

The Family-School Partnership: A Critical Component of School Reform

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The Family-School Partnership: A Critical Component of School Reform

Background Briefing Report
by Theodora Ooms and Shelly Hara

and highlights of the Seminar held on February 21, 1991,
at the Mansfield Room, S. 207, U.S. Capitol Building, Washington, DC

- Panelists:**
- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Michael Usdan, Ph.D. | President, Institute for Educational Leadership |
| Susan Swap, Ph.D. | Professor of Psychology and Education,
Wheelock College |
| Don Davies, Ph.D. | President, Institute for Responsive Education and
Co-Director, Center on Families, Schools, Commu-
nities, and Children's Learning |
| Lillian Brinkley | Principal, Willard Model School, Norfolk, VA
and president, National Elementary School
Principals' Association |
- Moderator:** **Theodora Ooms** Director, Family Impact Seminar

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COFO Members: American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) American Home Economics Association (AHEA) Family Resource Coalition (FRC) Family Service America (FSA) National Council on Family Relations (NCFR)

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The Family-School Partnership: A Critical Component of School Reform

Highlights of the Seminar

Held on February 24, 1992, in the Mansfield Room, S.207, US Capitol.

In her opening remarks, **Theodora Ooms** said that one of the best kept secrets in Washington is that families are educators' most powerful ally. Current national proposals for education reform both undervalue and misunderstand the parents' role in education. Panelists at this seminar shared what is being learned about how to strengthen the family-school partnership and why this is so critical to school reform. They focused primarily on the elementary school level.

The first panelist, **Michael Usdan**, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership, spoke about the broader concept of the demographics and politics of school reform within which the parent-school partnership needs to be understood. Schools can no longer operate within a vacuum; they cannot handle the proliferating social, economic, and health problems that increasingly confront parents and children. Political and business leaders seem to be finally understanding this.

Usdan stressed that two demographic trends are particularly key factors shaping education today. The first is that close to 40% of all the nation's children now grow up in poverty or in very marginal economic circumstances. Not only are 23% of children under 6 now living below the legal poverty line (incomes under \$12,800 for a family of four), but close to another 20% are living in economically limited conditions that border on poverty. This is not just a minority or core city issue—well over one-half of the poor are to be found in rural and suburban districts and are white. Schools must play a very central role in the effort of public sector agencies to confront the transcendent issue of children's poverty because “no other institution has the social penetration of schools, located as they are in every neighborhood in every community.”

The second important demographic trend is the aging of our population, which means that schools are losing their political constituency. Only 23% of adults now have kids in public schools. One out of every four voters is over 50 and most aren't poor. Their children are out of school and they are no longer involved. Yet, these older citizens are tremendously powerful and engaged politically. Usdan commented that this situation creates dangerous potential for dysfunctional intergenerational conflict.

If schools are going to maintain their base of support, they must broaden their political constituency, he said. These demographic social, economic, and political changes led to the inexorable need for collaboration: “schools can't be as insulated and isolated from the mainstream of politics” anymore. He stressed that the traditional separation of schools from political life will no longer work. This means that schools are going to become involved in a new form of coalition politics—the involvement of the business community and politicians among others is absolutely essential to education.

Schools are now run apart from local government, with separate funding streams, regulations, and elected board elections, Usdan pointed out. Accountability for school performance is too often unclear among different governmental entities. Creative ways need to be found to mesh the funding streams which serve the needs of children—but this will only occur if attention begins to be focused on local school

governance issues. In the next few years, Usdan predicted, there is going to be more attention paid to the relationship of schools to general government and to the need to bring together and coordinate more effectively the diverse educational, social, and health services that are offered in such a fragmented way to so many children and families.

Another important factor is the new national focus on educational standards and outcomes, reflected in the 1989 Presidential Summit meeting at the University of Virginia and the development of the national educational goals. Schools are in a unique position to meet the broader needs of families. Yet, Usdan pointed out, although 91% of the time kids spend between birth and 18 is spent outside the schools, the new *America 2000* thrust pays too little attention to this reality and assumes that just changing academic requirements alone will improve the life chances of millions of poverty-ridden youngsters.

Usdan concluded by stressing that collaboration is very difficult to achieve. The big challenge is how to create new incentives for collaboration between schools and other institutions in the public sector. This is particularly difficult in a time of fiscal retrenchment. What is needed is going to cost money: vaccinations, prenatal care, preschool, etc. Fortunately, Usdan said, enlightened business leaders with political clout are beginning to realize that investment in children and families is a moral and economic imperative. “Some influential business leaders now see that it is absolutely stupid, both economically and morally, not to begin to invest as early as possible in kids lives,” he said.

But these new forms of collaboration will in turn require that schools break out of their insularity, isolation, and traditional separation from general government. Usdan admonished that the public sector, and especially educators, “can no longer engage in what we traditionally do, namely, pulling the wagons around the circle and shooting inwardly at each other.”

Susan Swap, the second panelist, is professor of psychology and education at Wheelock College and a member of the Consortium of Families, Communities, Schools, and Children’s Learning. She addressed the research findings on families and education, what is meant by parent involvement, and its relevance for diverse populations.

America 2000, Swap began, sets a goal for the readiness of children to start school. But schools are not ready for many of our children. Currently, one-third of our children are at risk of school failure and in many of our cities nearly a half drop out before graduation. Children of color, recent immigrants, and children living below the poverty line are increasingly at risk of school failure.

There is an urgent need for schools to find new ways to educate all our children, including schools in which as many as thirty different languages are spoken. One way that we know contributes to children’s success is family involvement. The evidence that family involvement improves school achievement is unequivocal, Swap declared. Studies show that even when two schools within the same community or two classrooms within the same school are compared, those with teachers especially committed to parent involvement will have higher student achievement. The assumption in these studies is that the schools or classrooms would be drawing from the same population.

Swap explained that there is no single formula for successful home-school partnerships. She cited Anne Henderson’s studies which show that the form of parent involvement does not seem to be as important as that it is reasonably well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting. Families, even from impoverished backgrounds, are more likely to get involved when they see direct benefits for their children’s learning and when they sense that educators are really committed to family involvement.

Swap then cited specific examples which show that local school policies and teacher practices are important factors in determining if parents continue to be part of their children's education—more important than race, parent education, family size, marital status, or grade levels.

Typologies of Family Involvement. Several different typologies describe the diverse ways in which parents and educators connect. Swap outlined her own four-part model of types of family involvement, which includes policies and practices that:

- Create two-way communication channels between parents and educators;
- Enhance learning at home and at school;
- Provide mutual support; that is, parents support educators and vice versa; and
- Rely on joint decisionmaking among families and educators at the individual, school, and district levels.

From research currently being conducted, Swap also described different levels or degrees of family involvement, each reflecting different goals and assumptions about families. She emphasized that schools range from situations in which both parents and educators assume the school is basically responsible for educating the child and the parent has almost no involvement to those in which it is recognized that parents and educators are jointly responsible and share a joint mission which requires collaboration.

Swap asserted that we need to develop clear, strategic thinking about family involvement in children's learning because family involvement activities are often the result of "fuzzy thinking."

Swap went on to say that it is very difficult for educators to create such relationships with all their students' parents since teachers are given little training in how to create multicultural and multi-ethnic schools. Some of the incorrect assumptions which teachers hold, due to lack of training and lack of involvement with families from diverse backgrounds, include the views that all families agree with educators about purposes and most effective school practices; that all children from the same racial or cultural background learn in the same way; or that nonverbal communication and words spoken in English will convey identical meanings to individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Swap illustrated some of these points with findings from new studies conducted by her colleagues at Wheelock College among others. These examples showed how children from diverse cultures and teachers consistently misunderstand each other's responses and how difficult it is for these children to learn both overt academic content and the subtle cultural rules for learning in the classroom. In addition, when the history and perspectives that are part of a child's background are omitted from the texts and classroom context, then the effects are a loss of continuity between home and school, mistrust, lowered expectations of the child's performance by the teacher, and lowered achievement. Educators need to learn to identify these differences and respect and build on these families' strengths.

Swap concluded with five recommendations for policy makers.

1. Include in the preamble and the policy requirements of any education bill a family involvement in schooling component.
2. Initiate demonstration grants for colleges of education to create programs that help future teachers learn more about working with families. (Teacher preparation programs rarely address home-school partnerships.)

3. Expand the availability of grants to help educators learn to teach all children, with a key emphasis on collaboration among families, educators, and college faculty.
4. Create a national policy that clarifies the essential role of families in the education of school-age children and creates small but accessible incentives for schools to reach out to families.
5. Increase the diversity of our teaching force. The federal government could increase the supply of teachers from diverse backgrounds by providing additional financial aid for college or by forgiving loans for teachers who teach for two years in schools serving at-risk children.

Swap ended by asserting that families are educators' greatest allies in the effort to create schools that are successful in serving all our children.

Don Davies, co-director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, began by stressing the significance of the Center, the first federally supported research consortium on this broad topic. The Center, which has only been in operation for a year, was formed to study the overlapping responsibility for children's learning among families, communities, and schools.

Davies then discussed the results of a survey of 42 schools in the League of Schools Reaching Out. These schools are already committed to the importance of families and communities in achieving success for all children and are located mostly in urban areas serving children at risk. (See page 18 for a description of the League.)

The first conclusion from this survey was that it is possible to establish collaborative working relationships among families, communities, business leaders, and educators, even under difficult circumstances, and that parents and community agencies will respond with enthusiasm. Many of the League schools are moving toward an "old-fashioned" idea of the community school which serves families and others in the community and draws on the resources of the larger community.

A second general finding was that these schools are rediscovering the "whole child," and finding that one can't separate the child's physical, moral, social, and cognitive development. "You can't succeed very well on filling the brain unless you attend to the rest of the needs of this child," Davies said. This requires that the family and the community be involved.

A third major survey finding is that schools are involved in an impressive amount and variety of new parent involvement activities. However, in most of the schools there is not a comprehensive plan for parent and community involvement (or indeed for the school itself).

Davies described some of the innovative strategies these local schools are using. For example, 50% have Parent/Family Centers in the schools—a symbolic home for parents in the school building promoting parent-oriented activities—and 40% are providing home visiting programs. Fifty percent have some programs to assist parents help children at home. Every school surveyed had at least six partnerships with community agencies, businesses, and cultural institutions to help coordinate services. Sixty to seventy percent of schools in this sample had hired a specialized person, usually from the community, to function as a parent liaison or community coordinator.

There is no doubt, Davies added, that school principals are clearly the key factor. There is a direct relationship between those schools reporting a high level of parent involvement and the leadership and interest of the principal.

In the League schools, the principals tended to see themselves as mediators, getting a complex system to work for their parents and teachers, and they viewed the community as “people we can work with.” In the control schools visited by the survey teams, the principals tended to see parents as a nuisance and in the way. Their attitude was that “we can’t do much with parents, because of the way those people are.” Thus, in these control schools there were very few parent involvement activities.

One disappointing finding, Davies mentioned, was that classroom teachers themselves initiated or were involved in very few family involvement programs or strategies. “The classroom teacher is an important missing piece of this picture. The leadership comes from principals, from parents, from associations. Teachers, who are the most important connection between the child and the family, aren’t there very much.” Davies pointed out that if parent involvement is going to have a real impact on children’s learning, teachers have to become part of the picture.

Chapter I is an important tool for promoting parent involvement but by and large, with a few wonderful exceptions, this is not being realized. Davies reported that one-third of the principals surveyed did not know of the strengthening of the parent involvement components in the 1988 Stafford-Hawkins amendments to Chapter I. Neither the states nor local districts are doing the job of informing principals about the choices they have in utilizing Chapter I money.

Davies concluded by raising three main questions for policymaking.

- How can schools be motivated, induced, required, and encouraged to do comprehensive planning for improving students’ learning, using the parents and community as resources, so that family involvement is not an episodic, random event?
- How can the potential of Chapter I for comprehensive, school-wide planning for parent involvement be realized—before the reauthorization occurs, and in the reauthorization process itself?
- How can current funds be decategorized so that schools and teachers can draw on health and social services and education programs of various kinds, in order to create community schools?

Davies commented that we do not need more categorical programs at the state or federal level to induce parent involvement, but he believed that decategorization of existing programs is essential and should be tried at least on a pilot basis, including Maternal and Child Health programs, Chapter I, Head Start, Chapter II, and programs for children with disabilities.

The fourth panelist was **Lillian Brinkley**, principal of Willard Model Elementary School, Norfolk, Virginia and president, National Elementary School Principals’ Association. Brinkley echoed the sentiments of the previous panelists by agreeing that educational reform—and positive outcomes for children—requires strong, viable family-school and community partnerships. Both parents and educators must be involved and each must respect what the others bring to the partnership. Too often this does not happen and far too many of our children are not successful in school. “Too often teachers seem to feel that parents are adversaries...and this is a perception that can and must be changed.”

Brinkley pointed out that parents are not only the child’s first teacher, but the essential link that connects what the child learns at home with the school experiences. It is critically important, because of our changing demographics, that our family-school partnerships reflect a recognition and respect for cultural diversity. This has to be on the front burner, a recognition that our schools and our families

have changed and yesterday's strategies are no longer useful. Directing her remarks to schools in urban areas, she pointed out that many of these children now come to school from very impoverished homes and neighborhoods and it is important to understand why educators have difficulty establishing positive relationships with their parents.

Differences in the economic backgrounds of school staff and parents in the communities they serve is one important barrier. Many of the teachers do not live in the school community any more and this creates a lack of communication and understanding. Poverty, language and cultural barriers, and differing educational expectations between the home and school are compounded by the lack of training for teachers and administrators in working with children of poverty. This lack of understanding and trust between family and school results in the child's school failure being blamed on the family.

Brinkley said some urban schools have established positive relationships with parents and the children do better in these schools. She then gave a description of the programs she has developed at Willard Elementary School in Norfolk, as they are examples of successful strategies being used to create family-school partnerships in many schools with large numbers of children at risk.

Willard Model School was a school of 900-1000 children (depending on the rate of evictions) which, when she became principal 8 years ago, had the lowest test scores in the system, with families struggling to meet their basic survival needs. Eighty to ninety percent of the families received public income support and services and were single-parent homes. The children were not succeeding and neither they, their parents, nor the school personnel believed they could succeed—a self-fulfilling prophecy. Currently, student test scores have risen to where students at all grade levels are scoring at or above the national norm.

Brinkley believed that in a setting like this the school must take the first step and “say to the parents we're here for you and your families.” Brinkley initiated **door-to-door home visits** by herself and her staff to introduce themselves to the parents and convey that “we want to get to know you and tell you what we are planning to do.” She emphasized to her staff that their goal was to accept the families as they found them. Many low-income parents don't feel that teachers accept them as they are. These home visits now occur every year, during the inservice education days before school starts.

Brinkley then briefly described other strategies that have proved essential to successful family involvement at her school, including the following.

- **Parenting and family workshops and classes** in homes and churches in the community, to meet the needs parents themselves identified. These include how to stretch a paycheck, how to handle stress and deal with child abuse, how to prepare meals, and how to access social services. Brinkley pointed out the connection between improving parents' skills and their children's self-esteem. When parents asked for help in repairing children's clothing, the school bought sewing machines and set up classes so that children would come to school with clean, neat clothes and, thus, feel much better about themselves.
- **Benefits and services for parents** such as basic education classes, GED classes, and language classes.
- All these activities create a climate of acceptance and trust between parents and our school. Brinkley includes **training for all school staff**, so that they know how to say to parents “we want you in our schools.” Even custodians and cafeteria managers should be trained to make parents feel welcome.
- The school works with employers to get them to create **flexible time for working parents** so that they can come to school to be with their children and meet the teachers.

- **Social activities** to help faculty to get to know parents and children such as skating or bowling. The school also arranges to take parents on field trips each month, to the sites their children have visited or will visit so that parents can talk with their children about what the child is learning.
- **Business involvement:** Getting businesses involved in providing mentors, tutors, and others to help parents directly.
- **Giving parents the resources and tools** they need to help their children at home. The school has a loan system of games, videos, books, and computers that parents can check out and take home. Also suggested are things parents can do with their children at home that are practical and use everyday routines and materials.

In conclusion, Brinkley said, “we know that the child who has not been able to negotiate our system can do so if we provide for them a stronger relationship between home and school and if they see the connection between home and school and the importance of education in both settings...The way to create better childhoods for our children is to forge better relationships and partnerships between the home and the school. The school cannot do it alone.”

Points Made During Discussion

- A participant asked the panelists to comment on the involvement of African American males in schools. Are school-parent interactions mostly with mothers, and if so, what are the barriers to participation on the part of fathers?

Both **Brinkley** and **Swap** emphasized the importance of involvement from fathers, and male role models in general, and gave some examples of schools that were successfully reaching out to males. At Willard, Brinkley has arranged for boys to meet weekly with men from the community and from a range of occupations (not only high-level occupations), who served as mentors, as role models. In another school, middle-school boys who have been expelled or suspended have been asked to work with the younger children. This approach helps the younger children, motivates the older participants to return to school, and keeps them from having idle time on the streets.

Swap mentioned the very successful Algebra Project in Boston, in which African American men from local colleges were recruited to tutor students in subjects such as math and algebra. There was a tremendous response to this project. Another creative example is at the Miles Park Elementary School in Cleveland, where laid-off Ford plant workers were invited to work with students, with Chapter I monies utilized to provide stipends.

- A questioner asked, given the number of single parents and households where both parents work, how is it possible to involve parents who have busy schedules?

Brinkley said many of their family programs and workshops are available at all hours, including evenings and weekends. She also encourages parents to involve their children in evening household activities. A video on this issue has been developed by the National Elementary School Principals' Association, entitled "The Little Things Make a Big Difference," and is available at Blockbuster Video at no charge.

Davies reminded participants that a broader definition of parent involvement allows schools to provide a wide range of opportunities that acknowledge the time limitations which might prevent parents from attending meetings and also acknowledge that all families, despite their diversity, want to help their children.

- A participant asked what kinds of organizational arrangements can be made to allow teachers to make home visits and work during "off hours," particularly given the limitations of union contracts, for example.

Although her teachers are not unionized, **Brinkley** stated that it is necessary to take risks and be creative. It does take some rearrangement in the use of staff and differentiated kinds of staffing. Utilizing pre-service days is one option. Brinkley reemphasized the definite need for teachers to have face-to-face contact with parents. Brinkley said she is known as the "walking principal" in Virginia, often walking a student home and spending time with his/her parents. She added that she finds that the "good" teachers often make time, without pay, to be involved with their students and families.

According to **Davies**, in most urban schools, regular home visitation by teachers (at \$25-30 per hour) is too expensive. However, many schools employ community members who are recruited and trained, but receive much lower pay (at \$7-9 per hour) for home visiting. Teachers can be freed up for selected periods of time, but sometimes community people are better at home visiting (e.g., when they speak the language).

Usdan, picking up on Davies' earlier comment on the need for decategorization, emphasized that this must be done "from both the top down and the bottom up." There are many innovative collaborative programs at the local level, but he agreed that incentives must be provided at higher levels to allow for maximum flexibility at the service delivery level. The restructuring of the educational system toward decategorization and deregulation must parallel efforts to provide services and case management approaches for families and children, according to Usdan. Oftentimes, the myriad of problems faced by families impinge on the educational process and families need assistance in negotiating the system so that they can attend to the multifaceted needs of their children.

- A participant working at the National Institutes of Health added a cautionary note: There is considerable resistance out there to collaboration. Their office has just issued an RFA to design, implement, and evaluate interventions dealing with issues of violence and consequences of unprotected sexual behavior among minority youth. This has called forth many protests from service providers who target a particular segment of the population or a particular problem who do not want to collaborate with those with another focus.
- Another person asked if case management doesn't take responsibility away from families, creating dependency on the system. **Usdan** stated that, ideally, family self-sufficiency would be promoted, but many households are so submerged in economic, social, and political problems that "they can't be left to sink." Families need help in negotiating a complex system and schools are well-placed to be involved, as they are the institutions with maximum outreach.

Davies added that if you design interventions that assume dependence and deficits, they will indeed do more harm than good. If you design the parent involvement and education program well, they will build on family strengths and foster independence.

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A Background Briefing Report
by *Theodora Ooms and Shelly Hara*

Introduction

(Sources: Barth, 1990; Chavkin, in press; Fiske, 1991; Henderson, 1987; US Department of Education, 1991)

Families and schools are jointly responsible for children's successful learning. This increasingly widely shared assumption represents a radical shift in thinking about education. As long as it was viewed as a process—as a collection of inputs—education was considered the exclusive responsibility of educators who were delivering the service. But once attention became focused on educational outcomes, researchers pointed out that the family had a stronger influence than the school. To some, this finding absolved educators from responsibility for school failure since they could assure themselves that many children were not learning due to familial and environmental factors apparently beyond their control.

Recent studies and innovations in school practice lead to a different conclusion. Educators can become much more effective with all children if they learn to build strong family-school partnerships. We now know more about the many ways in which parents and other family members support, reinforce and complement the efforts of teachers. “When parents are involved, children do better in school and they go to better schools” (Henderson 1987, p. 1).

Educators make a major difference in how much, and how well, parents are involved in their children's education. School policies and practices at the building and classroom level can help to create and strengthen the collaboration between families and schools, and when they do so children are more successful. Importantly, we now know that schools can also find ways to successfully work with families whom educators often dismiss as uninterested and hard to involve—poor minority families, non-English speaking families, single parents, and employed parents. Educators need to harness the powerful potential of all these families to help their children succeed in school.

Given the projected growth in the numbers of children at risk of school failure, strengthening the family-school partnership needs to be an integral component of efforts at school reform. Parent involvement is a key aspect of many of the most promising school-based reform initiatives. But at state and national level most policymakers still minimize and misunderstand parents' role. Before we examine the family-school partnership concept in some detail we need to briefly set this discussion within the context of the national school reform movement.

Restructuring the Educational System

For over a decade Americans have acknowledged that schools are failing to educate children adequately to meet the demands of today's work force. In 1983 the federal report *Nation at Risk* sounded the alarm and asserted that substantial education reform was imperative. The nation's governors, legislators, school boards, and superintendents scrambled to institute many of the reforms the report recommended. These reforms included merit pay for teachers, tightened graduation requirements, and higher teacher salaries. Results were spotty, but overall they were disappointing.

In hindsight, the conclusion was inescapable, comments Edward Fiske in a recent book (1991). These reforms simply represented tinkering with a system that leading policymakers and educators are now willing to agree needs fundamental organizational, system-wide change. “We have been asking a nineteenth-century institution to educate people for life in the twenty-first century...” (Fiske, 1991, p. 25). Public schools were organized around the model of the industrial factory—with centralized authority, standardization, and bureaucratic accountability, Fiske explains. “School reformers in the 1980s tried to squeeze more juice out of the orange. It took five years to realize that we were not dealing with an orange. We were holding a lemon.” No amount of improvements can make an obsolete system work. In their joint statement in September 1989 President Bush and the governors announced they “agree that significant steps must be taken to restructure education in all the states. We share the view that simply more of the same will not achieve the results we need” (Department of Education, 1991, p. 78). Schools need to learn the lesson from the corporate world that modern technology and the needs of the information society requires more decentralized decisionmaking, trimming management, and giving increased authority to teams of workers at the lower levels.

School “restructuring” is the new buzzword in educational reform. It means different things to different people but at its heart it involves decentralizing power and decisionmaking to the local level. It incorporates, but is broader than, the term “school-based management.” Restructuring reforms, which take on many shapes, encourage those in the schools themselves—principals, teachers, parents, and others—to rethink the organization of the school, curricula, instructional methods, interpersonal relationships, and relations between schools and those in the community who have a stake in successfully educating children. Restructuring is now firmly on the Governors’ agenda and is an underlying theme in President Bush’s announced national education strategy, *AMERICA 2000*.

Initiatives that fall under this “restructuring umbrella” are occurring at the bottom and from the top. Some started out in one or two demonstration schools, then became replicated and are now organized into “movements” promoting a particular model of school reform such as James Comer’s School Development Program and Henry Levin’s Accelerated Schools. In a review of many of these school-based initiatives, Fiske points out that each of these “educational visionaries is working in isolation. Each has focused on one or two structures of public schools that must be overhauled. But no one has put together a whole package” (Fiske, 1991, p. 247).

The President, together with many others, believes that parent choice is an essential strategy needed to release the market forces necessary to break the bureaucratic lock on the education system. But parent choice is only tangentially related to the creation of strong family-school partnerships, if it is related at all. In the Administration’s *AMERICA 2000* strategy and in pending congressional reform proposals parents are seen as an important **agent** of school reform, but family-school relationships are not viewed as an **object** of reform.

Since we now know a good deal about how schools can work collaboratively with families and understand why it is so important, the absence in the national education debate of any goals and strategies designed to strengthen family-school relationships seems shortsighted. In the view of many reformers and parent organizations it is deplorable.

The questions focused on in this report are:

- How do families influence their children’s success in elementary school? How is this different for families of different cultural background?
- What are the ways in which parents are involved with their children’s schools? What are the barriers to their involvement?

- What are the underlying assumptions and basic principles of an effective family-school partnership?
- What kinds of school policies and practices strengthen family-school partnerships?
- How have schools responded to the dramatic changes in family life?
- What role does the family-school partnership play in current school reform movements?
- What is the role of district, state, and federal policymaking?
- What strategies are needed to integrate family involvement into the current national school reform?

Note: The family-school partnership is important at all age levels. However, in this background briefing report we primarily focus on the elementary school. (Future reports will focus on the middle and high school years.)

I. Research On Family Involvement In Education

(Sources: Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Chavkin, 1989; Chavkin, ed., in press; Clark, 1983 and 1990; Coleman, et al., 1966; Coleman, 1987 and 1991; Epstein, ed., 1991; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, in press; Henderson, 1987; Henderson et al., 1985; Lightfoot, 1981; Linney & Vernberg, 1983; Scott-Jones, 1984 and 1988; Swap, 1990 (b) and in press)

Families' Influence On School Success

A wide range of family factors affect children's successful academic achievement and social adjustment in school. Those factors most commonly mentioned in the research literature include genetic endowment, family structure, size, birth order and spacing, parental education, income and employment, family communication and parent-child interaction, and parents' school expectations.

A more recent group of studies consider family interactions more broadly. These studies examine the role of siblings, grandparents and others in the family; families' use of time and space; parent's role as mediators between the child and outside institutions, and the existence of informal supports. Another emerging group of studies examines the cultural discontinuities between the dominant middle class culture of the school and those of various cultural minority groups and how these discontinuities can affect school adjustment and success.

The landmark report, *Equality of Opportunity*, by sociologist James Coleman and his colleagues, published in 1966, was the first national study to make clear that family backgrounds make more difference in school achievement than variations among school inputs. The family characteristics initially reported on in this study were demographic and structural—income, education, and race. These were all factors that educators could do little to effect.

Other studies have found poverty and single parenthood to be highly associated with low levels of school achievement. Later researchers challenged some of the findings pointing out how hard it was to disentangle the combined effects of class, income, structure, and race. For example, when socioeconomic status is taken into account, no achievement differences are found between children from single and two parent families. Studies of the effect of maternal employment on school achievement have had mixed findings. Importantly, in low-income black families, children whose mothers are employed outside the home have higher achievement than comparable children whose mothers do not work (Linney & Vernberg, 1983).

Studies that began to look at family processes within income and racial groups were able to pinpoint different kinds of parental and family behavior as having more significance than income or race. Indeed, later analyses of the Coleman national data set found that across all ethnic groups, family process variables—attitudes towards education, parent-child activities, etc.—explained more of the difference in outcome than did family background and structural variables.

Several studies on smaller samples examined these family processes in more depth. One study compared characteristics of low-income, black, single-parent, and two-parent families whose children did well in school with those from similar families whose children did not do well. Successful families were those with clearly expressed valuation of education, high expectations for school achievement, interest in, and reinforcement for, school work, regular routines, and meal times, a purposive use of time and space, and parents own sense of self-esteem and self-mastery (Clark, 1983).

Studies of families from diverse cultural backgrounds illustrate the many varied ways in which families interact with their children around learning and their different expectations about how they should relate to the schools (see Chavkin, ed., in press; Swap, in press; and Wheelock College, 1992).

The social capital argument. James Coleman has become increasingly impressed with the power of children's relationships with adults in affecting educational outcomes. Drawing on his comparative studies of school achievement and school drop-out in public and parochial schools he coined the term "social capital" to describe those norms, social networks, and intimate, trusting relationships between children and adults that are essential for effective socialization. "Social capital held by a person lies in the strength of social relations that make available to the person the resources of others" (Coleman, 1991, p. 8). Social capital for children can only be provided by the family, and to some extent the community. His studies showed that parochial school children had higher levels of academic achievement and were less likely to drop out of school than public school children. This was not because of differences in school inputs but, he believed, due to the social capital provided to them by the community that the school was embedded in, centering around the church. (Children from similar backgrounds who went to nonreligious private schools did not do as well.)

Coleman believes that in past decades children's supply of social capital has declined due to parents spending less time with them, to the lessening of parental authority, and families' loosening ties with social networks in the community. This decline has greatly weakened the ability of schools to educate children. His conclusion is that the effectiveness of schools where the social capital of family and community is weak depends upon schools, or some other agency, helping to rebuild the family and community social capital that facilitates learning. Thus he argues for school involvement with parents.

The lesson from the academic success of Indochinese refugee children. Coleman's thesis receives strong support from a new study of the academic achievement of Indochinese refugee children published in the *Scientific American* (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992). From a large survey of nearly 7000 Indochinese refugees who had settled in five urban areas, a research team from the University of Michigan chose a random sample of 200 two-parent families to study in depth. The sample included 536 children. Twenty-seven percent of these families had four or more children and at the time of the study they had been in the US for an average of three and a half years. Interviews were conducted in their native tongue and the researchers had access to school records. The parents generally came to this country with no economic resources and virtually no knowledge of English. Their children were attending schools in low-income metropolitan areas.

The children's school achievement was remarkable given their background and the short time they had spent in school. On several standard achievement measures they performed at or above average levels, and in math they were significantly above average. (In terms of letter grades 52% scored in the B range; on the California Achievement Test, their mean overall score was in the 54th percentile, and in math, half performed in the top quartile and 27% in the top 10%.)

The study collected information on family size, cultural values, and family behavior in the home, especially related to school. The researchers found strong support and commitment to accomplishment and education exemplified by many specific behaviors in the home. These Indochinese children spent over twice as much time on homework than the average American student. Among the many interesting findings was the common practice of family members sitting at the dinner table together for several hours doing their home work with siblings helping each other. (In contrast to studies with other populations, this study found a positive relation between the number of siblings and children's GPA.) Almost a half of the parents reported reading aloud regularly to their children. The researchers did not comment on the extent to which these families participated in school-based activities such as parent-teacher conferences, back to school nights, etc.

The researchers note that Indochinese students have often adapted quickly to US schools because “studying and learning are an integral part of home life: there is little schism between the two worlds.” These families were able to clearly communicate to their children the importance of education as being their route to success in their new home, America. (In their home country education was only available to the privileged few.) The researchers also found a strong sense of what they termed “family efficacy” among these families; namely the sense that the family collectively has control over its future well-being.

The lesson of this study for American schools, the authors conclude, is that, “Schools must reach out to families and engage them meaningfully in the education of their children. This involvement must go beyond annual parent-teacher meetings and must include, among other things, the identification of cultural elements that promote achievement” (Caplan et al., 1992, p. 42). Others would add an important footnote to this conclusion: educators must become aware of the many diverse ways in which families from different cultures promote success in school. The very same behavior that works for these Indochinese families—doing homework together around the kitchen table—might be a disaster for others.

Overall, the clear conclusion of the research is that the factors in family life that have the most profound effects on children’s learning are values, attitudes, and behaviors. These variables, unlike variables of class, race, and income, are much more amenable to being changed by educators and others.

II. The Growth of The Parent Involvement Movement

(Sources: Dauber & Epstein, in press; Epstein, in press; Epstein, ed., 1991; Henderson, et al., 1985; Moles, 1987; Swap, 1987 and 1990 (a) and (b))

Parent/Family Involvement in Elementary Schools

Parent involvement is a very broad and loosely defined term. This vagueness has led to much official rhetoric in its favor on the part of educators and parents alike. To the vast majority of both constituencies it probably still connotes activities like parents helping with fund raising activities or in the classroom or on school trips. However, in the sixties and seventies researchers and educators began to be interested in the many ways “beyond the bake sale” in which parents interacted with the school.

A considerable amount of literature has evolved describing the different types and levels of parent involvement and the effects of interventions designed to increase involvement. Clearly the nature of parents’ involvement with schools develops and changes as their children grow older and the structure and organization of the school changes. Until recently, most of the theoretical and descriptive work has focused on the family-school relationship at the elementary school level. There is now a great deal more interest in examining these issues at middle and senior high schools. Another development is that in recognition of the diversity of family structures, it now seems more appropriate to use the term “family involvement,” since, in some families, adults other than the biological parents and siblings may be the key link between home and school.

Parents’ roles in education. To understand the purpose and nature of parents’ interaction with the school it is helpful to distinguish between the different roles parents play in their child’s education. One type of distinction is between those activities seen to primarily benefit and support their own child (for example, helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, back to school nights, school sports events, and performances) and those designed to benefit and support the overall school or classroom program (such as serving as a PTA officer, various advisory committees, helping with school-wide events, etc.).

Another type of distinction emphasizes the location of the activity. Some parents may not have the time or inclination to be involved in activities centered in the school building, but are quite willing and comfortable with school-related activities they can carry out in their home or community.

Several typologies of parent roles in education are currently in use. It is interesting to note that the two roles assigned to parents in *America 2000* are not usually included among these categories, namely helping their children become ready to enter school and choosing a school that best meets their child’s needs (if choice is a real possibility).

We have outlined here seven principal ways that parents ideally can help support their child’s education once the child enters elementary school. This typology is a somewhat revised version of the categories used in *Beyond the Bake Sale* (Henderson et al., 1986, p. 3-11).

1. Parents meet basic obligations and school’s expectations

Parents do a great many things to make it possible for educators to teach their children. Some are legal obligations, such as seeing that their child attends school, obtaining required vaccinations and medical examinations, filling out forms, signing permission slips, etc. Others include fulfilling schools’ expectations that parents will read and respond to communications and understand and follow school rules and procedures. Gradually, some schools are also requiring parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences. And private schools may require that parents buy uniforms and supplies and perform volunteer work.

Corresponding to these basic obligations are certain parental rights such as access to school records, due process in disciplinary procedures, and participation in placement decisions around special education.

2. Parents collaborate with their child’s teacher to reinforce learning

Parents show their child that school effort and achievement is important in a host of ways; they provide many learning and enriching experiences at home and in the community; help their child complete homework assignments; and participate in parent-teacher conferences, communicate regularly with the teacher, and read information and attend events designed to explain the school program.

3. Parents collaborate with their child’s teacher to help solve learning and behavior problems

Parents ask to meet with teachers when they believe their child is having problems and/or they respond to teacher’s expressed concerns about any difficulties. Parents jointly explore with the teacher the various causes of these problems and together plan strategies to remedy them.

4. Parents participate as audience to enjoy/applaud their child’s performance or involvement in sports or other events

Parents attend school sports events, plays, musical performances, and informational meetings at school to demonstrate interest and support for their child and for the school program.

5. Parents serve as volunteers to support the school program and other parents

Parents provide an increasingly wide range of types of volunteer assistance to schools including serving as “room parents,” participating in telephone trees, presenting their special expertise to the class, and assisting in the school library, on trips, and with fund raisers. Parents may also provide various kinds of organized help to other parents through participation in the PTA, serving as “safe homes” in snow or other emergencies, helping to get an after school child care program started, and so forth.

6. Parents serve as school advisors and co-decisionmakers

School principals have often called upon parent representatives to serve on advisory committees specifically set up to deal with a special problem or emerging new need. However, increasingly, as a result of new state mandates, schools are now required to set up school site management councils with parent participation and parent advisors are mandated to have input into several federal education programs (such as Chapter I, Bilingual Education, etc.).

7. Parents choose the school that best meets the needs of their child (when choice is an option)

In the public school sector it is not yet common for parents to have a choice of schools to send their child to at the elementary level, although it is becoming more common at middle and high school levels. In the communities in which they do have a choice, parents need to seek out information about the schools upon which they can base their decision.

Parents obviously vary a great deal in the extent to which they participate in any of these seven types of roles. Somewhat ironically, those parent involvement activities that have received the most public attention and official support—parents as volunteers and advisors—are precisely those that fewest parents are involved in and that studies suggest have perhaps the least direct affect on children’s educational success. For example, most parents cannot and do not participate in volunteer activities at the school building. About three-quarters of public elementary school parents never volunteer and very few participate in advisory, governance, and leadership roles.

Single parents and parents who are employed are less likely than other parents to come to school for events, meetings, and workshops, but studies have found that they are just as likely, or even more likely, to spend time helping their children at home on school work.

While most parents do fulfill their basic obligations, some parents have difficulty doing so, especially those who don’t speak English and those in poor health or under great stress. And many parents do not

understand their rights. Importantly, several studies have documented that the large majority of parents are interested in learning more about how they can best help their children at home. Many minority parents and families of low socioeconomic status are uncomfortable about coming to the school, feeling both intimidated and unwanted. Yet in surveys they express just as strong an interest in learning ways to help their children do better in school.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

The attitudes and motivation of educators and specific school policies and practices can have negative or positive effects on the extent and nature of parent involvement in their children's education. There are many kinds of barriers to family involvement. Among the most difficult to remove are the deeply ingrained attitudes and practices of educators, and indeed, of many parents themselves. Lightfoot has described most eloquently the ways in which these kinds of barriers have served to keep families and schools as worlds apart (1984). Too often communications from school to home are formal and in only one direction. Too often parents are called in to school only when there is something wrong. Sometimes home and school are hostile, even at war, each blaming the other for the child's poor achievement or disruptive behavior and the child is caught between. Parents and teachers, especially at the elementary school level, can often perceive themselves as inherently competitive, each claiming better knowledge of the needs of the child.

Family-school relations can suffer from too much distance or too much closeness. Parents, either due to their own fear and awe of educators, their cultural tradition, or the practical complexities of their lives, may often seem to educators as indifferent and uncaring. Alternatively, other parents may place too great demands on teachers and their children and act intrusively, instructing the teacher on what and how to teach. Similarly, while many parents may pay too little attention to their child's learning, a few may show too much interest. These parents' high demands and expectations can cause children great stress and lead to underachievement.

Numerous studies have examined these and other barriers to effective family-school communication and collaboration. They have noted various practical difficulties such as families' lack of time or transportation, distance from home, safety of the neighborhood around the school, child care and other family demands, and employers' inflexible leave policies. Teachers' negative attitudes and frequent stereotyping of families are noted to be a major problem. Educators frequently mentioned their need for more information on families in general and how to work with them and their lack of adequate professional training on this subject in both pre-service education and inservice training.

Several existing school policies have been identified as barriers, some of which may be within the power of school principals to change themselves, but many which require at least district level cooperation to remove. These ranged from union policies regarding teacher's use of time, to constraints against using school facilities in the evening, to lack of transportation available to bring parents to school, and above all to lack of funds to spend on special events, services, or personnel.

In general, however, it was the absence of **positive** policies promoting parent involvement and the lack of resources devoted to implementing parent involvement that seemed to be the major barriers. Many examples of proactive policies will be given below.

Parent Choice and Parent Involvement

(Sources: Bamber et al., 1990; Chubb, 1988; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Riddle & Stedman, 1989; Stedman, 1982)

School choice has risen high on the education reform agenda. Increasingly, states and districts are looking to public school choice as a vehicle for achieving the goal of providing equal access for every family to good quality public schools. In Minnesota, Cambridge, MA, Harlem (NY) Community District #4, Montclair, NJ, and Richmond, CA, some version of school choice has been in place long enough to provide evidence of positive results. Magnet schools at the secondary level are among the most tried and popular programs to date.

The National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) states that choosing the best school for one's child is certainly an important aspect of parent involvement and could improve student achievement (Bamber et al., 1990). However, they caution that there is no guarantee that choice will automatically improve the family-school partnership. NCCE points out that improving parent and teacher involvement needs to be an explicit goal of school choice reforms as well as all other school reform efforts. NCCE also has concerns that many parents may not be able to take advantage of these choice plans unless great care is taken in their implementation.

The publication of the book *Politics, Markets and American Schools*, gave considerable impetus to the school choice movement as it proposes a system of public education in which private schools could apply for public charters. This strategy was designed to let market forces strip away the power of the educational bureaucracy and make schools more directly accountable to consumers, that is parents and students (Chubb and Moe, 1990). In an early report of the study they state that plans that increase choice—such as magnet schools, open enrollment, and full or partial vouchers—“provide parents more choice among schools and more reason to become cooperatively involved in them” (1988, p. 49).

The authors' assumption that parent choice implies increased levels of parent involvement is open to some question. Although many educators involved have the general impression that levels of parent involvement are higher in communities with choice programs, there is little data available on this issue. However, one study of parent involvement in five inner-city Catholic secondary schools found that most parents did not become involved in school-based activities, although most are involved in activities directly related to their child's school progress (Bauch, 1988).

A review and analysis of the existing research on school choice considers the evidence on the question whether school choice strengthens or hinders parental involvement in education. “The net effect of greater choice could be self-selection of the children of educationally aware and involved parents into certain schools or districts, leaving primarily the children of parents who are unable or unwilling to become actively involved in attending other schools,” (Riddle & Stedman, 1989, p. 18). These may be just those children for whom parent involvement is most urgently needed. The authors cite data from one school choice program, Harlem Community District #4, which shows no evidence of increased parental involvement.

Many seem to believe that choice plans will lead to more parents being involved in collaborative decisionmaking with school personnel around the school program. But this has not been the result of choice in the private school sector. From the evidence available, private schools do not usually involve parents on advisory or other governance bodies to any great extent. Indeed, it is equally plausible that choice might lead to less parent involvement of all sorts: once parents have been able to choose a school which they feel is going to be able to educate their child, they may believe that there is much less need to get involved either in governance or other school involvement activities.

The Shift from Involvement to Partnership

The major conclusion to draw from the new knowledge of the importance of families' role in education is that education is a collaborative enterprise. Children shuttle daily between the two worlds of family and school. These worlds can no longer remain at a parallel distance from each other. The way we think about the relationships of families and schools is undergoing a radical transformation. Schools and families are now being viewed as overlapping spheres of influence or interacting systems. Researchers are now focusing on the many factors that affect the way these systems interact with each other. Practitioners are now talking about partnerships. Thus, one of the central challenges of school reform is to find effective ways for families and schools to collaborate to achieve their mutual goal—the successful education of children.

The family-school partnership is being shaped and in some ways transformed by the dramatic changes in family life. In earlier periods—and perhaps still in certain very homogenous, stable communities where there is congruity between the school and community culture and expectations—schools could educate children successfully in the traditional, formal manner without involving parents actively. Schools felt they could do their job as long as parents met their basic obligations. Schools and families had separate, parallel responsibilities. Nowadays, schools can no longer make the assumption of the two-parent, one-earner family. Many schools have extremely diverse and unstable student bodies and the problems of family instability, parental absence, or inaccessibility and families' problems associated with poverty are spilling over into the schools.

Educators are now readily admitting they can no longer educate children by themselves and are reaching out for help to other sectors of the community, including businesses. Schools are also assuming new types of responsibility for children's well-being that go beyond the traditional scope of pedagogical learning. As a result, they are becoming less isolated as institutions and working more collaboratively with the health and social service sectors.

Almost all educators now subscribe, at least theoretically, to the importance of parent involvement, although many still have little idea about what this entails and how it should be carried out in practice and they invest few resources in doing so. Over the last decade a great deal of information has become available about how to work collaboratively with parents. This has built on the experiences of the rapidly growing number of schools and school districts which have instituted strong and creative efforts to increase parent involvement.

Several national conferences have been held on the subject, and several resource guides and handbooks aimed at educators and parents have been, and are being published. (See for example: Collins, et al., 1982; Henderson, et al., 1986; Henderson & Marburger, 1990; Moles, in press; Swap, 1987.) In the early eighties a number of national organizations formed the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education which currently has nearly 30 members. Many of these organizations have prepared booklets and other publications for educators and parents on topics such as "How to Conduct Parent-Teacher Conferences." There is no shortage of ideas or examples of family-school partnership practices for schools to draw upon.

Susan Swap has pointed out that there are three main philosophies underlying current programs designed to increase parent involvement, all of which have promise of improving school achievement (1990). One set of strategies primarily emphasize one-way communication from school to home to strengthen parents support and reinforcement of the teacher's efforts, largely through reinforcing home-learning activities and encouraging parents to spend more time with children in building "cultural capital." This strategy has some limitations. Not all parents have the time or resources to work with their children at home. Moreover, relying on parents to engage in home-teaching risks confusing the boundaries and distinctive roles between home and school.

A second strategy is designed specifically to increase the participation of minority parents. It addresses the discontinuities between the school and home cultures (see Chavkin, in press; and Swap, in press). These efforts involve parents more interactively in jointly developing goals and activities that build on families' own values, history, and learning styles. Although admirable in intent, Swap points out that this multicultural strategy can be very difficult to implement in schools where children come from not one or two, but multiple, cultural backgrounds.

A third group of parent involvement initiatives is fueled by a more radical vision, namely, creating a broad-based partnership with all parents based on mutual respect, sharing of power, and the explicit goal of achieving success for all children. This partnership philosophy underlies several of the reform movements such as Comer's School Development program and Levin's Accelerated Schools described below.

Schools as multi-service centers. A fourth emerging trend, not noted by Swap, is that an increasing number of schools are beginning to view themselves as community institutions, serving as the locus for providing a number of social, health, and supportive services to families. It is important to note that educators do not provide these services directly, they simply facilitate other agencies or community organizations to provide them in or near the school site. (School systems may provide some in-kind resources.)

In many communities, schools are now the site for before- and after-school child care. In a number of states, parent education and family support programs are linked to schools (see Ooms and Owen, Oct. 1991). In San Diego, a program called **New Beginnings**, a highly ambitious effort, is underway to bring integrated public social services into the elementary school. **Schools for the Twenty First Century** is a model, developed by Ed Zigler, to provide integrated, early childhood related services in the school setting. At the high school level, many states are providing school-linked, multi-service centers for youth some of which involve parents (see Ooms & Owen, July 1991). These efforts serve two purposes: they help bridge the gap between home and school, especially for low-income and minority families, and they provide services to meet needs of children and their parents which are currently not being met, thus hindering children's successful learning in school.

Evaluation

The field of parent involvement stands on a solid foundation of research, albeit a not very expansive one. Several reviews of the research have confirmed, in general, that parent involvement improves children's achievement. The clearest positive results come from studies of intensive early interventions that all had a strong parent involvement component, usually aimed at improving parent-child interaction around learning activities in the home. The more intensive and comprehensive the intervention, the better the results (Henderson, 1987). Recent studies by Joyce Epstein have shown that programs in selected inner city schools can systematically improve practices that successfully involve disadvantaged families in their children's education. In addition, these studies found that when parent involvement improved, teachers gained in confidence and a sense of self-efficacy. Thus, successful parent involvement programs make teachers' jobs easier (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

An ongoing problem with most current parent involvement and partnership initiatives is that they are not being evaluated. Thus, generally, it is not possible to document, except anecdotally, the effect these efforts are having on the level and nature of parent involvement and what effects any increased amount of involvement is having on children's achievement and adjustment. Davies et al., in their review of current partnership practices in a survey of schools in the League of Schools Reaching Out, conclude that there is a strong need for more systematic and focused studies and evaluations (Davies, et al., 1991). In a state of the art special issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan*, Epstein, the guest editor, concludes "There are still vast

gaps in our knowledge that can only be filled by rigorous research and evaluation of particular types of school/family connections in support of children's learning. We need both formal studies and clear documentation of existing practices" (Epstein, ed., 1991, p. 349).

Preparing Teachers for Partnership

(Sources: NCATE, Jan. 1990; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Goodlad, 1990)

Teachers are at the front line of educational reform. However bold and sensible the reform plans, they will fall flat on their face if teachers are not convinced about their value and trained in how to implement them. Family-school partnership researchers and practitioners are united on the critical importance of preparing teachers to work in collaboration with families, especially those from disadvantaged and culturally diverse backgrounds. Yet there is evidence that teachers are not being prepared to assume this role.

Teachers are taking a lot of the blame for the failures of education. They are bombarded by demands from every side that they must learn new content and new skills. For their part, teachers are constantly complaining about the lack of support they feel from busy, overwhelmed, or "disintegrated" parents. A survey of first year teachers by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company found that 70% viewed parents as adversaries!

Teacher education is under fire from all quarters. There seems to be a general consensus that teacher education curricula totally fail to prepare teachers to work with families of their students. Yet, in several surveys, teachers, school principals, and administrators overwhelmingly agree that teachers need training in working with parents at both the undergraduate (pre-service) and the graduate and inservice levels. A survey of over 500 teacher educators in the five state, southwest region revealed that extremely little is being taught to teachers about families and how to work with them. Only 4% indicated they taught a complete course on the topic and 37% offered only one class period devoted to the subject. Yet over 70% of the teachers, and more than 80% of the principals and teacher educators, agreed that a required course was needed.

Similarly, with respect to field experience, more than 90% of the principals responded that teachers in training should have experience in working with parent volunteers, participating in parent-teacher conferences, etc. Yet over half of the teachers had had none of these experiences in their training.

There are several major attempts underway to try to improve standards and change the content of teacher education. Yet none appear to have even begun to address the serious lack of attention to families in the curricula. The field of teacher education apparently does not yet appreciate the need for, and value of, parent-teacher partnerships. For example, the new standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education make no mention of parents, families, or communities in their standards addressing the knowledge base or the field experiences (NCATE, 1990). Similarly, in an article summarizing the findings and conclusions from a massive five-year study of the Education of Educators, John Goodlad also did not mention the issue (Goodlad, 1990). A few states' accreditation requirements include a reference to parent involvement, but apparently this has had only token effect. With the exception of the Comer Child Development Program (see p. 19), the family-school partnership reform movement has not yet developed strategies for influencing teacher education.

There is a good deal more going on, however, in the area of inservice training. Many of the parent involvement initiatives at school and district level develop publications targeted to teachers and hold workshops and conferences for them on parent involvement. Several comprehensive guides and handbooks are becoming available. The National Education Association, for example, is very active in inservice training of teachers and now has a full-time staff member training cadres of teachers in selected states for parent involvement.

Costs. Given the scant body of evaluation, it is not surprising that there is little information available on how much different types of parent involvement programs cost. In the League survey, the school respondents found it a somewhat baffling task when asked to quantify how much their partnership activities cost. However, they did identify multiple sources of funding that they drew upon, including Chapter I funds. Epstein, however, reviews various sources of information and estimates that a modest allocation of \$25 per student, per year at the school level would establish a viable program of school/family connections. In addition, she suggested that \$10 per pupil at the district level and \$5 per pupil at the state level would be what was required for investment in sustained programs for successful partnerships (Epstein, ed., 1991, p. 349).

III. Examples of Family-School Partnership Principles, Practices and Policies

(Sources: Davies, et al., 1991; Chavkin, ed., in press; Epstein, ed., 1991; Henderson, et al., 1986; OERI, forthcoming)

Schools are exploring many different routes to achieving strong family-school partnerships. While there is no blue print, these efforts appear to share a commitment to several underlying principles. Henderson and colleagues identified seven such basic principles and provided examples of school practices and policies being put in place to carry them out (1985). These are adapted and expanded below. There is very little data available about the extent to which schools are implementing these policies across the country. However, there is one recent study of schools that are beginning to implement relatively low-cost partnership initiatives. Findings from this study provide a sense of the direction in which many progressive educators are moving. This was a study of 42 schools, all members of the League of Schools Reaching Out who responded to the 1990 survey of partnership practices conducted by the Institute for Responsive Education. These schools participate in the League because of their demonstrated interest in improving the family-school partnership. Fifty-two schools were surveyed and 42 responded. Thirty-five were elementary schools. A few private schools were included (see Davies, et al., 1991 and description of the League on p. 16). We weave selected results of this study into the examples given below.

Family-School Partnership Principles

1. *Every aspect of the school building and general climate is open, helpful, and friendly to parents.*
 - “Parents are Welcome” signs.
 - Parent lounges/centers providing a place to meet and talk, and information on activities, child development, etc.
 - Principal’s open office hours for parents, etc.

In the League Schools survey, nearly half provided some kind of Parent Center.

2. *Communications with parents—whether about school policies and programs or about their own children—are frequent, clear, and two-way.*
 - Attractive wall calendars with important school-related information and examples of home-learning activities sent to all parents.
 - Teachers calling home to introduce themselves and giving their own phone numbers and times when they can be reached.
 - Friday folders sent home each week. Parents are asked to return them with comments on their child’s work and adding questions or any additional relevant information to help the teacher.

The League survey found that schools were using multiple strategies to communicate with parents but relied the most on the traditional vehicles such as Back to School Nights and newsletters. It did not comment on the extent to which these communications were two-way. However, nearly 80% of the respondents reported that staff made some home visits and nearly 90% reported staff made phone calls to families.

3. *Parents are treated by teachers as collaborators in the educational process. Parents' own knowledge, expertise, and resources are valued as essential to their child's success in school.*

- A school district requires parent-teacher conferences twice a year—at the beginning to share information and plan goals and at the end to review progress.
- A school develops learning contracts for each child in collaboration with, and signed by, the parents.
- Teachers share with parents, verbally and in writing, their expectations about home work.
- Teachers send home Reading Activity Packets providing examples of the many ways in which parents can help their children at home.

The League schools reported that, for the most part, parents were expected simply to monitor homework but almost half of the respondent schools provided parents with some home-learning activities. Many schools offered parent workshops on current teaching strategies for reading and math.

4. The school recognizes its responsibility to forge a partnership with all families in the school, not simply those most easily available.

- Schools schedule some conference times and special events like Open Houses on evenings and on Saturdays to accommodate needs of employed parents.
- Schools translate communications into Spanish or other foreign languages and make interpreters available.
- The school, upon request, will routinely send all school communications and copies of report cards to noncustodial parents.
- School personnel visit homes and churches in minority and immigrant communities.
- Teacher inservice workshops focus on learning about the families' multicultural backgrounds represented in their student body.

The League survey reported many instances of schools reaching out to parents, especially in minority and immigrant communities, sometimes hiring outreach workers specifically for this purpose. Nearly a half of the schools employed home visitors and 86% provide translation services to non-English speaking parents.

5. *The school principal and other administrators actively express in words and deeds the philosophy of partnership with all families.*

- The school principal hires substitute teachers for conference days and uses special activity funds to pay for babysitters at special events so parents can attend.
- A school district assigns one inservice day per year to helping teachers learn how to collaborate with parents.

The League survey, which included follow up phone calls and selected site visits, confirmed the critical importance of the school principals' commitment, resourcefulness, and leadership in successful partnership efforts. When these qualities were present many obstacles that discouraged less committed educators were overcome.

6. *The school encourages volunteer support and help from all parents by providing a wide variety of volunteer options including those that can be done from home and during non-work hours.*

- A school principal announces the expectation that all parents should provide some kind of volunteer assistance to the school and then provides a list of 30 different options that mothers and fathers can choose from.
- An elementary school parent group organizes an information and referral service for parents who need after-school care.

The League study confirmed that half of the schools offered a broad menu of volunteer options to parents.

7. *The school provides opportunities for parents to meet their own needs for information, advice, and peer support.*

- A school principal collaborates with the PTA to develop a series of peer discussion groups and workshops, held on Saturdays, on issues of most concern to parents.
- The district school system funds 12 parent centers in targeted low-income neighborhoods.

The League study revealed that a half of the schools had parent centers and almost as many sponsored some kind of family support and education program.

8. *Parents' views and expertise are sought in developing policies and solving school-wide problems; in some schools parents are given important decision making responsibilities at a policy level.*

- The school principal appoints a committee of parents and teachers to review and monitor the development of a broad-based health and sexuality education program.
- A school site council, part of a school-based management program, includes several parent representatives who help to administer the schools discretionary funds.

Nearly all the schools in the League's survey reported that they had at least one advisory or governance body which included parent representatives. Those which had multiple committees/councils (often due to separate federal mandates) complained that this was confusing and ineffective. All schools reported that only a small number of parent activists were involved. (Interestingly, none of the private schools in the study reported including parents in any advisory or policy roles.)

9. *Schools recognize that they can best help parents provide a home environment conducive to children's learning if they facilitate their access to basic and supportive services.*

- A school district encourages individual schools to make arrangements with community organizations to sponsor before- and after-school care on site.
- A school in a low-income neighborhood makes a contractual agreement with several public agencies to help staff a family services center in the school which provides basic health screening and employment and job counseling.

The League survey provided many examples of schools redefining themselves as community institutions and offering health and social service referrals, vaccination clinics, clothing exchanges, parent education workshops, and adult literacy and education courses.

In summarizing the results of the League survey, Don Davies and his colleagues comment that the level and variety of reaching out activity reported and observed was high and impressive. Much of the activity was reported to be instituted within the previous one to five years. However, they noted several gaps, the most important being that few of the strategies reported were either initiated by, or aimed at, classroom teachers. Only the handful of schools that were implementing comprehensive partnership programs invested in inservice training of teachers.

IV. Partnership as Integral to School Restructuring

In this section of our report we briefly examine some examples of intensive, deliberate, multi-site initiatives to restructure elementary schools and improve school effectiveness, at least in part, through strengthening the family-school partnership.

League of Schools Reaching Out, Institute for Responsive Education (IRE)

(Davies, 1990 and 1991; Davies, et al., 1991)

The League of Schools Reaching Out represents the second stage of a restructuring reform strategy that is incremental and uses relatively few additional resources. Its sponsor, the Institute for Responsive Education, built on over a decade of working in promoting community and parent involvement as a strategy for school effectiveness. The director and staff are fully aware that profound systemic change is needed in the educational system, but are also mindful of the slowness of organizational change. Rather than “wait for the revolution,” the Institute has designed a strategy that can be implemented right away. The lessons of Schools Reaching Out, a demonstration program in two urban schools, convinced the Institute president, Don Davies, that “some new concepts of school-family-collaboration can be implemented in unstructured schools, can contribute to increased student achievement, and can, in fact, provide leverage for broader restructuring” (1990, p. 69).

Three of the ideas can be easily adopted by almost any school. The costs are low and schools may be able to use outside funds, such as those from Chapter I, to cover a good portion of them. They are:

- **Parent Centers.** Centers are usually an accessible room set aside in the school building for parents, furnished with adult size furniture, coffee pots, telephones, and paid coordinators—usually parents themselves. Centers sponsor special programs, classes, and activities for parents but primarily serve as a comfortable way to draw parents into the school, bring them into informal contact with other parents and school staff (who often drop in and use the Center themselves as a resource), and to meet some of the parents’ own needs for information and support.
- **Home Visitors.** Educators continue to judge the interest and commitment of parents to their child’s education by the extent to which they come into the school. Yet many parents, for all kinds of reasons, find this difficult if not impossible to do. Thus, a central component of the Schools Reaching Out strategy was to go to meet families on their own turf—whether in their home or neighborhood. Paid and trained parent support workers, using the non-deficit approach, are hired to visit families to provide information about the school and its activities, share with them positive ways they could reinforce their child’s learning, and facilitate any needed referrals to health and social service agencies.
- **Teacher Action Research Teams.** Teachers are the key link to effective home-school partnerships. The Schools Reaching Out model identifies volunteer teachers in each school, pays them a very modest stipend, and involves them in working as a team in studying home-school relationships in their school and devising actions to improve them.

Following the two year Schools Reaching Out demonstration, IRE has expanded its efforts by creating a national network of 70 schools, all committed to the basic philosophy and mission of Schools Reaching Out and willing to undertake steps towards building improved partnerships. The goal of the League of Schools Reaching Out is to better understand how to create, implement, and sustain family-school-community partnerships that lead to success for all children.

Fifteen of the League schools receive funding through the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) for special programs: developing a parent center and home visiting program, initiating a mentoring program, establishing structured focus groups for parents and teachers, and modeling language learning materials during home visits with young mothers and their infants.

Nine of these schools are working with facilitators hired by IRE to organize parent-teacher action research teams. Participants on these teams work together to identify an action question relating to their special program. If their program involves African American male mentoring in the school, the question might be, “What impact are mentors having on student performance?” The process of researching the question gives parents and teachers an opportunity to reflect on what is happening in the school community and how to improve on it.

The research findings, along with the facilitators’ record of the process, are being channeled to researchers in the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children’s Learning. This research and development center is a consortium of educational researchers from IRE, Boston University, Wheelock College, Yale University, The Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Illinois. The Center is supported by the US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement in cooperation with the US Department of Health and Human Services and several foundations.

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School Development Program (Comer Process)

(Sources: Comer, 1980; Comer, 1988; Comer, 1991; Yale Child Study Center, 1991)

The School Development Program, now being implemented in schools in twenty districts and over a hundred schools across the US, is built upon a decade of an intensive collaboration between the Yale University Child Study Center and the New Haven School System, led by Dr. James Comer, a child psychiatrist. The program began in 1968 with a demonstration in two schools in which over 90% of the children were black and from low-income households. These schools were the lowest achieving in the city, had poor attendance, and had serious relationships problems among and between students, staff, and parents. The children came to school so ill prepared and their families were under such stress that staff felt helpless to educate them. Morale was very low. The children’s behavior was often interpreted as bad, and staff responded with low expectations and punishment. There was enormous distrust between the parents and school staff.

The Child Study Center mental health team’s initial assessment was that only a comprehensive approach built upon a sound knowledge of child development and relationship issues would be able to turn the school system in a new direction. All the stakeholders in the school—principal, teachers, parents, and others needed to be involved in building the relationships necessary for learning to take place. The Comer process is uniquely based on child development and mental health principles. Unlike other systems reform models that focus primarily on governance and curriculum measures, the Comer model focuses primarily on enhancing the quality of the relationships among students, staff, and parents.

“Our analysis of the two New Haven schools suggested that the key to academic achievement (for these disadvantaged youngsters) is to promote psychological development in students which encourages bonding to the school. Doing so requires fostering positive interaction between parents and school staff, a task for which most educators are not trained...our task then was to create a strategy that would overcome staff’s resistance to change, instill in them a working understanding of child development, and enable them to improve relations with parents” (Comer, 1988, p. 46).

The systems change model that was gradually crafted has nine principal components. At its core is a governance and management team representative of parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff which provides the whole school community with a sense of ownership and direction; a mental health or support staff team which helps them apply child development principles and relationship knowledge to all their activities; and a parents program which consists of participation in the governance, school program support activities, and special events. The Process includes developing a comprehensive school plan with specific goals in the social climate and academic areas, staff development activities, and periodic self-assessment which encourages modification of the process as it is implemented.

Their early work also led to the development of a “Social Skills Curriculum for Inner City Children,” designed to provide these inner city, low-income students with the social skills automatically acquired by middle-income children, which would then enable them to join the mainstream.

The program has undergone many revisions and modifications as it began to be replicated in other schools within the New Haven School district, including at the middle and high school levels. With the aid of a substantial five year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation it is now launched into an ambitious dissemination effort across the nation. The new activities include:

- Trained local Comer facilitators to assist the local districts and schools in the implementation of the program.
- Production of a series of 14 “How To” video tapes together with a manual to be used by the district facilitators and educators implementing the program.
- Creating partnerships between local school districts and schools of education to develop undergraduate teacher training curriculum based on the Comer Process and program.

A document is now available summarizing results of various evaluative studies of the effects of the School Development Program using diverse strategies and methods and assessing various academic and behavioral outcomes. Some of the studies have included experimental control group comparisons (see Child Study Center, 1991). Statistically significant gains have been made in both the academic and social areas—language arts, reading, mathematics, attendance, and school behavior—in numerous schools using the SDP model compared to similar schools not using the model. Several schools have made spectacular academic gains and have received national attention.

Contact: Edward Joyner, Director, Comer Project for Change in Education, Yale Child Study Center, 314 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511.

Quality Education Project (QEP)

The Quality Education Project is a highly structured and focused system designed to promote student success through parent involvement which has gained a good deal of attention in its home state of California and is now being replicated in other states. QEP staff contract with school districts or individual schools to provide training and technical assistance to implement the program over a period of 2-3 years. Currently there are 72 schools in the action phase of the project in California with others, having completed the program, in the follow up stage. Since 1989 the project has also been working in schools in Mississippi and Indiana and discussions are underway with school districts in Washington state, Alaska, and New Jersey.

When a school or school district initially applies to QEP, the staff undertake a complete assessment of the status of the family-school partnership and design a plan for providing technical assistance. They will help the school site seek funding to support the activities and train local people in their program method.

QEP has developed a well planned curriculum summarized in a 200 page resource manual and other publications and teaching materials. This curriculum includes QEP Parent Pledges, designs for Back to School Nights, parent-teacher conferences, weekly folders, newsletters, and community outreach.

Contact: Peg Rybicki, national director, Quality Education Project, 2110 Scott Street, San Francisco, CA 94115. (415)921-8673.

Accelerated Schools Project

This system reform project was designed by Professor Henry Levin at Stanford University and tested in two pilot demonstration sites in California. It is now operating in many other schools throughout the country. (Details unavailable at press time.) Its basic philosophy is to involve all sectors of the school community in a restructuring of the organization and curriculum of the school in a process designed to accelerate the learning of disadvantaged underachieving children. It challenges the self-fulfilling prophecies of low expectations that are the norm and is specifically designed to move all children “into the mainstream” by the 6th grade. Parent involvement is seen as integral to the vision.

Contact: Claudette Sprague, Accelerated Schools Project, CERAS 402S, School of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. (415)725-1676.

V. The Role of District, State, and Federal Policy

These four initiatives we have described have focused, at least in their formative stages, on changes at the school building level. Depending how intensive the reform effort was, they required the delegation of various degrees of autonomy to the school principal and staff to be able to design and implement the new partnership practices and other aspects of restructuring. However, schools do not operate in a vacuum. School-based parent involvement and other reform initiatives have encountered many barriers that emanate from the district, state, and federal levels. On the other hand, when policymakers at these levels are themselves committed to improving partnerships, there are many things they can do to support and reinforce—and sometimes even catalyze—the local efforts. They can do this through encouragement (carrots) and through mandates (sticks) or a combination of both. If they are to be more than symbolic gestures of support, both the carrot and stick strategies require some investment of resources. Since parent involvement is multifaceted, and the people who need to be involved may all use somewhat different definitions, policy can also set direction through clarifying the definition of parent involvement and setting priorities and guidelines for the various groups to work together on.

District Level

(Sources: Chrispeels, 1991; Dansberger, et al., forthcoming; Warner, 1991)

District school boards and district school superintendents can play a strong leadership role in partnership reforms. Somewhat ironically, although the school board is clearly the linchpin of school governance, the district level has been largely bypassed in the ongoing discussion and debate about educational reform.

A forthcoming book, to be published by the Institute for Educational Leadership, underscores the rationale for strengthening and broadening the base of lay involvement in schools through involving sectors of the community who have a stake in successful reform, particularly the business community (Dansberger, et al., forthcoming). Parents are often elected to school boards and can play a critical role in shaping school policy. However, demographic trends point to a shrinking school constituency of parents (only 25% of adults currently have children enrolled in public schools). It is imperative, therefore, that school boards reach out to seek new allies among the business and political leadership. Moreover, an increasing proportion of school families will be members of low-income minority groups who experience many of the problems associated with poverty that can interfere with their children's success in school. The authors conclude, "School boards must provide much stronger leadership both for educational reform and for more collaborative solutions to the problems of children and families."

There is no information available about how many school districts across the country are actively promoting parent involvement and partnerships with schools. However, Indianapolis and San Diego are two of a growing handful of school districts providing strong support for parent involvement. Their efforts are described briefly here.

Indianapolis. The Indianapolis Public School District has successfully conducted a comprehensive parent involvement program throughout schools in the district for over ten years. It thus qualifies as one of the pioneers in the field. The program was initiated in 1978 by an assistant superintendent who was impressed with the need for parent involvement. He enlisted the support of the teachers, the school board, and the superintendent and launched the Parents in Touch program which is coordinated and administered by a special office set up in the school district. The underlying policies and many of the resources have required board action and strong support from the district superintendent. Initial funding for many of the activities came from a three year grant awarded by the Lilly Foundation in 1978. Since then the program has been funded out of state discretionary monies, some Chapter I money, and additional foundation support.

Parents in Touch uses a variety of approaches in order to reach and involve all parents in the district. These include:

- **Parent-Teacher Conferences** for all parents grades K-12 to be held early in the school year. With the agreement of the administration and teacher's association, specially assigned coordinators schedule these conferences at times convenient to working parents. These conferences are at the core of the program. The goal of the conference is to share information about the student and set goals for the year. In addition, initial report cards are handed out and various information materials are explained and shared with the parents including school activity calendars, student/teacher/parent contracts, and folders describing school policies, procedures, and key dates. Conferences are scheduled in the afternoons and evenings.

It is estimated that 82% of parents at the elementary school level attend these conferences, at the upper grade levels it is around 70%. When parents do not attend, teachers generally make phone calls instead. On some occasions the teacher or the principal will go to their homes. In some schools, teachers have been provided with various incentives (special classroom resources) awarded upon achieving 100% parent participation at conferences.

- **Dial A Teacher, Homework Hotline, and Parent Line/Communicator.** Various other avenues are available to communicate with parents. The Dial a Teacher program provides students and parents with assistance with, and information about, homework. The "Homework Hotline" is a live call-in television program aired once a week on public television. The Parent-Line Communicator offers 24-hour access to tape recorded messages about school policies and special programs and on topics such as substance abuse. Each message refers parents to other sources of information.
- **Parent education programs.** Upon request from individual schools, Parents in Touch provides a wide variety of workshops for parents, often involving experts and leaders from the community. Workshops are also offered at worksites during lunch hours for employed parents who find it difficult to come to the school even in the evenings and weekends. With a grant from the state department of education, teachers helped to design a curriculum focusing on math and science homework assignments which involve parents, following the Teachers Involve Parents in School work program (TIPS) developed by Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University.

Finally, the Parents in Touch program provides support for the superintendent's advisory council which includes parent representatives and assists the district with fulfilling the Chapter I mandates for parent involvement. The program has sponsored three national conferences and, as a result, many of those who have attended from other Indiana school districts have built upon the Parent in Touch model in their own district. This program has been successful in the absence of any supportive state policies. In fact, the state board retracted its initial permission to let the students stay home a whole day on conference days.

Contact: Frances Richey, dissemination specialist, Parents in Touch, 901 N. Carrollton, Indianapolis, IN 46202. (317)226-4181.

San Diego. The San Diego school district is a good example of the various kinds of support a district can provide to nourish parent involvement efforts. However, it has received encouragement and active support from the county and from a strong new state parent involvement mandate enacted in 1991 (see below). In 1988, the San Diego City Schools (SDCS) established a task force to explore ways in which parent involvement could be strengthened in their district. They developed a broad-based policy, outlining a multifaceted definition of parent involvement, which was adopted by the board. The implementation plan they followed focused on three major goals:

- **Building the capabilities of staff members.** Activities supporting this goal include a regular newsletter, publications on communicating with parents, a handbook for school principals, and various workshops for educators at all levels.
- **Creating partnerships with parents.** This goal is being approached through the board of education, awarding parent involvement incentive grants to individual schools encompassing a wide variety of creative approaches. In the first year, 16 grants were awarded for a total of \$100,000. In 1990-91 23 grants were awarded.
- **Follow-up and support services.** The board has tried to find ways to institutionalize these efforts by, for example, ensuring that parent involvement is a component of required school improvement plans and by bringing together school personnel from different divisions to find ways to coordinate parent involvement activities that are a component of several federal and state categorical programs (e.g. in Chapter I, in special education, etc.).

The Office of Education of San Diego County provided complementary support for these district efforts through serving as an information clearinghouse on parent involvement, sponsoring conferences and publications, and providing direct information services through a telephone line and its own educational television programs. It has also sponsored many workshops for educators.

In summarizing the early lessons from the San Diego experience, Janet Chrispeels writes that these initiatives incorporated features that suggest that they may be more successful than earlier initiatives. They include: the shared goals and coordination between levels of government, the emerging knowledge about successful practices, and the recognition of the need for staff development and training. Nevertheless, change is slow and the task of changing attitudes and practices is not easy. However strong the district policy, school-based leadership is still essential and it is not always forthcoming. The incentive grants have most often been directed at “fixing” parents rather than helping schools reach out to parents and alter their own structures. Finally, “neither state, county, nor the district has given serious consideration to documenting and evaluating its efforts” (Chrispeels, Jan. 1991, p. 371).

Contact: Janet Chrispeels, Center for Parent and Community Participation in Effective Schools, San Diego County Office of Education, San Diego, CA. (619)236-2705

State Level

(Sources: Chapman, 1991; Nardine & Morris, 1991; CCSSO, 1991 and 1989)

States’ education agencies and state legislatures have an opportunity to effect the nature and level of parent involvement and partnership in two ways. First, they administer many federal programs targeted on special populations, which include parent involvement mandates. Second, they are responsible for helping local school districts provide effective public school education for all children.

In 1988, University of Wisconsin researchers conducted a survey of states to assess the status of state leadership, staffing patterns, funding, training, and technical assistance for parent involvement activities. A second follow-up survey assessed the status of state legislation, guidelines, and regulations. In summarizing the results, the researchers pointed out that although quite a number of activities were documented, most of them were connected to federal mandates or to federally funded compensatory programs (Nardine and Morris, 1991). Responsibility for parent involvement was highly fragmented and diffused between different programs and varied from state to state. Several states reported sponsoring workshops and conferences and providing clearinghouses and limited technical assistance, but few reported any substantial investment in personnel or long-term support. Much of the current activity concentrates on parent education programs in the preschool and early grades (see CCSSO, 1989).

Just over half the states have passed legislation to increase home-school collaboration. A few of these had enacted some kinds of mandates—for example, Tennessee mandated parent/teacher conferences to be held twice yearly outside of regular hours. The Illinois state board of education established a program of Urban Education three-year Partnership grants to schools which were found to substantially raise the levels of parent involvement (Chapman, 1991). But most states have enacted statutes that simply encourage parent involvement. Levels of staffing and funding in all states were found to be very small. For whatever reasons, the researchers concluded, “state-level administrators have played a limited leadership role...and in actual practice seem not to have advanced much beyond the concept of “bake sale” parent involvement. Parent involvement still has a long way to go to become an integral part of state education policies” (p. 366).

CCSSO Four-State Case Study. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) conducted an in-depth study to explore four states’ approaches for increasing the involvement of families in schools. An earlier study by CCSSO (1989) had laid the groundwork by documenting many state and community efforts in implementing family support, education, and involvement programs focusing primarily on early childhood initiatives. The states selected for study were **Alabama, California, Florida, and Minnesota**. The report summarizing the findings was published at the end of 1991 (CCSSO, 1991).

From this sample of states and from some preliminary inquiries in other states, the CCSSO study reports that many more states are beginning to employ strategies to make family involvement an integral part of the education system. Many are just getting underway and are not far beyond the planning stages. There is little data available, however, to know the extent of these new activities and none assessing their effects. The CCSSO report describes many of these activities in some detail. We provide here only a few examples of these activities to illustrate their range.

Those states launching major school reform initiatives, such as Alabama and Minnesota (and Kentucky), are assigning parents pivotal roles in school governance in these restructuring efforts and are planning to provide a broader array of services to parents. Florida is strongly committed to family and community involvement and has launched a major promotional campaign which includes some unusual approaches such as promoting flexible leaves for employees of state education agencies and working with the business sector to give their employees released time to visit their child’s school. A program has been set up to designate “Red Carpet” schools—“family-friendly” schools meeting certain parent involvement criteria. And Florida has put in place several pieces of supportive legislation—for instance, requiring school boards to establish school or district advisory committees which are to include parents.

Minnesota, building on a strong tradition of citizen involvement in public schools, has led the nation as the first state to enact school choice legislation. In 1987 it implemented a statewide, interdistrict, open enrollment plan for the public schools. Minnesota has also enacted a law that specifies that employers must grant their employees up to 16 hours of leave during any school year to attend school conferences or other classroom activities related to the employee’s child.

California has enacted the most comprehensive approach to parent involvement to date, spelling out a broad definition of parent involvement and targeting many levels of activity. A law passed in January 1991 mandates parent involvement for all school districts receiving Chapter I and certain categories of state funding. The state education agency has established the Parenting and Community Education Office, staffed by two full-time professionals, which provides leadership and support to local school districts to develop and implement continuing programs of parent and community involvement. A broad-based, interdepartmental committee meets quarterly to coordinate activities across programs and the Office has developed guidelines for policy development for county and district superintendents. There is a rich variety of resources that districts can call upon for information and technical assistance in California and the department has also published a directory of parent involvement programs.

VI. National Education Reform Proposals: Where is the Family-School Partnership?

(Source: Department of Education, April and August, 1991)

The researchers agree: families' values, attitudes, and behavior—more than income, class, or race—have a powerful influence on children's school achievement and social adjustment. Parents' support and involvement, which can assume many different forms in different families, is essential to children's success in school. School policies and practices have a strong influence on determining whether parents will play a constructive role in their children's education. Most importantly, educators **can** help parents from seriously disadvantaged backgrounds learn how to improve their children's success in school.

The obvious question to ask is to what extent are efforts to strengthen parent involvement and the family-school partnership a component of the Administration's and the Congress's education reform proposals? Our review of the texts of the Administration's and two major congressional proposals reveals several references to parents and families. Yet they fail to acknowledge that successful education is a product of a partnership between family and school.

The President's proposal certainly recognizes the important role of families in education and several times exhorts parents to do a better job. It does not acknowledge that educators have any responsibility to work collaboratively with parents once their child is in school. Nor that many strategies are available for educators to accomplish this goal.

Parents are assigned two important roles in the Administration's proposed strategy. The first is that parents are viewed indirectly as an instrument to accomplish the first of the announced education goals, that "all children will start school ready to learn." The implementation guidelines for this goal do include as *Objective 2. Every parent in America will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day helping his or her preschool child learn: parents will have access to the training and support they need* (US Department of Education, August, 1991). But there is no mention in *AMERICA 2000* of training or support provided to parents as co-educators once their child has already entered school. The second recognition of the importance of parents is the proposal for school choice in which parents are viewed as an essential part of a strategy for school restructuring.

In the two congressional proposals, S 2. and H.R. 3320, the principal role parents are assigned is, again, that of serving as **agents** in the reform process. At many points parents are required to be included, along with many others, in the planning and implementation of the new reform programs. With the exception of a mention in both bills that one of the uses of the funds can be to support parent involvement activities, there is no recognition of the importance of strengthening the family-school partnership.

The National Parent Teachers' Association has critiqued the six national education goals for not recognizing the importance of parent involvement. An official flyer from the organization says, "Despite the rhetoric and speeches by policymakers about the importance of parent involvement, the goals bypass parents almost exclusively." In early 1992, every member of a local, district, and state PTA was urged to write their governor, the President, and the media to urge that the following goal be added to the list of 6:

By the Year 2000, every elementary and secondary school in the country should have a parent involvement program.

In June of 1991 the National PTA had drawn up its own list of nine education goals, of which this one was the first.

Excerpts from the Reform Proposals

To provide the back up for our assessment and the PTA's view we thought it would be useful to excerpt here all the references to parents and families in the text of The National Education Goals, the Administration's *America 2000* proposed strategy, and in two major education reform proposals pending in the US Congress.

The National Education Goals

On September 27-28, 1989, President Bush convened an education summit meeting with the nation's governors in Charlottesville, Virginia. The following excerpts are from their joint statement issued at the end of the meeting.

The first mention of parents is in the first paragraph:

Education has historically been, and should remain, a state responsibility and a local function, which works best when there is also strong parental involvement in the schools

The first step in restructuring our education system is to build a broad-based consensus around a define set of national education goals... The process to develop the goals will involve teachers, parents, local administrators, school board members, elected officials, business and labor communities, and the public at large.

Only the first of the seven announced goals related to parents, and only indirectly:

...the readiness of children to start school.

After describing their plans for implementing the goals, they added:

We know that other voices need to be heard in this discussion—voices of educators, parents, and those whose primary interest is the protection of the disadvantaged, minorities, and the handicapped. We need to work with the Congress. The processes we will set up immediately following this conference will involve all parties.

Under a heading "Commitment to Restructuring" it states that most successful restructuring efforts seem to have certain common characteristics. The fifth and last cited is:

...active, sustained parental and business community involvement.

America 2000: An Education Strategy

In the President's remarks (9 printed pages) at the presentation of his National Education Strategy on April 18, 1991, Bush mentions parents only once:

It's time parents were free to choose the schools that their children attend.

The President then introduced to the press "four people here today who symbolize each element of this strategy and point the way forward for our reforms..."

The four were: An award winning eighth grade student, a lead teacher, a factory worker attending college while he was employed, and a single mother, active in Missouri's Parents as Teachers Program who "wants her year old son to arrive for his first day of school ready to learn."

In the **Overview** to the Strategy:

It recognizes that real education reform happens community by community, school by school, and only when people come to understand what they must do for themselves and their children and set about to do it."

The overview outlines four parts, “four big trains, moving simultaneously down four parallel tracks: Better and more accountable schools; a new generation of American Schools; a nation of students continuing to learn throughout their lives; and communities where learning can happen.”

This fourth part is explained as follows:

For schools to succeed we must look beyond their classrooms to our communities and families. Schools will never be much better than the commitment of their communities. Each of our communities must become a place where learning can happen.

In the main text of the plan, parents are first referred to in negative terms:

- *For too many of our children, the family that should be the protector, advocate and moral anchor is itself in a state of deterioration.*
- *For too many of our children, such a family never existed.*
- *Too many of our children start school unready to meet the challenges of learning.*
- *Too many of our children arrive at school hungry, unwashed and frightened.*
- *And other modern plagues touch our children: drug use and alcohol abuse, random violence, adolescent pregnancy, AIDS and the rest.*
- *Schools are not and cannot be parents, police, hospitals, welfare agencies or drug treatment centers. They cannot replace the missing elements in communities and families.*

The plan then restates the six goals jointly agreed to in 1989 in a somewhat revised version. The first is:

By the year 2000...All children in America will start school ready to learn.

The plan then reviews the four part strategy. In Part I, the references to parents concern accountability through national and state report cards, choice, and parents’ involvement in school restructuring efforts.

Report cards on results: *More than reports to parents on how their children are doing, these report cards will also provide clear (and comparable) public information on how schools, school districts are doing...*

Choice: *If standards, tests and report cards tell parents and voters how their schools are doing, choice gives them the leverage to act.*

The school as the site of reform: *Because real education improvement happens school by school, the teachers, principals, and parents in each school must be given the authority—and the responsibility—to make important decisions about how the school will operate. Federal and state red tape that gets in the way needs to be cut.*

Parents and families are not mentioned in Part II which discusses the plan to establish 535+ New American Schools, although there is a reference to models such as the Comer Schools and the Levin’s Accelerated Schools, which do involve parents.

Part III discusses continued learning opportunities for the work force and says:

We need to learn more to become better parents.

Part IV addresses **Communities Where Learning Can Happen.**

Even with accountability embedded in every aspect of education, achieving the goals requires a renaissance of sound American values—proven values such as strength of family, parental responsibility, neighborly commitment, the community-wide caring of churches, civic organizations, business, labor and the media.

Government at every level can play a useful role... But much of the work of creating and sustaining healthy communities... can only be performed by those who live in them: by parents, families, neighbors and other caring adults.

The plan then outlines the idea of **America 2000 Communities**, to be designated as such by the governors. One of the criteria for these communities appears to be described under the heading:

Individual responsibility: *Increased attention will be focused on adult behavior, responsibility for children and family and community values essential for strong schools—including involving parents as teachers of their children and as school partners.*

Under the heading **Who Does What?** the plan outlines the roles the following will play in implementing the strategy including the President, the Congress, the governors, the business community, and at the community level just about everybody is mentioned, and lastly:

Most of all, it will take America's parents—in their schools, their communities, their homes—as helpers, as examples, as teachers, as leaders, as demanding shareholders of our schools—to make the America 2000 education strategy work—to make this land all that it should be.

In the glossary of terms there is no entry for parent involvement. And in the questions and answers parents are mentioned in two questions related to choice and finally there is a question:

Q. What can parents do to help?

A. A thousand things. Parents are the keys to their children's education, and there is no part of AMERICA 2000 strategy in which they do not have an important role. As for what they can do today—they could read a story to their children, check to see that tonight's homework is done, thank their child's teacher, talk with their children's teachers and principals about how things are going in school, and set some examples for their children of virtuous, self-disciplined, and generous behavior.

Two Major Reform Bills in the US Congress

Senate bill S. 2. Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act.

This bill, introduced by Senator Kennedy (D-MA), was reported to the Senate floor on April 19, 1991, by the Labor and Human Resources Committee. With a few amendments it passed the Senate on January 28, 1992.

In general, the bill codifies the National Education Goals adopted by the President and Governors, establishes a council to report on progress towards these goals, and authorizes a new grants program to states and localities (with high need) for the development of education improvement plans. \$850 million is authorized for the program for FY 1992. We will comment on the text's references to parents and families in the three major relevant titles.

Title I A. National Education Goals. Parents are mentioned briefly as one of those agents to be involved in designing effective reform strategies and achieving the national education goals. Parents are not mentioned in parts B and C, the National Academic Report Card and the National Education Standards and Assessment Council.

Title II. The Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act. One of the three purposes of this program of grants to state education agencies is to “increase community, parental and business collaboration to improve such schools and raise academic achievement.”

The state may apply for a waiver to use not more than 10% of the funds for “initiatives to increase parental choice among public schools, including assessment and referral programs if such initiatives... *encourage parents to participate in governance, management processes or activities related to their children’s education program.*” This last phrase was a revised amendment introduced by Senator Seymour (R-CA). The revision substituted “encourage” for his original phrase “require.”

Parents are to be members of the Neighborhood Schools Improvement Advisory Council to be established by each state, and must be involved in the development of the proposals submitted for funding. Importantly among the 16 listed activities permitted to receive funds under this legislation were “projects to strengthen parent involvement and parenting education and to increase the partnership between families and the schools.”

Title III. Educational Reform and Flexibility. This title gives the Education Department Secretary various kinds of waiver authority in federal education programs in order that states and localities can mount demonstration programs to help improve the coordination of education and related services that benefit children and families. The grants would enable educators, parents, and others in the community “to work together to develop effective education programs that lead to improved achievement and meet the needs of all participants, particularly those who are disadvantaged.” Once again parents must be involved in the planning, development, and implementation of the programs.

House Bill H.R. 3320. Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act.

This bill, introduced in September 1991 by Congressman Kildee (D-MI), proposes to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by inserting Title VIII, the Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act. The bill was reported to the House from the Education and Labor Committee on November 7, 1991.

This legislation would establish a new authorization program at the level of \$700 million for FY 1992. Its purpose is announced as “To improve education for all students by restructuring the education system in the States.” It intends to raise the quality of education for all students by supporting a 10 year, broad-based public effort to promote coherent and coordinated changes in the education system throughout the nation. Choice programs may be funded at state option. Grants will be made to state educational agencies to develop and implement innovative reform plans at state and local levels.

The provisions of this bill, with respect to parents, are similar in intent to Title II of S. 2. Parents must participate in the development of the state and local plans and applicants must describe how parents are involved in the development, operation, and evaluation of programs and activities assisted under this title.

A local education agency, which receives a sub-grant under this title, may use funds for 13 identified purposes including choice programs consistent with state law and state constitutions and “activities which maximize parental involvement in improving the education of their children.”

The bill includes a provision requiring the Secretary to evaluate a representative sample of these reforms in order to assess their effectiveness, especially for disadvantaged student.

Organizational Resources

Department of Education Parent Involvement Initiatives

(Adapted from ERIC Review, Sept. 1991, p. 7; and OERI, Sourcebook, forthcoming)

The US Department of Education supports a number of programs and activities to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education. Many of these programs are related to federal legislation that mandates some form of parent involvement for particular categories of children, for example, low income, educationally disadvantaged, and children with disabilities. (These will be discussed in more detail in a future briefing report.) Initiatives range from programs designed to involve parents in their young children's literacy development to family-school partnership demonstrations to research centers studying families and home-school connections. Some of the Department's recent parent involvement initiatives are highlighted below.

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) administers the **Chapter I** program to aid schools with many low-income students. The Stafford-Hawkins education amendments of 1988 greatly strengthened the parent involvement provisions of this multi-billion dollar program. The law now requires that parent involvement programs be established in all local education agencies (LEA) receiving funds under Chapter I. The definition of parent involvement is broadened to include not only parents serving in advisory roles, but also parent volunteer or paid participation in the school program, and "programs, training, and materials which build parents' capacity to improve their children's learning in the home and in school." These changes will allow a much broader variety of parent involvement activities to be funded with Chapter I dollars.

Regional technical assistance centers support the work of local Chapter I projects. These centers are assisted by a national Chapter I Parent Involvement Center which collects, organizes, and disseminates information via the regional centers to help Chapter I projects develop plans to involve parents in their children's education.

Another OESE program, **Even Start**, provides assistance to instructional programs that combine adult literacy outreach with training to enable parents to support the educational growth of their children, in and out of school. It aims to integrate early childhood education (birth to age 7) and adult education. The Office of Bilingual and Minority Languages administers the Family English Literacy Program, which helps limited English-proficient adults gain competence in English, improve parenting skills, and increase home-school collaboration.

The White House **Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans**, established in the Department of Education, is charged with strengthening the nation's capacity to provide quality education for Hispanic Americans. The initiative will emphasize parental involvement, particularly the responsibility of families and parents to be teachers of their children and advocates for their children's education.

The Office of Special Education Programs supports a network of **60 Parent Training and Information (PTI)** centers in all 50 states and Puerto Rico to enable parents to participate more effectively with professionals in meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities. Another program, **Technical Assistance to Parent Projects**, provides technical assistance and coordination to the 60 PTIs and to developing minority programs in urban and rural locations.

The Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI), and its predecessor offices, has supported family and school research and various parent involvement activities for a number of years. Building on much of this work, staff are presently preparing a sourcebook for educators, *Schools and Families Together: Helping Children Learn More at Home*, to help urban parents strengthen home learning activities among elementary children. The sourcebook provides materials for self study and staff development workshops and is especially targeted to teachers and school administrators who work in large urban areas with diverse populations. The sourcebook will be pilot tested in several schools in summer of 1992 (see Moles, ed., in press).

OERI administers the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST), which is a new program established by the Stafford-Hawkins amendments in 1988. FIRST funds demonstration grants through its Family-School Partnership Program to eligible Chapter I local education agencies for projects that increase the involvement of parents in their children's education. Thirty-one new awards were made by FIRST in September 1990. Another 19 awards are expected to be made for FY 1993.

OERI supports a new Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning. Over the next five years, this center will conduct research, development, policy analysis, and dissemination projects to provide new information about how families, communities, and schools foster student motivation, learning, and development, and how to improve the connections among these social institutions. This center is a consortium administered by the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston University. Co-Directors are Don Davies of IRE and Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University. Another new institution, the Center on Education in the Inner Cities, will study the role of families in the educational process and ways to enhance the family's contribution to education from a multicultural perspective. The Center is located at Temple University and its director is Margaret Wang. The recently awarded Southwest Educational Development Laboratory contract will promote home and school connections for at-risk students in its five-state region during the next 5 years.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

The coalition is dedicated to developing and promoting effective family/school partnerships in schools throughout America. To this end, the coalition sponsors conferences and seminars and has developed guidelines for schools and school districts. The coalition has recently released a *Guide to Parent Involvement Resources* designed for parents, teachers, school administrations, and parent and community groups.

The guide describes policies, services, projects, contacts, training, studies, programs, and publications related to family support, education, and involvement, and, more broadly, community involvement. The guide also identifies resources for specific types of parent involvement, parent involvement research, policy development, program models, and partnerships. The guide includes resources from the following NCPIE member organizations:

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education	National Association of Partners in Education
American Association of School Administrators	National Association of School Psychologists
The ASPIRA Association, Inc.	National Association of Secondary School Principals
Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning	National Association of Social Workers
Center for Law and Education	National Coalition of Title I Chapter I Parents
Children's Defense Fund	National Committee for Citizens in Education
Council for American Private Education	National Community Education Association
Council for Educational Research and Development	National Council of La Raza
	National Education Association

Council of Chief State School Officers
The Council of the Great City Schools
Home and School Institute
The Johns Hopkins University
School and Family Connections Project
Institute for Educational Leadership
Institute for Responsive Education
International Reading Association
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association of Elementary School Principals

National Information Center for Children and Youth
with Disabilities
National Middle Schools Association
National PTA
National School Boards Association
National Urban League
The Parent Institute
School Council Assistance Project

Contact: Elena Pell, Chair, NCPIE, Box 39, 1201 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036

To obtain copies of the Guide contact:

The National Committee for Citizens in Education, 900 Second Street NE, Suite #8,
Washington, DC 20002-3557. (202)408-0447.

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- Siu, S.F., "Toward and understanding of Chinese-American educational achievement: A literature review."
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