

FALL 2000

## Administrators and District Leaders are the Key

Joyce L. Epstein, Director, National Network of Partnership Schools, Johns Hopkins University

**P** rincipals, district superintendents, and school boards make the difference between successful and unsuccessful school partnership teams. Effective leaders focus on important goals, encourage hard work, and recognize the efforts of others. Some educators and parents may become partners regardless of the attitudes of principal or school board. However, only with continuous administrative leadership will teachers, parents, and students be able to design and implement comprehensive partnership programs. Administrators and policy leaders need to know the components and results of such programs, and how to build their leadership.

How can administrators and school boards improve their leadership on school, family, and community partnerships? Leadership for family and community involvement requires understanding, action, and persistence.

**Understanding:** This includes understanding the framework of six types of involvement, the challenges that must be met to reach all families, and the connections of involvement to specific goals and results. Family and community involvement does not take the place of high-quality teaching and challenging curricula for all students. But well-designed, goal-oriented involvement activities will help students succeed in many ways.

**Action:** School, district, and state leaders must take action for all schools to develop programs of partnership. In Connecticut guidelines, training opportunities and technical support are available from the new Bureau of School-Family-Community Partnerships. Guidelines for action are also available from the National Network of Partnership Schools. (See below.)

**Persistence:** Developing excellent home, school, and community partnerships is an on-going process that takes time, organization, and effort. Progress is accelerated if efforts are targeted in annual professional evaluations and if teachers, parents, students, and others have opportunities to provide ideas for improving partnerships.

**What results will good programs of partnership produce?** Many studies indicate, for example:

- All communities have resources to promote student development. Community resources must be mobilized by comprehensive partnership programs.
- Families are important for children's school success from preschool through high school. Students are more positive about school and learning, and do better in school if families are involved in their education.
- Teachers who frequently involve families in their children's education, report that all families can help their children, including single parents, poor parents, linguistically diverse parents. When schools develop excellent partnership programs, families become involved, including those who would not become involved on their own.

No longer viewed as secondary to "real" reform efforts, school, family, and community partnerships are a central component of school improvement. Family involvement is needed for students to succeed with challenging curricula, innovative instruction, and new assessments. With strong leadership, partnerships must become, an expected and permanent part of school organization, just like reading, math, or sports programs. Partnership programs improve schools, strengthen families, energize communities, and most importantly increase student success. The leadership of administrators and school boards is key to making this happen.

This work is supported by grants from the U. S. Department of Education and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. The ideas are the author's and do not necessarily represent the policies of either funding source. The original version of this article appears as a chapter by Dr. Epstein in *Administration: A problem-based approach*. W. Cunningham & P. Cordiero, New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2000.

For information on the National Network of Partnership Schools contact the author at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Tel: 410-516-8818; Fax: 410-516-8890; E-mail: [nnp@csosjhu.edu](mailto:nnp@csosjhu.edu); or web site: [www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000).

# SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

## What School Boards and District Policy Leaders Can Do

**Write a policy** that supports comprehensive partnership programs (see, *Policy Action Packet for School-Family-Community Partnerships: A Guide to Developing Partnership Programs for Student Success*, CT Dept. of Education et al, June 1998).

**Establish a single office** to coordinate partnerships across departments, and facilitate the continuous improvement of partnership programs.

**Allocate a budget** to cover partnership staff and program costs.

**Establish small grants** and other support for developing and implementing partnerships.

**Support requirements** for teacher and administrator credentials on partnerships.

**Develop courses** for preservice, advanced, and/or inservice education on partnerships.

**Support a master teacher or professional coordinator** in each school to lead an Action Team for Partnerships.

**Develop partnership tools**, e.g., brochures, calendar templates, newsletters, guidelines for involving non-English-speaking families.

**Establish a partnership advisory committee** including educators, parents, and community members.

**Institute an accountability system** to monitor progress, reward excellent work, and evaluate the effects of partnership programs.

**Encourage business, and other community connections** to strengthen partnerships.

**Conduct an annual conference** for schools to share best practices and develop annual plans for improving partnership programs.

From: J. Epstein (in press). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

CT School-Family-Community Partnerships, a project of the State Department of Education, helps educators, parents and community members develop partnerships by providing training and resources designed to promote policies and programs at the local level and to increase public awareness of the positive impact of school-family-community partnerships on student learning.

Staff: Judy Carson, Harriet Feldlaufer & Wendy Harwin, CT State Department of Education; Barbara Stone, SERC

## A Different Way of Working with Families

Traditionally, when a child or a family needs help, whether social, economic, emotional, educational or otherwise, helping professionals start by identifying deficits. They then prescribe treatment through participation in programs, and apply sanctions to those who do not fulfill the program requirements. The services system is often fragmented, problem-specific, crisis-driven and ineffective in helping families produce long-lasting, positive changes in their lives.

In Connecticut, there is a new training program for those who work with children and families. Connecticut's Family Development Training and Credentialing Program is a statewide interagency initiative designed to reorient the way helping services are delivered to families. Using an empowerment-oriented model of practice, participants gain skills in supporting individuals and their families in efforts to build on strengths, set goals and reach them. Upon successful completion of the coursework and related requirements, a Family Development Credential is awarded from the University of Connecticut's School of Family Studies.

For those working in schools, it is an ongoing challenge to try not only to interact positively with many different types of families, but also to involve them actively in supporting our schools. School personnel are traditionally not trained to work effectively with families, and most have no formal preparation for the types of complex issues families face today. Social workers, guidance counselors, truancy officers, administrators, parent liaisons and others who work closely with families to support student success and well being, will all benefit from this competency-based training.

The 110-hour interactive training program has resulted in documented improvements in at least four key areas: effects of the family development process on individuals and families; personal and professional development of those trained; changes in practice and skills in the work place; and changes in organizational and community climate. The strengths-based curriculum developed by Cornell University includes such topics as cultural competence, ongoing assessment, home visiting and facilitating family conferences, to name only a few. Participants learn how to establish mutually respectful partnerships with families, and pursue a solutions-focused approach, assisting families in identifying and developing individual strengths to achieve long-lasting self-reliance and interdependence with their communities.

The Connecticut State Department of Education, the Children's Trust Fund, the Capitol Region Education Council and the School of Family Studies at the University of Connecticut are sponsoring this exciting training program. To learn more, contact Betsy LeBorjous, Family Development Credential Coordinator at 860-509-3615.

## Schools Share Partnership Practices

### Middletown Leads the Way

Recently identified as a "Best Practice" model by RMC Research at Brown University, the [Middletown School District](#) has clearly made School-Family-Community Partnerships a priority. Donna Marino, the district's full-time Parent Resource Coordinator, was hired in her words "to increase communication and outreach to families and the community, toward building more effective partnerships in the city's eleven schools." This involves collaboratively planning, coordinating, and evaluating a variety of family and community projects both school-based and system-wide.

Middletown especially excels in the area of community partnerships. Middletown Schools have longstanding relationships with many area businesses, colleges and universities. Working with the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, Donna helped establish school/business partnerships for each school, and meets often with community groups to share school information *and* stay informed on what they offer. Collaboration with area businesses, agencies, and community groups has made many programs available that otherwise would not be possible.

#### **Donna's advice for districts that want to duplicate Middletown's success:**

- *Know your community. After-school programs, community health groups, nursery schools, churches, social/senior organizations, and libraries can help schools connect.*
- *Be a friendly school. Take advantage of key events. Open houses, conferences, student performances must be well planned and publicized. To reach more people, enlist family and community leaders to make phone calls to encourage participation.*

Please visit Middletown's web site on "Creating Family Friendly Schools" to learn more, [www.wesleyan.edu/mtsd/presentation/familyhtml](http://www.wesleyan.edu/mtsd/presentation/familyhtml), or contact Donna Marino at the Middletown Board of Education.

### Partnerships as the Basis for School Reform

Beverly White, principal at [Park Avenue School in Danbury](#), felt challenged to have teachers "step out of the box" and involve parents as partners in their child's education. To finance the effort Ms. White led a team of parents, teachers and community members that won a federal Obie Porter grant, allowing them to implement Comprehensive School Reform. The team studied many models as possible vehicles for reform. "As a strong advocate of shared responsibility of family, school, and community in each child's learning and development," says Ms. White, "I know Joyce Epstein's School, Family and Community Partnerships model will improve student achievement."

The school uses Action Teams to develop partnerships touching every aspect of school life. Five teams, *Reading, Writing, Math, Behavior, and Community Connections*, each include teachers, parents and community representatives as equal members. In addition, 10% of parents serve as neighborhood representatives, passing information and encouraging participation. According to Ms. White, "the biggest challenge is to maintain momentum while adjusting to staff changes, but the result of well-implemented partnerships is more support for students and teachers. In a true partnership, all involved are winners."

### Save the Day to spend with Joyce Epstein

Mark October 19th on your calendar to spend a day with Joyce Epstein, nationally-known researcher, and Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

At the [Partnerships for Student Success Conference](#), you will:

- learn about an effective partnership framework that can improve student success;
- discover leadership traits that make a difference in student lives;
- discuss critical topics affecting youth, including violence prevention, school climate, and others
- enjoy the rhythm of partnership with a unique after-lunch experience.

Please contact Wendy Harwin for more information and registration materials, e-mail: [sde.partnership@po.state.ct.us](mailto:sde.partnership@po.state.ct.us), tel: (860) 566-7856, fax: (860) 566-2957.

### National Recognition for CT Partnership Project

Connecticut is one of two states being honored by the National Network of Partnership Schools for its "excellence in facilitating and supporting comprehensive programs" of family and community involvement. The Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnerships Project has been supporting the creation and expansion of effective partnership programs since 1995. We should all be proud of the work our state is doing to support student achievement through family and community involvement!

## Resource Materials on S-F-C Partnerships Available For Loan

**The administrator's guide to school-community relations.** Pawlas, G.E. (1995). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education. This book, written by a former high school principal, provides principals with the leadership skills needed to develop a relationship between schools and the community. The author discusses the need for sufficient school-community ties and provides examples of strategies, which past principals have found useful. Topics discussed in the book include strengthening communication, strategies for working with the media, and the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

**Everybody's house: The schoolhouse.** Warner, C. (1997). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc. This handbook provides principals and other educators with practical techniques, based on case studies of successful programs, to reach out to parents, families, and other community members and keep them involved. Learn how to: design at-home and in-school involvement programs that work; provide purposeful opportunities for parents and other volunteers; include parents in decision making; engage community stakeholders and high-tech resources; create business/school partnerships; and reach diverse families.

**Creating partnerships with parents, an educator's guide.** Leuder, D.G. (1998). Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc. This book provides the reader with the "why, where, when and how" of truly involving all families, especially hard-to-reach parents, in the academic and social development of their children. It is designed to show the importance of creating partnerships between families, schools, and communities.

**The parent involvement facilitator: Elementary and secondary editions.** The MASTER Teacher, Inc. (1997). Manhattan, Kansas: Author. These two 3-ring binder collections of activities for elementary and secondary schools are designed to help teachers and administrators get parents more involved in schools. They each include detailed instructions for over 150 activities, as well as Dos and Don'ts, sample letters, and reproducible hand-out pages.

Be sure to visit the SERC Library to explore the extensive collection of resources related to family involvement, available for loan free of charge. Located in Middletown, the library is open to the public Monday through Saturday. Call (860) 632-1485 for directions or hours. You may also request annotated bibliographies on a variety of topics including school-family-community partnerships. The collection of books, journals, videos and other materials covers a broad spectrum of issues helpful for administrators, teachers and family members alike.

[www.state.ct.us/sde/dsl/sfcp/index.htm](http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dsl/sfcp/index.htm)

e-mail: [sde.partnership@po.state.ct.us](mailto:sde.partnership@po.state.ct.us)

fax: (860) 713-7024

phone: (860) 713-6585

Connecticut State Department of Education

Wendy Harwin, Project Coordinator

*For more information, please contact:*

PO. Box 2219 HARTFORD, CT 06145-2219

BUREAU OF SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

