

Family, School, and Community Connections Symposium:
New Directions for Research, Practice, and Evaluation
December 2, 2004, Cambridge, MA

Sponsored by

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, TX

&

Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA

*Summary—Assessing the Impact of Parent Involvement Programs—Creating a Learning System:
New Directions for Family-School-Community Connections*

Heather Weiss, Founder and Director, Harvard Family Research Project, Cambridge, MA

Heather Weiss reflects on the current status and future direction of the field of family-school-community partnerships and the role of research and evaluation. The current research and evaluation knowledge base points to the benefit of family involvement for children's development and learning, the importance of school support for family involvement, and the significance of involvement from birth through high school. Yet the field of education has not made family-school-community partnerships a priority nor dedicated adequate resources to support an infrastructure for this work.

Dr. Weiss argues that the demand for effective partnerships will increase in coming years as education leaders look outside of the school for other resources to help close the achievement gap to meet the promise of Leave No Child Behind. To make the most of this opportunity, Dr. Weiss believes a national strategy is needed that will build a learning system, including the collection and use of research and evaluation, professional development, a policy and legislative development agenda, and a communication and advocacy strategy.

She argues that next steps for research and evaluation include further mining of developmental research to inform applied work, using evaluations to identify interventions with positive results, distilling and distributing information to practitioners, and developing research-based tools for professional development and practice. Successfully carrying out this work requires an openness to studying all forms of family involvement, a commitment to learning and reflection, a demand for evaluation from funders, the establishment of evaluation networks, and the building of intentional connections between evaluation, practice, and professional development.