

# Educating Our Children Together:

## A Sourcebook for Effective Family-School-Community Partnerships



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Dear Parents and Families, Educators and Members of the Community:

This document provides practical information for parents and families, educators and administrators, and individuals involved in programs that support partnerships between families, schools and communities. It has been developed to support and promote creative solutions through the sharing of resources and information about family-school-community partnerships.

Parents and family members play an important role in the education of their children, and can provide the keys to success for their children during their school years and transition to adult life. The partnership of parents, families, educators and members of the community has been shown to have a positive effect on educational outcomes for students. Research has shown that family involvement has a powerful influence on a child's school experience, improving a child's achievement, attendance, attitudes, behavior, test scores, and long-term outcomes.

The New York State Board of Regents and the State Education Department have set high goals for educational programs and services for students with disabilities in New York. The Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) has developed a strategic plan driven by a vision that is based on the belief that individuals with disabilities, given high expectations, opportunities and support when necessary, will live successful adult lives. Students can be helped to reach their full potential when parents, families and schools work collaboratively and enlist the support and involvement of the wider community.

I would like to express my appreciation to all those who assisted in the creation of this document. CADRE (the National Center on Dispute Resolution, which is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs at the United States Department of Education) partnered with VESID in its development. The assistance of many other individuals and organizations is noted in the acknowledgements included in the opening pages of the document.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact the VESID Special Education Quality Assurance and Support Services Unit by email at: [VESIDSPE@MAIL.NYSED.GOV](mailto:VESIDSPE@MAIL.NYSED.GOV).

Sincerely,

Lawrence C. Gloeckler

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## ***Preface***

In the fall of 2001, the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) at the New York Education Department expressed an interest in technical assistance from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the United States Department of Education to further their efforts to encourage positive parent involvement in schools. Based on that communication, CADRE (the OSEP-funded National Center on Dispute Resolution) began working with VESID staff to develop a technical assistance plan. It was agreed that an important first step would be to convene a small work group of educators and parent leaders to identify priority activities. Prior to that meeting, CADRE was asked to summarize research on parent involvement from the past decade and present it to the work group. That summary, *The Impact of Parent/Family Involvement on Student Outcomes: An Annotated Bibliography of Research During the Past Decade*<sup>1</sup>, clearly documented the value of family involvement in education and demonstrated the relationship between parent involvement and improved student outcomes.

When the work group convened in spring 2002, it reviewed the bibliography and developed a plan for future activities. It was agreed that an initial focus for the initiative would be to assist “low-performing” schools in identifying and implementing activities that would lead to higher levels of positive parent engagement. It was agreed that CADRE would put together a “sourcebook” that would identify and describe promising practices in family-community-school involvement occurring in pre-K-12 school environments across the country. An initial draft was reviewed by an expanded group of parents and educators in October, 2002, who provided feedback on ways the document might be strengthened.

This sourcebook is the culmination of those efforts. It was compiled as a resource for educators to use to build effective school-family-community involvement. Although the focus of the sourcebook is on building-level strategies for school personnel, the ideas should be useful to these others as well:

- *Family members*: to gain ideas about how families can be effectively involved in school-family-community activities;
- *Community members*: to learn how community members can build successful partnerships with schools and families;
- *Teacher education faculty members and students*: to research and study family involvement practices and programs;
- *Policymakers, including legislators, state and national organization leaders, and state and national education department officials*: to help shape state and national policies and legislation regarding family involvement in schools;
- *Funding agencies*: to gain information about family-involvement practices occurring across the country that are worthy of financial support.

Although this sourcebook focuses on what is occurring in New York schools, it also includes promising practices from several other states. *Not all the strategies included will work for every school.* To be most effective, school administrators and teachers, in consultation with parents and community representatives, should select strategies based upon each individual school’s needs, priorities, resources, student population, and community support. Many of the strategies can also be adapted to fit local school/district needs.

The sourcebook includes guiding principles for family-school-community involvement, tips for getting started, a self-assessment tool to determine current practices, strategies, and program descriptions that have been organized according to the following interrelated eight “cluster strategies”:

1. Creating a family-friendly school environment
2. Building a support infrastructure
3. Encouraging family involvement
4. Developing family-friendly communication
5. Supporting family involvement on the homefront
6. Supporting educational opportunities for families
7. Creating family-school-community partnerships
8. Preparing educators to work with families

Additionally, a comprehensive index of family involvement practices is included for each “cluster strategy” as well as resources for evaluating the effectiveness of family involvement activities. A sample school calendar of family involvement activities, a bibliography, and a list of contacts for additional information and references are also included.

## **Introduction**

*So much is riding on our schools. As parents and communities, we have entrusted them with our greatest resource and tangible investment in the future: our children. The sheer magnitude of what we ask of these institutions—to promote learning, prepare a workforce and create a citizenry—puts them at the heart of our communities and endows them with special status.*<sup>2</sup>

Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means much more than providing students with academic knowledge and skills. “Educators alone cannot help children develop intellectually, personally, socially, and morally—develop all the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to be productive citizens and caring people as adults”<sup>3</sup>. Educating children to live in our rapidly changing and increasingly complex society “requires contributions and commitments from everyone in the community”<sup>4</sup>.

Although, as this sourcebook demonstrates, many schools, communities and families are working closely together to meet children’s educational needs, all too often schools seem to be “islands separated from the families they serve and the communities in which their students live”<sup>5</sup>.

Because schools, communities, and families play interconnected roles in this crucial mission of educating children, they must find ways to work together as educational<sup>6</sup>. And providing parents with information and resources to support their children’s education is a cornerstone of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

### ***What is a family?***

For this sourcebook we have chosen to use the broad definition of “family” offered by Turnbull and Turnbull:

Although families from different cultures define themselves in many and varied ways, we define family as two or more people who regard themselves as a family and who perform some of the functions that families typically perform. These people may or may not be related by blood or marriage and may or may not usually live together. Thus, four generations of women who are living together might call themselves a family unit; another family might describe a broad network of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and a host of others who are part of close-knit family relationships

### ***What is family involvement?***

We use the term “family involvement” in this sourcebook in an expansive way to include and recognize the value of a broad spectrum of activities that involve family members and/or guardians helping children to learn, both at home and at school. The single-parent who works two jobs to support her three children and makes sure they are safe, loved, and fed each morning before school is “involved.” The significant other who attends the IEP meeting of his



partner's child is "involved." The grandparents with temporary custody of their two grandchildren who clear a space at the kitchen table for them to do homework are "involved."

The foster parents who keep their foster children's birth parents informed of their children's progress in school are "involved." The immigrant parents who cannot speak English and are unfamiliar with the American school system but are passing on a strong work ethic to their children are "involved." The father serving in the Air Force Reserves who is deployed on a military mission and records audiotapes of himself reading books for his preschooler to hear while he is away is "involved." The stepfather who volunteers to judge a debate tournament at his stepson's high school is "involved." The Bosnian parents who volunteer to teach their daughter's school staff about the Bosnian language and culture are "involved." So too is the aunt caring for her nephew with spina bifida who becomes a strong advocate for his needs.

### *Ten Truths of Parent Involvement*

1. All parents have hopes and goals for their children. They differ in how they support their children's efforts to achieve those goals.
2. The home is one of several spheres that simultaneously influence a child. The school must work with other spheres for the child's benefit, not push them apart.
3. The parent is the central contributor to a child's education. Schools can either co-opt that role or recognize the potential of the parent.
4. Parent involvement must be a legitimate element of education. It deserves equal emphasis with elements such as program improvement and evaluation.
5. Parent involvement is a process, not a program of activities. It requires ongoing energy and effort.
6. Parent involvement requires a vision, policy, and framework. A consensus of understanding is important.
7. Parents' interaction with their own children is the cornerstone of parent involvement. A program must recognize the value, diversity, and difficulty of this role.
8. Most barriers to parent involvement are found within school practices. They are not found within parents.
9. Any parent can be "hard to reach." Parents must be identified and approached individually; they are not defined by gender, ethnicity, family situation, education, or income.
10. Successful parent involvement nurtures relationships and partnerships. It strengthens bonds between home and school, parent and educator, parent and school, school and community.

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### **Today's Families Take Many Different Forms**

American families are more diverse than ever before, spanning cultures, languages, levels of education, and socioeconomic and demographic differences. In the year 2000 one out of every three Americans was of African American, Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American heritage<sup>7</sup>. Contemporary families can be described as "traditional, blended, extended, multi-generational, migrant, minority, single-parent, divorced, dual-worker, and refugee"<sup>8</sup>. In 2001, 27% of children in the U.S. were living in single-parent homes, and 40% of children living with their mothers had not seen their fathers during the past<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, children being raised by

grandparents are a growing population <sup>10</sup>, and many children live with extended family members or with foster parents.

These rapid and continuing changes in the American family have vastly complicated the issue of how to involve families in their children’s education and pose some significant questions for educators to consider:

*How can we stimulate more parent involvement if mothers work outside the home? Which parents do we try to reach: the stepparent a child lives with, the father who lives across town, the kindergartner’s 34-year-old grandmother, or perhaps her 19-year-old mother? What responsibility do we have to help children cope with the stress of their parents’ breaking up? How can we ask overburdened single parents to help teachers educate their children? How can we be adequately sensitive to cultural, social and economic differences, and collaborate with parents who cannot speak English or whose cultural background makes our way of thinking and doing things almost incomprehensible? <sup>11</sup>*

Because of the variety of students’ backgrounds, reaching out to families has become increasingly complex for schools. Educators who define families in more narrow terms may have assumptions that make it difficult for them to understand the families of many of their students. The San Diego City Schools <sup>12</sup> identified the following “common assumptions” held by educators that can either hinder or facilitate home-school collaboration. Identifying these assumptions is a first step toward changing them and determining ways for educators to encourage family involvement in school <sup>13</sup>.

***Educators’ Assumptions that Hinder or Facilitate Home-School Collaboration***

| <b><i>Assumptions that Hinder Collaboration</i></b>   | <b><i>Assumptions that Facilitate Collaboration</i></b>  |
|---|--|
| Parents who don’t attend school events don’t care about their children’s success in school.                     | Not all parents can come to school or feel comfortable about it; that doesn’t mean they don’t care.  |
| Parents who are illiterate, non-English speaking, or unemployed can’t help their children with school.          | All families have strengths and skills they can contribute to their children’s school success.   |
| Parents from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds don’t understand how to help their children with school. | Parents from different ethnic and racial groups may have alternative and important ways of supporting their children.                        |
| It’s up to parents to find out what is going on at school.  | Schools have a responsibility to reach out to all parents.   |
| Parent involvement is not worth educators’ effort.  | Parent involvement pays off in improved student achievement, improved school effectiveness, and increased parent and community satisfaction. |

## **Recognition of Family Strengths**

Parents are a child's "first and most influential" teachers and often their strongest advocates. Parents "teach, model and guide their children" <sup>14, p. 25</sup>. They are the "big picture" team members in their child's education. Many parents spend 365 days a year with their children and are the most knowledgeable about their history, interests, and abilities <sup>14, p. 26</sup>. Providing opportunities for parents to share information about their children can help families and educators avoid conflict and develop collaborative relationships that encourage the best educational opportunities for students.

*Aside from children's parents or guardians, classroom teachers are the "most significant adults" in children's lives. "When teachers strive to work collaboratively with their students' families in honoring and including students, results are astonishing"<sup>15</sup>.*

This sharing of information is especially important for the families of children with disabilities. These family members are an invaluable source of information, as they know the history and understand the nature of their children's disabilities. Children with disabilities may need special assistance and may have specific medical concerns, assistive technology needs, transportation needs, feeding issues, or behavioral/social concerns that need to be conveyed by their families to educators.

Although the American family has changed dramatically over the last half century, with increasing numbers of single-parent households, more varied family structures, increasing numbers of working mothers, less father involvement, more children living in poverty, and a rising number of homeless families <sup>16</sup>.

Whitaker and Fiore maintain that "parents are parents" – that today's parents are not significantly different from parents of 50 years ago. "Parents still want what is best for their children" <sup>17, p.5</sup>. Regardless of the challenges that families face, all have unique strengths worthy of recognition and respect <sup>16</sup>.

*"One thing I have learned will stay with me no matter where I go or where I teach: Never underestimate the power of a parent."*

Carla Becker, teacher, Norwalk, Iowa <sup>18</sup>

### ***"I'm poor, I'm single, I'm a mom, and I deserve respect."***

Mothers living in poverty face more complex challenges to becoming involved in their children's education than do middle-class mothers. "Mothers in poverty, lacking in one or more important resources such as academic skills, emotional well-being, positive ties in schools, a sense of entitlement to be involved in schools, flexible schedules, and money may find involvement extremely burdensome and psychologically taxing" <sup>19, p. 300-316</sup>. When they fail to live up to the expectations of schools for family involvement, mothers living in poverty often feel that they are viewed by the school as part of the problem instead of being welcomed as educational partners. Additionally, mothers who live in poverty indicate that in interactions with schools they often feel "de-skilled" by teachers treating them as if they lack knowledge of their children; "disappeared"

by being ignored and disregarded during conversations about their children; “infantilized” by teachers relating to them as if they are students; intimidated by the team approach and professional status of school staff scrutinizing their parenting; and marginalized by their roles in these interactions <sup>19, 20</sup>.

Bloom suggests that in addressing poverty-related issues schools should shift their focus from “poor mothers” to the social inequalities and stereotypes perpetuated by the schools’ typically middle-class approach to family involvement. “What needs to be made visible are not the failures of poor mothers,” she contends, “but the failure of the schools to support poor single mothers.” <sup>19</sup>

Beyond Welfare, a community-based, grassroots organization in central Iowa, has developed an advocacy program that assists mothers living in poverty with school-related issues. Volunteer advocates accompany mothers to school and help them “sort out what they are hearing, interrupt the interactions when they are demeaning or humiliating, and remind the staff of the mother’s presence and expert knowledge about her child” <sup>19</sup>.

### *Insights into Poverty*

Bowie Elementary Principal Ruby K. Payne, who has done extensive research on families living in poverty in Illinois, indicates that although poverty is normally thought of in terms of financial resources, these “do not explain the differences in the success with which individuals leave poverty nor the reasons that many stay in poverty. “The ability to leave poverty,” she says, “is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources” <sup>20, pp. 16-17</sup>. Each of these resources-- including financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules—“plays a vital role in the success of the individual.”

Payne concludes from her years of research in studying poverty that:

1. Poverty is relative.
2. Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries.
3. Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.
4. Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.
5. This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.
6. An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.
7. Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of the middle class.
8. For students to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school and at work.
9. We can neither excuse students nor scold them for not knowing; as educators we must teach them and provide support, consistence, and expectations.
10. To move from poverty to the middle class or from the middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time). <sup>20, pp. 10-11</sup>

## ***Additional Demands of Raising Children with Disabilities***

Families who are raising children with disabilities face daily stresses that far exceed those of families with non-disabled children. They must negotiate confusing and complicated human and educational service systems, shopping from place to place, piecing together a blend of services that will meet their child's needs. In the process, they may receive conflicting information, follow mistaken leads, contend with confusing eligibility criteria, and struggle through baffling application processes. The special education system, in which most children with disabilities are involved, is a complicated one. While families are considered members of the special education team, they frequently arrive on this team with little knowledge or preparation. Participating in the development of their child's educational program can be overwhelming and intimidating, especially in meetings, where a large group of professionals are speaking unfamiliar educational jargon.

In addition to the stress involved in negotiating the various service systems, families of children with disabilities face financial stresses above and beyond those faced by families of non-disabled children. The cost of raising children with disabilities is much higher than the cost of raising children without disabilities, with more money spent on medical care, therapies, equipment, transportation, childcare, and other needed services. Because there are fewer available after-school, social, recreational, and community programs that meet the needs of children with disabilities, families must spend more time locating these services. In cases where the services are not available, parents may need to take time off work or even quit their jobs to care for their children.

## ***Respecting Cultural Diversity***

"All families are embedded in a cultural context and in economic and social realities that shape their lifestyles, attitudes, and childrearing practices"<sup>22</sup>. Reaching out to and connecting with families of different cultural backgrounds "requires that educators develop an understanding of cultural differences, demonstrate respect for the differing values and behaviors of diverse families, and become aware of the unique communication styles of the various cultural groups that are represented in their programs"<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, educators working with culturally diverse families "need to move beyond stereotypes that may be grounded in their own limited frame of reference"<sup>24</sup> while they "move beyond cultural knowledge and develop an understanding of how each individual family expresses its culture"<sup>23</sup>.

*Culture encompasses everything around us; it is a part of every environment. Often we forget that children and youth bring their very own culture from home into school, and as a result they may struggle with trying to make it all fit. Successful learning depends greatly on everyone's ability to accept, listen, and embrace cultural diversity so that we can celebrate our unique strengths and contributions to our school community, one which is composed of families (parents and guardians), children and youth, educators, and administrators. Just imagine what can happen if we give ourselves the opportunity to learn from the contributions that our many cultures bring to the table.*

Lourdes Rivera-Putz  
Program Director, United We Stand in New York

Cross-cultural research indicates that there is “no universally successful way” to involve families. Even definitions of “involvement” vary in different cultures<sup>3, 25</sup>. In some cultures, schools and home are viewed as separate entities, and parents do not view questioning what teachers do at school as their role. In some culturally diverse families, older siblings—not parents—help younger ones by tutoring and helping with homework.

Many families arriving each year from other countries may be experiencing “cultural, social, and linguistic trauma”<sup>26, p. 43</sup>. These immigrants may have had little opportunity for formal education in their homelands and may not feel prepared to help their children at home or volunteer in schools<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, these parents may initially be unfamiliar with the American education system and may not be aware of the “social, cultural, and academic skills” required for success in American schools<sup>26, p. 43</sup>. In reaching out to culturally diverse families, educators who demonstrate “knowledge and understanding, sensitivity, and respect for cultural differences” can help bridge differences and develop positive relationships with these families<sup>26, p. 21</sup>.

*My son is not an empty glass coming into your class to be filled.  
He is a full basket coming into a different environment and society  
with something special to share. Please let him share his knowledge,  
heritage, and culture with you and his peers.*

Robert Lake (Medicine Grizzlybear)<sup>28</sup>

Schools are in a unique position of being capable of reversing the “present power structures in society” that often force minority-language families to adopt the culture of the majority if they want to participate in the education of their children or risk being “marginalized and silenced.” By discovering and building upon the cultural and linguistic strengths of these families, schools can empower families to decide what is best for their children and become involved in whatever ways they feel are appropriate<sup>29, p. 145</sup>.

*If we are going to find solutions to our challenges and grow as a human race, we need to  
VALUE diversity. For it will be most likely that the answers to our most stubborn  
questions will be found through the strength in our diversity and our ability to thrive in it.*

Dr. Candace White-Ciraco  
Coordinator, Research, Planning & Grants  
Eastern Suffolk BOCES, Holbrook, NY

### ***Key Practices of Schools Engaging Culturally Diverse Families***

Schools that have been successful in engaging culturally diverse families share three key practices. These schools:

- focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members;
- recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural difference;
- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared.<sup>30, p. 7</sup>

## What the Research Says

In *A New Generation of Evidence*, Henderson and Berla<sup>31</sup> state: “The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life”<sup>31, p. 1</sup>. Three decades of research have demonstrated that parent-family involvement is a “critical element of effective schooling”<sup>32</sup>. Family involvement significantly contributes to improved student outcomes. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities all derive benefits from family involvement, as illustrated in the following table.

| <b>Benefits of Better Parent/School Collaboration</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More positive attitudes toward school</li> <li>• Higher achievement, better attendance, and more homework completed consistently</li> <li>• Higher graduation rates and enrollment rates in postsecondary education</li> <li>• Better schools to attend</li> </ul>                                 | <p><b>Parents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater knowledge of education programs and how schools work</li> <li>• Knowledge of how to be more supportive of children</li> <li>• Greater confidence about ways to help children learn</li> <li>• More positive views of teachers</li> <li>• Greater empowerment</li> </ul>                             |
| <p><b>Teachers and Administrators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater teaching effectiveness</li> <li>• Higher expectations of students</li> <li>• Increased ability to understand family views and cultures</li> <li>• Greater appreciation of parent volunteers</li> <li>• Improved morale</li> <li>• Greater sense of community</li> </ul> | <p><b>Communities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater strength through collaboration with schools and parents</li> <li>• Greater impact of services through a comprehensive, integrated approach</li> <li>• Increased access to services for families</li> <li>• Greater sense of community</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">4, 3, 34, 35</p> |

In a bibliographical analysis of more than 60 research articles published during the past decade on the impact of family involvement on student outcomes, Carter<sup>1</sup> made 12 key findings:

1. Effective parent/family involvement improves student outcomes throughout the school years.
2. While parent/family involvement improves student outcomes, variations in culture, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic background affect how families are involved.
3. Parent/family involvement at home has more impact on children than parent/family involvement in school activities.
4. The nature of effective parent/family involvement changes as children reach adolescence.
5. Parent/family involvement in early childhood programs helps children succeed in their transition to kindergarten and elementary school.
6. Parents/families may need guidance and assistance in how to effectively support their children with homework.

7. The many ways that families of differing cultural/ethnic backgrounds are involved in their children's education are valuable and should be respected when planning parent/family involvement programs.
8. Improved student outcomes have been documented in mathematics and literacy when parents/families are involved.
9. The most promising opportunity for student achievement occurs when families, schools, and community organizations work together.
10. To be effective, school programs must be individualized to fit the needs of the students, parents, and community.
11. Effective programs assist parents in creating a home environment that fosters learning and provides support and encouragement for their children's success.
12. Teachers and administrators must be trained to promote effective parent/family involvement.

### ***Changing Perspectives***

For many years the prevailing view of many educators was that families had a very limited role to play at their children's schools:

- parents should come to school only when invited
- stay-at-home mothers served as "room mothers"
- parents visited school mainly for children's performances and open houses
- parents helped raise funds (e.g., bake sales to buy new band uniforms)

"The idea of parents coming in and out of school at any time was seen as intrusive and a challenge to teachers' professionalism" <sup>36, p. 86</sup>. Parents, too, often viewed education professionals as adversaries. Teachers and parents moved in "separate spheres of influence" based upon their individual responsibilities and respective views (parents' focus on "my child" versus educators' responsibility for considering the needs of all students, including individual ones) <sup>3, p. 86</sup>. Under this paradigm, educators asked: "What can parents, community members, and organizations do for us?" <sup>3, p. 25</sup>.

*Parents' focus on "my child" and educators' focus on "all children" must be extended and reconceptualized to a community concern and commitment for educating all children as "our children."* <sup>3, p. 289</sup>

Epstein <sup>37</sup> challenged this separatism by creating a model of "overlapping spheres of influence" on children's learning that includes family, school, and community. The more compatible these spheres are, the more effective families, schools, and communities are in sharing the responsibility of educating children.

*The way in which schools care about children is reflected in the way they care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and*



*responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.* <sup>37, p. 403</sup>

Schools that have been the most successful in involving families “look beyond traditional definitions to a broader conception of parents as full partners in the education of their children.” These schools view children’s learning as a “shared responsibility” among stakeholders, including parents, who play important roles in this endeavor <sup>38</sup>. Educators at these schools ask, “What can all of us together do to educate all children well?” <sup>3, p. 126</sup>.

*“Schools must recognize that parent involvement activities are not just opportunities for schools to transmit knowledge to parents, but for parents to educate teachers and administrators as well.”* <sup>39</sup>

### ***Schools as Extended Family***

When children begin their educational careers, the school becomes an “extension of the family”: “If learning is to occur, the trust relationship developed between a parent and child during the first years of life must be transferred to school staff” <sup>40, p. 27</sup>. In order to build a trusting relationship, families need to convey to children that teachers play a “special role” in their lives similar to that of extended family members. In turn, teachers must earn this trust as extended family members in the relationships they build with children and their families.

Studies of resilience have underscored the importance of a “consistently supportive person” in the life of a child <sup>41</sup>. While ideally this should be a parent, if necessary, it can also be another family member, a friend, a neighbor, or a teacher. This individual is one who “unflinchingly communicates the conviction that this child can and will beat the odds. Often this person also serves as a resilient role model” <sup>41</sup>. In addition to offering emotional support, teachers can also nurture resilience by helping students build networks of caring adults who will serve as a positive force in their lives, encouraging activities that will help students develop caring relationships with peers, and teaching students social skills.

### ***A Growing Movement***

In 1994 the United States Department of Education created the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE) to promote children’s learning. The partnership is a “broad-based coalition of thousands of schools, families, employers, government and the community that have joined together to address intersecting concerns” <sup>42</sup>. The Department of Education supports PFIE partners around the country, providing resources, making connections, sharing best practices, and keeping partners current on educational issues and current trends <sup>42</sup>.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals, also reaffirmed the value of family involvement in its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs <sup>43</sup>. Other organizations, networks, and initiatives involving family-school-community partnerships continue to grow: the National Network of Partnership Schools, the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPPIE), and the Coalition for Community Schools. In 2001, three states—Indiana, Michigan, and Nevada—all passed legislation designed to increase parent involvement in schools <sup>44</sup>.

The federal government acknowledged the significance of family involvement in Goal 8 of the Goals 2000 legislation: “Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children”<sup>45</sup>. Reflecting this goal, Title I regulations “include mandates for family-school connections for states, districts, and schools to obtain and keep federal funds”<sup>46</sup>.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorized in 2002 as the *No Child Left Behind Act* also includes provisions for family involvement, including requirements that::

- school report cards be provided to parents of migrant students in the language of the parent, where feasible;
- school districts receiving Title I, Part A funding develop and distribute to parents a written parent involvement policy that establishes expectations for parent involvement;
- schools receiving Title I, Part A funding seek the assistance of parents, educators, and administrators in valuing the contribution of parents, determining how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implementing and coordinating parent programs, and building ties between parents and schools;
- schools receiving Title I, Part A funding convene an annual meeting to provide parents with timely information about programs, a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet;
- schools receiving Title I, Part A funding develop a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will develop a partnership to help children achieve the state’s high standards;
- schoolwide reform plans include parental involvement and partnerships with parents and communities; and
- schools include parents in the planning of professional development activities and activities associated with other federally funded programs<sup>47, 48</sup>.

The law also “establishes school-linked or school-based parental information and resource centers that provide training, information, and support to parents, and to individuals and organizations that work with parents, to implement parental involvement strategies that lead to improvements in student academic achievement”<sup>48</sup>. Other federal, state, and local policies also mandate and/or encourage partnership activities. California was the first state to pass a law in 1990 to require local school boards to develop family involvement policies. California was the first state to pass a law in 1990 that requires local school boards to develop family involvement policies. Following passage of the 1990 law, the state passed the Family School Partnership Act in 1994 that requires that parents, grandparents, and guardians be allowed to spend 40 hours during the school year participating in school and licensed child care center activities<sup>49</sup>

Parent advocacy for educational rights for their children resulted in the passage of PL 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) in 1975. The percentage of students in public schools receiving special education services has risen steadily since then<sup>50</sup>. Successive reauthorizations and amendments to this initial legislation have involved teachers and families working together to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorized in 1997 provides an even stronger mandate for parent involvement than any preceding special education legislation<sup>15</sup>. The law requires that parents of children receiving special education services must actively participate in the design of individualized education programs (IEPs) for their child.

While family involvement has clearly reached a “new level of acceptance” today as one of many factors that can help improve the quality of schools, “acceptance does not always translate into implementation, commitment, or creativity”<sup>51, p. 34</sup>. In the 15,000 school districts and more than 88,000 schools across the country, much remains to be done. According to Henderson and Raimondo<sup>52</sup>, parent involvement is “truly the most untapped resource that we have.”

### ***Barriers to Family Involvement***

Most of the time it is not lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved in their children’s education<sup>53</sup> but challenges such as poverty, single parenting, language/literacy barriers, and cultural and socioeconomic isolation that hinder involvement. A number of other barriers can prevent families from being involved in their children’s education. These barriers may originate in the home environment or may be related to school policies and practices:

- School environments that do not support parent/family involvement
- School practices that do not accommodate diverse family needs
- Child care constraints, especially for families with children with disabilities
- Families’ past negative experiences with schools and/or feelings of uncertainty about “treading on school ‘territory’”
- Families’, particularly those who live in poverty, past interactions with schools that have marginalized their contributions
- Cultural differences (language barriers, attitudes toward professionals, lack of knowledge about the American education system, etc.)
- Primacy of basic needs (food, clothing and shelter take precedence over educational needs)
- Feelings of inadequacy associated with differences in income or education
- Time constraints Intimidating size of the school
- Safety, especially in inner-city school neighborhoods
- Uncertainty about how to contribute
- Uncertainty about how the system works<sup>8, 11, 15, 17, 19, 54, 56, 57, 56</sup>

A 1992 National PTA survey of 27,000 local and unit presidents in the organization indicated that lack of time was by far (89% of respondents) the greatest barrier to family involvement in schools<sup>8</sup>. Caplan includes an instrument, “Challenges to Family Involvement Program”, that can be used to assess barriers to family involvement and plan strategies to address them.<sup>13, p. 27</sup>

*Families know their children the best and should be respected for that knowledge. Schools have a lot of knowledge about children, but they are not in the relationship for a lifetime. When schools understand and respect what families bring to the table then partnerships can grow.*

Susie Nettleton  
Finger Lakes Regional Coordinator,  
Parent to Parent of New York State

### ***Making Time for Family Involvement***

While families may be more diverse than ever before, they share the common trait that they are *all* busy. Our often-hectic pace of life and numerous responsibilities seem to leave little time in the day for “one more thing.” Families who have children with disabilities are often even busier

because of the special, more time-consuming needs of their children. In addition to these often overwhelming responsibilities, these families also need to understand the complex laws and legal issues that impact children in special education and their families <sup>59</sup>.

The majority of mothers and fathers now work outside of the home to support their families, and many of these parents are raising children by themselves. Their hectic daily lives do not allow large blocks of time to be devoted to “family involvement” activities. In addition, some mothers and fathers are caring for aging parents at the same time that they are raising children, so their time and attention are divided.

Similarly, teachers and administrators are busy people with multiple responsibilities. Family involvement may not be a priority among the many issues that compete for their attention each day. Scarce school resources, in terms of time, personnel, and funds, may make the adoption of any new initiatives seem unreasonable. There may also be provisions in union contracts and collective bargaining agreements that limit the amount of time that educators can devote to family involvement activities. Tight budgets—a reality in most schools—may not support additional activities to encourage more family involvement.

However, for families as well as educators, family involvement need not be a supplemental activity—*one more thing* they have to do each day. Working together with strong administrative support, families, schools, and communities can find effective ways to integrate the most promising strategies into their daily routines so that they mesh with other school improvement initiatives. In this way, family involvement can be viewed by both parents and educators as a valuable and necessary part of what is done each day to help encourage all children to learn.

## ***Guiding Principles***

This sourcebook is based on these 13 “guiding principles” for family involvement in education:

1. Family members are equal partners in a child’s education and know their child best.
2. Schools “need families to help them help our children” <sup>60</sup>.
3. Efforts must be made to develop “trusting and respectful relationships” and to share power with families <sup>30, p. 8</sup>.
4. The home environment is the “primary educational environment” <sup>32</sup>.
5. Schools must respect the diversity of families and their varied needs.
6. All families care about their children and, “regardless of their income, education, or cultural background, are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well” <sup>30, p. 8</sup>.
7. Family involvement remains important through all the years of a child’s education.
8. Family involvement takes many forms and may not require a family’s physical presence at school.
9. Families, schools, and communities are closely interconnected, and the responsibility for children’s educational development is a shared one.
10. Educators and parents each have strengths and weaknesses.
11. School leaders and staff need support/training to encourage family involvement.
12. “One size does not fit all” when developing school-family partnerships.
13. “Change takes time,” and building a successful partnership requires “continued effort over time” <sup>8</sup>.

## Getting Started

The many practices in this sourcebook are intended to serve as jumping-off places for schools that are at different stages in building effective family involvement programs. While some of the strategies included here require significant resources, others may be adopted with a minimal outlay of resources. What works in one district may not work in another; all schools, with the input of families and community members, must decide which practices to adopt—or adapt—to meet their particular needs.

*Building a strong, caring community takes time and commitment. Everyone must be included, valued, and respected — even when people disagree. Yet bound by a common purpose — the creation of a community home for all children — people working together can make a difference.* <sup>3, p. 283</sup>

The first step in getting started is to reach out to families and share the research-based outcomes that document the benefits of family involvement in children’s education. This information should be accompanied by the message that schools *need* families to help in the educating of all children, that parent voices are valued in the school, and that families can be involved in the education of their children in many ways <sup>60</sup>. This information will be most effective if communicated at the start of the school year and reinforced throughout the school year through a variety of reminders in newsletters, family fact sheets, school calendars, web site messages, phone messages, workshop sessions, etc., to reach families in as many ways as possible.

Schools should involve family and community members in all phases of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of family involvement strategies. A variety of self-assessment instruments are available that can be used to evaluate a school’s current family involvement practices and help guide the planning of strategies to build on the program. These are listed in the **Evaluation** section on of this document. Data generated by this assessment phase need to be analyzed to determine the current status of family involvement activity in the school or district and the most appropriate next steps to take. Educators, family members, and community representatives should also consider how any proposed family involvement strategies relate with other ongoing school initiatives to insure that these initiatives complement one another.

Epstein <sup>46</sup> recommends a team approach to developing effective school-family-community partnerships, including the following steps:

1. *Create an action team with diverse membership*  
An action team with diverse membership, including school, community, and family members, ensures that various needs and interests are represented. This team takes responsibility for planning, implementing, coordinating, and overseeing action; monitoring progress; solving problems; presenting reports; and designing new directions for building positive connections with families and communities. The team works with other educators, family members, and community organizations to carry out its responsibilities.
2. *Obtain funds and other support*  
The action team will need a modest budget, sufficient time, and social support to do its work. Federal, state, and local sources can be explored to support family involvement programs and the staff needed to coordinate selected activities.

3. *Identify starting points*

The action team needs to determine starting points for improving family involvement. This may be accomplished through informal means (focus group sessions, telephone interviews, etc.) or more formal questionnaires that solicit ideas from teachers, administrators, family members, and students. Regardless of the methodology used, the information gathered should indicate the school's present strengths, needed changes, expectations, sense of community, and links to goals.

4. *Develop a three-year outline and one-year action plan*

Based upon the ideas gathered from the identification of starting points, the action team can develop a long-term, three-year plan that includes specific steps to reach the vision of where the school wants to be in three years with its school-family-community involvement program. Additionally, a detailed one-year action plan should outline the first year's work, including specific activities to be "implemented, improved, or maintained"; a timeline of monthly actions; identification of individuals responsible for and assisting with activities; indicators of how the success of the activities will be evaluated, and other important details. The three-year outline and one-year plan should be shared with educators, families, students, and the community.

5. *Continue planning and working*

Each year the action team updates the three-year outline and develops a new one-year action plan. The team also needs to keep educators, families, students, and the community "aware of annual progress, new plans, and how they can help." <sup>46, pp. 416-20, 577</sup>

Some of the questions the action team must ask in order to develop and strengthen its partnership programs from year to year include:

- What are the school's present school-family-community practices? What do individual teachers do and what does the school do to involve families and communities?
- What are the school's goals for improving student success?
- How do we envision the school's program of school-family-community involvement three years from now?
- What current practices should be maintained or improved?
- What new practices should be added to increase involvement, reach more families, and reach student and school goals?
- How is the school progressing? What indicators will be used to measure quality of partnership and progress toward goals? How should activities be evaluated to determine their effectiveness?
- How will assessments and evaluations be used to help develop the next one-year action plan? <sup>46, p. 579</sup>

## **Family Involvement Strategies**

*This guidebook includes more than 80 promising practices that have been implemented effectively by schools to encourage family involvement in education. These practices have been organized into the following eight “cluster strategies,” each of which is described more fully in corresponding sections of the sourcebook:*

### **Strategy 1: Creating a family-friendly school environment**

- Host family-friendly social events
- Develop a family/school/community partnership policy
- Establish policies that recognize the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the school community
- Create an “open-door” policy and a responsive climate for parents
- Provide translations of printed materials in all languages spoken in the school and/or hire minority language teachers
- Provide interpreters for all languages spoken in the school
- Provide flexible options for routine tasks that accommodate family needs
- Consider varied family needs when scheduling events
- Coordinate school tours and orientations for new families
- Offer child care, transportation, and refreshments to encourage family involvement
- Foster “total teacher commitment” to family involvement among school faculty
- Maintain a parent-friendly office
- Hire a family coordinator/liaison
- Post welcome signs in all languages spoken in the school
- Post user-friendly school maps
- Reserve parking places for family visitors
- Create classroom/school environments that reflect the school’s diversity
- Maintain a welcoming bulletin board
- Create a welcoming booklet and/or videotape for new families
- Link new families with mentors
- Adopt “father-friendly” practices

### **Strategy 2: Building a support infrastructure**

- Create a family center
- Hire a family coordinator/liaison
- Provide administrative support for family involvement activities
- Devote staff time to family involvement activities
- Commit resources to family involvement activities

### **Strategy 3: Encouraging family involvement**

- Hire a family coordinator/liaison to coordinate volunteer program
- Take an inventory of family involvement
- Involve parents in planning, implementing, and evaluating family involvement activities
- Survey family and community members for prospective volunteers
- Identify barriers to family involvement
- Help volunteers feel welcome
- Show appreciation for volunteers
- Invite family involvement with a family-friendly letter
- Host a “You Can Make a Difference” orientation to volunteer activities
- Match volunteers with meaningful activities
- Announce volunteer opportunities throughout the school year
- Acknowledge the many different ways families can be involved
- Create culturally appropriate volunteer opportunities
- Host an orientation program to prepare volunteers
- Develop a screening process for potential volunteers
- Provide Volunteer information packets
- Develop a volunteer database and directory
- Encourage local businesses to support family involvement
- Establish a process for evaluating the volunteer system
- Involve parents in decision-making roles

#### **Strategy 4: Developing family-friendly communication**

- Host neighborhood meetings
- Organize neighborhood walks
- Hold family focus groups
- Make home visits
- Host informal principal meetings
- Make positive “warm” telephone calls
- Exchange home/school communication
- Host conferences
- Communicate via newsletters
- Use a variety of technology tools
- Make audiotapes of written materials for families with emerging literacy
- Translate all written information into families’ native languages
- Develop a process for resolving family concerns

#### **Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront**

- Develop programs that involve homefront activities
- Provide guidance on developmentally appropriate practices
- Provide guidance on student learning
- Involve parents in action research projects
- Involve parents in behavioral assessments
- Provide homework assistance

#### **Strategy 6: Supporting educational opportunities for families**

- Conduct assessments of educational needs of families
- Involve diverse parent and community members in planning
- Make home visits
- Offer parent workshops
- Offer opportunities for parents and children to learn together
- Offer opportunities for parents to develop leadership skills
- Organize family support groups
- Develop teen parenting programs

#### **Strategy 7: Creating family-school-community partnerships**

- Bring together families, schools, and community organizations for mutual benefit
- Develop comprehensive, wraparound services for families
- Develop schools as community learning centers
- Develop full-service schools
- Cultivate school-business partnerships

#### **Strategy 8: Preparing educators to work with families**

- Provide ongoing professional development
- Provide opportunities for staff, families, and community members to learn together
- Embed family involvement in preservice education programs
- Include family involvement in educational policy
- Make encouraging family involvement an expectation of new faculty and staff members
- Include parents as teachers and faculty members
- Include parental perspectives in planning and implementing professional development opportunities



### **Matrix of Activities**

This cross-topical matrix may be used as a guide for locating information on specific topics related to family involvement within the eight “cluster strategies.” For instance, the matrix indicates that information on family involvement for students with disabilities is located in each of the eight cluster strategies; information on home-based strategies may be found in Strategies 4, 5, and 6.

| Topics                                 | Strategy 1 | Strategy 2 | Strategy 3 | Strategy 4 | Strategy 5 | Strategy 6 | Strategy 7 | Strategy 8 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| School-based strategies                |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Home-based strategies                  |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Preschool children                     |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Elementary students                    |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Middle school students                 |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| High school students                   |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Students with disabilities             |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Students at risk                       |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Homework                               |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Cultural diversity                     |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Family-friendly schools                |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Family centers                         |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Infrastructure support                 |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Volunteers                             |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Communication                          |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Parent education                       |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Parent-child activities                |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Parent support groups                  |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Parent leadership                      |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Pre-service education                  |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Professional development               |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| School-business-community partnerships |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Schools as community learning centers  |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |
| Mental health                          |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |            |

## ***Strategy 1: Creating a family-friendly school environment***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Establish a stakeholder group of parents and school staff to guide family-friendly development and activities
- ✓ Assess the diversity of families in your school, including diversity in race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, home language, and disability, and create a school environment that is friendly to all families
- ✓ Create a family-friendly policy or mission for the school
- ✓ Create a school environment that is welcoming to families
- ✓ Plan regular events to bring families and school staff together for positive interaction in support of learning

### ***International Festival and "Taste of School 45"***

Buffalo Public School #45, renamed The International School in 2002, serves approximately 1,000 students in grades pre-K-8 who speak 29 different languages. In April of 2003 the school will collaborate with families and the community to host the school's 11th International Festival. During the festival students take the approximately 600 families and community members who attend the annual event on a "colorful journey around the world by performing cultural songs and dances" <sup>61</sup>.

Planning for the annual event begins early in the school year, according to Principal Colleen Carota, and involves parents volunteering in many. Parents representative of the cultures in the school are recruited to help students develop performances from their native countries. Parents also help coordinate and prepare food for the "Taste of School 45" held the same evening in the school's cafeteria, where students and families sample treats from around the world such as Somalian sweet bread and Polish Kielbasa.

"The International School has always been a splendid example of how to bring together people from varying cultures around a common goal: providing the best education possible for their children," said Buffalo Superintendent Marion Canedo. "It is always very gratifying to see the many different costumes, foods, languages, and traditions represented. It brings children and families together to celebrate their own culture and to learn about others. It is a unique experience and a wonderful learning opportunity for students, teachers, and families alike."

Planning social events that bring together school faculty and staff with families in informal gatherings is one effective way to create a family-friendly school environment. Informal gatherings help educators to "make connections and build relationships" with families <sup>62</sup>. Feeling welcome at school at events such as these can help encourage families to become more involved in activities to enhance their children's learning.

Schools can try a variety of strategies to build a bridge connecting the faculty and staff with families. The message these strategies convey to parents should be: "You are welcome, you are important to us, and we want to work with you to educate your children" <sup>62, p. 62</sup>.

### ***Family-friendly Schools***

Henderson, Marburger, and Oom <sup>11</sup> define "family-friendly" schools as those that "create a climate in which every aspect of the school is open and helpful." Family-friendly schools strive to forge partnerships with *all* families, not just those that are most involved. Unfortunately, the opposite can also happen: school culture can marginalize families by creating an environment that discourages involvement <sup>63</sup>.

### *Family-friendly Social Events*

- Meet-the-teacher events (morning and evening sessions to accommodate parents' schedules)
- Ice cream social
- Domino tournaments
- Dads' Day breakfast
- Kids' Turn to Teach Day
- Faculty/family sports and games
- Grandparents' Day

### **"Fortress" Schools**

"Fortress" schools are those that do not welcome or provide outreach to families; they have inconvenient hours, unfriendly staff members, and an unwelcoming atmosphere that inhibit home-school communication and family involvement<sup>64</sup>. Additionally, if the first time parents hear from a school is when there is a problem, this "lends a negative association to school involvement" and may be discouraging to parents<sup>65</sup>. Creating a family-friendly school environment means taking a close look at the building, atmosphere, policies, and activities of the school, and, with parental feedback, making sure all of these aspects are conducive to family involvement.

*Schools must become places where families feel wanted and recognized for their strengths and potential.*<sup>55</sup>

### **Middle School Family Involvement**

Family involvement often begins to decline when students reach the middle school years. Families interviewed for Giannetti and Sagarese's *The Roller-Coaster Years* indicated they felt welcomed in their children's elementary schools but felt less welcome and even "left out" once their children reached middle school<sup>66, p. 40</sup>.

Successful middle and secondary schools recognize that "both the expectations and means of family involvement" at those levels are very different from what they were during the elementary school years<sup>67</sup>. Giannetti and Sagarese<sup>68, p. 40</sup> offer ten strategies to encourage family involvement at the middle school level:

1. Dust off and roll out the welcome mat.
2. Advertise your expertise.
3. Implement an early-warning system.
4. Show parents a familiar, positive portrait of their child.
5. Convey shared values.
6. Reassure parents that their child will be protected in your care.
7. Demonstrate your inside scoop (educators may have knowledge about middle school students that parents don't have).
8. Empathize with parents about the tough job they have.
9. Be an effective and fair disciplinarian.
10. Be a consistent role model.

### ***Building Middle School Connections***

Urbana Middle School in Urbana, IL, with a student enrollment of 1,100, has implemented a number of strategies for involving middle school families. Among them are:

- Creating a welcoming environment, including a "Community Center" (<http://www.cmi.k12.il.us/Urbana/ums/community/family.htm>)
- Facilitating a "continuum of involvement" for family participation
- Encouraging parents to talk about school-related activities with their children
- Maintaining effective communication with families (phone calls, notes home, etc.)
- Maintaining a homework hotline and school information hotline
- Hosting three-way conferencing, including parents, teachers, and students
- Encouraging parents to become classroom volunteers and organizing the volunteer effort

Community Connections coordinator Barbara Linder indicates that ten years ago there was the perception that parents were not welcome in Urbana Middle School. But once the formal parent involvement activities began and parents and teachers saw the positive benefits, participation gradually grew, and success began to "breed success." Continuing challenges for the middle school include finding the time required for teachers to build relationships with parents and involving families of at-risk students, who do not always feel welcome in school settings <sup>67</sup>.

### ***Building Family-friendly Atmospheres***

Practices for creating a family-friendly atmosphere in schools include:

#### Family-friendly policies:

1. Developing and publicly posting a family-school-community partnership policy that provides the philosophical framework for all family-school-community activities.
2. Establishing policies and practices that "acknowledge traditional and nontraditional families" <sup>69</sup> and recognize the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the school community <sup>70</sup>.
3. Creating an open-door policy and climate in the school that is responsive to parents and their concerns.
4. Providing translations of printed material and making available translators for all languages spoken in the school, including sign language for hearing-impaired families.
5. Arranging for flexibility in routine tasks such as registration and orientation (on-line options, telephone options, day and evening hours, etc.) to accommodate different family needs.
6. Considering varied family needs and preferences when scheduling meetings and school events; and offering child care, transportation, and refreshments for participating families.
7. Creating an atmosphere that says, "*We respect everyone. We understand and will try to accommodate your unique needs and concern.*" <sup>65, p. 60</sup>.
8. Recognizing the special time constraints on families who have children with disabilities or who are caring for aging parents.
9. Recognizing and welcoming same-gender parents/guardians/partners.

### Family-friendly faculty and staff:

1. Fostering “total teacher commitment” among administrators and teachers who believe in the value of and are experienced in family involvement, and who demonstrate respect for families and their primary role in raising children <sup>70, 71</sup>.
2. Maintaining a school office that is inviting and welcoming to visitors.
3. Maintaining a staff of school employees who are friendly and responsive to families and who reflect a “sense of family” in their “actions, beliefs, and language” <sup>72, p. 31</sup>.

*School staff who are successful in engaging family members share the following qualities:*

- They know they must have the support of parents.
- In every interaction, they demonstrate their concern for the child.
- They always treat parents the way they would like to be treated.
- They always demonstrate professionalism and confidence. <sup>73</sup>

4. Developing the school as a “culturally competent system” staffed by individuals “whose behaviors, attitudes, and policies recognize, respect, and value the uniqueness of individuals and groups whose cultures are different from those associated with mainstream American culture” <sup>74</sup>.
5. Hiring a family coordinator/liaison (voluntary or paid) responsible for connecting families and educators. (See Strategy 2: Building a Support Infrastructure)
6. Hiring language and/or culture teachers who can help bridge different languages and cultures and support families of varied backgrounds.

### Family-friendly environment:

1. Posting welcome signs in all the languages spoken in the school:

***Visitors are Welcome at Our School!***

We are proud of our school and the overall learning process at Mountainview. We encourage parents to visit the building and to observe your child's classroom, browse through our media center or just talk to the principal about your ideas for improving our school. We request only that prior notice be given and that visitors check in at the office upon arrival.

--School Policy Statement, Mountainview Elementary School,  
Morantown WV

2. Creating a classroom/school environment (pictures, books, resources, etc.) that reflects the diversity of families included in the school.
3. Maintaining a welcoming bulletin board that includes visitor information, announcements, news articles, and photographs of recent school events.
4. Creating and posting user-friendly school maps in several places throughout the school building.
5. Reserving several parking places for family visitors near the front door.
6. Providing disability access to buildings and parking areas.
7. Creating a family center where parent involvement activities are coordinated.  
(See **Strategy 2: Building a Support Infrastructure**)

Ways to welcome new families:

1. Creating a welcoming booklet and/or videotape that provide helpful information to families about school policies, personnel, assistance, resources, and volunteer opportunities.

***Welcome Folders***

The Rush Henrietta Central School District in West Henrietta, NY, provides each new family to the district with a "Welcome Folder." The folder is full of helpful brochures and handouts describing the school district, its programs, and various community services, as well as educational and recreational opportunities for both children and their family members.

2. Coordinating school tours and orientation sessions for new families.
3. Linking new families with volunteer mentors who have children who are similar in age, cultural background, disabling condition, etc. to provide information, guidance, and support.

60, 62, 75, 71, 14, 76, 4

***How Father-Friendly is Your School Environment?***

1. Do faculty and staff welcome and value father involvement?
2. Do faculty and staff welcome the involvement of gay fathers and caregivers?
3. Do faculty and staff members greet fathers as they drop off and pick up their children?
4. Do school forms include a space where a "significant male" can be listed?
5. Are opportunities for involvement provided that will be of interest of fathers, grandfathers, and uncles?
6. Are activities planned to show fathers that they are an important part of the program and their children's lives?
7. Do school posters and brochures show images of fathers as well as mothers?
8. Does program literature include references to both fathers and mothers, "he" as well as "she"?
9. Are program hours flexible so working fathers and mothers can participate?
10. Are suggestions for involvement solicited from fathers?
11. Are report cards sent to both parents to keep non-residential fathers informed?
12. Are male outreach workers a part of the school staff?
13. Are male tutors and mentors recruited in the school?
14. Are opportunities provided that will help fathers enhance their parenting skills through education and modeling?
15. Are opportunities provided to help fathers build more positive self-respect and self-esteem so that they will be empowered and feel they have something to offer their children?
16. Are professional development opportunities offered to the faculty and staff on father involvement?
17. Does the school have policies and guidelines related to working with families that include fathers?
18. Are mothers invited to play a role in recruitment and support for male involvement?
19. Are opportunities provided for father-to-father support?
20. Do school programs promote the idea of "cooperative parenting," whether parents live together or separately?<sup>77, 78</sup>

## **Strategy 2: *Building a support infrastructure***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Commit resources to family-friendly system development
- ✓ Hire a family coordinator/liaison with a clear role and responsibilities
- ✓ Create a family center in your school – a place for activities and resources that support the family role in child development and education
- ✓ Plan for and commit resources to development of a family-friendly staff



Encouraging family involvement in schools requires the creation of an infrastructure to support these efforts. This infrastructure typically includes developing a family center, hiring a family coordinator, and insuring ongoing resource commitments to maintain and/or expand family involvement activities.

### **Family centers**

*The Family Center is both a place and a program.*

--Rush-Henrietta Family Center, West Henrietta, NY

#### ***Howard Lewis Parent Center***

The Buffalo Public Schools' Howard Lewis Parent Center in Buffalo, NY, was the first parent center in New York and one of the first in the country. Begun in 1989, the center now offers services and activities for more than 44,000 students and their families, according to Supervisor Bonnie Nelson. The center is housed in downtown Buffalo in the Buffalo Urban League Building. It has a staff of 22, including 7 specialists in adult and early childhood education, a full-time teacher who teaches computer skills, and teachers from the public school system who serve as mathematics, reading, and language specialists.

The center includes two computer labs with more than 50 computer work stations and a discovery room where a number of hands-on learning activities are offered. Additionally, the center has 60 portable computers that may be loaned to families to work together at home with their children.

Except for adult education classes and Title I sessions, all learning activities at the center are planned for parents and children to participate in together through the use of college tutors, computers, and family literacy activities. Core academic and other classes in areas such as art, health, exercise, sewing, and music are provided.

Transportation to the center is provided for parents through the district's school bus system. Buffalo Public School teachers may also schedule classroom visits to the center. The Parent Center is open year-round, except for school holidays, from 8 a.m.-7:30 p.m., and 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. during the summer. In addition to this center, each school building in the district includes a parent room or parent area where families can meet or complete volunteer projects.

Creating family centers in school buildings and school districts is one significant way in which schools can involve families in the education of their children. Offering families a special "place of their own" in schools recognizes the "overlapping spheres of influence" that both teachers and parents share in children's learning<sup>75, 79</sup>. Establishing family centers sends families a "very positive message" that they are valued as partners, belong in the school, and should feel welcome there<sup>62, 80</sup>.

"A well-designed parent center can help a school's learning environment in numerous ways"<sup>81</sup>. Family centers are "accessible, safe, and friendly" places for parents to gather to share a cup of

coffee and talk with other parents or teachers in a casual setting<sup>79</sup>. These centers also serve as the “hub of information” for parents and as a primary “link” to community resources<sup>82</sup>. Family centers are places where families can go for training, support, resources, services and even, in some centers, food, clothing, and shelter<sup>62, p. 142</sup>. The success of family centers “hinges on ownership”<sup>81</sup>. “Parents, especially those who have not felt comfortable in school, need to feel the center belongs to them.” Family centers that welcome all family members, including children of all ages, grandparents, and other family members, display respect for “the family as a unit,” which is especially important to families with a “collectivistic value orientation”<sup>25, p. 43</sup>.

***Mission Statement***  
***Rochester Parent Action Center***  
***Rochester City School District, Rochester, NY***

The mission of the Parent Action Center is to empower parents to be advocates for their children and to provide parents with information, guidance, and support. This will be achieved by providing the highest standards of customer service in a parent-friendly neighborhood center.

The Parent Action Center is committed to encouraging parents to make informed choices and be full partners in their child's education.

The New City Elementary School in New City, NY, maintains a building-level family resource center open Monday and Friday mornings 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. The purpose of the center is to make families feel welcome in the school environment by encouraging parental involvement, inviting parents to “meet and network,” communicating with and informing parents, and helping parents “develop a greater sense of community,” and to provide parent workshops and “family-oriented” services<sup>83</sup>. Services offered to parents visiting the center include:

- Parenting workshops
- Discussion groups
- Parent resource library
- Story hours
- Family crafting workshops
- After-school enrichment
- Early risers club
- Child care for parent/teacher conferences
- Kindergarten registration
- Chess club

### ***Planning Family Centers***

Location: Family centers “come in all shapes and sizes”<sup>62, p. 143</sup>. They may be as small as a corner of the school library that houses parenting resources and as large as several rooms with multiple purposes. Many centers begin small and then expand as more resources become available<sup>62</sup>. Although most family centers serve individual schools, some larger centers serve entire districts. Some districts such as the Syracuse School District have created mobile centers that make resources more accessible to families.

Funding: Funding is a major challenge for family centers. Most centers are funded through some combination of donations, often from business partners, community agencies, school funds, Title I funds, and fund-raising activities in support of the center. A family center does not

need a large budget in the beginning. “What is more important is a firm commitment to the idea and a willingness to explore all possible sources of support” <sup>81</sup>.

Staffing is the primary expenditure of centers, followed by resources. Business and community donations such as books, supplies, food, and equipment (refrigerators, computers, photocopy machines, etc.), as well as volunteer time from family and community members can all support the development and maintenance of family centers.

Staffing: “The center staff, whether volunteer or paid, will be the heartbeat of your family center” (81). A family center can be staffed by paid employees or volunteers, or a combination, although a full-time, paid coordinator is an asset because the position is a demanding one that requires <sup>79, p. 92</sup>. Title I funds may be used to pay the salaries of center employees, including a coordinator. Ideally, parent center coordinators should be drawn from among the families whose children attend the school.

Autonomy: Administrative support for family centers is essential, although centers need an identity of their own. Policies regarding independence and confidentiality need to be developed with parental collaboration from the beginning. Issues related to the respective roles of the administration and the family center, confidentiality, information sharing, and resolution of family-related problems need to be addressed <sup>84</sup>.

Activities: The programs and services provided by family centers vary considerably from school to school. Both the scope of services to be offered and how they will be delivered need to be determined. A wide range of activities, services, and resources may be coordinated in family centers. These include:

- books, videos, and computers that parents can take home to use with their children
- a lending library of print and non-print parenting resources, such as:
  - books
  - videotapes
  - educational games
  - software
  - activity kits
- educational toys and books for visiting preschool children
- information resources, including school and community resources and services, volunteer opportunities, employment opportunities, transportation, immigration child-care services
- after-school and evening tutoring programs
- parent classes and support groups
- parent-child informal education activities
- crisis intervention/family counseling, auxiliary support services such as food and clothing banks, health screenings, housing assistance, legal aid, job counseling, and transportation assistance<sup>61, 62, 85, 69, 75, 71, 14</sup>

Autonomy: Administrative support for family centers is essential, although centers need an identity of their own. Policies regarding independence and confidentiality need to be developed with parental collaboration from the beginning. Issues related to the respective roles of the administration and the family center, confidentiality, information sharing, and resolution of family-related problems need to be addressed <sup>84</sup>.

Evaluation: Evaluation of family centers should be an ongoing process focused on continual development and improvement. Types of data that may be collected and analyzed include:

- number of participants using the center
- number of parents enrolled in classes offered at the center
- number of volunteers

- number of parent contacts made through the center
- number of requests for services
- number of referrals to the center made by school staff members and community organizations
- evaluations of center activities and programs
- interviews with family and community members
- oral and written comments from participants, school staff members, and the community<sup>86</sup>

The Rochester Action Center requests that parents fill out an “exit survey,” which ensures continual feedback on center services and issues of concern to Rochester City School District<sup>87</sup>.

### ***Family coordinator/liaison***

The family coordinator/liaison plays a vital role in coordinating family involvement activities for the school. The coordinator’s salary in many schools is paid through Title I funding. The coordinator’s responsibilities may include:

- planning and coordinating outreach activities to families
- recruiting, screening, orienting, and matching parent volunteers with opportunities
- planning and coordinating family education events
- planning and coordinating orientation sessions for new families
- arranging for translation services in the native language of families
- serving as a “bridge” between families and schools
- making home visits to families
- producing newsletters and other communications to publicize activities
- coordinating the evaluation of family involvement activities<sup>30, 38, 80</sup>

### ***Resource commitment***

For family involvement efforts to be effective, they need to be considered a priority by schools. Administrators must provide positive leadership to develop partnerships with families and communities and be able to translate talk into implementation, commitment, and resource allocation<sup>13</sup>. Improving family involvement may require changes in resource allocations, time commitments, and priorities. Administrators leading these efforts “will need to monitor and nurture the effort continuously”<sup>13, p. 9</sup>.

*While family involvement is crucial, it is not easy to achieve. The key ingredient of success is commitment.*<sup>13, p. 10</sup>

Staff time: In addition to schools needing a full-time family involvement coordinator, the school faculty and staff need to be given time and training to enable them to work effectively with families<sup>66</sup>. Support from administrators is necessary to allow team members the time to meet, plan, and conduct activities associated with family involvement<sup>91</sup>. Training is especially needed to enable faculty and staff to work effectively with the diversity of families represented in American schools today, including how to make home visits, facilitate effective IEP meetings, create a welcoming school environment, and recognize the many ways that families are involved in their children’s education.

Resources: Most family involvement programs are supported by a blend of federal, state, and district funds. Federal funding is available through Title I, Title II, Title VII, Goals 2000 and other federal programs offered by the U.S. Department of Education. Another funding strategy is for school districts to offer a mini-grant program to teachers who propose and implement effective family involvement approaches in the classroom.

### *Mobile Parent Resource Centers*

A familiar sight in Syracuse, NY neighborhoods is the school district's P.U.M.P. (Power Unit for Motivating Parents) bus that reaches out to parents even in the evenings and weekends during non-winter months. Staffed by the district's parent advocate, Michele Abdul Sabur, and three parent liaisons, the bus "seeks out parents where it can find them" in the community, whether at a Native American festival, a community shopping area, or outside of city hall<sup>88</sup>. As if they were shopping in a bookstore, parents make choices for their children (infants-12th grade) as well as themselves from a variety of free, new, and diverse books. Home learning activities for different grade students and local agency information are also available. The focus of the project is to support at-home learning and assist parents to help their children meet the New York State learning standards in literacy and math.

Ms. Abdul Sabur indicated that in order to create greater awareness of the neighborhood resources available she and the staff often collaborate with community agencies to provide "one-stop shopping" for parents who visit the bus. "It's been wonderful what we've learned from the families, what they are looking for," she said. "It really debunks the myth that people don't care about their kids' education". Superintendent Dr. Stephen C. Jones says the P.U.M.P. bus "is a valuable mechanism by which we have realized two vital components of our district's Family and Community Involvement Policy--home-school communication and learning at home"<sup>88</sup>.

The P.U.M.P. bus served more than 4000 students and parents during the 2000-2001 school year and 4,860 during the 2001-2002 school year, according to Ms. Abdul Sabur<sup>88</sup>. The bus operates on an annual budget of approximately \$13,000, excluding donations from local bookstores.

Mobile parent centers are also operating in Virginia and California. The Greensville County Public Schools Mobile Parent Center serves parents in the rural Emporia, VA area. The center includes two classrooms, various kinds of equipment, and both print and non-print parenting resources<sup>99</sup>.

The Fresno Unified School District in Fresno, CA operates a "Family Center on Wheels" that offers childhood health services, family support, and family education for preschool children and their families. The parent mobile visits neighborhood parks, businesses, and churches three days weekly<sup>90</sup>.

The Syracuse City School District Partnership Policy includes a commitment to the following resources to support its partnership initiative <sup>46, p. 333</sup>:

- administrative leadership and vision
- a budget allocation
- a diverse workforce that reflects our community
- staff development
- aligned policies and practices

Epstein and Clark <sup>92</sup> surveyed members of the National Network of Partnership Schools to determine current funding sources and levels for school, family, and community partnerships. Responses from 94 schools, 25 districts, and 7 states indicated that members were tapping into a variety of sources to fund family involvement programs during the 1996-97 school years, including federal funds, state and district grants, and funds from local or other organizations.

*Questions for Principals Concerning Family Involvement:*

- How do I view the role of parents in the operation of the school and in their children's education?
- Do I talk about family partnerships? Where and when? What expectations are placed on teachers regarding partnering with parents?
- Does the school's budget include funds (preferably a line item) supporting family involvement?
- Is there a person on staff dedicated to increasing family involvement in the school? To what extent are parents included in school decision making? Are parents invited to curriculum meetings? School improvement planning teams? Professional development workshops? <sup>13, p. 10</sup>

Individual school budgets to support partnership activities ranged from under \$100 to \$70,000, with an average of \$4,065. School district spending on partnership activities ranged from under \$100 to \$1.2 million, with an average of \$85,013. Funding for school partnership efforts primarily came from bilingual education, drug prevention, Even Start, Goals 2000, special education, state compensatory education, Title I, Title VI, Title VII, principals' discretionary funds, PTA/PTO, and general funds. Seven districts reported awarding grants to schools, ranging from \$1,000 to \$6,500, to support projects for school, family, and community partnerships.

### **Strategy 3: Encouraging family involvement**

#### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Recognize and value the many ways that families can contribute volunteer efforts, both at home and at school
- ✓ Involve parents who represent the diversity of the school population in all aspects of planning, implementing, and evaluating volunteer activities
- ✓ Include parents on all levels of involvement, from bulletin board decorating to decision making
- ✓ Show appreciation for volunteers in a variety of ways all year long

### *First Day of School America in Cohoes, NY*

The goal of the First Day of School America program is to involve families and build community support for education at the beginning of the school year. Participating schools in this nationwide initiative invite families to a variety of activities intended to welcome students and parents and build involvement<sup>93</sup>. The Cohoes School District is one of 231 in New York State and 1,751 nationwide participating in the initiative, which is sponsored by the First Day of School Foundation.

In Cohoes, three public elementary schools and one Catholic school collaborated to put on the city's first First Day Celebration at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year. The celebration was held in a city park centrally located to the four schools, according to Barbara Hildreth, Principal of Harmony Hill School and Chairperson of the First Day Committee<sup>94</sup>. "We were in awe," she said. "The park was mobbed" as more than 1,500 of the blue collar town's 16,000 students, parents, and community members joined Clifford the Big Red Dog, a local radio station, George and Harry Hippopotamus, Ronald McDonald, the high school band, and the local police department's bike safety team to mingle informally and welcome the new school year. After the mayor proclaimed the official opening of the school year, the students marched with their classmates back to their respective schools. The PTA served coffee to parents at each school. Those with younger students were invited to stay for reading-with-your-child workshops, while parents of older students were invited to workshops on how to effectively help their children with homework<sup>95</sup>.

The 2002-2003 school year First Day celebration included not only the morning celebration at the park but also an evening event for parents unable to participate in the morning at the high school. This event included a book swap, a magic show, and "make-your-own" ice cream sundaes<sup>94</sup>.

Planning for this event, which the district intends to make an annual celebration, begins in January and is coordinated by a committee that includes parents and educators from each participating school. According to parent Mary Rumsey, First Day "promotes parental involvement and character education that last long into the school year," and unites parents from the community's four schools<sup>96</sup>.

To be successful today, volunteer opportunities in schools must recognize the diverse needs and preferences of family members who may be involved in the education of children<sup>97</sup>. Acknowledging that family members do not have to be in the school building to volunteer, and beginning with the assumption that families are already involved in the lives of their children are ways to broaden the appeal of volunteering<sup>98, 99, 100</sup>.

Offering a variety of volunteer opportunities that have varied time commitments and can be done at different times by mothers, fathers, guardians, and other family members—both in



school and at home—and acknowledging varying levels of participation as positive contributions to the school can help to build interest. Studying the cultural diversity of the school’s population and collaborating with families to create a variety of culturally appropriate opportunities for volunteering (such as language interpreters or parent mentors, for example) also are effective ways to build interest.

Making family members who volunteer feel welcome to join their children for lunch or providing coffee and donuts in the family center helps family members feel valued and comfortable at school. Enthusiasm for the program can be fostered by showing appreciation for volunteers in a variety of ways (volunteer appreciation events, newsletter articles, thank you notes, etc.) and by valuing their diverse contributions throughout the year.

*When parents become involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools.*

—Anne T. Henderson  
Author of *The Evidence Continues to Grow*

### ***Strategies for building an effective volunteer system:***

#### Developing an infrastructure to support family involvement

1. Create a family center where volunteer activities are coordinated by a paid or volunteer coordinator. (See **Strategy 2: Building an Infrastructure**

#### Planning a volunteer program

1. Take a current inventory of the ways in which families are involved in the school through an informal survey (online, paper, or telephone), parent interviews, focus groups, or a combination of these methods.
2. Involve parent volunteers that represent the diversity of the school population in planning family-oriented activities and events; seek their input, suggestions, and assistance. Utilize organized parent groups such as PTAs and PTOs to recruit family members.
3. With family input, identify barriers to volunteering such as childcare, transportation, work schedules, language differences, etc., and find creative solutions by problem solving with family members.

#### Recruiting volunteers

1. Survey family and community members to identify individuals who are willing to volunteer. The National PTA <sup>4</sup> has developed a parent survey that can be used or adapted. *Essentials for Principals: Strengthening the Connection between School and Home* (2001) includes both a Teacher and Staff Survey (pp. 19-20) and a Parent Survey (English version, pp. 23-24 and Spanish version, pp. 65-66) that can be used as starting points for developing or improving volunteer programs. Send out a family-friendly letter at the beginning of the school year inviting parent involvement (see the sample from Mountainview Elementary School, Morgantown, WV, below). *Essentials for Principals: Strengthening the Connection between School and Home* (2001) also includes sample letters from principals to parents (p. 68) and teachers to parents (p. 69).

August 27, 2002

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the start of a new school year at Mountainview Elementary, where a great part of our success stems from cooperation and help from parents. Now is your chance to become involved.

If you've never been a parent volunteer before, please join us. There really is something for everyone. Whether you enjoy working with large groups of children, tutoring individual students, or providing clerical support, we need you! The rewards of volunteering are numerous for you and the children.

If you have volunteered in previous years, welcome back. You provided more than 4000 hours of service to Mountainview students, faculty, and staff last year. Every minute made a difference. The staff and faculty thank you for this effort and dedication.

Please take a few moments of your valuable time to review the attached Parent Volunteer Form. Indicate your area(s) of interest, and preferred day(s) and time(s) and return the completed form to your child's homeroom teacher by August 30. Brief orientation meetings will be held on September 19 at 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. At this meeting a description of the needs of the teachers will be available. I will also discuss how the parent volunteer program works.

Remember that no matter how small a job may seem to you, it's a big help to our school. Please feel free to contact me at 296-8488 if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions regarding Mountainview's Parent Volunteer Program.

Very truly yours,

Sandy Martin  
Parent Volunteer Coordinator  
Mountainview Elementary School

2. Host a "How You Can Make a Difference" orientation for potential family and community volunteers at the beginning of each school year.
3. Match volunteers with activities that are meaningful to them and build on their interests and abilities.
5. Use school and community resources throughout the school year to announce volunteer opportunities.

### Developing a volunteer program

1. Develop a process for screening potential volunteers to ensure the safety and security of the school's population.
2. Host an orientation program to prepare volunteers for their assignments and to acquaint them with school procedures.
3. Provide each volunteer with a "Volunteer Information Packet" of helpful information, including a welcome letter, list of benefits of volunteering, building map, parking information, sign in/out policies, accident procedures, and directions on where to go for supplies, etc.
4. Provide training to volunteers on important issues such as confidentiality.
5. Develop a volunteer database and distribute a directory (school "Yellow Pages") of volunteer interests/talents/availability to all school personnel for easy access.

### Soliciting community support

1. Recruit community members as school volunteers to work with family members.
2. Encourage local businesses and employers to help by allowing employees paid release time and/or flexible working hours to volunteer and/or participate in activities at school.

### Evaluating the volunteer program

1. Establish a process for volunteers to sign in and out so that there is a record of volunteer time.
2. Conduct ongoing evaluations of the volunteer system, and with input from parents revise as needed<sup>4, 46, 69, 71, 82, 86, 101</sup>.

## ***Family involvement in decision making***

When family and community members are involved in decision-making and advocacy, they feel more deeply invested in the school and more empowered. Schools benefit from the feedback and different points of view provided by family and community members. Involved family and community members can help promote public understanding and support for the school. They can also play an advocacy role for the school with the community and local government<sup>69, 102</sup>.

Sue Mills, Principal of Monica Leary Elementary School, indicated that the Rush-Henrietta School District in Rush, NY, has "parent representation on every major committee"<sup>103</sup>. This includes, for instance, the Space Study Committee, which has addressed such issues as opening and closing schools, locating space for new programs, and redrawing boundary lines. The support of this committee was instrumental in opening a second middle school in the district and proposing a bond issue to open a new elementary school. Another example is the Budget Advisory Committee, which has addressed fiscal issues such as sources of revenue, state aid, and property taxes. This committee works closely with the assistant superintendent of schools and makes recommendations to the board of education<sup>104</sup>.

*As a parent, I feel it is imperative that parents are given, and take advantage of, the opportunity to be involved on major school district committees. Parents bring a unique perspective to a group that is making decisions that will directly impact their children.<sup>105</sup>*

Special Education Parent Advisory Councils. One of the most effective ways to involve parents of students with disabilities is to form a Special Education Parent Advisory Council. “An active and effective special education parent advisory council can be a true asset to a school district by providing parent involvement and input on special education issues,” including disability law, understanding of different disabilities, assistive technology, transition, and other topical areas <sup>106</sup>

Strategies for involving families in decision-making roles include:

- Developing a team to address issues that need family-school discussion and cooperation
- Conducting family focus groups to discuss critical issues
- Seeking out parent perspectives by conducting mini-surveys

*Tips on Creating and Using Parent Surveys*

1. Determine what it is you want to find out from parents.
2. Translate surveys into parents' native languages.
3. Keep language simple and free of jargon.
4. Minimize open-ended questions. Multiple-choice questions increase response rates.
5. Assure parents that surveys are anonymous, unless they choose to sign their names.
6. Inform parents ahead of time when to expect the survey.
7. Enlist teachers, students, and parents to disseminate and collect the surveys.
8. Allow only one response per family.
9. Involve school personnel and parents in the interpretation of data and development of an appropriate plan.
10. Provide feedback on survey results to school staff and parents <sup>65, p. 60.</sup>

- Including diverse family members on decision-making and advisory committees
- Providing training for parents on how to access, interpret, and use data to promote school reform
- Providing training for school faculty, staff, and family members on collaboration and shared decision making
- Involving family and community members in the school improvement planning process
- Treating family concerns with respect and actively working to demonstrate a sincere interest in seeking resolutions to concerns voiced by family and community members <sup>69, 81, 102, 107, 108</sup>

***Volunteer opportunities at school:***

- Constructing and maintaining playground equipment
- Planting flowers, trees, shrubs, etc.
- Assisting in coordination of service learning projects in the community
- Conducting parent trainings
- Facilitating parent support meetings
- Mentoring/tutoring students
- Reading stories to students or listening to students read
- Assisting with teacher appreciation activities
- Decorating bulletin boards
- Greeting and welcoming visitors
- Staffing the family center
- Assisting in coordinating a resource lending library
- Offering language translation services
- Accompanying students on field trips
- Acting as "Teacher for a Day" to share a special interest or expertise with students
- Working in after-school programs
- Serving on decision-making and advisory committees <sup>82, 102, 109, 110, 111</sup>

***Volunteer opportunities at home:***

- Assisting with writing, design, and publication of school notices, newsletters, and other publications
- Writing letters/thank you notes
- Making telephone calls to other parents
- Recruiting/coordinating volunteers
- Designing and/or making costumes
- Constructing instructional games
- Fundraising
- Providing child care
- Hosting parent meetings
- Serving as peer mentors for new parents
- Designing web sites
- Repairing equipment
- Translating school information into families' native languages <sup>82, 102, 110, 111</sup>

## **Strategy 4: *Developing family-friendly communication***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Communicate often and in a variety of ways with families
- ✓ Use culturally appropriate ways to relate with the diversity of families represented in the school
- ✓ Choose communication strategies that encourage two-way interactions
- ✓ Reach out to communicate with families who do not often come to school activities

### *Neighborhood Meetings*

When Dr. John Metallo was superintendent of the rural Fort Plain Central School District in eastern New York, he realized that in order to encourage more family involvement in school, especially among parents who were reluctant to come to the school building, "We needed to get the show on the road"<sup>112</sup>. He began a tradition of neighborhood meetings to reach out to families, which continued for the five years he served there. Now, serving his first year as superintendent of the Middleburgh Central School District, Dr. Metallo intends to continue the tradition because it proved to be an effective way to encourage family involvement.

The neighborhood meetings, held monthly during the evenings, were inviting to parents because the settings were more comfortable and less intimidating than the school for many parents<sup>113</sup>. Although most of the meetings were held in the homes of volunteer host parents, several were held in neighborhood churches and senior citizens centers. Each meeting attracted 10-14 parents.

School personnel went to the meetings in teams, according to Dr. Metallo, and focused the theme of each meeting on the concerns of parents who were attending and the ages of their children. Following an introductory overview by team members, the meeting facilitator would offer everyone an opportunity to ask questions, on topics that ranged from the district budget to class size to inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Then the host would provide refreshments and there would be an opportunity for informal conversations among parents and the school team members. These opportunities allowed parents to "see that we were real people," said Dr. Metallo, "and that we shared a lot of the same values"<sup>112</sup>.

Neighborhood meetings are only one of many effective strategies to communicate with families and build stronger school-family relationships. Communication often serves as the first step to developing other types of parental involvement<sup>114</sup>. The more opportunities for personal contact, "the stronger the bonds that link home and school"<sup>75, p. 41</sup>. In addition to administrators and teachers, school board members can also host neighborhood meetings as a strategy to get to know families in the school community and address their concerns.

Good communication between teachers and parents increases trust<sup>115</sup> and encourages realistic expectations for children by keeping parents and teachers "on the same page"<sup>51, 116</sup>.

To be effective, home-school communication needs to be "consistent, two-way and meaningful"<sup>69</sup> using a variety of forms, both formal and informal, conveying both bad news and good, on a regular basis<sup>17, 117</sup>. Anne Henderson, author of *A New Generation of Evidence* (31), recommends that schools make contact with every family every month by such means as parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, e-mails, home visits, or "quick chats" after school. She suggests that all teachers should have cell phones and/or all classrooms have telephone lines<sup>118</sup>. Rich<sup>119</sup> acknowledges that it is more difficult to communicate with parents as students grow older. In kindergarten, children can "wear" notes home. In elementary school, notes can be attached to school menus. At the secondary level it becomes more difficult to reach parents. She recommends that teachers have parents' work phone numbers and addresses and be

“accessible and responsive” when parents call or want to meet<sup>119, pp. 38-39</sup>. Some care must be taken in using families’ work numbers, however, as in some cases calls at work may endanger employment.

Communicating with culturally diverse families. All communication should be in the native language of parents and respectful of cultural variations. The personal approach to reaching out to parents is especially important in diverse communities<sup>120</sup>. The Hispanic Policy Development Project found that written communication and radio and television announcements were largely ineffective with Hispanic parents, even when they were translated into Spanish, and that “The only successful approach is personal: face-to-face conversations with parents in their primary language in their homes”<sup>121, p. 132</sup>. From an analysis of family involvement in 42 school/parent projects, the HPDP concluded that “overcoming the barriers between schools and Hispanic parents does not require large amounts of money; it does require personal outreach, nonjudgmental communication, and respect for parents’ feelings”<sup>121, p. 133</sup>.

Family coordinators can serve as an effective communication bridge between culturally diverse parents and the school. In Austin, TX, Ridgetop Elementary School parent support specialist Maria Teresa Flores meets with parents who speak limited English either individually or in small groups before they meet with teachers or principals in order to help them understand the system and what questions to ask<sup>122</sup>. Ms. Flores works to empower parents by using a variety of methods, including role-playing<sup>123</sup>.

Communicating with parents of students with disabilities. When parents have a child with a disability, “it is imperative that a trusting relationship is built between family and teacher. Partnerships can be built upon an openness to information shared with the family and a sensitivity to the changing needs and concerns within each family system”<sup>14, p. 85</sup>. It is very important that school districts provide information to parents about services available to their child, and their rights as parents, as soon as the child is identified as having a disability. Otherwise, as one parent expressed it, “You’re sort of left out there hanging,” feeling lost at a time when information, support, and guidance are most needed<sup>124</sup>. Developing good communication and building a relationship based upon trust helps strengthen home-school support for children with disabilities and diminishes the potential for conflicts.

In a 2000 survey of parents of students with disabilities, parents indicated that discrepant views of their children or children’s needs create the majority of home-school conflicts.<sup>124</sup> Parents were frustrated when they felt the school did not view their children as unique individuals with strengths and abilities and demonstrated a limited understanding of their children’s overall needs. Parents were also saddened when school personnel consistently described their children from a “deficit-model perspective,” emphasizing what their children could not do instead of what they were capable of doing. To avoid conflicts such as these, educators and parents need to communicate, so that educators are able to see that the disability is only *part* of the child. “This sharing of parent and school perspectives and viewing of the child as a whole person provides a firm foundation for good parent-school partnerships<sup>124</sup>.

*We have found that by establishing a positive relationship with our daughters’ teachers or case managers and communicating regularly, we can solve problems quickly when they occur. Effective ongoing parent and teacher communication is the key to ensuring that our children will be successful in school.*

Bob Brick, Families and Advocates Partnership  
for Education, Minneapolis, MN



When communicating with parents of children with disabilities, there are many ways that teachers can be supportive, responsive, and resourceful. These include:

- recognizing the family as an invaluable source of information about their children;
- practicing active listening;
- providing comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date information about the child's disability and related issues
- assisting parents as they learn to navigate the education system;
- providing information about services and benefits available to the family;
- providing emotional support for the family;
- conveying the value of the child to parents;
- having the ability to "put yourself in the shoes of the parent";
- challenging stereotypes about parents;
- persevering in building partnerships;
- demonstrating interest in parents' goals for their children;
- talking with parents about how they want to share information;
- developing effective ways for planning and problem solving that honor parent needs and preferences;
- expanding cultural diversity awareness;
- conveying assessment and evaluation information with sensitivity and empathy;
- advocating for the family across school and community agencies; and
- linking families who have children with similar disabilities <sup>5, 23, 125, 126</sup>

*When we respect parents as partners in their children's learning, the lines of communication between home and school are strengthened, and we as teachers are not quite so alone in our efforts to educate children.* <sup>127</sup>

In addition to neighborhood meetings, communication strategies that have proven effective in building personal connections with families include family focus groups, neighborhood walks, home visits, informal principal meetings, positive "warm" telephone calls, home-school notes, conferences, newsletters, technology tools, and processes for resolving family concerns.

### **Family focus groups**

For families who are not comfortable coming to school, or cannot come because of transportation or child care barriers, family focus group sessions can be held in neighborhood homes, community centers, churches, businesses, or even fast-food restaurants. During these sessions educators can learn about family needs, concerns, and culture, and can help parents feel more connected to the school. Educators planning these meetings should be sensitive to family needs concerning location and times <sup>62</sup>. Providing childcare enables more parents to attend.

### **Neighborhood walks**

Another way to reach out to parents in the community is for the school to initiate neighborhood walks to meet parents and talk about their concerns. This has proved effective at Ridgetop Elementary School in Austin, TX, where many parents speak limited English <sup>122</sup>. Maria Teresa Flores, a parent support specialist at the school, leads teachers and community volunteers on walks through the school's neighborhood each fall and spring <sup>123</sup>. Knocking on doors of families

with children in the school, Ms. Flores and other Ridgetop faculty and staff members, along with parent volunteers, invite families to talk about educational issues that concern them.

## ***Home visits***

Benefits of home visits. Home visits are a “very powerful mechanism” for teachers to connect with families<sup>128, p. 125</sup> and a concrete demonstration of their “concern, caring, and commitment” to families<sup>62, p. 79</sup>. These visits allow teachers to understand their students better by seeing their families in their home environment<sup>80</sup>. In addition, two major barriers to family involvement—childcare and transportation—are removed by home visits. Home visits also may be more comfortable for many parents, especially if there are cultural barriers or negative past experiences associated with going to the school building.

Home visits are most effective when made before the school year begins to establish relationships with families. Visits may also be made during the school year to continue building relationships and to work individually with families. If families speak different languages, outreach efforts to non-English speaking families should be made by individuals who speak their language and know the culture<sup>62</sup>. Blank and Kershaw<sup>129</sup> have developed a Parent Information and Interest Inventory and guidelines that may be used as a starting point for planning home visits.

*I believe this time (making home visits) is the best investment I can make in my students and their families. The partnership is founded so early. We begin working together before the first bell rings, and I believe this personal introduction helps to alleviate the anxieties of all those involved: the students, their parents, and me. The first day of school is more like a reunion, and a very happy one at that.*

Lori Woods, Teacher,  
Greenbook Elementary School, New Jersey<sup>3, p.198</sup>

School staff members conducting home visits may require training in order to relate effectively with families. In many districts teachers who make home visits have their teaching schedules adjusted so that they are given the necessary time to make visits. In some school districts home visiting is built into teacher contracts as a responsibility<sup>128</sup>. Some schools have used federal Title 1 or Chapter 1 funds to hire home-school liaisons who coordinate the home visitation program as well as make home visits themselves.

Home visits to families of children with disabilities. Many parents with children who have disabilities have difficulty attending school-based functions because of the intensive needs of their children. Home visits allow these parents to connect with teachers while caring for their children and sharing information about how they can work together to best meet their children’s educational needs. Additionally, home visits can serve as informal pre-planning meetings for annual Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). For a child with multiple special needs, a team of educators may want to visit who have specialized training in areas such as physical therapy, speech therapy, or occupational therapy. Families of different cultures have varying interpretations and attitudes toward disabling conditions; home visits allow teachers to learn more about the cultural perspective of the family toward the child’s disability<sup>130</sup>.

Disadvantages of home visits. Home visits have disadvantages as well. To plan, schedule, and make home visits is very time consuming for educators. Some families may regard home visits as an intrusion, and their privacy and boundary needs must be honored<sup>131</sup>. Other families who

live in poverty may be embarrassed to have teachers visit their homes. Home visits in high crime neighborhoods or rural areas can also be potentially dangerous. Visiting in teams and carrying cell phones for emergencies help ensure safety<sup>14</sup>.

### ***Informal principal meetings***

Principals who make themselves available to families on a regular basis invite positive two-way school-home communication and build bridges with families. The climate of these informal meetings, held during either morning or evenings hours, “can be an essential element in maintaining positive home-school relations throughout the year”<sup>132, p. 210</sup>. These meetings can also serve as a forum to gain parent input on hot issues and let parents know that their opinions are valued.

At Ridgetop Elementary School in Austin, TX, Principal Julie Pryor meets parents for an informal potluck breakfast every Friday morning. Parents are invited to talk about any issues of concern to them, which can range from adjustment for new students to cafeteria menus. The informal meeting attracts about 35 parents weekly, according to parent support coordinator Maria Teresa Flores<sup>123</sup>.

### ***Positive “warm” telephone calls***

In most instances the only time parents receive a telephone call from their child’s school is when there is a problem. The intent of a positive “warm” telephone call, in contrast, is to “establish or strengthen a two-way communication flow and to build the collaborative relationship between the family and the school”<sup>62, p. 105</sup>. Positive calls “can go a long way in fostering a sense of commitment to the student and to ongoing communications with the family (rather than communications that occur only when problems arise)” (107). In addition to welcoming parents, these calls can convey the importance of information sharing, provide contact information, invite parents to school events, give parents an opportunity to ask questions, and enable teachers to learn more about individual students<sup>133</sup>.

In addition to making positive phone calls, former Missouri junior high principal Dr. Todd Whitaker also sent “positive postcards” home to parents. These served as an effective way to praise students for positive accomplishments and to “enhance positive relations with all parents in the school”<sup>17</sup>. Postcards were “doubly appropriate” for students whose families did not have telephones. Although Whitaker had doubts when the school first started sending the postcards, these were quickly alleviated:

*“I’ll never forget that years after some students went through our school I could go into their homes, and every postcard they ever received from our staff was still prominently posted on the family refrigerator. And I do believe that having parents think positive thoughts about you and your school every time they get out the milk is probably very beneficial in establishing the relationship that you would like.”<sup>17, p. 61</sup>*

When school staff members do need to contact family members with concerns, positive communication strategies should be used to connect with families. These strategies include conveying the desire to work together to help the child, using the family’s own language or a translator, not talking “above” family members, listening to the family member’s perspective and

valuing his/her input, asking the family member for help, and thanking the family member for “listening, caring, and helping”<sup>80, 107</sup>.

### ***Home-school notes/notebooks***

Communication can be sustained by a variety of parent-friendly formats that invite two-way interaction (63). For example, special folders can be used to send home student work and school notices each week; the folder can include a place for parent comments to encourage two-way communication<sup>134</sup>.

Fayetteville Elementary School in Fayetteville, NY, has adopted a brightly colored, easily identified, parent-friendly, bound notepad for the past three years to encourage two-way communication between home and school. Fayetteville Elementary Principal Nancy Smith says her staff “views the form as a simple practice that facilitates home-school communication and sends a message to parents that we realize their time is valuable and that we want to assist them with following school procedures”<sup>135</sup>.

Home-school interactive notebooks, or message journals, are an effective way for parents and teachers to maintain communication<sup>70</sup>. These journals can be beneficial not only to communicate to families what their children are learning at school, but also to help students “integrate their understandings” of what they are learning while improving their writing skills<sup>57, 136</sup>.

Home-school notebooks are an effective way to communicate with families of children with disabilities who may be unable to communicate important information to their families. Notebooks travel back and forth between home and school carrying messages about accomplishments, concerns, needs, and assignments. Parents and teachers communicating with interactive notebooks should decide together how frequently to write, who will write, what kinds of information will be shared, and who will have access to the journal<sup>5</sup>.

### ***Conferences***

School conferences, scheduled periodically throughout the school year, allow families to communicate face-to-face and individually with teachers concerning their children’s academic progress at a time and location that is convenient to their needs. If parents cannot come to school, they may be able to participate through conference calls or other technological means. Berger offers a Conference Checklist,<sup>71, p. 199</sup> which may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

#### ***Mobile Conferences***

Giancarlo Mercado, who characterizes herself as a “community style teacher,” teaches several students in Venice, CA who are bused from East Hollywood. To make conferences more convenient for these parents, Ms. Mercado makes arrangements to meet parents in their neighborhood schools for conferences three times yearly. “Yes, it takes effort,” she said, “but they (the parents) are making an effort, too. And I can’t think of what our relationship would be like if I didn’t meet them halfway.”<sup>25, p. 71</sup>

Student-led Parent-Teacher Conferences. Student-led parent-teacher conferences encourage both students and parents to actively participate in the educational process. Schools that used student-led conferences found that parent attendance rates were higher than with traditional parent-teacher conferences<sup>137 138,139</sup>. The student-led conference enables students to reflect on the school curriculum and their own learning<sup>136</sup>, communicate with both teachers and parents about their learning experiences, assume more direct “ownership of their learning”<sup>139</sup>, and “see themselves as capable of participating in the assessment process as reflective learners”<sup>140, p. 90</sup>.

With sufficient preparation and support, students with disabilities from age 14, or sometimes even younger, can be active participants in planning their Individualized Education Program (IEP). With training in self-determination skills, these students may participate in and even lead their own IEP meetings, including the development of their individualized transition<sup>141, 142</sup>.

IEP Conferences. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) mandates that “schools provide an opportunity for active parental participation in decisions about the education of children”<sup>143</sup>, including the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP). In fact, family involvement is considered a “necessary ingredient for appropriate and individualized educational programming”<sup>143</sup>. One of the many benefits of family involvement in the IEP process is improved communication between parents and the school<sup>143</sup>.

The New York State United Teachers Guide to Special Education recommends that in developing the IEP parents and teachers should work together to help determine:

- positive behavioral strategies for the child
- annual goals and objectives and how they will be measured
- specific programs, services, modifications, and supports necessary to help the child meet his or her goals and objectives and be involved in the general education curriculum
- how parents will be informed about their child’s progress during the school year
- what test accommodations will be necessary<sup>144</sup>

Much has been written about how to conduct IEP meetings that maximize parent participation. The following are a few suggestions for how school staff might prepare for an IEP meeting<sup>145</sup>:

- Tell parents why parent involvement is crucial and what will happen at the meeting
- Invite parents to bring anyone they wish
- Explain who will attend from the school district and why; ask parents if anyone has been left out
- Schedule a convenient time and location, and ample time for the meeting
- Find out if parents need help with transportation or childcare
- Invite parents to review relevant documents prior to meeting and encourage classroom visits

To promote the family partnership envisioned by IDEA, teachers should meet the child’s family to obtain information at the beginning of the year and maintain contact throughout the year to report progress and solve problems collaboratively via communication notebooks, phone calls, e-mail messages, and/or face-to-face meetings<sup>146</sup>.

*Parents who work collaboratively with schools provide educators the necessary tools to value their child as a learner, a student, and as a human being.*

Cassandra Archie,  
Advocates for Educational Equity, Rochester, NY

## **Newsletters**

School and classroom newsletters can provide a steady stream of information from school to home. Brief newsletters that are informative and sent to families on a regular basis are more likely to be read than longer newsletters that are printed occasionally<sup>117</sup>. Newsletters can include interactive features that allow for two-way communication, including columns written by family and community members and mini-surveys inviting family responses. They may also include suggested learning activities that involve family members. Family volunteers can work on newsletters at home or at school assisting with the writing, design, desktop publishing, and dissemination.

The Rochester City School District Parent Action Center disseminates a parent newsletter via its web site (<http://www.rcsdk12.org/pac>). The spring 2000 issue included information on the center's hours, opportunities for parent volunteers, parent education workshops, and free bus tours to visit the center.

## **Technology tools**

A variety of technology tools may be utilized to effectively and efficiently communicate with families. Many schools have developed and maintain World Wide Web sites that include a wealth of information for families. A list of New York schools/school districts that have developed web sites may be found at <http://www.grandpajunior.com/NewYork.shtml>. Some districts have developed Internet-based, home-school communication programs where families can access student and school information such as daily grade reports, attendance reports, individual class web pages, class newsletters and reports, and school information and calendars<sup>147, 148</sup>. Including a special link to information of interest to parents (family center hours, family involvement policy, upcoming workshops, volunteer opportunities, homework hotline, etc.) is a family-friendly way to make information readily available.

The Rush-Henrietta Central School District has created a family-friendly school calendar on its web site, which may be accessed by month, school, or category. This allows parents to access information about district-wide events for the entire school year or to narrow their search, for example, to upcoming family center events and school parent group activities in a particular school during a given month of the year<sup>149</sup>.

Teachers are also using e-mail messages and listservs to maintain two-way communication with families. However, since not all families have Internet access, teachers need to communicate with families in a variety of ways. Publicizing the availability of school computer labs for family use during non-school hours is helpful for families who do not have computers at home, as are computer lending libraries for families<sup>117</sup>.

Many schools are now wiring classrooms for telephones at the same time that they are wiring for Internet access, giving teachers telephones in their classrooms for the first time<sup>150</sup>. The introduction of this technology in the classroom, which many educators feel is long overdue, represents yet another avenue for teachers to communicate with family members, both directly and indirectly. Utilizing the "Transparent School" model, parents can leave messages for teachers, and an autodialing system can broadcast messages to multiple families to convey school information<sup>151</sup>.

### *Daily Family Phone Messages*

Teresa Jo Clemens-Brower<sup>111</sup>, a teacher at Errol Hassell Elementary School in Aloha, Oregon, records a one-minute voice mail message to inform family members about what is happening in her class each day. At the end of the recorded message, family members and students calling in have the option of leaving messages. "Over the past seven years," she says, "parents have heard trumpet performances of Three Blind Mice, responded to requests for toilet paper rolls, left many messages of thanks and praise, and have always appreciated feeling connected in a non-threatening way. Most importantly, children who used to report they did nothing at school know that parents now have a way to really hear what has been going on. This back-up system has increased the amount that children share with parents and has families feeling like our school is doing great things for children!"<sup>152</sup>

Homework hotlines where students and parents can access homework assignments on a daily basis have also become increasingly popular. The New York City United Federation of Teachers maintains Dial-A-Teacher, a homework helping service for parents and students, 12 hours weekly in eight different languages. (See **Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront**) Some schools offer regular "parent call-in" times for parents to discuss their questions or concerns with teachers or administrators<sup>80</sup>.

Local cable channels and radio stations can also be effective communication vehicles for school-family information. For non-English speaking parents, school events may be publicized on radio stations/programs that broadcast in their language<sup>14</sup>.

Making sure that school-home communication is conveyed in multiple ways and does not assume that all families have access to technology will help all families in the school community stay informed.

### **Processes for resolving family concerns**

Each school needs to have a clear process for resolving family concerns. "Although conflict in schools is inevitable, effective school leaders minimize, manage, and eliminate misunderstandings" by addressing concerns in a responsive manner<sup>153, p.81</sup>. A parental complaint form may be used to document the individual making the complaint, the nature of the complaint, and the follow-up actions taken by the school to address the concern. An electronic version may be posted on the school's web page.

For disagreements arising from special education issues, "the best, fastest, and least costly way to solve a conflict is through informal problem solving"<sup>143</sup>. Family members and educators "should keep in mind that the student's interest is the main objective, and, regardless of the outcome, school personnel and parents will still have to work together".<sup>143</sup> If family members and educators are unable to resolve the conflict, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) provides for mediation, "a voluntary and confidential process that brings conflicting parties together" to resolve their differences and avoid due process through the assistance of a trained mediator<sup>140</sup>. "Conflicts that arise out of misunderstandings or lack of shared information can be resolved through mediators helping parents, educators, and service

providers to communicate directly with one another”<sup>74</sup>. When working with culturally diverse families, it is important that mediators be skilled in “diversity, cultural competence, flexibility, and the design of processes that are culturally relevant and appropriate to all participants” and to put into practice “collaborative dispute resolution strategies that respect diverse methods of handling conflicts”<sup>74</sup>.

### ***Family Support Teams***

Peck Elementary School, a high poverty school in Houston, TX, has created a Family Support Team to assist teachers and families when they have problems related to children's learning or behavior. The team communicates to the family what the school is doing to address the problem and works to involve the support of the family at home. This promotes consistency between what is happening at home and at school. The team also helps to “identify and resolve” home situations that may be affecting children's success at school. The team, which meets weekly, includes the project manager, school principal, Title I coordinator, and school nurse, according to Tameka Qualls, project manager.

(Council of Chief State School Officers and The Charles A. Dana Center, 2002; personal communication December 5, 2002)

Following disagreements, it is important to be ready to “mend fences”<sup>22</sup>. “There may be times when you disagree with families or they disagree with you. Remember that it is in everyone's interest to understand and accept these differences and not let them interfere with the ongoing collaborative relationship.”

### ***Guidelines for Written School-family Communication***

- Include non-custodial fathers and mothers in all correspondence, including divorced parents as well as parents whose children are in foster care.
- Include parents whose children are placed out of district in all communication.
- Use current terminology that is respectful of families who have children with disabilities.
- Make sure written communication is easily understood, jargon free, and available in the native language of all families represented in the school, and that it recognizes that family members other than parents may be raising children (“Dear Parent or Caregiver”).
- For families with emerging literacy levels, record communications on cassette tapes and make these available through the family center lending library. (See ***Strategy 2: Building a Support Infrastructure***)<sup>63</sup>



## ***Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Begin early in children's education to involve families in meaningful ways.
- ✓ Educate parents to use effective, age-appropriate strategies to encourage learning at home
- ✓ Assign homework projects that involve family interaction
- ✓ Provide information/resource support for parents helping their children with homework assignments
- ✓ Actively involve parents in educational activities such as action research projects and functional behavioral assessments

Programs that involve family members as educators of their children in the home environment recognize the important connection between “what is taught (at school) and what is encouraged, practiced, discussed and celebrated at home”<sup>46, p. 510</sup>. Families can effectively help by supporting, encouraging, and motivating their children, monitoring their work, celebrating their progress, and engaging in interactions that will help children complete homework and do well in school<sup>46, 156</sup>.

### ***Preschool Math Concept and Literacy Development Program***

The Parent Teacher Student Association in the Keshequa School District, a small rural district in western New York with limited resources and high needs serving approximately 1,000 k-12 students, is promoting reading and math literacy through a special initiative for preschool children and their families. With a \$2,500 State Improvement Program grant from the New York Department of Education for the 2001-2002 school year, the PTSA was able to purchase a variety of early reading and math resources to begin the program. These materials—including books, small tape recorders, audio cassettes of the books, parent-child activity materials and supplies, and math manipulatives—were placed in 25 canvas bags, which were decorated by kindergarten students and made available to preschool children and their families.

Through direct mailings and school notices, the PTSA invites families to preschool story hours, held two Wednesday mornings and one Saturday morning each month. During these sessions, preschool children may check out a literacy bag, to be returned at the next story hour. These story hour sessions give parents an opportunity to network with other families with similar age children and to become acquainted with the school facility before their children enter kindergarten, according to PTSA president Lori Gray<sup>154</sup>. Although the program is primarily focused on four- and five-year-old children, younger siblings are also welcome. The program has been entirely organized and implemented by PTSA volunteers.

During its first year, the program attracted 20-25 parents and their children for each story hour. To determine the impact of the program on literacy readiness, the district plans to compare the readiness skills of program participants over the next three years to incoming kindergarten students who have not been participants. With a \$5000 Community Services Block Grant through Livingston County, the PTSA planned to expand the program during the 2002-2003 school year, adding 25 literacy bags and extending the program through the summer months.

“The ‘learning bags’ were a huge hit,” according to Kammy Snyder, a parent who participated in the literacy program. The project activities and “homework” helped her daughter “get used to using some of the math manipulatives that she sees in kindergarten this year! The books were great too<sup>155</sup>).

## ***Age-appropriate family involvement***

The type of family involvement that is most beneficial in the home environment changes as children grow and mature. Helping children with homework is most appropriate at the elementary school level when families understand homework concepts and use developmentally appropriate practices when helping their children<sup>157, 158</sup>. To support students doing well academically during middle and high school, parents should not interfere with self-study, but reinforce autonomy so that their children develop time-management and study skills that will enable them to become autonomous, lifelong learners<sup>157</sup>. Families can also support children as they grow older by helping them develop positive attitudes and values, discussing school-related issues at home, helping children to plan their educational and transition programs, maintaining high expectations for their children, and reinforcing their children's feelings of personal competence by expressing confidence in their ability to succeed<sup>159, 160, 161</sup>. Some students will benefit significantly from opportunities to partially or fully participate in home activities (cooking, shopping, laundry, menu planning, etc.). Increasing experience and responsibility in these areas can significantly contribute to their potential for a successful transition into community living.

Promising practices that encourage and support family involvement in the home environment include communication to family members about student learning, programs that involve families in homework activities, homework helping services, literacy programs, action research projects, and functional behavioral assessments.

## ***Guidance on student learning***

Most parents want to help their children learn, but some may be unsure about what assistance is most helpful or appropriate. Working together, schools can help families develop a home environment that supports children's learning by providing written materials, workshops, web sites, home visits, etc., that offer guidance in the following ways:

- Informing family members about curricular goals and assessments for students in each subject at each grade level with suggested ways to complement the curriculum in the home environment.
- Informing family members of homework expectations and policies, including information about how to best assist children with homework assignments.
- Providing opportunities for parents to learn about differences in how children learn (learning styles, multiple intelligences, etc.) and prepare for school (studying, motivation, test preparation, etc.).
- Involving family members in setting goals for students, making course selections, determining Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, and planning for transition to postsecondary education, careers, and the workplace.
- Providing opportunities for family members to learn about different types and levels of involvement and how they can effectively support the education of their children.
- Demonstrating to family members ways to reinforce behaviors at home that enhance learning, such as time management, organizational skills, planning, and limited television viewing and computer use. Encouraging family members to model good reading habits, participate in informal educational activities in the home and community, and promote lifelong learning.<sup>69</sup>

### *Learning Families*

A learning family recognizes that parents are not only teachers but also learners. They can learn from their children, and adults and children can learn at the same time. These learning experiences can be either structured or more casual experiences. Louv describes these basic characteristics of a learning family:

- Any family can be a learning family.
- Learning families build a basic foundation for learning in the home and in their interactions with children.
- Parents view themselves "as their children's learning partners, not their programmers."
- "A learning family seizes the moment" to learn new things together.
- Anyone in the family can be an expert.
- "A learning family uses the whole community as a classroom and laboratory."
- A learning family uses travel to learn.
- A learning family has fun while learning. <sup>163</sup>

### ***Involving families in homework activities***

One of the most successful programs in the country for involving families in homework activities is the Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) elementary and middle grade program which features an interactive homework process to involve families in math, science, and language arts activities with their children. The program's two primary goals are:

- to encourage students to complete their homework well and to improve attitudes, behaviors, and achievements; and
- to create good information and interactions at home between students and their families about schoolwork <sup>164</sup>.

All TIPS homework assignments incorporate student-family interaction. Evaluations of the program, which have been consistently positive, indicate that a "large number of parents, previously not involved with their children's homework, were actively involved in TIPS; teachers were reporting much higher rates of return for TIPS homework than for regular homework; and the TIPS program itself helped teachers communicate with parents" <sup>17, p. 188</sup>.

The following features make the TIPS program unique:

- The program helps all families become involved, not just those who have knowledge in subject areas.
- The program makes homework the student's responsibility and does not require parents to "teach" subjects or skills.
- The program requires students to share their work, ideas, and progress with their families.
- The program includes a home-to-school communication feature that allows families to comment or request information from teachers <sup>165</sup>

The TIPS program can be introduced to parents through letters home, newsletters, or meetings. Classroom or grade-level meetings can be used to show parents examples of TIPS activities

and how parents can be involved in them. Students also need an orientation to the program, emphasizing the family involvement component of each assignment.

### ***Homework helping services***

The United Federation of Teachers in New York City offers a Dial-A-Teacher homework helping service that provides parents and students free help via telephone when they need assistance doing daily homework assignments in all subject areas. A staff of 45 teachers responds to more than 2,000 calls weekly; approximately 10% of these requests for assistance come from parents. The program is available 12 hours a week on Monday-Thursday afternoons and evenings and offers help in eight different languages<sup>166</sup>. Many teachers now post homework assignments on Internet web sites where parents with computers can access helpful information<sup>147</sup>. Homework hotlines that include recorded messages of the day's homework assignments are also helpful to both parents and students.

### ***Action research projects***

Action research projects bring together teachers and families in new roles and responsibilities that “ultimately strengthen parents’ involvement in their child’s education”<sup>167, p. 8</sup>. Parents’ involvement in action research has much in common with the involvement of parents in the special education process:

*Special educators have been trend-setters in parent involvement, using the individualized education program (IEP) to tap into parents’ knowledge about their children. Parent-teacher action research takes the next step—inviting parents to join teachers in a systematic exploration of a puzzling issue. When they work together as equals, parents and teachers have more opportunities to express their respect for one another’s wisdom, learn more about the other’s perspective, and often become allies in making improvements in the school.*<sup>167, p. 8</sup>

Action research projects usually involve parents participating as partners with teachers in research on their own children<sup>167</sup>, although the projects may also entail research on broader educational issues in the school.

The action research process entails several steps:

1. Choosing a research question(s)
2. Collecting data
3. Reflecting
4. Analyzing data
5. Drawing conclusions
6. Brainstorming ideas
7. Developing a plan of action (167)

In action research projects focusing on an individual child, parents and teachers set mutual goals and carry out action plans that provide for consistency between home and school. The observations and reflections that are afforded by these projects “yield new knowledge about the child that helps both teachers and parents improve their practices”<sup>168</sup>. This process requires “a great deal of commitment from everyone on the team: parents, teachers, and student”<sup>169</sup>.

## ***Functional behavioral assessments***

Family members can be involved in various kinds of assessments of their children's learning. For children with behavioral disorders, families are active participants in the assessment process and implementation of interventions to address problem behaviors. The 1997 amendment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a functional behavioral assessment be conducted "when a child exhibits significant behavioral difficulties," in order to "identify why the behavior occurs within a specific context ...[and] to develop appropriate interventions" <sup>170</sup>. Once the appropriate intervention components are identified, parents, teachers, and other care providers are offered training and coaching so that the intervention can be carried out consistently at home and school. When a comprehensive approach involving parents, teachers, and care providers is used, "there is an increased likelihood for long-term success" <sup>170</sup>.

*Parents have valuable insights into their children's behavior --the possible triggers, underlying messages, and desired effects. Too often, their only opportunities to share those insights occur in the wake of serious behavioral incidents, when they are perceived as making excuses or minimizing the behavior at issue. Parent involvement in the FBA process is crucial because it represents an opportunity to use parent's knowledge proactively rather than defensively.*

Donald A. Lash, Metropolitan Parent Center and  
Long Island Parent Center, New York, NY

## ***Strategy 6: Supporting educational opportunities for families***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Conduct assessments of families' educational needs to determine the content and form of delivery
- ✓ Involve a diverse group of parents and community members when planning parent education programs
- ✓ Provide opportunities for parents and children to learn together
- ✓ Provide opportunities for parents to share challenges and offer emotional support to one another
- ✓ Reach out with educational opportunities to families who do not often come to school activities.

The Monica Leary Elementary School transition to middle school program exemplifies a practice that includes both parents and children in teaching and learning roles while giving and receiving support as they face an important milestone in their school careers.

### *Fifth Grade Transition*

For the past several years the Fifth Grade Transition Program at Monica Leary Elementary School in Rush, NY, has informed and eased the anxiety of both parents and students who are facing the significant transition from elementary to middle <sup>61</sup>. During the spring of each year, sixth grade students who have graduated from Monica Leary return to the elementary school to discuss the culture of middle school (backpacks, lockers, lunch choices, homework assignments, etc.) and share their experiences with fifth graders and their parents.

Following the student-parent activity, graduating fifth grade students meet with the middle school students in a "kid-to-kid" session while parents of the fifth and sixth grade students meet separately to discuss mutual topics of interest such as schedules and supplies. "Talking to other parents and students who have just been through the anxious transition you are facing can be reassuring," said parent Patricia St. Clair (105). "Parents and students alike realize the value of sharing the practical, day-to-day experiences of someone who's 'been there.'"

"Parents are reassuring to one another," says Sue Mills, elementary school principal <sup>103</sup>. Each year attendance increases, attracting 20-30 parents and their fifth grade students.

Parent education is considered an "essential component" of parent involvement programs <sup>171</sup>. However, "Parent education is not a single concept that comes in one easy-to-identify package. Rather, it is a group of strategies that can assume a number of directions and formats" <sup>14, p. 151</sup>.

High quality parent education programs lead to increased parent volunteerism, better teacher-parent communication, and improved child behavior and attendance <sup>173</sup>. The benefits of parent education programs "can increase many-fold when different organizations work together and provide their expertise in putting together quality parent education programs" <sup>172, p. 177</sup>. Meeting the complex needs of families for social, emotional, and educational support requires a community effort.

Characteristics of effective parent education programs include:

1. Assessments to determine parent and student needs <sup>174; 171</sup>
2. Involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in planning the programs <sup>174</sup>
3. Consistent outreach that attracts and retains parents and involves fathers in an active role <sup>175; 176; 171</sup>
4. Demonstration of "sensitivity, respect, and affirmation of diversity" <sup>177, 4, 171</sup>
5. Development of "ongoing training programs in which parents, administrators, and staff participate as teachers and learners" <sup>171</sup>



Schools can select from an array of strategies for delivering parent education so that programs meet the needs of their families. These include home visits by parent educators, parent workshops, programs that support parents' own educational needs, programs that develop parent leadership, parent/child education opportunities, support groups, and teen parenting programs.

### ***Home visits by parent educators***

Home visits are an effective strategy to reach parents who may not feel comfortable coming to school. They allow educators to individualize teaching and modeling according to each family's needs. Additionally, home visits allow children to observe teachers and parents sharing the educational role. (See ***Strategy 4: Developing family-friendly communication***)

### ***Parent workshops***

Workshops can help family members develop skills to help them with parenting. Care must be taken, however, to build on parents' strengths and to respect cultural differences in parenting approaches, such as individualistic versus collectivistic orientations<sup>25</sup>. Schools that attempt to educate parents by "telling them what they must do" may cause resentment toward the school and the negative perception that the school is "demanding" and not family-friendly<sup>178, p. 12</sup>.

Successful workshops require careful planning and implementation:

- Assess family needs through surveys, home visits, or other informal methods
- Identify resources needed to conduct workshops, including specialists, skilled parents, practitioners, and educators
- Recruit participants through a variety of means--written materials, home visits, telephone networking, and meeting announcements
- Provide support services to make it easier for parents to attend, such as child care and transportation
- Evaluate the success of the program through surveys and/or group discussions to determine how the program might be improved and what activities need to be added<sup>80</sup>

A sampling of possible workshop topics includes:

- Anger management
- Transitions between schools and from school to the community
- Advocating for your child with disabilities
- Monitoring television watching
- Helping children develop positive self-esteem
- Creating summer learning opportunities
- Prevention of child abuse
- Positive parenting strategies
- Single parenting
- Father involvement
- Managing multiple family responsibilities
- Accessing community resources
- Parenting grandchildren

### ***Programs that support parents' own educational needs***

Schools can encourage greater family involvement by offering family members opportunities for their own education and enrichment. Many family centers offer a variety of educational opportunities, ranging from aerobics to advanced computer classes for college credit.

Parent University. The Rochester City School District in Rochester, NY, provides education and training for parents through its Parent University. Parent involvement/empowerment classes are offered at three different levels – beginning to advanced – according to parent liaison Cynthia Minz<sup>179</sup>.

Parent Literacy Workshop. The Syracuse Parent Partnership Network offered a literacy workshop for parents of high school students during the 2001-2002 school year and plans to continue the program if grant funding can be secured, according to parent advocate Michele Abdul Sabur. The intent was for the parents to model literacy practices for their children through writing poetry. The fathers and mothers met in evening sessions at a high school. In one session, their high school students joined them and the family wrote together. Local poets facilitated the four-session course, which attracted 8-10 parents and culminated in a celebration with participants sharing their original poetry with 100 of their family members and friends present. Their poetry was bound into a collection entitled *Finding Our Voices*.

### ***Programs that develop parent leadership***

Many schools now offer opportunities for parents to learn effective leadership skills. As an outgrowth of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) passed in 1990, the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership was launched in 1997 by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence to build leadership capacity in parents<sup>52</sup>. Many schools in the state realize they cannot institute major reforms without the assistance of parents, so they now have a “powerful incentive to engage families in improving student achievement”<sup>52, p. 28</sup>. Two hundred participants each year attend three intensive two-day sessions that are held around the state. Each parent graduate agrees to design and complete a project aimed at improving student achievement, increasing parent involvement, and having a lasting impact. Many graduates of the Institute have become officers in parent-teacher organizations and run for school board positions. Steve St. Clair, Principal of Conway Middle Schools, says the Institute “unlocks the potential in a parent leader.” For principals, he says, “it is much easier to communicate the school’s needs and goals with parents who have had this kind of training. Parent leaders can communicate a vision with other parents, often in a way that staff members cannot”<sup>52, p. 32</sup>. Many Parent Training and Information Centers and Developmental Disabilities Planning Councils also offer parent and consumer leadership development opportunities.

### ***Parent/child education opportunities***

Many schools offer opportunities for children and parents to learn together. Intergenerational literacy programs have grown nationwide during recent years in order to promote parent and child literacy development and to break the cycle of poverty in urban areas<sup>172</sup>.

Parent-child computer education: The Howard Lewis Parent Center in Buffalo, NY, offers parent-child computer classes for students in grades 6 through 12. Parents and children learn skills in desktop publishing and computer programming together. The center also allows parents to take home computers to learn with their children<sup>38</sup>.

Community School District 10, the largest urban school district in New York City, is working to bridge the digital divide with a cost-sharing wireless laptop leasing program for middle school students and parents<sup>180</sup>. The program will be in its third year with the 2002-2003 school year. Under the lease contract agreement, 36 monthly payments are shared by the school district and families, and parents are given the option to purchase the computers at the end of the lease period for \$1. A supporting professional development program includes a "three-pronged process for teachers, parents and students." According to Director of Information Technology Mario Fico, parents must participate in a 12-hour training program, conducted in English and Spanish, before the laptops are taken home by students,<sup>181</sup>. Among the positive impacts of the program, which will grow to more than 300 computers being leased in the district during the 2002-2003 school year, is an increase in student attendance and parent involvement.

### *Building Science Sundaes*

The BUILD Academy, an inner-city magnet school in Buffalo, NY, has successfully involved students and families of all ages with its Building Science Sundaes program. The program originally began during the 1997-98 school year as an opportunity to display elementary school science projects school-wide. From that beginning the program expanded to the school gym to include hands-on interactive experiments for students and parents at all levels--primary, intermediate, and secondary.

During the 2000-2001 school year secondary students were given the opportunity to make presentations discussing the "science behind the experiments" (Salinas, Jansom, and Nolan, 2001). A technology component was also added to the program during the 2001-2002 school year, according to Mary Kay Muscarella, Technology Integration Specialist (182). Students engaged in interactive technology activities demonstrated their projects for attendees.

The annual event, which "has highlighted the school's commitment to providing a strong science curriculum" as well as the "importance of parent partnerships," draws about 300 students and families, according to Ms. Muscarella. The school's PTA sponsors an Ice Cream Social during the same evening to encourage family participation.

### *The Hungerford Mosaic Project*

At the PS 721 Richard H. Hungerford School in Staten Island, NY parents became "arts partners" with their children to create the Hungerford Mosaic. The one-year Parents as Arts Partners program was funded by the New York City-based Center for Arts Education ([www.cae-nyc.org](http://www.cae-nyc.org)).

Teaching artist Kristi Pfister hosted a tour of the Staten Island Zoo for 47 family members and students who participated in the project. Ms. Pfister showed how zoo animals are translated into ceramic mosaic imagery. She then hosted a series of four, two-hour family workshops at the school for families and children to learn how to create a ceramic mosaic. A total of 70 family members and their children attended these Friday-night workshops, according to arts coordinator and teacher Linsey Miller. The result was the creation of a 2x4-foot ceramic mosaic that is now displayed in the school's lobby. Hungerford School is a District 75 school serving 235 K-12 students with disabilities.

"This collaboration has enabled our students, siblings, parents and teachers to experience the deep satisfaction of creating artwork and giving to the community," says Principal Dr. Mary McInerney. "Families have learned new ways to use the arts to help improve their child's perceptual, motor and problem solving skills" (183). Parent Liz Devoti said the project "bonded family members as a unique community." It also "inspired us to see our abilities and strengths and to recognize that the disabled member of our family has many hidden talents" <sup>184</sup>.

### **Support groups**

When families meet in support groups they discover they are dealing with common issues and life circumstances and are not alone. During group sessions a facilitator can help parents "to support each other while they work to help themselves" <sup>62, p. 176</sup>. Support groups can be organized around a single issue or be open-ended, depending upon the concerns of the participating parents. Groups may also be formed to appeal to family members with similar concerns (grandparents raising grandchildren, single parents, families with children with disabilities, etc.). Guidance counselors and school psychologists can take an active part in support group sessions.

### **Teen parenting programs**

"Schools are the social institution with the greatest opportunity and capacity to educate and intervene in the lives of school-age parents" <sup>185, p. 22</sup>. These young parents need "special attention, skillful direction, and sensitive support" <sup>71, p. 286</sup>. Rochester City School District has operated a Young Mothers Program since 1969. The program, housed at the Family Learning Center, offers education and comprehensive support services for teen mothers. Prenatal and postnatal care courses, career development classes, job training, and independent living skills classes are offered to up to 200 teen mothers a year. The services of a public health nurse,

guidance counselor, and social worker are also provided as a part of the program. Additionally, the program houses an infant day care center and a baby boutique where students may purchase clothes, toys, and furniture with credits earned in the program, according to Program Administrator Audrey Cummings <sup>186</sup>.

In New York City, the Living for the Young Family through Education (LYFE) program operates in 41 centers, some self-contained and some operating inside traditional schools <sup>187, 188</sup>. These combination schools/day care centers serve 600 infants and young children, ranging in age from two months to 33 months, and 700-1,000 young mothers and 50 young fathers annually. The LYFE program provides comprehensive education and social services to meet the needs of adolescent parents and help them transition with the support of community services. The program is primarily funded by the New York City Board of Education and Administration for Children's Services-Child Care.

## ***Strategy 7: Creating family-school-community partnerships***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Bring together families, schools, and community organizations in a collaborative effort to meet the comprehensive needs of children, families, and the community
- ✓ Open schools beyond traditional school hours and mission to become community learning centers for everyone in the neighborhood
- ✓ Cultivate school-business relationships that will benefit both school and business partners and sustain family-involvement programs

### *Community Schools in New York City*

The Children's Aid Society (CAS) in New York City has expanded partnering efforts over the last ten years to develop community schools: from an initial site in 1992 to eight additional sites in three neighborhoods serving 10,000 children and their families. Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, the CAS is adding two additional school sites in South Bronx including a full-service neighborhood center<sup>189</sup>.

A combination of federal, state, and private funding supports these schools, which while differing structurally and programmatically have created a sense of renewed hope in their communities<sup>85</sup>. One of the newer CAS community schools, an elementary school located in East Harlem, features a unique partnership involving the New York City Board of Education, Children's Aid Society, and Mount Sinai Hospital. The school focuses on comprehensive health prevention and promotion, with particular emphasis on the prevention and treatment of asthma, which affects a "sizable percentage" of the students who attend the school<sup>85, p. 38</sup>.

Parents were involved in the initial needs assessment process conducted at each CAS community school and are represented on the School Leadership Team, which meets monthly for planning and decision making. In these schools "parents are treated as partners rather than service recipients"<sup>85, p. 48</sup>.

The family resource centers in each school are considered parents' "first point of access" to the school, where they are welcome to wait for their children, talk with a teacher, look into adult education opportunities, sign up to volunteer, or use a computer to access their child's homework assignment for the day<sup>85 p. 40</sup>. "For many parents, these centers are "an arena of comfort in neighborhoods where there is much stress and hardship"<sup>190</sup>.

External evaluations of these programs have indicated "a number of tangible accomplishments," including improved academic performance; higher attendance rates; the development of positive, safe learning environments; increased parent involvement in "many ways throughout the school" (including a "significant and notable *presence*" of parents noted in the schools and teachers rating parent involvement as an "asset"); and improved student-teacher relationships<sup>85, p. 56</sup>.

"The sweeping changes that have occurred in families, schools, and communities require educators to collaborate with families and communities if they are to be successful in their primary mission of educating children"<sup>191, p. 45</sup>. The Community Schools initiative that has proven successful in some of the most challenging neighborhoods in New York City is one of many partnerships involving schools, families, and community agencies and organizations that are multiplying across the country.

Another successful initiative in New York City is the Beacon School-Based Community Centers program operating in 81 schools, the majority of which are open seven days a week<sup>192</sup>. These school/community centers offer children, youth, and adults a blend of social services, recreation, educational and vocational activities, health education, medical referrals, social activities, and community meeting places in a safe environment.

In their 1998 survey, Melaville and Blank discovered that school-community initiatives across the country were “skyrocketing” and noted that these collaborations illustrate a “strong sense of direction and shared purpose” among participating schools and agencies, although they are very diverse in terms of design, management, and funding<sup>193, p. 6-7</sup>.

### **Benefits of school-family-community collaborations**

One of the six National PTA standards<sup>4</sup> summarizes the benefits of school-family-community collaborations: “When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own:

- Families access community resources more easily;
- Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;
- Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,
- Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.”

Studies over the past two decades document that community organizing has contributed to the following changes in schools:

- Upgraded facilities;
- Improved school leadership and staffing;
- Higher quality learning programs;
- New resources and programs; and
- New funding for after-school programs and family supports<sup>30, p. 8</sup>

### ***The Syracuse City School District Partnership Policy (excerpt)***

The Board of Education of the Syracuse City School District believes that education is the shared responsibility of the students, parents, family, school, and community. Further, the Board recognizes that the academic achievement and success of our students depend on the strength of the partnerships developed among students, parents, families, schools, and the community, from preschool through graduation and beyond.

The Board of Education believes that strong partnerships can be developed through nurturing respect, sharing knowledge, supporting each partner’s role, collaborating on matters of importance, and appreciating the contributions each partner makes to student achievement. Parents and families provide their children with values, supervision and assistance in goal setting. They offer knowledge of their children’s unique histories, traditions, experiences, resources, and challenges. Educators contribute professional dedication, caring, and expertise. The community provides cultural and financial resources, support services, collaboration, and monitoring. Students, who are at the center of these partnerships, bring unique skills, talents, and learning styles, and ultimately are responsible for their own academic achievement.<sup>46, p. 332</sup>



School-community partnerships have the ability to “weave together a critical mass of resources and strategies to enhance caring communities that support all youth and their families and enable success at school and beyond” <sup>194, p. 2</sup>.

The Community School Assessment Checklist can be used by school and community partners to assess supports that are currently available in the school and community as an initial step in planning integrated services <sup>195</sup>. Other useful tools include the Community School Program and Service Checklist and the Community School Funding Source Assessment <sup>195</sup>.

### ***Barriers to school-family-community collaborations***

Although school-family-community collaborations are proliferating, many school and community programs and services continue to function “in relative isolation from each other,” and conflicts often arise over turf, use of space, confidentiality, and liability when school and community professionals try to collaborate <sup>194, p. 7</sup>. Despite its “promising direction” for strengthening families and neighborhoods, partnership building “requires an enlightened vision, creative leadership, and new and multifaceted roles for professionals who work in schools and communities, as well as for all who are willing to assume leadership” <sup>194, p. ii</sup>. School-community partnership development also takes time; partnerships are built “one relationship at a time” and need continual nurturing <sup>191, p. 46</sup>. Collaboration also often requires changes in traditional roles, responsibilities, expectations, and schedules, which can prove difficult for partners <sup>196</sup>.

#### ***Key Dimensions of School-community Collaborations:***

1. Initiation
2. Nature of collaboration
3. Focus
4. Scope of collaboration
5. Scope of potential impact
6. Ownership and governance of programs and services
7. Location of programs and services
8. Degree of cohesiveness among multiple interventions <sup>194, p. 2</sup>

Strategies included in this section which have proven effective in building school-family-community partnerships include community learning centers, full service/community schools, wraparound services for students who have or are at risk for developing emotional and/or behavioral disabilities, parent training and information centers, and school-business partnerships.

### ***Community learning centers***

Community learning centers “extend the concept of public education beyond the traditional K-12 program and are not limited by traditional school schedules and roles. Community schools are open schools, available for use before and after school for academic, co-curricular, recreational,

health, social service, and workforce-preparation programs for all ages”<sup>191, p. 45</sup>. “Keeping school doors open during nontraditional school hours provides students, parents, and the community with access to valuable educational resources”<sup>196</sup>. Schools may be used during these nonschool hours to serve families in a variety of ways: for community meetings, adult education, local theatrical productions, candidate forums, health screenings, and physical fitness classes, for instance<sup>196</sup>.

A community learning center can also serve as an after-school and summer learning environment for children where they are safe and supervised. Programs offered in these centers include tutoring and mentoring; drug and violence prevention; youth-focused activities (Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.); computer instruction; language instruction; employment preparation or training; and supervised recreation and athletic programs<sup>196</sup>.

A successful public-private partnership in New York City has created a comprehensive after-school program at Washington Irving High School that has given students “enhanced opportunities to explore their interests, connect with the community, and form positive relationships with adults”<sup>197, p. 50</sup>. In 1994, the 14<sup>th</sup> Street-Union Square Local Development Corporation formed a partnership with the school that has resulted in a “culture of raised expectations, improved self-esteem and increased academic achievement” at the school. In 2000, aided by a grant from The After School Corporation, the partnership created a diverse after-school program for educational enrichment that includes a range of corporate and not-for-profit support from the surrounding neighborhood. For example, Con Edison, a local utility company, sponsors an after-school robotics team where students work with professional engineers. Similarly, the after-school drama team works closely with the nearby Vineyard Theater, giving students experience working with professional playwrights, producers, and directors. Program Director Jenny Bailey indicated that 450 students (about 20% of the student population) participate in the after-school clubs, which are an extension of the school’s curriculum and give students an opportunity to work in smaller groups and benefit from more individualized attention<sup>198</sup>. An “After-School Showcase” is held periodically, giving students an opportunity to demonstrate to their families what they are learning.

### ***Full-service/community schools***

Full-service schools, also referred to as community schools, act as “one-stop centers where the educational, physical, psychological, and social” needs of families are met in a holistic approach<sup>199</sup>. These schools “combine the best quality educational practices with a wide range of vital in-house health and social services to ensure that children are physically, emotionally, and socially prepared to learn”<sup>200, p. 30</sup>. For children, teachers, and parents alike, this approach insures that “help is often just a step away”<sup>85</sup>.

A community school is “both a set of partnerships and a place where services, supports, and opportunities lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities”<sup>200, p. iv</sup>. In a community school the various partners are “not conducting business as usual. They are working together toward common results; changing their funding patterns; transforming the practice of their staffs; and working creatively and respectfully with youth, families, and residents to create a different kind of institution”<sup>201</sup>. Community schools offer families “many avenues for involvement,” including opportunities to serve on planning and advisory boards, volunteer in schools, and be hired as teachers’ aides and outreach workers<sup>202, p. 11</sup>.

*Although community schools have been referred to as “schools of the future,” the economic, social, and technological changes that are taking place all around us indicate that the future is already here. Community schools are schools for today because they offer a comprehensive response to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century children and their families. With their emphasis on providing students with extended learning opportunities, bringing together the key developmental influences in children’s lives—families, communities, and schools—and providing essential supports, protection, guidance, and opportunities, community schools are designed to help all students develop into productive adults who are able to earn a decent living, become responsible family members, and contribute to the larger society through good citizenship.*<sup>85, p. 27</sup>

No two full-service or community schools are exactly alike, although they share similar characteristics<sup>202</sup>. “A wide range of models and approaches can fit into a basic community school framework”<sup>200, p. iv</sup>. The most common services offered are medical and dental care, mental health, and social services, although one school that was having difficulty involving parents discovered that the service they most needed was access to a laundromat since none existed in the neighborhood. The school installed two washing machines and dryers in the basement of the school, which both families and teachers began utilizing. Before long, “parents and teachers got to know one another by chatting over the washing machines”<sup>202</sup>.

Successful programs require a full-time coordinator or program director, “who builds a team of personnel sensitive to the issues related to youth development, cultural diversity, and community empowerment”<sup>199</sup>. The director “oversees the delivery of an array of supports provided by local agency partners and participates on the management team for the school”<sup>200, p. iv</sup>. Bilingual staff may also be essential in many locations.

Although evaluations of full-service schools have been inconclusive thus far, gains have been documented in student achievement, attendance, reduction in suspensions, reduction in high-risk behaviors, better access to services, increased parental involvement, and safer neighborhoods<sup>202</sup>. Full-service schools have been especially beneficial for students with disabilities because of their emphasis on prevention and early intervention, integration of services that support total well-being of students, and easy access to comprehensive services and specialists<sup>203</sup>.

## **Wraparound services**

School-community collaboration is especially crucial for students who have or are at risk for emotional and behavioral disabilities. These students have a more than 50% dropout rate and many enter the justice system after they leave.<sup>60</sup> The wraparound process allows families, schools, and community teams to come together for “realistic problem-solving and creative planning”<sup>204, p. 10</sup>.

*Wraparound brings teachers, families, and community representatives together with a commitment to a family-centered, strength-based process. This results in the creation of unique services that support the student as well as the family, teacher, and other caregivers. Supports and services found in wraparound plans may include respite, mentors, peer supports, parent partners, and assistance for families in need of basic supports such as housing, transportation, job assistance, childcare, and health and safety supports.*<sup>204, p. 10</sup>

A “key element” in this process is families, students, and professionals “reaching consensus on the outcomes they want to achieve”<sup>204, p. 10</sup>. The community can play a vital role in the success of these programs, for example, in providing incentives (gift certificates, event passes, etc.) that can be used to reinforce student efforts.

### ***The Center Without Walls***

The Center Without Walls (CWW) program helps parents of children with disabilities or other special needs connect with programs and services for their children and themselves. A bilingual, mobile access team takes information, training, and advocacy services to community-based organizations serving immigrant, minority, and at-risk families in New York City. CWW provides on-the-spot information about schools, educational and related services, family and community resources, and respite programs. Parents can use CWW's traveling library to and access the program's comprehensive database of programs and services.

The Center Without Walls' multilingual Access Team provides training and helps parents in English, Spanish, Haitian, Creole, and Chinese. They can also link parents to sources of help in many other languages.

The Center Without Walls is a joint project of two Parent Training and Information Centers, Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc. and Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., both located in New York City.

### ***Parent Training and Information Centers***

Funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) are located in every state and U.S. territory. PTIs assist parents of children birth to 21 with disabilities and special needs. Each center is part of or its own independent not-for-profit organization. Together, PTIs form a national network of more than 100 centers that provide valued services, including information and referral, educational advocacy, training for parents and professionals, outreach and special events, libraries, and publications. New York State has four PTIs - one in Rochester and three in New York City, and one Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC) which serves a specific community in Brooklyn, NY.

An important goal of all PTIs is to improve communication between parents of children with disabilities and special needs and the school personnel who work with their children. PTIs work to achieve this goal in many ways, including holding workshops for parents and professionals on topics such as parent and student rights, special education services, how the school system works, and home/school communication. PTI staff also work directly with parents and schools to

obtain the most appropriate education for students with disabilities. All PTIs can refer parents to a wide range of resources in their communities, including after-school programs, camps and summer programs, tutoring, early intervention services, and much more.

### ***School-business partnerships***

School-business partnerships “are a long-established means of working with the community, and they continue to be fertile ground for improving programs offered by schools” <sup>205, p. 122</sup>. The typical ways that businesses support schools are through donations of voluntary labor and funding. Some employees serve as adult mentors for students and provide encouragement and support, especially for students with limited family involvement at home. Employees may also invite students to accompany them to work for a day to job shadow, giving them an opportunity to learn about potential careers and the expectations of the workplace. Further, these workplaces can serve as school-to-work sites for secondary students to gain on-the-job experiences. Businesses and community agencies may also collaborate on service learning projects that engage students in a business or community-related project as part of their coursework.

School-business collaborations result in businesses gaining “a work force that’s prepared and ready for the world of work” because the businesses have been involved in helping to prepare students through opportunities such as mentoring, apprenticeship, and service learning programs <sup>205, p. 125</sup>. Other tangible benefits to business partners may include:

- research assistance using school resources or personnel
- student volunteer assistance through service learning programs
- recruitment of future employees through student career and mentoring activities
- student artwork and decorations
- student performances
- access to school recreation and exercise facilities
- free advertising in the school newspaper
- student and faculty art assistance <sup>3, 205</sup>

Strategies businesses can utilize to support home-school-community partnerships include:

- creating and adopting “family-friendly” policies (paid time off, flex time, “lunchtime flex,” part-time employment, job sharing, and other arrangements) to encourage family participation in school activities;
- supporting employees who are parents through worksite programs (parent support groups, lunchtime parenting seminars, literacy training, etc.);
- working to improve child care and schools through internal and community programs (child care resources, in-kind donations, and *pro bono* consulting to schools, etc.);
- working with schools to help them better meet the needs of employed parents (“employee-friendly” scheduling of school events, family resource centers, translation of materials into native languages, etc.); and
- supporting and sustaining family involvement strategies that prove effective. <sup>55, 76</sup>

## **Strategy 8: *Preparing educators to work with families***

### **Action Steps:**

- ✓ Provide ongoing professional development for school faculty and staff on ways to create family-friendly schools, build positive school-family relationships, and involve families in the education of their children
- ✓ Make positive interactions with families and encouragement of family involvement an expectation for new faculty and staff members
- ✓ Include parental perspectives in planning and implementation of professional development opportunities
- ✓ Provide opportunities for staff, families, and community members to come together to learn skills in leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and shared decision making

***School, Family, and Community Relations Course  
University of Rochester, Rochester, NY***

School, Family and Community Relations is a required course for graduate students earning masters degrees in school administration at the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. The course, taught by Dr. Howard Kirschenbaum for the past seven years, introduces administrators, teachers, and counselors to "the dramatic changes taking place in school, family, and community relations". Students survey "the wide variety of models and approaches taking place today for uniting schools, parents, and community institutions into meaningful partnerships for academic success and healthy development of young people". They also examine "the many theoretical, political, and practical issues associated with these new models of collaboration".<sup>206, p.1</sup>

Because he works closely with the Rochester City School District on research and implementation projects involving family involvement, including assisting in developing the district's strategic plan for parent involvement, Dr. Kirschenbaum is able to bring his own experiences into the classroom. He also invites resource people from the school and community into the classroom, including active parent volunteers, and takes the class on field trips into the community. Students are also required to go out into the community and conduct school-case studies by interviewing parents, teachers, and administrators, and by gathering information about schools previously unfamiliar to them<sup>207</sup>. "It's a lot to cover in one course," said Dr. Kirschenbaum, "but I think it's possible to give students a good feel for the newer 'partnership paradigm' in education and some of the theory, research, and practice associated with it"<sup>208</sup>.

Topics covered in the course include:

- School-family communication
- Partnership models
- Parent involvement at school
- Measuring and evaluating parent involvement
- Parent empowerment
- Parent rights, school choice, and related controversial issues
- School-linked services
- Community support for schools
- Tutoring and mentoring
- School-to-work programs
- Service learning
- Issues and controversies in school-community relations

***Family, Child, and Teacher Interaction in  
Regular and Inclusive Settings  
Bank Street College of Education, New York City, NY***

Rena Rice has taught the Family, Child, and Teacher Interaction in Regular and Inclusive Settings graduate course at the Bank Street College of Education since 1990, although the college has offered a course in school-family relations for the past 50 years<sup>207</sup>. The class focuses on developing competency in school-family relations and building content knowledge and skills, and emphasizes changing attitudes. The experiences students undergo during the class help them to "look at families in different ways" than before they took the course. "School-family relations are an area that all teachers have anxiety about," Ms. Rice indicated, "even experienced teachers. It should be a part of all education classes"<sup>209</sup>.

Going beyond the traditional teaching methods found in most college classes, Ms. Rice introduces a variety of strategies to help her students learn more about families of diverse backgrounds and develop empathy and understanding for their perspectives. These include role-playing, self-reflection, modeling, and interactive learning methods.

Assignments include students interviewing a parent of a different socioeconomic and/or ethnic background from their own about their feelings and experiences concerning school-family relations, analyzing and critiquing family involvement policies and practices utilizing the National PTA Standards, and developing plans to include parents in a curriculum study. These activities help move students beyond the "myth of physical availability" that assumes parents cannot be actively involved in their children's education unless they are present in the classroom.

Ms. Rice views her students as teachers who will be "agents of change" in their respective schools. She is hopeful that the class will motivate students to change school policies from ones that often "distance families" into ones that welcome and encourage greater family involvement and improved school-family relations<sup>209</sup>.

The courses described above are among a growing number nationwide that prepare educators for school-family-community collaboration. The Harvard Family Research Project is also working with teachers colleges and school districts to prepare teachers to work with parents. The project maintains a web site of syllabi for teacher preparation courses in family involvement that may be accessed from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/syllabus/index.html>.



Nationwide there is a growing recognition of the importance of training educators in school-family-community collaboration, although “*in practice* such training is not happening as widely or quickly as necessary”<sup>207, p. 188</sup>. Surveys of higher education practices over the past two decades indicate that more institutions are incorporating family involvement into teacher preparation coursework, although only a minority of institutions offer a “comprehensive program in school-family-community relations that gives educators a thorough grounding in the theory, research, and practice of partnerships”<sup>207, p. 188</sup>. An ongoing debate centers on whether colleges and universities should offer required courses in school-community-family involvement or “infuse the content throughout the curriculum,” or both<sup>207, p. 194</sup>.

## ***Policies and practices***

With the addition in 1994 of Goal 8 to the Goals 2000 legislation, which states: “Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children”<sup>46</sup>. More attention has been given to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the positive impact of school-family-community collaborations. At the same time, there is recognition of a “serious discrepancy” between preservice preparation of teachers and the types of family involvement activities that teachers are increasingly expected to perform<sup>43</sup>. Until recently, most state certification departments did not require courses on family involvement for preservice educators. Since the late 1990s the number of states requiring that teachers have knowledge and skills related to parent and community involvement has increased significantly and many states have begun to mandate preservice training and ongoing professional development in family involvement and school-family-community partnerships<sup>201, 207, 211</sup>. However, California is the only state thus far that has enacted legislation mandating preservice and practicing teachers “to serve as active partners with parents and guardians in the education of children”<sup>212</sup>.

The New York State Department of Education<sup>213</sup> requires all teachers receiving certification by 2004 to have training that covers:

- The impact of factors in the home, school, and community on students’ readiness to learn
- The importance of productive relationships and interactions among the school, home, and community for enhancing student learning—and skill in fostering effective relationships and interactions to support student growth and learning
- Experiences practicing skills for interacting with parents or caregivers
- Participating in collaborative partnerships for the benefit of students with disabilities, including family strengthening partnerships
- Communicating assessment results to parent, caregivers, and school personnel

Additionally, New York’s eight *Standards for Teachers* includes one standard that specifically addresses family involvement:

*The teacher promotes parental involvement and collaborates effectively with other staff, the community, higher education, other agencies, and cultural institutions, as well as parents and other caregivers, for the benefit of students.*<sup>214</sup>

The Massachusetts State Department of Education's *Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Guide* <sup>69</sup> recommends that training in family-school-community involvement for both preservice and practicing teachers include:

- Research findings and information on the benefits of family involvement
- Strategies for helping educators “develop the skills, sensitivity, and insight necessary to work effectively with parents representing a variety of family structures and cultural backgrounds”
- Strategies for helping school staff to create a welcoming school environment
- Methods of developing “effective parent outreach and engagement strategies, including the regular two-way communication between the school and home”
- Strategies to overcome barriers to family involvement
- Development of effective communication skills
- Models of successful school, family, and community partnerships and methods for building these partnerships
- Community resources and programs and strategies for connecting families with these resources
- Opportunities for staff, families, and community members to come together to learn skills in leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and shared decision making <sup>69</sup>

The Council for Exceptional Children <sup>215</sup> recommends the following knowledge and skills that new teachers need to have in order to work effectively with families:

Knowledge:

- Culturally responsive factors that promote effective communication and collaboration with individuals, families, school personnel, and community members.
- Concerns of families of individuals with exceptional learning needs and strategies to help address these concerns:
- Family systems and the role of families in supporting development and educational progress.

Skills:

- Foster respectful and beneficial relationships between families and professionals.
- Assist individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families in becoming active participants in the educational team.
- Plan and conduct collaborative conferences with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families. <sup>p. 26</sup>
- 

Additional skills are recommended for early childhood special educators, including the following:

- Establish and maintain positive, collaborative relationships with families.
- Apply family systems theory and knowledge of the dynamics, roles, and relationships within families and communities.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to differences in family structures and social and cultural backgrounds.
- Assist families in identifying their resources, priorities, and concerns in relation to their child's development.
- Respect parents' choices and goals for children and communicate effectively with parents about curriculum and children's progress.

- Involve families in assessing and planning for their children, including children with special needs.
- Implement a range of family-oriented services based on the family’s identified resources, priorities, and concerns.
- Implement family services consistent with due process safeguards.
- Evaluate services with families <sup>pp. 50-51</sup>

Both of the national associations that either accredit or set standards for teacher preparation programs—the National Council for Accreditation of teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) have added or strengthened indicators addressing parent involvement. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards includes parent involvement competencies among 11 generalist standards for educators <sup>210</sup>.

In *New Skills for New Schools*, Shartrand, Weiss, and Lopez <sup>34</sup> offer a comprehensive framework that “illustrates the range of training for family involvement” to prepare teachers:

### ***Family Involvement Framework for Teacher Training***

| <b>Type</b>   | <b>Goals</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b><i>General Family Involvement</i></b>                | To provide general information on the goals of, benefits of, and barriers to family involvement. To promote knowledge of, skills in, and positive attitudes toward involving parents                       |
| <b><i>General Family Knowledge</i></b>                  | To promote knowledge of different families' cultural beliefs, childrearing practices, structures, and living environments. To promote an awareness of and respect for different backgrounds and lifestyles |
| <b><i>Home-School Communication</i></b>                 | To provide techniques and strategies to improve two-way communication between home and school (and/or parent and teacher)  |
| <b><i>Family Involvement in Learning Activities</i></b> | To provide information on how to involve parents in their children’s learning outside of the classroom   |
| <b><i>Families Supporting Schools</i></b>               | To provide information on ways to involve parents in helping the school, both within and outside the classroom   |
| <b><i>Schools Supporting Families</i></b>               | To examine how schools can support families’ social, educational, and social service needs through parent education programs, parent centers, and referrals to other community or social services          |
| <b><i>Families as Change Agents</i></b>                 | To introduce ways to support and involve parents and families in decision making, action research, child advocacy, parent and teacher training, and development of policy, programs, and curriculum        |

Maintaining that “no one method of instruction can prepare teachers to work effectively with families and communities,” Shartrand, Weiss, and Lopez<sup>34</sup> advocate for approaches that are “comprehensive, integrated, and varied.” Best practices they recommend include “providing prospective teachers with opportunities to develop problem-solving skills by exposing them to challenging situations that require them to negotiate sensitive issues,” and having them work in schools and communities under the guidance of experienced professionals, where they apply research skills for a better understanding of families and communities and utilize information to develop family involvement activities.

Among the nine recommendations made by the *New Skills for New Teachers* study<sup>34</sup>, five directly address school-family-community collaborations:

- 1) Make training available to elementary, middle, and high school teachers; early childhood educators receive more preservice training than other teachers
- 2) Improve the effectiveness of training through collaboration across subspecialties and disciplines—health and social services
- 3) Integrate training throughout the teacher preparation curriculum rather than treating it as an isolated component
- 4) Sustain teachers’ knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes toward families through inservice training
- 5) Move beyond classroom-based teaching methods by offering teachers direct field experiences working with families

Ongoing professional development for teachers is needed as family structures continue to change, requiring “new or different family outreach strategies from what may have been effective in the past”<sup>38</sup>. These trainings may include topics such as strategies for contacting parents, students’ home culture, appreciation of diversity, effective communication, conflict resolution, team building, and ways to involve parents as leaders and decision-makers in the school. In addition, as more children with disabilities are included in the general education curriculum, both special and regular educators will need training that focuses on effectively interacting with parents of children with disabilities to involve them as equal partners in the educational planning and decision-making process for their child<sup>216</sup>.

In addressing issues related to poverty, professional development for educators needs to change the focus from mothers in poverty as contributors to the problem of underachieving students to “how the schools, as powerful institutions of social control, reproduce inequalities of social class and stereotypes of the poor”<sup>19</sup> and “socialize children into a white, middle-class system,” promoting values which may be in opposition to the values of some families in the school<sup>3, p. 28</sup>. Possible topics for discussion include poverty and privilege, stereotyping, unrealistic middle-class expectations for families living in poverty, and recognition of the strengths of families as a balance for any limitations.

### ***Parents as teachers***

Parents of different cultures, such as Native American, Hispanic, and Asian, can take an active role in presenting parental perspectives in professional development opportunities for teachers that focus on family involvement. In California, “mentor parents” provide professional development to school staff on parent involvement and home-school communication. One workshop addressed obstacles to parent involvement in schools, including parents’ negative

past experiences that discourage participation, and perceived teacher biases based on parents' different socioeconomic status, race, gender, physical appearance, or language ability<sup>38</sup>.

### *Reading at Home*

Reading at Home is a course taught by parents to parents of K-3 students in several Illinois Solid Foundation schools. The course helps parents encourage children to develop a lifelong love of reading. Parents who take the course attend three weekly, 90-minute sessions that are taught in groups of ten and led by parents trained as group leaders. Parents learn activities and exercises to do with their children and then share experiences with the group. Many of the activities require no previous planning or extra supplies. In several schools where students speak more than one language, parent volunteers are translating the course into multiple languages.<sup>217</sup>

### *Parents as faculty*

Parents have also been effective when employed as co-instructors in the professional development of teachers. The Family as Faculty project, begun in 1999 at the University of South Florida, recruits family members as guest lecturers in education classes with the goal of enhancing "home-school partnerships by providing future educators with opportunities to listen to the voices of families from a variety of walks of life"<sup>218</sup>. Topics presented by parents have included attention deficit disorder, language barriers, socioeconomic barriers, teacher conferences, and grandparent caregiving, according to project director Dr. Jane Sergay. One parent of a child with a learning disability shared a strategy with the students of videotaping interactions with her daughter to help the teacher relate more effectively with her daughter. Some parents have brought their children to classes. Other parents have agreed to role play with students in counseling education courses.

*Participation in the Family as Faculty Program is a gratifying experience. I have the opportunity to share positive interactions, experiences, and strategies with my child's educational planning team.*

Phyllis Guthman<sup>219</sup>

Parents recruited for the program are given a three-day orientation and training during which they reflect on their experiences, identify specific issues and personal stories, and consider what makes a good presentation. They also give practice presentations and give one another feedback. Parents receive a training stipend and fee for each presentation. This program is now being replicated at other institutions, including the University of North Carolina and the University of Central Florida.

The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children<sup>220</sup> recommends that family members be involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating preservice curriculum as well as in delivering in-service training. Although the approaches to co-instruction vary in degree and content, the emphasis is still on the ability of family members to share with professionals their personal experiences and perspectives from living with a child with a disability. "This ability to understand the world from the perspective of family members is critical to providing educational services to children and families that reflect a family-centered philosophy"<sup>221</sup>.

## **Evaluation**

As schools implement new practices in family involvement, the benefits for students, parents, staff, the school, and the community need to be evaluated on an ongoing basis<sup>8, 164</sup>. Surveys of families, school staff, and community members about participation in and satisfaction with family involvement activities; interviews; sign-in sheets for parent volunteers; and comparisons of “before and after” practices are all ways to assess the effectiveness of practices. These evaluations can be formal or informal, but “it is important to learn how each practice is working to inform future plans and improvements”<sup>164, p. 30</sup>. Schools should remain open to suggestions from parents about how their involvement can be improved<sup>222</sup>. In schools with family coordinators, they can take a lead role in coordinating evaluation activities.

The following is a list of evaluation instruments that can be utilized to assess the benefits of family involvement practices and school-home-community practices.

### **Family Involvement Evaluation Instruments**

- Appendix F: Schools that Say “Welcome”<sup>223</sup>
- Checklist for a Welcoming First Impression of Your School<sup>13, pp. 51-52</sup>
- Checklist for Improving Parental Involvement<sup>56</sup>
- Checklist for Improving Parent Involvement<sup>224</sup>
- Checklist of Quality Indicators of the Six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (Available in English, Chinese, Cambodian, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese)<sup>107, pp. 210-214</sup>
- Educator Reflection: Gathering Perceptions and Collaborating on Results<sup>129</sup>
- End-of-Year Evaluation: School-family-community partnerships<sup>164, pp. 137-143</sup>
- Evaluating PTA Parent/Family Involvement Activities<sup>4, p. 222</sup>
- Evaluating Group Process<sup>4, pp. 215-216</sup>
- Faculty Survey<sup>4, pp. 211-212</sup>
- Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Early Childhood Education Programs<sup>225</sup>
- How Welcome are Parents in our School?<sup>226</sup>
- Inventory for Creating School-Family Connections<sup>107, pp. 223-227</sup>
- Inventory of Present Practices of School-Family-Community Partnerships<sup>164, pp. 122-125</sup>
- Parent Involvement in Our Schools<sup>4, pp. 201-204</sup>
- Parent Involvement Inventory<sup>227, 228</sup>
- Assessment Form<sup>229</sup>
- Parent Survey<sup>4, pp. 205-209</sup>
- Resource 1-1: Survey on Parent Involvement<sup>113, pp. 7-12</sup>
- Resource 1-2: Learning Together—A Checklist for Schools<sup>113, pp. 13-15</sup>
- Resource 1-3: Decision-Making Table<sup>113, pp. 16-18</sup>
- School-community self-assessment on community and parent engagement based on five community values.<sup>90</sup>
- Self-Assessment Tool for Schools to Evaluate Parent/Family Involvement<sup>231</sup>
- Survey (self-study) – Home Involvement in Schooling<sup>32</sup>
- Taking Stock: Checklists for Self-Assessment<sup>11, pp. 79-93</sup>
- Using the Model to Guide Parent Involvement Practice<sup>125, pp. 27-31</sup>

## ***School-Home-Community Evaluation Instruments***

- Building Community – Strengthening Partnerships: Parent Survey <sup>129</sup>, pp. 25-27
- Building Community – Strengthening Partnerships: Community Survey <sup>129</sup>, pp. 28-29
- Checklist of Quality Indicators of the Six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (Available in English, Chinese, Cambodian, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese)<sup>107</sup>, pp. 210-214;
- Community School Partnership Assessment <sup>195</sup>
- Ideas into Practice: School-Community Partnerships: Self-Study Survey<sup>193</sup>, p. 9
- Parent Involvement Inventory <sup>227; 228</sup>
- School-community self-assessment on community and parent engagement based on five community values. <sup>230</sup>
- Survey (self-study) –School-Community Partnerships <sup>194</sup>

## ***Sample Calendar of Family Involvement Activities***

### **August**

Home visits  
Family Center open 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **September**

First Day of School activities  
Positive phone calls to all families  
Parent-friendly letter/survey of volunteer interest sent home  
Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Open House Ice Cream Social  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
After-school workshop for teachers:  
Working with culturally diverse families  
(parent facilitators)  
Action Team meeting  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **October**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Dad/Child Saturday Breakfast  
Bring Your Parents to School Day  
ESL classes for family members  
Family Science Night  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
Family Education Workshop: Positive parenting strategies  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **November**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Parent-teacher conferences (morning and evening)  
Grandparents Day  
Family Education Workshop: Second-time-around parenting for grandparents  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
Action Team meeting  
ESL classes for family members  
Family Math Night  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **December**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
Family Education Workshop: Monitoring television/computer time  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **January**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
Action Team meeting  
Family Education Workshop: Anger management  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **February**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Family Science Night  
GED classes for family members  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
After-school workshop for teachers:  
Working with families who have children with disabilities (parent facilitators)  
Family Education Workshop: Keeping children safe from abduction  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

### **March**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Take Your Child to Work Day  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
GED classes for family members  
Family Math Night  
Action Team meeting  
Family Education Workshop: Preventing substance abuse  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities



**April**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Mom/Child Saturday Breakfast  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
Family Education Workshop: Effective communication with teachers  
International festival for families  
Parent-teacher conferences (morning and evening)  
Family support group meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

**May**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Teacher Appreciation Week  
Recognition awards for volunteers  
Transition Student/Parent Activities for graduating students  
Welcome Folders sent to each new family  
Family Education Workshop: Summer learning activities for families  
Family support group meeting  
Action Team meeting  
Ongoing evaluation of activities

**June**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Action Team meets to plan for coming year  
Summative evaluation of year's activities

**July**

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Action Team meets to plan for coming year  
Summative evaluation of year's activities

## Contacts/Resources

### Introduction:

Academic Development Institute  
The Center for the School Community  
Family Study Institute  
Illinois Family Education Center  
121 N. Kickapoo St.  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
Phone: (217) 732-6462  
Web site: [www.adi.org](http://www.adi.org)

Family Friendly Schools  
13080 Brookmead Drive  
Manassas, VA 20112  
Phone: (800) 648-6082  
Web site:  
<http://www.familyfriendlyschools.org/>

Family Involvement Network of Educators  
Harvard Family Research Project  
Longfellow Hall  
Appian Way  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Phone: (617) 495-9108  
Web site:  
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/syllabus/index.html>

Fathers Network  
11620 NE Eighth St.  
Bellevue, WA 98008-3937  
Phone: (425) 747-4004, ext. 218  
E-mail: [jmay@fathersnetwork.org](mailto:jmay@fathersnetwork.org)  
Web site:  
<http://www.fathersnetwork.org/674.html>

Institute for Responsive Education  
Northeastern University  
40 Nightingale Hall  
Boston, MA 02115  
Phone: (617) 373-2595  
Web site:  
<http://www.dac.neu.edu/ire/home.html>

Mental Health in Schools Training and  
Technical Assistance Center  
UCLA / School Mental Health Project  
Department of Psychology  
P.O. Box 951563  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563  
Phone: (310) 825-3634  
E-mail: [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

MetLife Foundation Teacher-Parent  
Engagement Through Partnerships  
Initiative  
National Coalition for Parent Involvement  
in Education  
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org/>

National Center for Family and Community  
Connections with Schools  
*Emerging Issues in School, Family, and  
Community Connections*  
Web site:  
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/>

National Center for Family and Community  
Connections with Schools  
*The Connection Collection: School-  
Family-Community Connections Database*  
Web site:  
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement  
in Education (NCPiE)  
1201 16<sup>th</sup> St. N. W., Box 39  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 822-8405  
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org>

National Network of Partnership Schools  
Johns Hopkins University  
3003 N. Charles St., Suite 200  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
Phone: (410) 615-8818  
E-mail: [nnps@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:nnps@csos.jhu.edu)  
Web site:  
<http://222.partnershipschools.org>

Mental Health in Schools Training and  
Technical Assistance Center  
UCLA / School Mental Health Project  
Department of Psychology  
P.O. Box 951563  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563  
Phone: (310) 825-3634  
E-mail: [smhp@ucla.edu](mailto:smhp@ucla.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

MetLife Foundation Teacher-Parent  
Engagement Through Partnerships  
Initiative  
National Coalition for Parent Involvement  
in Education  
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org/>

National Center for Family and Community  
Connections with Schools  
*Emerging Issues in School, Family, and  
Community Connections*  
Web site:  
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/>

National Center for Family and Community  
Connections with Schools  
*The Connection Collection: School-  
Family-Community Connections Database*  
Web site:  
<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement  
in Education (NCPiE)  
1201 16<sup>th</sup> St. N. W., Box 39  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 822-8405  
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org>

National Network of Partnership Schools  
Johns Hopkins University  
3003 N. Charles St., Suite 200  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
Phone: (410) 615-8818  
E-mail: [nnps@csos.jhu.edu](mailto:nnps@csos.jhu.edu)  
Web site:  
<http://222.partnershipschools.org>

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)  
330 North Wabash Ave.  
Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611-3690  
Phone: (312) 670-6782  
E-mail: [info@pta.org](mailto:info@pta.org)  
Web site: <http://www.pta.org/>

National Teacher Recruitment  
Clearinghouse  
Recruiting New Teachers  
385 Concord Ave., Suite 103  
Belmont, MA 02478  
Phone: (617) 489-6000  
Web site:  
<http://www.recruitingteachers.org/index.html>

The Partnership for Family Involvement in  
Education  
U. S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202-8173  
Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN  
E-mail: [partner@ed.gov](mailto:partner@ed.gov)  
Web site: <http://pfie.ed.gov>

#### **Strategy 1:**

Buffalo Public School #45  
Colleen Carota, Principal  
141 Hoyt  
Buffalo, NY 14213  
Phone: (716) 888-7077

The Fatherhood Project/Families and Work  
Institute  
267 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10016  
Phone: (212) 465-2044  
E-mail: [jlevine@familiesandwork.org](mailto:jlevine@familiesandwork.org)  
Web site: [www.fatherhoodproject.org](http://www.fatherhoodproject.org)

National Fatherhood Initiative  
101 Lake Forest Boulevard, Suite 360  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877  
Phone: (301) 948-0599  
Web site: <http://www.fatherhood.org/>

Rush-Henrietta Central School District  
Rush-Henrietta Family Center  
Kay Lyons, Partnership Schools Facilitator  
Vollmer Building  
150 Telephone Road  
West Henrietta, NY  
Phone: (716) 359-7915 or 7912  
E-mail: [Klyons@rhnet.org](mailto:Klyons@rhnet.org)

Urbana Middle School  
Barbara Linder, Community Connections  
Coordinator  
West Campus  
1201 S. Vine  
Urbana, IL 61801  
Phone: (217) 337-0853  
E-mail: [linderba@cmi.k12.il.us](mailto:linderba@cmi.k12.il.us)

## **Strategy 2:**

Academic Development Institute  
The Center for the School Community  
Family Study Institute  
Illinois Family Education Center  
121 N. Kickapoo Street  
Lincoln, IL 62656  
Web site: <http://www.adi.org/>

Buffalo Parent Center  
Bonnie Nelson, Supervisor  
Buffalo Board of Education  
15 E. Genesee  
Buffalo, NY 14203  
Phone: (716) 851-3651 or 52

Family Friendly Schools  
13080 Brookmead Drive  
Manassas, VA 20112  
Phone: (800) 648-6082  
Web site:  
<http://www.familyfriendlyschools.org/>

Fresno Unified School District  
Parent Engagement Center  
2940 N. Blackstone  
Fresno, CA 93703  
Phone: (559) 241-7237  
Web site:  
<http://fresno.k12.ca.us/divdept/pec/>

Greensville Public Schools  
Dr. Margaret Lee, Title I  
Coordinator/Elementary Supervisor  
105 Ruffin St.  
Emporia, VA 23847  
Phone: (434) 634-3748  
Web site:  
<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/Div/Greensville/>

New City Elementary School  
Dorothy Atzl, Site Coordinator  
60 Crestwood Drive  
New City, NY 10956  
Phone: (845) 639-6360  
Web site: <http://www.ccsd.edu/newcity/>

Parent Partnership Network  
Michele Abdul Sabur, Parent Advocate  
Syracuse City School District  
725 Harrison St.  
Syracuse, NY 13210  
Phone: (315) 435-4148  
E-mail:  
[mabdusab@freeside.scsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:mabdusab@freeside.scsd.k12.ny.us)

Rochester Action Center  
Barbara Jarzyniecki, Chief  
Communications Director  
30 Hart St.  
Rochester, NY 14605  
Phone: (716) 262-8070  
E-mail: [Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org](mailto:Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org)  
Web site: <http://www.rcsdk12.org/pac>

**Strategy 3:**

First Day Foundation, 210 Main Street  
PO Box 10  
Bennington, Vermont 05201-0010  
Toll Free Phone: 1-877-FIRST DAY  
E-mail: [firstday@sover.net](mailto:firstday@sover.net)  
Web site: <http://www.firstday.com/>

Harmony Hills Elementary School  
Barbara Hildreth, Principal  
Madelon K. Hickey Way  
Cohoes, NY 12047  
Phone: (518) 233-1900  
E-mail: [bhildret@cohoes.org](mailto:bhildret@cohoes.org)

Monica Leary Elementary School  
Sue Mills, Principal  
5509 E. Henrietta  
Rush, NY 14543  
Phone: (716) 359-5468  
E-mail: [smills@rhnet.org](mailto:smills@rhnet.org)

Rush-Henrietta Central School District  
Rush-Henrietta Family Center  
Kay Lyons, Partnership Schools Facilitator  
Vollmer Building  
150 Telephone Road  
West Henrietta, NY  
E-mail: [Klyons@rhnet.org](mailto:Klyons@rhnet.org)  
Phone: (716) 359-7915 or 7912

**Strategy 4:**

Fayetteville Elementary School  
Nancy Smith, Principal  
700 South Manlius Street  
Fayetteville, NY 13066  
Phone: (315) 682-1320  
E-mail: [nsmith@fm.cnyric.org](mailto:nsmith@fm.cnyric.org)

Middleburgh Central School District  
John Metallo, Superintendent  
181 Main Street  
Middleburgh, NY 12122  
Phone: (518) 827-5567  
E-mail: [metallo@rocketmail.com](mailto:metallo@rocketmail.com)

Ridgetop Elementary School  
Maria Teresa Flores, Parent Involvement  
Coordinator  
5005 Caswell Ave.  
Austin, TX 78751  
Phone: (512) 414-4469  
Web site:  
<http://www.austinschools.org/ridgetop/>

Rochester Action Center  
Barbara Jarzyniecki, Chief  
Communications Director  
30 Hart St.  
Rochester, NY 14605  
Phone: (716) 262-8070  
E-mail: [Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org](mailto:Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org)  
Web site: <http://www.rcsdk12.org/pac>

Middleburgh Central School District  
John Metallo, Superintendent  
181 Main Street  
Middleburgh, NY 12122  
Phone: (518) 827-5567  
E-mail: [metallo@rocketmail.com](mailto:metallo@rocketmail.com)

Ridgetop Elementary School  
Maria Teresa Flores, Parent Involvement  
Coordinator  
5005 Caswell Ave.  
Austin, TX 78751  
Phone: (512) 414-4469  
Web site:  
<http://www.austinschools.org/ridgetop/>

Rochester Action Center  
Barbara Jarzyniecki, Chief  
Communications Director  
30 Hart St.  
Rochester, NY 14605  
Phone: (716) 262-8070  
E-mail: [Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org](mailto:Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org)  
Web site: <http://www.rcsdk12.org/pac>

**Strategy 5:**

Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships  
Johns Hopkins University  
3505 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
Phone: (410) 518-8800  
Web site:  
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm>

Keshequa Central School District  
Ms. Lori Gray, PTSA President  
15 Mill St.  
Nunda, NY 14517  
Phone: 585-476-2234 x1213  
E-mail: [dgraze@yahoo.com](mailto:dgraze@yahoo.com)  
Web site: <http://www.kcs.k12.ny.us/default.htm>

University of Florida  
Dr. Jennifer M. Asmus  
Department of Educational Psychology  
P. O. Box 117047  
Gainesville, FL 32611-7047  
Phone: (352) 392-0723  
E-mail: [Jasmus@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:Jasmus@coe.ufl.edu)

University of Vermont  
Dr. Pam Key  
School Research Office  
Department of Education  
429 Waterman Building  
Burlington, VT 05405-0160  
Phone: (802) 656-8551  
E-mail: [pkay@zoo.uvm.edu](mailto:pkay@zoo.uvm.edu)

**Strategy 6:**

The BUILD Academy  
Mary Kay Muscarella, Technology Integration Specialist  
340 Fougerson St.  
Buffalo, NY 14211  
Phone: (716) 897-8110

Community School District #10  
Mario Fico, Director of Information Technology  
One Fordham Plaza  
Bronx, NY 10458  
Phone: (718) 329-8064  
Web site: <http://www.csd10.org/>

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership  
Beverly N. Raimondo, Director  
Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence  
Lexington, KY  
Phone: (859) 233-9849 or (800) 928-2111  
Web site: <http://www.cipl.org/index.html>

Living for the Young Family Through Education  
Joan Davis, Assistant Principal  
22 E. 128<sup>th</sup> St.  
New York, NY 10035  
Phone: (212) 831-1049

Monica Leary Elementary School  
Sue Mills, Principal  
5509 E. Henrietta  
Rush, NY 14543  
Phone: (716) 359-5468  
E-mail: [smills@rhnet.org](mailto:smills@rhnet.org)

Parent Partnership Network  
Michele Abdul Sabur, Parent Advocate  
Syracuse City School District  
725 Harrison St.  
Syracuse, NY 13210  
Phone: (315) 435-4148  
E-mail: [mabdusab@freeside.scsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:mabdusab@freeside.scsd.k12.ny.us)

**Strategy 7:**

14<sup>th</sup> Street—Union Square Local Development Corporation  
Michelle Jarney, Director of Education  
40 Irving Place  
New York City, NY 10003  
Phone: (212) 460-1200  
E-mail: [JarneyM@coned.com](mailto:JarneyM@coned.com)

Children's Aid Society  
Richard Negron  
102 East 22<sup>nd</sup> St.  
New York, NY 10010  
Phone: (212) 254-4587  
E-mail: [Richard@childrensaidsociety.org](mailto:Richard@childrensaidsociety.org)  
Web site: <http://www.childrensaid.net/>

Center Without Walls  
Resources for Children with Special Needs,  
Inc.  
116 East 16<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10003  
Phone: (212) 677-4650  
E-mail: [info@resourcesntc.org](mailto:info@resourcesntc.org)  
Web site: <http://www.resourcesnyc.org/>

Coalition for Community Schools  
c/o Institute for Educational Leadership  
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Suite 310  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 822-8405  
E-mail: [ccs@iel.org](mailto:ccs@iel.org)

Federation of Families for Children's Mental  
Health Needs  
1101 King Street, Suite 420  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
Phone: (703) 684-7710  
Web site: <http://www.ffcmh.org/>

New York City Department of Youth and  
Community Development.  
Beacon Programs  
New York, NY  
Phone: (212) 676-8255  
Web site: <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/>

Washington Irving High School  
Jenny Bailey, Program Director  
4 Irving Place  
New York, NY 10003  
Phone: (212) 358-1065

### **Strategy 8:**

Bank Street College of Education  
Ms. Rena Rice  
610 West 112th Street  
New York, NY 10025  
Phone: (212) 875-4508  
E-mail: [renarice@bankstreet.edu](mailto:renarice@bankstreet.edu)

Center on School, Family and Community  
Partnerships  
Johns Hopkins University  
3505 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
Phone: (410) 518-8800  
Web site:  
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm>

Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in  
Education  
Jane Sergay, Director  
University of South Florida  
3500 E. Fletcher Ave., Suite 225  
Tampa, FL 33613  
Phone: (813) 558-5365  
E-mail: [jsergay@tempest.coedu.usf.edu](mailto:jsergay@tempest.coedu.usf.edu)

Harvard Family Research Project  
Longfellow Hall  
Appian Way  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Phone: (617) 495-9108  
Web site: <http://qseweb.harvard.edu>.

University of Rochester  
Dr. Howard Kirschenbaum  
Warner Graduate School of Education and  
Human Development  
Rochester, New York 14627-0425  
Phone: (585) 275-5077  
E-mail: [kirs@troi.cc.rochester.edu](mailto:kirs@troi.cc.rochester.edu)

## **Other Resources:**

*Connect for Success: Building a Teacher, Parent, Teen Alliance*  
National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse  
Web site: [www.recruitingteachers.org/news/2002pitoolkit.html](http://www.recruitingteachers.org/news/2002pitoolkit.html)

*Family-school-community partnerships: A compilation of professional standards of practice for teachers*  
Harvard Family Research Project  
Web site: <http://gseweb.harvard.edu>

*Home school communication workshop*  
Harvard Family Research Project  
Web site: [http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/materials/home-school\\_workshop.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/materials/home-school_workshop.html)

*Teens as Parents of Babies and Toddlers: A Resource Guide for Education*  
Cornell University Resource Center  
Ithaca, NY 14850

National PTA Model Parent Policy:  
<http://www.pta.org/programs/append.htm>

### School district parent involvement policies:

Alexandria City, VA <sup>46</sup>  
Chaska, MN <sup>232</sup>  
Chicago, IL <sup>4</sup>  
Jefferson County, CO <sup>223</sup>  
Milwaukee, WI <sup>113</sup>  
Montgomery County, MD <sup>46</sup>  
New York City, NY <sup>235</sup>  
San Diego, CA <sup>113</sup>  
Syracuse, NY <sup>46</sup>  
Tacoma, WA <sup>113</sup>

### State parent involvement policies:

California <sup>46</sup>  
Connecticut <sup>46,234</sup>  
Kentucky <sup>46</sup>

### Resources for designing school web pages:

Designing Exemplary School Web sites: <http://www.caller2.com/grantms/schoolweb.html>  
West Central Four Intermediate Service Agency:  
[http://www.wc4.org/expemplary\\_school\\_web\\_sites.htm](http://www.wc4.org/expemplary_school_web_sites.htm)



Videotapes:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Producer). (1992). *Involving parents in education* [Videotape].

Bateman, B., & Kinney, T. (Producers). (2001). *Emerging issues in special education* [Videotape].  
(Available from: Program Development Associates)

Bateman, B., & Kinney, T. (Producers). (2000). *IEP success*. [Videotape].  
(Available from Attainment Company, Cicero, NY)

Cuellar, L., & Vaughn, C. (Producers). (1994). *Latino parents as partners in education* [Videotape].  
(Available from Films for the Humanities and Science, Princeton, NJ)

Institute for Responsive Education (Producer). (1991). *Building community: How to start a family center in your school*. [Videotape].

## ***New York Parent Centers***

### **The Advocacy Center** (Jason Blackwell, Director)

590 South Avenue  
Averill Court  
Rochester, NY 14620  
Phone: (585) 546-1700  
(800) 650-4967 (in NY)  
Fax: (585) 546-7069  
E-mail: [info@advocacycenter.com](mailto:info@advocacycenter.com)  
Web site: <http://www.advocacycenter.com/about.htm>

### **Advocates for Children of New York, Inc.** (Jill Chaifetz, Executive Director)

151 West 30th Street, 5th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
E-mail: [info@advocatesforchildren.org](mailto:info@advocatesforchildren.org)  
Phone: (212) 947-9779  
Fax: (212) 947-9790  
Web site: [www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)

**Center Without Walls**, a collaborative parent center formed by Advocates of Children of New York, Inc. and Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc.

### **The Long Island Parent Center of Sinergia, Inc.** (Myrta LeBron, Director)

Kellum Street Learning Center  
887 Kellum Street  
Lindenhurst, NY 11757  
Phone: (631) 884-1848  
Fax: (631) 884-1830

### **Parent Network of WNY** (Max Donatelli, Acting Executive Director)

Parent Network of NY at the Wilson Parent Center  
1000 Main Street  
Buffalo, NY 14202  
Phone: (716) 332-4173  
Fax: (716) 885-0221  
Web site: [www.parentnetworkwny.org](http://www.parentnetworkwny.org)

### **Parent to Parent New York, Inc.**, (Michael Minis, Acting Executive Director)

1050 Forest Hill Road  
Staten Island, NY 10314  
Phone: (718) 494-4872  
Fax: (718) 494-4805

### **Resources for Children with Special Needs** (Karen T. Schlesinger, Director)

200 Park Ave. South, Suite 816  
New York, NY 10003  
E-mail: [resourcesnyc@prodigy.net](mailto:resourcesnyc@prodigy.net)  
Phone: (212) 677-4650  
Fax: (212) 254-4070  
Web site: [www.resourcesnyc.org](http://www.resourcesnyc.org)

**Sinergia** (Donald A. Lash, Executive Director)

15 W. 65th Street, 6th floor

New York, N.Y. 10023

E-mail: [sinergia@panix.com](mailto:sinergia@panix.com)

Phone: (212) 496-1300

Fax: (212) 496-5608

Web site: <http://www.sinergia.org/>

**United We Stand** (Lourdes Rivera-Putz, Director)

Casa Del Barrio

728 Driggs Ave.

Brooklyn, NY 11211

Phone: (718) 302-4313

Fax: (718) 302-4315

E-mail: [uwsofny@aol.com](mailto:uwsofny@aol.com)

Web site: <http://www.taalliance.org/ptis/uws/>

## Works Cited

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