

Charting Progress Toward Collaboration

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Preface

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) exists to challenge, support, and enrich educational systems in providing quality education for all learners, enabling them to lead productive and fulfilling lives in an ever-changing, increasingly interconnected world. A private, non-profit corporation, SEDL has served for more than 29 years as a federally designated Regional Educational Laboratory (REL). SEDL's current REL operations serve the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The REL operates with funds from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. SEDL provides training and technical assistance, creates and fosters educational networks, conducts applied research studies, and produces research-practice-based materials.

This is the third in a series of booklets developed by SEDL's Home, School, and Community Partnerships (HSCP) Project. This booklet describes how HSC partnerships can chart progress toward collaboration through their participation in a planning phase. Another booklet in this series, *Building Home, School, and Community Partnerships: The Role of the Neutral Facilitator*, focuses on the role of the neutral facilitator in building HSC Partnerships. Both booklets support the central volume of this series, *Building Home, School, Community Partnerships: The Planning Phase*. The HSCP Project also produces an annual *Directory of Home, School, and Community Partnership Programs* and participates in networking activities to advance collaboration at the state and local levels.

"Community assessment is both a product and a process. However good the community assessment is in producing a product, that product will be used only if the process builds commitment to and ownership of the assessment." – (Bruner et al., 1993)

Introduction

During the past five years, SEDL has provided ongoing, long-term technical assistance to demonstration sites in five states of the Southwestern region. The five states are Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Each demonstration site participated in a planning phase to develop and support a partnership involving representatives of the home (parents and other family members), school (teachers, school administrators, and other educators), and community (health and social service providers, business representatives, and other community members).

Context: The Planning Phase of Home, School, and Community (HSC) Partnership Development. Research acknowledges the need for a planning phase early in the development of a collaborative partnership (Kagan, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). This planning phase is frequently referred to as the “formation stage” and its activities are referred to as “preformation activities.” Kagan (1991) refers to the formation stage of collaboration as one that shapes all future stages. Kagan suggests that a group must successfully pass through these initial stages of a collaborative partnership before it will be ready to implement its program.

The purpose of the planning phase is to develop and refine the skills, relationships, and plans that prepare an HSC partnership to implement collaborative efforts. SEDL’s staff have outlined four necessary stages of the planning phase. (See booklet one of this series, *Building Home, School, and Community Partnerships: The Planning Phase* for an in-depth discussion of the planning phase.) HSC partnerships must pass through all four

stages to develop and strengthen these skills, relationships, and plans that are necessary for effective collaboration. When partners have completed the four stages of the planning phase, they can expect to have accomplished a number of outcomes.

Expected Outcomes of the Planning Phase

- *A shared vision about the needs of children and families in the community*
- *An action plan to address the HSC partnership's priority concerns*
- *Strong working relationships and equal partnership among home, school, and community partners*
- *Mechanisms to ensure ongoing communication among partners*
- *A support network among families, school staff, and community representatives*

Miller (1993) points out that “In the planning phase of a program, it is crucial that you are clear about what the program is trying to achieve and think carefully about what will be needed to measure and describe those achievements.” HSC partnerships that are committed to working collaboratively need to gather information that they can use to chart progress toward successful collaboration and toward achieving the expected outcomes of the planning phase.

The purpose of this booklet is to offer insights into how HSC partnerships can chart progress toward successful collaboration and toward achieving the expected outcomes of the planning phase. As the term “charting progress” suggests, the booklet describes informal methods for helping HSC partner

ships begin to think about how they will measure and describe

ships begin to think about how they will measure and describe their work together. SEDL's planning phase provides a framework for partnership development. The planning phase, however, is flexible and individualized from partnership to partnership. It evolves uniquely as each group tailors the process in response to many factors, including its particular resources, barriers, timelines, and priorities. Thus, HSC partnerships should view this booklet as a resource for discussing how they will evaluate their planning efforts.

The booklet also offers insights into how HSC partnerships can involve partners in charting their own progress. By involving partners in charting progress from the outset, they can practice new roles and develop new skills in working collaboratively. For example, they can share responsibilities for gathering data, and use the results to build consensus about priorities for action. This process also helps partners develop a deeper appreciation for the value of evaluation and for the importance of defining indicators of progress early in their work together. This approach ensures that evaluation is an ongoing activity, not one that is tagged on at the end of a partnership's work together.

Factors of Successful Collaboration

Research and practice-based studies suggest that many factors contribute to successful collaboration. For example, Mattessich and Monsey (1992) identify 19 factors of successful collaboration. SEDL staff, in their experience of providing technical assistance to five demonstration sites, suggest that five factors are critical for successful collaboration during the planning phase of an HSC partnership. These critical factors for success are: *diverse membership; ongoing and effective communication; collaborative relationships that support shared leadership; a shared vision for action; and local support for collaboration.*

This booklet examines the five critical factors in detail. SEDL's demonstration sites used these critical factors to track progress during the planning phase. For each critical factor, this booklet provides the following: a *description* of the critical factor, a discussion of *indicators*, or tangible evidence that demonstration sites used to measure their progress in achieving each critical factor; and examples of *successful strategies* which the demonstration sites used to achieve their desired outcomes.

It is important to note that the *indicators* are offered as suggestions, rather than as a checklist. Different partnerships may prefer to select their own indicators to describe their progress. HSC partnerships should feel free to develop indicators that are appropriate for their work together. Secondly, the indicators which a partnership uses will be determined by their current stage of development. Some indicators emerge very early in the planning phase. Others do not surface until the later stages of planning. Thus, HSC partnerships should choose a variety of indicators so that they can chart progress throughout the planning phase.

Critical Factor #1: Diverse Membership

Description. This factor is the foundation of HSC partnerships. Commitment to diversity, equity, and balanced representation from home, school, and community underlies all HSC partnership efforts. In addressing this factor, an HSC partnership actively recruits and maintains diverse partners representing families, school staff, and representatives of the community. Thus, the HSC partnership builds from a base of individuals with diverse backgrounds, roles, educational levels, skills, and experiences. A committed core of partners who regularly attend meetings emerges over time. The partnership expands its membership whenever the work suggests the need for new perspectives or better representation.

Indicators. Demonstration sites used the following indicators to chart progress in recruiting and maintaining diverse membership.

1. The HSC partnership possesses an adequate number of partners (between 8 and 20 members) that form a core group who regularly attend meetings.
2. Membership reflects the community's characteristics (for example, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status).
3. The partnership has a balanced representation of home, school, and community members.
4. Partners demonstrate feelings of belonging to the group by being able to describe how the partnership benefits them.
5. Membership is flexible and offers opportunities for short-term as well as long-term involvement in the partnership.

Successful Strategies. Demonstration sites used a variety of strategies to recruit and sustain diverse membership that include:

- **Encouraging each partner to bring a parent or community representative to an HSC partnership meeting** (*El Paso, New Orleans, West Memphis, and Oklahoma City*)
- **Activating the parent's organization to strengthen parent involvement in the school and in the HSC partnership** (*West Memphis*)
- **Gaining the support and involvement of central office administrators before launching an HSC partnership** (*New Orleans, Oklahoma City, West Memphis*)

- **Involving the principal, teachers, and other campus staff in an HSC partnership from the outset** (*Oklahoma City*)
- **Recruiting representatives from businesses, churches, community agencies, and other organizations through presentations and publicity efforts** (*New Orleans, New Mexico*)

Critical Factor #2: Ongoing and Effective Communication

Description. This factor refers to an HSC partnership’s ability to obtain and present information openly, accurately, and regularly among partners, colleagues with similar roles, and with the wider community. Meetings are the primary way that HSC partnerships address this factor. Meetings offer opportunities for partners to practice listening skills, consensus building, and collaborative problem solving. Partners voice differences of opinion in ways that keep the focus on the needs of children and families, not on individuals, agencies, organizations, or schools. Meeting summaries document the wide range of ideas shared by partners, and the group’s willingness to work toward consensus. The summaries also provide insights about the group’s progress and help to share this information with many audiences. Partners enhance their communication by regularly taking time at meetings to reflect on their progress as a group and individually. This reflection helps the partnership review its operation and make corrections so that partners work together more effectively.

Indicators. Demonstration sites used the following indicators to chart progress toward establishing ongoing and effective communication.

1. Meetings are held regularly. They focus on and support the partnership in reaching the expected outcomes of the planning phase.

2. Partners share information and work together at meetings. All partners give input to and feedback about the direction and decisions of the partnership.
3. Partners address conflicts in ways that aim to strengthen rather than divide the partnership and community.
4. Meeting summaries are distributed to all partners and more widely to the larger community.
5. Partners regularly reflect on their progress and exchange feedback about how the partnership is operating.

Successful Strategies. All demonstration sites used a similar set of strategies to develop ongoing and effective communication. These strategies included the following:

- **Monthly meetings set to accommodate the varied schedules of partners during the course of a year** (*El Paso, New Mexico, New Orleans, Oklahoma City, West Memphis*).
- **Mailing lists for meeting summaries include influential decision makers such as state department of education contact** (*Oklahoma City*).
- **Celebrating linkages is a standard agenda item and encourages information sharing and networking** (*El Paso*).
- **Partners reflect regularly about their progress** (*El Paso, New Mexico*).
- **Annual celebration of partnership invites broad-based public participation** (*New Mexico, New Orleans*).
- **Partners invite others of diverse views to join them on committees** (*Oklahoma City*).

Critical Factor #3: Collaborative Relationships that Support Shared Leadership

Description. This factor refers to the partnerships' efforts to promote positive interaction and develop shared leadership skills among persons who traditionally have not worked together. HSC partnerships promote positive interaction by structuring discussion so that partners see how their diverse opinions enrich the planning phase. Partners thus develop respect for each other and learn to value their differences as well as their common concerns. Over time, partners also begin to recognize how they can contribute to the partnership's activities. HSC partnerships encourage shared leadership by involving all partners in making decisions about the partnership and its direction from the outset of the partnership. As a result, partners develop the commitment and skills needed to share leadership in the ongoing activities of the partnership.

Indicators. Demonstration sites used the following indicators to chart progress toward establishing collaborative relationships that support shared leadership.

1. Partners' behaviors and attitudes demonstrate respect and acceptance of differences within the partnership and community.
2. Partners use collaborative problem solving techniques and build consensus in their work together.
3. Partners (especially parents) begin to take on new roles that they do not traditionally perform.
4. Partners play a role in decision making about the purpose, direction, and activities of the partnership.
5. Partners share responsibility for implementing collaborative activities of the partnership.

Successful Strategies. Demonstration sites used various strategies to establish collaborative relationships that supported shared leadership. These relationships follow group activities in consensus building and problem solving. Some specific examples of how partnerships approach this include the following:

- **Building the momentum of the HSC partnership through small successes** (*New Orleans, West Memphis*)
- **Forming planning committee for the partnership's first major event that reflects strong representation of home, school, and community** (*Oklahoma City*)
- **Offering support and technical assistance from state agencies for undertaking new collaborative relationships** (*New Mexico*)
- **Developing a leadership team to ensure balanced representation and shared leadership within HSC partnership** (*West Memphis*)
- **Partners rotating the responsibility for hosting meetings, which provides opportunities for shared leadership** (*El Paso*)

Critical Factor #4: Shared Vision for Action

Description. This factor helps partners move from individual perspectives to a common perspective about the needs of children and families. A shared vision is crucial if diverse partners are to use consensus and collaborative problem solving in their work together. When partners share a vision, they can more easily work together to connect the community's current reality with partners' dreams for children and families. This factor supports partners' efforts to come to consensus about what needs to change and translate these ideas into desired outcomes. Partners can also agree upon priorities and

“buy-in” to the partnership’s collaborative plan of action because, together, they shaped the partnership’s direction.

Indicators. Demonstration sites used the following indicators to chart progress toward achieving a shared vision for action.

1. Partners share an understanding about the concerns facing children and families in the community and about current resources that address those concerns.
2. Partners achieve consensus and develop written statements about their vision and desired outcomes for children and families.
3. Partners establish a clear connection between HSC partnership activities and desired outcomes for children and families.
4. Partners develop an action plan that describes how the partnership will share responsibility, accountability, and resources for collaborative efforts.
5. The partnership’s purpose and direction require and demonstrate a collaborative approach.

Successful Strategies. Demonstration sites used the following strategies to achieve a shared vision for action.

- **Writing a mission statement that identifies the partnership and its direction** (*Oklahoma City, West Memphis*)
- **Building a shared understanding about the needs of children and families** (*Oklahoma City, New Orleans*)
- **Developing a vision statement, and linking it with a collaborative action plan** (*El Paso, New Mexico*)

- **Identifying and designing collaborative activities that address partners' priority concerns**
(*El Paso, West Memphis*)

Critical Factor #5: Support for Collaboration

Description. This factor ensures that partners identify and secure a range of resources, including human, technical, and financial resources, to support the partnership and its collaborative efforts. This factor also ensures that the partnership's efforts will have a positive, lasting influence on education and services for children and families in the community. Addressing this factor means that partners promote awareness of the partnership's priority concerns and build support for a collaborative approach to address those concerns. Partners identify manageable starting points for their collaborative efforts and build momentum by continuing to cultivate additional support and resources over time. This factor also ensures that partners advocate for policy changes and for expanded services to support the vision of the HSC partnership.

Indicators. Demonstration sites used the following indicators to chart progress toward achieving support for collaboration.

1. Decision makers within agencies, organizations, and schools express awareness of and support for partnership and its collaborative efforts.
2. Partners have evidence of their efforts to increase awareness about the needs of children and families in the community.
3. Partners secure in-kind contributions (for example, staff time, office space, and supplies), direct funding, volunteer efforts, and other support from agencies, organizations, parents, and others to continue a collaborative approach.

4. Partners meet regularly with local, state, and federal decision makers (for example, school superintendents, legislators, school board members, directors of human service agencies, directors of state agencies, and directors of community health centers) and their staff to advocate policy changes and expanded services to support the vision of the HSC partnership.

Successful Strategies. Demonstration sites used the following strategies to achieve support for collaboration.

- **Obtaining support from decision makers to attend HSCP meetings** (*Oklahoma City*)
- **Building support for collaborative approaches at the state and local levels** (*New Mexico*)
- **Securing support for a new program from the superintendent and the school board** (*El Paso*)
- **Making presentations at professional meetings to advocate for the HSC partnership's approach** (*West Memphis*)
- **Sponsoring special events to raise awareness of the needs of children and families** (*New Orleans*)

Summary

Home, School, and Community Partnerships need to gather information that they can use to chart their progress toward successful collaboration and toward achieving the results of the planning phase. SEDL staff, in their experience providing technical assistance to five demonstration sites in the Southwestern region, identified five factors which appeared to be critical to achieving success.

These factors were: *diverse membership; ongoing and effective communication; collaborative relationships that build shared leadership; a shared vision for action; and local support for collaboration.* This booklet defines and describes these factors, suggests types of evidence which HSC partnerships might use to measure their progress along these factors, and provides examples of strategies which were successful at the five demonstration sites.

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