

SPRING 1998

New Project Supports Partnerships for Student Success

It's about relationships . . . it's about open communication, it's about working together for something we all want. And most importantly, all of our students can benefit. What is it? The Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnership Project. Simply put, children's success depends upon teachers, families and community members all working together. Most educators want to build strong partnerships, but most have not reached this goal. If you are ready to take action — ready to develop good connections between home, school and community — ready to take the time and effort to organize, then you'll be pleased to hear about the network of similarly minded people that exists here in Connecticut.

The CT State Department of Education was one of the first states to take the lead to join the National Network of Partnership - 2000 Schools at Johns Hopkins University. Now in its third year, the National Network has grown to over 800 members including 750 schools, 60 districts and 8 states. Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director, sees one of the Networks main goals as "to help schools, districts and states establish permanent programs of school, family and community partnerships." Epstein goes on to say, "In permanent programs, families and community members are welcomed, respected, informed, and involved in positive and productive ways."

Acknowledging that family and community involvement in education is critical to student achievement, Epstein has developed a framework of six types of involvement. The six types explain how schools can work with families and communities to assist them to become or stay informed and involved in children's learning at home and at school. Each type of involvement may be demonstrated by hundreds of practices that schools may choose to develop in their own programs. Each practice that is implemented opens opportunities for varied interactions between teachers, administrators, students and family and community members. Briefly the six types are:

- * **helping parents to parent**
- * **communicating with families**
- * **expanding volunteer programs**
- * **strengthening learning at home**
- * **involving families in decision-making**
- * **collaborating with the community**

Joining forces with other organizations within the state, the Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnerships Project has conducted a number of training and technical assistance activities for school-based teams comprised of administrators, teachers, family and community members. Training allows school-based teams to engage in "hands-on" planning of programs and activities around the six major types of involvement. We welcome our 8 new school teams who have just completed three days of Action Team training on School-Family-Community Partnerships. These schools join 20 existing schools in Connecticut's network.

In addition to school-based team training, the project offers "hot topic" workshops on school-family issues throughout the year. Developing ways for schools and families to work together to deal with children's challenging behaviors was the focus of the most recent workshop. The next "hot topic" workshop devoted to promoting early literacy at home and at school will be offered during the fall of 1998.

SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

The State Board of Education position statement was introduced at a statewide Policy Forum co-sponsored by a diverse group of organizations. State Education Commissioner, Theodore S. Sergi, convened leaders from education, business, government, communities and parent groups to discuss ways that they can better work together to improve students' educational experiences and academic achievement. The group of about 160 local and state leaders heard from keynote speaker, Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership-2000 School at Johns Hopkins University, and a panel made up of Jeffrey L. Browne, Coordinator of the Hartford Parent Network, Richard B. Farr, Manager of Employment and Personnel Relations for J.C. Penney Company, Ana Maria Garcia, Chief Executive Officer of the YWCA of the Hartford Region, Jane Givehand-Glover, Former Mayor of New London, Commissioner Sergi, and David M. Nee, Executive Director of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund. Sarah Campbell, Deputy Director of Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, CT facilitated small group, participatory discussions allowing all those in attendance to address the issue in a collaborative manner and to consider multiple perspectives.

The co-sponsors of the forum were:

- Capitol Region Education Council
- CT Association of Boards of Education
- CT Association of Partners in Education
- CT Education Association
- CT PTA
- Drugs Don't Work! The Governor's Prevention Partnership
- Elementary and Middle School Principals' Association of CT
- Graustein Memorial Fund
- Special Education Resource Center
- STATES Initiative
- United Technologies Corporation
- United Way of CT

“Keeping together is beginning. Staying together is progress. Working together is success.”

– Henry Ford

State Board of Education Adopts Position Statement on Partnerships!

The Connecticut State Board of Education, for the first time, adopted a definition of School-Family-Community Partnerships in their position statement dated August 7, 1997:

“The State Board of Education defines school-family-community partnerships as the continuous planning, support and participation of school personnel, families and community organizations in coordinated activities and efforts at home, in the school and in the community that directly and positively affect the success of all children's learning. Each partner is viewed as an equally contributing member, maintaining a certain independence while acknowledging shared responsibility. To succeed, the partnership must be flexible and based upon mutual trust and respect. Schools must take the lead in developing and sustaining effective partnerships.”

In addition to defining what a school-family-community partnership is, the State Board of Education adopted a set of standards based upon Epstein's framework of six types of involvement to include — parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with community. The position statement goes on to articulate the role for schools, families and communities in carrying out these standards for involvement.

Along with the position statement, a Partnership Policy Action Packet is available to help local boards and school administrators develop and implement policies and programs that support high quality school-family-community partnerships. Local leaders will be interested in the policy action packet as they prepare to meet a new state law — Public Act 97-290, Section 14 — that requires each local and regional board of education to develop, adopt and implement written policies and procedures to encourage parent-teacher communication. This law goes into effect September 1, 1998.

Send in the attached information card to receive the



Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnerships

Bristol

*Greene Hills
South Side

Cheshire

Highland

Norton

Danbury

Stadley Rough

East Granby

Allgrove

East Hartford

*East Hartford Middle

Enfield

Eli Whitney

Henry Barnard

Nathan Hale

Hartford

*Kinsella

*S.A.N.D. Everywhere

Jewett City

Griswold

Manchester

Highland Park

Robertson

Meriden

*Nathan Hale

Middletown

*Bielefield

New London

*Jennings

Old Saybrook

Goodwin

Norwich

*Veteran Memorial

Plantsville

Strong

Trumbull

Daniels Farm

West Hartford

Norfeltd

Windsor

Clover Street

Oliver Ellsworth

Winsted

Batcheller

* New to the Network.
Welcome!

Schools Share Partnership Practices

Many Connecticut schools are developing active School-Family-Community Partnerships. An effective partnership offers a broad array of opportunities for schools, families and communities to interact. Not all partnerships look the same. Successful ones exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that create them. Partnerships work best when they recognize and accommodate differences among families, communities and cultures.

In Enfield School-Wide Interactive Homework Involves All Families

At Eli Whitney School, the Family Connection involves students and their families in homework on topics such as "About My Family" and "Favorite Family Fun". The Family Connection aims to improve students' writing skills and parent-child interactions. Because it is a well organized and school-wide, it incorporates many ways of involving families, such as helping parents to parent, communicating from home-to- school, strengthening home learning and expanding volunteer roles.

The interactive homework topics are discussed and selected by all teachers at a staff meeting to ensure that they are involved and agree on the assignment. Students and families at all grade levels receive the same voluntary assignment and complete it in the same time period. The writing and pictures are shared in classrooms and displayed throughout the school. The result is a celebration and appreciation of all families.

School principal, Linda Cavanaugh and Action Team Leader, Julie Leith explain: "Implementation of these activities was really quite easy. The most difficult part of the school-wide project is finding an activity that will appeal to the K-6 range of grade levels, and one that can be attractively displayed in our hallways."

Interactive projects are described as "low cost" and "non-threatening" with "strong interest from parents." Leith and Cavanaugh state: "The Family Connection has not only been a best practice, but it is fast becoming a tradition in our school culture!"

Principal's Problem-Solvers

At Norton School in Cheshire, Principal Donna Leake provides families the opportunity to work together at home to solve math-related problems. Problems are sent home on a monthly basis according to the grade level of the students. The primary purpose is to help students improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Students meet with the principal to review their solutions to the problems. As families solve problems together, their names are posted on a bulletin board and stickers are placed by their name for each problem solved. A Principal Pizza and Puzzle Celebration takes place twice a year for participating families. This popular program is being sponsored by RE/MAX Schoolside REALTORS.

Position Statement and the Policy Action Packet!

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

Be sure to visit the SERC Library located in Middletown at 25 Industrial Park Road. The library is open Monday through Saturday to the public. Membership is free!! Call for hours and directions (860/632-1485) to check out the extensive library of books, journals and videos related to School-Family-Community partnerships. These materials are helpful for administrators, teachers and family members and cover a broad array of issues. You may also request an annotated bibliography of the library materials on this topic. Listed are a few examples of what is available for loan:

Teachers & Parents Together. Botrie, M. & Wenger, P. (1992). Markham, Ontario: Pembroke Publishers Limited. A resource with practical easy-to-implement initiatives to involve parents in all aspects of their child's learning. Teachers will learn how to engage in effective partnerships with parents, including tips on guiding principles, ideas for parent bulletins boards and workshops, through suggested letters and procedures for parent interviews, open houses and newsletters.

At Home in Our Schools: A guide to schoolwide activities that build communities. Developmental Studies Center (1994). Oakland, CA. A 136-page guide to whole-school activities that help educators and parents create caring school communities. The guide includes ideas about leadership, step-by-step guidelines for 15 activities, and reproducible planning resources and suggestions for teachers. Also includes a 12-minute videotape for use in staff meetings and parent gatherings to create support for a program of whole-school activities that build community. The documentary footage shows diverse schools using community-building activities.

Building Communities of Learners: A collaboration among teachers, students, families and community. McCaleb, S.P. (1997). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers. The approach to education described in this book is aimed at the entire family. Specifically, it calls for building a community of learners through a collaboration among teachers, students, and their families and communities that embraces the diversity of cultures and languages that families pass on to their children. By acquiring deeper levels of understanding of the realities of families, teachers can simultaneously expand their students' and their families' acquisition of literacy skills and greatly enhance the possibilities for academic success.

A Tale of Two Partnerships. (video) The Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning. This 25-minute video tells the stories of two schools - a high school and an elementary school - that have been developing partnerships with families and community agencies for the last eight years. The stories told by parents, teachers and administrators, illustrate some of key research findings about partnerships.

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