use of in-depth transition activities:

- ◆ Provide training to instructional staff on helpful strategies to engage families or create opportunities for role-playing to help staff learn to interact with families about family concerns and student needs as they transition to the next grade. This can be done during the school year or during the summer.
- ◆ Supply teachers with class lists as early as possible before the start of school, so they can begin their efforts to contact the families of their students before the school year begins.

4 Policy decisions that district and school staff can enact to provide support for these efforts:

- ◆ Provide supplemental funds for teachers to participate in transition- and readiness-related training.
- ◆ Fund family liaisons or coordinators for school campuses who will reach out to parents and ensure that their questions are answered and concerns are addressed.
- ◆ Invite families to participate in focus or small discussion groups about student performance, expectations, curriculum, and other areas where the perspectives of all stakeholders are important.

For More Ideas on This Strategy

The Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPGI), located at the University of North Carolina, is one of the nation's largest multidisciplinary centers devoted to the study of children. One of its many projects, the **National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL)**, focuses on enhancing the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children from birth through age 8 and is a national early childhood research project supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). NCEDL is a collaboration with the University of Virginia and University of California, Los Angeles. NCEDL has numerous documents and other helpful resources on its Web site that can be used as professional development tools or as information sources for school staff, family members, or other interested groups. The following two documents provide research findings and recommendations that schools will find valuable as they work to improve student performance by involving families in child readiness efforts.

Early Developments: This product is published three times a year, and each issue is dedicated to a prominent theme in early childhood education. Each issue includes a detailed explanation of the selected topic, descriptions of teachers and schools who are attempting to address the topic, and explanations of current research on specific interventions for the topic. The Spring 2005 issue is dedicated to a recent NCEDL study on preK children. It is available in an easily downloaded PDF file.

Fact Sheets: This series of one-page briefs provide concise explanations and research analysis of key issues in early childhood education. These Sheets not only provide useful information on important early childhood topics, they provide insight into possible structures and content for fact sheets that a school staff might develop to communicate this type of information. These Fact Sheets are available in an easily downloaded PDF file.

National Center for Early Development & Learning

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The Harvard Family Research Project has developed various research reports and other helpful documents to assist private organizations and communities as they promote child development, student achievement, healthy family functioning, and community development. The following study report provides additional information on the topic of transition and family involvement that can be used to explore the most current research on this topic.

The Transition to Kindergarten: A Review of Current Research and Promising Practices to Involve Families (2004) –

A report from the Harvard Family Research Project by Marielle Bohan-Baker and Priscilla M. D. Little. Available at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/bohan.html>

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www.hfrp.org

Related Research

There are numerous studies on the more general topic of school readiness. While there have been randomized control trial studies on change and intervention strategies for transition practices and their impact on children's early success in schools, research on the specific topic of readiness and transition has primarily been descriptive. These descriptive studies focus on the exploration of issues rather than intervention success. Though the studies reported here are rich in description about issues and factors influencing readiness and transition and family involvement, they do not provide empirical evidence as to what interventions can produce the most effective practices in family involvement as it relates to readiness and transition. The studies described below utilize either survey or correlational designs. Additionally, the studies described in this section not only present information on current research, they also help to define what is known about effective family and community connections with schools efforts.

As part of a study for the National Center for Early Development & Learning's Kindergarten Transition Project, LaParo, Kraft-Sayre, and Pianta (2003) present descriptive findings on the Kindergarten Transition Project, a 2-year intervention in which family workers and teachers implemented transition activities at a high minority school. Transition activities included parent orientations, newsletters, and teacher-parent interactions. During the first project year, researchers collected interview and teacher questionnaire data on 95 preschool children and their families and their 10 teachers; in the second year, data were collected on 86 of these children, their families, and their 10 kindergarten teachers. The study found that more than 50 percent of families reported participating in almost all of the transition activities that were offered to them, and most characterized these activities as helpful in supporting their child's transition.

LaParo, K. M., Kraft-Sayre, M., & Pianta, R. C. (2003). Preschool to kindergarten transition activities: Involvement and satisfaction of families and teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 17*, 147–158.

Rathbun and Germino-Hausken (2001) used teacher and administrator questionnaires from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–1999 (ECLS–K) to examine the extent to which transitional activities offered by teachers or their schools are associated with various school characteristics and with levels of parent involvement. Based on the responses of 3,243 kindergarten teachers, the researchers reported that the number and type of transition activities differed by school characteristics. Teachers in schools with low proportions of at-risk children used a greater number of transition practices and practices that were more interactive with individual families, compared with teachers in schools with higher proportions of at-risk children. In terms of parental involvement, the study found that teacher-reported levels of parental involvement were higher in private school kindergartens than in public school kindergartens. In addition, several transition practices were associated with teacher reports of greater parental involvement. These included calling families, sending information home about the kindergarten program, hosting pre-enrollment visits, providing parent orientations, and having preschoolers spend some time in the kindergarten classroom. The researchers stated that increased efforts to work with families to ease transition for young students were correlated to successful schools.

Rathbun, A. H., & Germino-Hausken, E. (2001, April). *How are transition-to-kindergarten activities associated with parent involvement during kindergarten?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

HANDOUT 24, page 7 of 8

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 1

The following three studies provide related findings that help practitioners in understanding more about building positive relationships with families in order to support student learning and transition in the early grades. In their study, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) described characteristics of and changes in teacher-family contact in 2 preschools (1 Head Start) and 1 kindergarten over a 2-year period. Participating children were from low-income families. In Year 1, preschool and kindergarten teachers kept family involvement logs describing contact with families of 290 children; in Year 2, kindergarten teachers kept family-school contact logs on 82 of the children who had participated in the Year 1 study. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses showed that teacher-family contact occurred more frequently in both preschool programs than in kindergarten. The types of contact and sources of initiation of the contact also changed from preschool to kindergarten: Home visits, conversations during pickup and drop-off, and phone calls were more common in preschool than kindergarten, whereas notes were more typical in kindergarten. Contacts shifted from being typically home-initiated while children were in preschool to school-initiated while children were in kindergarten. Positive topics were discussed a greater percentage of time in preschool than kindergarten, whereas family support, academic problems, and behavioral problems were discussed more frequently in kindergarten (p. 433).

Extending these findings, Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gerke, and Higgins (2001) studied 110 children enrolled in 10 classrooms in 2 different preschool programs. Children were grouped by the school they would be attending in kindergarten. Though the study used a variety of data collection methods, including surveys and interviews, this report focuses solely on a subset of data collected on collaborative relationships among those involved. Much of this subset of data targeted communication strategies used by the teachers to create a "support network" (pp. 123–124) for student learning. The authors state that the "process is complex, and at times idiosyncratic"; however, the data reveal that when there is a positive respect for the roles of all involved, the outcome can be a collaborative

relationship between families and school staff that can support student needs.

Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, and Bradley (2003) added to the two earlier studies in their observation-based study of 223 kindergarten children, their mothers, and their teachers. They found that when families are actively involved in their children's education at this level, the collaborative relationships established between the teacher and the family members will create a more substantial support system for student learning and will "bolster children's achievement" (p. 193).

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (1999). Patterns of family-school contact in preschool and kindergarten. *School Psychology Review*, 28(3), 426–438.

Pianta, R. C., Kraft-Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufman, S., Gercke, N., & Higgins, T. (2001). Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: The National Center for Early Development and Learning's Kindergarten Transition Intervention. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 16, 117-132.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., & Bradley, R. H. (2003). Teacher-rated family involvement and children's social and academic outcomes in kindergarten. *Early Education & Development*, 14(2), 179-198.

References Cited

Within this document, the descriptions of concepts and recommendations come from both long-standing foundational research as well as more current studies. The references included in this section reflect both types of literature.

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- Rathbun, A. H., & Germino-Hausken, E. (2001, April).** *How are transition-to-kindergarten activities associated with parent involvement during kindergarten?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., & Pianta, R. C. (1999).** Patterns of family-school contact in preschool and kindergarten. *School Psychology Review*, 28(3), 426–438.

Find Research Related to This Strategy

You can find more information and research on this topic by searching the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools' publications database, *The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database*, at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bib-search.html>. If you are looking for information about easing transition to school in the early grades, useful keywords to help narrow your search are readiness, transitions, preschool, and early childhood.

Maximizing Your Use of the Interactive Learning Modules

The interactive learning modules are electronic resources that focus on the following aspects of family and community involvement with schools:

- ◆ An Overview of Family and Community Involvement
- ◆ Supporting Learning Outside of School
- ◆ Child Readiness

Each of the interactive learning modules provides the following processes:

- ◆ Exploration of key elements that are intrinsic to effective family and community connections with schools
- ◆ An opportunity to participate in an interactive environment to increase basic knowledge and skills on the topic

You may access these modules online through SEDL's Web site at <http://www.sedl.org/learning/> or find them on the CD.

When to Use This Activity:

As you determine the information needs of your school community, review these interactive learning modules and determine how the use of either the information or the suggested activities in one or more of them can contribute to your efforts. Each described approach can be used by an individual for personal learning or with a group to plan new efforts, refine existing programs, or create evaluation indicators. Because these modules are tightly focused on key elements, they are ideal as a first step in raising awareness and generating interest that will lead to the application of research-based concepts. They are ideal to use with activities in Section 1 and 2 or as supplementary events for activities in Section 3 or 4.

At the End of This Activity:

Participants will have explored key issues and reflected on how these key issues relate to their school community through an interactive medium.

Sources for This Activity:

Interactive learning modules:

- ◆ *What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?*
- ◆ *What Structures Can Help Schools Create Effective Family and Community Involvement That Supports Learning Outside of School?*
- ◆ *How Can Families and Community Members Support Children's Readiness for School?*

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 2

Maximizing Your Use

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Maximizing Your Use of the Interactive Learning Modules

To prepare yourself, take the following steps:

1. Pass out Handout 1, *What's Your Experience*. Depending on your preferences, the last section of text on the handout (starting with the word "Traditional") can be folded over or blocked out in order for you to make a stronger point without participants getting a hint of the punch line. You can also make an overhead transparency of Handout 1 and cover the lower portion for the beginning of this activity and then reveal the bottom section at the appropriate time as described below.

What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?	Explores the types of family and community involvement and the benefits of family involvement
What Structures Can Help Schools Create Effective Family and Community Involvement That Supports Learning Outside of School?	Presents a structural framework that is common to effective family and community involvement efforts.
How Can Families and Community Members Support Children's Readiness for School?	Explores strategies that both schools and families can use to support children's readiness for school.

2. Print out the text version of the chosen learning module located on the CD and meet with a colleague to discuss the contents. This peer-to-peer interaction will help you cement your understanding of the information presented in the learning module.
These text versions are also excellent tools for later review once a module has been completed or to share with those who find using or reading a computer monitor difficult.
3. Choose one of the other resources available in these materials and use that resource to study the topic more deeply. The following chart lists the resources related to each module:

MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to a computer lab or a computer with projection device

ELECTRONIC FILES NEEDED:

Chosen interactive learning module found on the CD or on Internet at <http://www.sedl.org/learning/>

OPTIONAL HANDOUT:

One copy per participate module
Text only version of the selected interactive learning module

ESTIMATED TIME

60–90 minutes for each module

<p>Learning Module 1: What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections With Schools?</p>	<p>Handout 2: What? Who? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools</p> <p>Synthesis: A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement</p>
<p>Learning Module 2: What Structures Can Help Schools Create Effective Family and Community Involvement That Supports Learning Outside of School?</p>	<p>Handout 2: What? Who? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools</p> <p>Strategy Brief: Developing a Collaborative Team Approach to Support Family and Community Connections With Schools: What Can School Leaders Do?</p> <p>Strategy Brief: Organizing Family and Community Connections With Schools: How Do School Staff Build Meaningful Relationships With All Stakeholders</p> <p>Synthesis: A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement</p> <p>Synthesis: Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections</p>
<p>Learning Module 3: How Can Families and Community Members Support Children's Readiness for School?</p>	<p>Strategy Brief: Easing the Transition From PreK to Kindergarten: What Schools and Families Can Do to Address Child Readiness</p> <p>Synthesis: Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections</p>

4. Use the Connection Collection online database at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/> to obtain a list of research reports on the module topic. Review these annotations and select a few primary studies to review to deepen your understanding of the topic.

Note: The research studies used in the syntheses and the Connection Collection represent a wide array of research methodologies. The concepts presented in the modules are derived from the syntheses. In this field, there are a limited number of studies that utilize the more rigorous randomized control design. Studies that use this design have stronger evidence to support their findings than those using descriptive methods. However, descriptive studies will help you contextualize important issues. As you complete this activity, you will need to consider which concepts are supported

by rigorous evidence and which ones deepen your contextual understanding but do not offer strong evidence for practice. In the syntheses, you will notice the authors provide charts that list the studies by type of design. Use these charts and the summary abstracts to help you weigh the evidence in each study.

For further information on rigor and quality research design, the US Department of Education Website (www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorous/vid/index.html) provides free access to a research guide called *Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported By Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide*. This resource provides a detailed explanation on how to gauge the quality of the research report's design.

To facilitate this activity with participants, take the following steps:

1. Use any of the following approaches to promote discussion and action based on the interactive learning modules. The modules may be used in a computer lab; with a computer that has a projection device, such as an LCD; or on a home computer.

Note: Use of the modules is intended to support efforts in your school community to increase family and community involvement. When you choose the setting and time for completing the interactive modules, consider: how you can use them to generate shared knowledge and understanding and secure greater support for your efforts?

Approach 1: On-site Professional Development

- Convene a meeting of interested individuals in a location where you have access to computer and appropriate projection devices.
- Ask participants to complete the module as a large group, in small groups, or individually.
- Ask participants to discuss answers recorded as a group or use sharing strategies, such as a pair-share, if the work is done in small groups or individually.
- Stop the work after text boxes or forced-choice activities written into the modules and ask participants what they are learning.
- Arrange for a debriefing after the event so that teams can discuss what they have learned from using the modules and determine ways they can use new information they have learned.

Approach 2: Learning Stations

- Set up stations or displays with modules loaded and ready to use at school events, community events, libraries, or other locations so that individuals who pass by the station or display can use the computer to use the module.
- Have teams of staff, family members, and community members available at each station or display to interact with those who are using the modules. Teams might use the following questions to prompt discussion with those who use the modules:

- Ask participants to discuss answers recorded as a group or use sharing strategies, such as a pair-share, if the work is done in small groups or individually.

What have learned from this module that will encourage you to be more involved with your children's school?

Now that you have learned more about what this type of effort involves, what can we do that will make it easier for you to participate?

What role can you see yourself playing in your children's education based on your learnings in this module?

- Arrange for a debriefing after the event so that teams can discuss what they have learned from those who used the modules or determine ways they can use new information they have learned.

Assessing Your Plan

Program developers need to ensure that planned actions are aligned to qualities that are common to effective efforts. This activity will help users to answer the following questions:

- ◆ Does the program's goal align to the characteristics and actions that are commonly found in effective family and community connections with schools efforts?
- ◆ Based on the alignment or lack of alignment of our goal to the identified characteristics or actions, what areas do we need to address to make our program stronger?
- ◆ Do the program's processes align to the characteristics and actions that commonly found in effective family and community connections with schools efforts?
- ◆ Based on the alignment or lack of alignment of our processes for involving family and community to identified characteristics or actions, what areas do we need to address to make the program stronger?

When to Use This Activity:

This activity is written with the assumption that you have already created an implementation plan, and it includes a goal or purpose statement and descriptions of actions to be taken. If the plan does not have these items, you will need to develop a process for creating these items and do that before you begin this activity. If you are not able to do this, you should skip this activity.

Additionally, before you attempt this activity, you should have already completed the following activities:

- ◆ Section 1, Activity 1 which raises awareness of the types of involvement that should be referenced in this activity. Handout 2, *Types of Involvement* provides a ready reference that can be used in this activity as well.
- ◆ Section 1, Activity 2 which contains information and concepts that relate directly to the characteristics and actions described in this activity. They are taken from Handout 3: *What? Who? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools*.

This activity will have more value if you have also completed other activities from these materials to deepen the knowledge of the participants.

At the End of This Activity:

Program leaders will be able to determine if their plans for implementation are aligned to characteristics and actions commonly found in effective family and community connections with schools programs.

Sources for This Activity:

Syntheses:

- ◆ *Emerging Issues in School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of Family and Community Connections with Schools on Student Achievement*
- ◆ *Diversity: School, Family, & Community Connections*
- ◆ *Readiness: School, Family, & Community Connections*

SECTION 4 ♦ ACTIVITY 3

Assessing Your Plan

FACILITATION DIRECTIONS: Assessing Your Plan**To prepare yourself, take the following steps:**

Note: This activity is written with the assumption that the implementation plan has a goal or purpose statement and descriptions of actions to be taken. If the plan does not have these items, you will need to develop a process for creating these items. If you are not able to do this, you should skip this activity.

1. Review the implementation plan that has been developed for the program.
2. Complete Handout 25, Assessing Your Plan Worksheet as a preparation for conducting the activity. Remember that the characteristics and actions used in this handout are taken from the text in Section 1, Activity 2, Handout 3, *Who? What? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools*.

Note: You will need to establish a base of shared understanding about important issues and qualities of effective family and community connections with schools before you introduce this activity. Other activities in these materials will help you establish this base. Be sure that you have completed Section 1, Activity 2 before doing this activity as the framework it introduces contains definitions and concepts that are vital to this activity.

To prepare yourself, take the following steps:

1. Use this activity after you have completed other activities from this section or other sections in these materials. Be sure that you have completed Section 1, Activity 2 as the framework introduces definitions and concepts that are used in this activity.
2. Divide the participants into small groups of three or four. Give each participant a copy of the program's implementation plan. Ask them to review the plan (time you allow should be determined by the length of the plan) and then discuss the actions described in the plan.
3. Give each team or participant Handout 25 and ask each person to write the goal statement from the implementation plan in the "Goal Statement" box. Or make the handout into an overhead transparency and record the statement on the transparency so that all participants can see the statement.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Chart paper/pens

ELECTRONIC FILES NEEDED:

One copy per participant
Handout 25, page 140
Planning Assessment Worksheet
Program Implementation Plan

OPTIONAL HANDOUT:

One copy per participant
Handout 3, page 15
Who? What? How? Family and Community Connections With Schools

ESTIMATED TIME

60–90 minutes for each module

4. Assist the participants in filling in the rest of Handout 25, following the directions on the sheet. For each characteristic or action that the group notes, encourage the participants to get specific and to avoid general statements that could be said of any program. Work with them to develop answers that are specific to their program or efforts.
5. Use the following questions to help the group determine if their efforts are grounded in current research in this field:

About the characteristics...

What characteristics are promoted in our efforts?

For example, participants might respond: “As school staff, families, and community members begin to work collaboratively, they will have to develop relationships with one another. Relationship-building is an important part of being collaborative.”

Are we doing enough to promote this characteristic (ask this for each characteristic)?
If not, what is missing?

Note: Answers to this question will require the participants to take a more global view of their work. It is likely their efforts may focus on parts of one of the characteristics, but not all elements. Be sure to keep the entirety of the characteristic descriptions in mind as you help them sort their responses.

For example, participants might respond: “While we say we are going to work collaboratively, we don’t say we are going to take advantage of our diversity as a strength to build new ideas to meet student needs. We should say and do this.”

About the actions...

Do our efforts incorporate each of the actions that are recommended?

Note: Many of their original statements will actually reference actions that are to be taken. Prompt the participants to review those statements that were created earlier and posted and use them as a starting point for answering these questions about the actions they will take.

For example, they might respond: “We say teachers will use new ways to communicate with parents, but we haven’t said anything about how we’ll do this. We might want to provide training or workshops to the teachers and to the families as well, so they can work together to meet the needs of students.”

If not, what is missing?

For example, they might respond: “I don’t see advocacy anywhere. Collaboration implies that we’re sharing, but how do we get everyone to advocate for the inclusion of all stakeholders, not just the ones that are easy to work with?”

6. Use the answers to these questions to prompt the participants to create a list changes or needed improvements in implementation plan.
7. Close the meeting by summarizing what has been accomplished and state proposed next steps based on their list of things to do.

Planning Assessment Worksheet

Goal Statement:

Describe how this goal fosters the following characteristics. . .

Establish relationships among all stakeholders?

Allow for the recognition of contextual and cultural issues?

Promote the involvement of all stakeholders in a shared partnership?

Describe how the actions described in the implementation plan will . . .

Prepare all involved?

Focus the efforts on student learning?

Focus the efforts on student learning?

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