

# **What Do We Mean by Family and Community Connections with Schools?**

(Module 1) Online version available at <http://www.sedl.org/learning/>

*Text Only Version for Online Professional Development Course; Slight modifications have been made to the text since this version is not an online interactive medium.*

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## **Family and Community Connections with Schools**

What do we mean by “family and community connections with schools”?

This module is designed to

- Assist users in defining family and community connections
- Help various stakeholders determine needs

This module should be used by

- School staff
- Parent volunteers
- Community volunteers
- Students

who are interested in finding new connections among schools, families, and communities.

When you have completed this module, you will have

- A printable record of your notes
- Strategies to share your ideas with others

As you work through this module, you will have an opportunity to record responses and make lists.

In this module, you will

- Explore your own experiences with family and community involvement
- Learn about 8 types of family and community connections
- Discover the benefits of family and community connections with schools
- Plan strategies for increasing or developing family and community involvement in your school

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## **What Is Parent Involvement?**

When some people think of family involvement, they think of parents volunteering in their child’s classroom or attending parent-teacher conferences.

The reality is that schools, families, and communities can connect in many different ways to support students.

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## **Your Experience**

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

Click 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 fundraiser 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 decision-making activity.       |

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What is your total number of experiences? \_\_\_\_\_

How many of them 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 benefit for school and families equally.

As you can see, your responses were categorized into either traditional or reciprocal forms of involvement.

In the traditional form, involvement generally takes the form of a request from the school for the family or community member to act.

In the reciprocal form, involvement usually benefits schools and families equally.

Though all forms of involvement can benefit students and schools, we have learned that more can be done with reciprocal connections than with the more traditional connections.

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## **Greatest Impact?**

Which kind of interactions do you feel might have the greatest impact on student achievement?

*Traditional?*

In traditional interactions, school staff are generally the only ones who benefit from the involvement. If you want the greatest impact, you need to create connections that foster interaction among students, school staff, family, and community members so that everyone involved in the efforts benefits from the actions.

*Reciprocal?*

You're right. Programs that are characterized by reciprocal interactions among students, school staff, family, and community members have greater benefits to all involved.

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## **National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools**

The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools at Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has explored an extensive research base on the success and outcomes of family and community connections in schools.

Read our detailed syntheses of the research by going to the syntheses web page [<http://www.sedl.org/connections>]. You may also obtain electronic copies of each synthesis at that location.

*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; define promising new directions; and identify 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 concerning kinds of school, family, and community connections, results from varied approaches, and effective strategies.

*Diversity: School, Family, and 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 and 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.

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## **Types of Connections**

In these syntheses, the Center has found that family and community connections with schools tend to fall into the following categories:

- ⇒ Fostering Supportive Home Environments
- ⇒ Promoting Shared Decision Making
- ⇒ Expanding Family, Community, and School Communication
- ⇒ Coordinating Resources and Services
- ⇒ Fostering Volunteer Support
- ⇒ Supporting Youth Development
- ⇒ Supporting Learning Outside of School (and)
- ⇒ Expanding Community Development

## **Defining the Types of Connections**

### Fostering Supportive Home Environments

is defined as strategies that assist families with parenting skills & help create home conditions to support student academic achievement.

### Promoting Shared Decision Making

is defined as strategies that include families and community members as partners in school decisions.

### Expanding Family, Community, and School Communication

is defined as strategies that help to promote effective two-way communications among schools, families, and community members or groups.

### Coordinating Resources and Services

is defined as strategies that unite efforts and programs to provide services for families, students, school, and community.

### Fostering Volunteer Support

is defined as strategies that organize and support family and community members in their efforts to support the school and its students.

### Supporting Youth Development

is defined as strategies that provide services for students, such as health and physical development, creative expression, and leadership development.

### Supporting Learning Outside of School

is defined as strategies that involve families and partner organizations to support learning in a variety of settings other than the classroom.

### Expanding Community Development

is defined as 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.

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## **What Type of Connection Is Needed?**

As you can see, family and community connections with schools can be defined in many ways.

However, it is the thoughtful decisions made about ways to create and offer involvement that determine program success. A school might choose to incorporate all of the categories of

involvement or select specific categories for the work.

With so many options, how can you decide what you need in your school?

First, you have to decide what you want to accomplish.

What are the benefits you want to gain from this effort?

Let's look at possible benefits that might result from each type of involvement.

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## Outcomes of Types of Involvement

When schools *Foster Supportive Home Environments* the result can be

- ⇒ Increased student academic achievement because students receive more support for classroom learning activities at home
- ⇒ Greater knowledge and skill for family members about how to support their children not only academically but physically and emotionally

When school and district leaders *Promote Shared Decision Making*, they can bring about

- ⇒ Enhanced family-school interactions that bring about improved relations among all those involved and support for the school's academic efforts
- ⇒ Additional resources for school improvement efforts

When schools work to *Expand Family, Community, and School Communication*, schools can gain

- ⇒ Greater knowledge and access to programs that support student, family, school, and community needs
- ⇒ More involvement in school and community programs

As school and community service groups *Coordinate Resources and Services*, they often secure

- ⇒ Greater support and use of existing outreach programs
- ⇒ Additional resources for families and schools in their work to meet student needs

When schools and teachers *Foster Volunteer Support* for classroom instruction, they also can create

- ⇒ Greater support for student academic success and for school improvement efforts
- ⇒ Positive perception of school staff, efforts, and programs

If schools, families, and community organizations *Support Youth Development*, they often gain

- ⇒ Greater support for students academically
- ⇒ Deepened sense of student identity and the need for planning for the future

As efforts to *Support Learning Outside of School* grow, schools often find they have

- ⇒ Additional support for student learning and personal development that might lead to increased academic achievement
- ⇒ Additional support and resources for school improvement efforts

When schools participate in *Expanding Community Development*, they often gain

- ⇒ Greater support for school improvement efforts
- ⇒ More positive relationship between school and community
- ⇒ Greater access to additional facilities and resources

Simply put, the wide array of possible types of involvement can have benefits for all those involved:

- Students
- Family Members
- School Staff
- Community Members

When schools, families, and communities work together, the student learning environment has multiple levels and avenues for support that benefit all those involved.

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## In Your School?

Let's take a moment to take stock of what is happening in your school.

In the box below, type in the ways that family and community members are currently involved in your school based on the categories you've already seen.

What school activities Foster Supporting Home Environments ?


What school activities Promote Shared Decision Making?



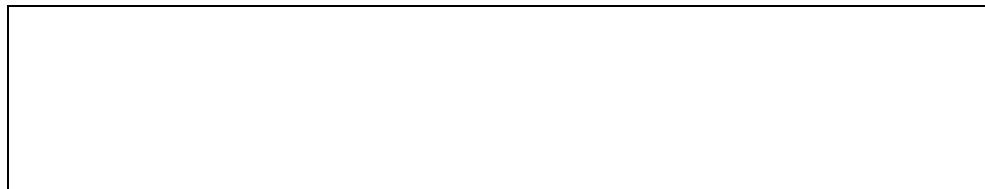
What school activities Expand Family, Community, and School Communication?



What school activities Coordinate Resources and Services?



What school activities Foster Volunteer Support?



What school activities Support Youth Development?

What school activities Support Learning Outside of School?

What school activities Expand Community Development?

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### **What Do You Want to Accomplish?**

Now, that you have an idea of what your school currently has in place, you can begin to think about what else needs to be in place.

One of the challenges in developing or expanding school, family, and community connections is making sure that the categories of connections that you use will have the benefits that you want.

Many forms of “at-school” connections, such as attending school meetings and student performances, don’t necessarily have an impact on student achievement.

However, because they can be valuable in increasing communication and understanding among school staff, family members, and community partners, these strategies are important to use.

As you develop plans for family and community connections with schools, you need to carefully consider what impact the program might have. What do you want to accomplish at your school?

- ⊖ Improved student performance?
  - ⊖ Better family-school relationships?
  - ⊖ Increased school-home communication?
- Or is there another need you'd like to address?

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## Benefits to Stakeholders

What are the possible benefits for  
Students ?  
Families ?  
Schools ?  
Community ?

*Students* – When programs focus tightly on academic needs, the result can be better support for student academic efforts, leading to increased achievement gains.

*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.

*Schools* – When programs focus on key learning targets, the result can be higher student achievement, positive teacher-student interactions, and additional resources.

*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.

What benefits would you like to see from family and community connections in your school?

Type your answer in the box below. Click submit when finished.

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## Determining Benefit Needs

The link between the kinds of connections and the benefits that result should be a key consideration when planning family and community connections with schools.





