

**PROMOTING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT,
IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES**

Working Paper

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I. FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS: Overview of the Issues

No one is more important than parents in sending the signal that reading and education matter and that school work is not a form of drudgery but a ticket to a better life . . . By giving their word to read to their children, to assist on homework, to engage the process of learning, parents can set an example for their children that is powerful and positive.

Governor Gray Davis, State of the State, January 7, 1999

The claims are powerful and unequivocal: "When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life" (Henderson & Berla, 1997, p.1). "The shared interests and investments of schools, families, and communities create the conditions of caring that work to 'overdetermine' the likelihood of student success" (Epstein, 1995, p.703). "Family practices of involvement are as or more important than family background variables in determining whether and how students progress and succeed in school" (Epstein, 1996, p.217).

The cultivation of strong family-school linkages is increasingly and widely viewed as an essential component of strategies to improve students' educational outcomes. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, federal legislation enacted in 1994, boldly predicts that "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." Nevertheless, the notion that families play a crucial role in their children's development and school success in both the home and school environments elicits a host of questions, all of which carry significant implications for the type of family-school linkages a particular school district or individual school might choose to pursue.

This paper will be guided by the following salient questions: What is the nature of the evidence linking parental involvement to student achievement? How powerful a predictor of school success is parental involvement? Can it overcome impediments to school success associated with certain characteristics of family background? Which types of parental involvement are most effective in increasing student achievement? How comprehensive must parent involvement efforts be? What is known about the precise processes that link parental involvement to student outcomes?

Once one has accepted the value of parental involvement for children's school success, questions abound as to the steps involved in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective school-family partnerships. These issues include: What are the barriers to parental involvement? What roles should schools play in facilitating parental involvement in their children's academic pursuits? Which school and teacher practices have been the most effective in influencing the level and quality of parental involvement? What steps are necessary to build effective partnerships? How does one evaluate effective parental involvement?

The topic of family-school linkages has been widely, although not exhaustively, researched. Experience accumulated over the past few decades reveals much about the value and characteristics of successful family-school partnerships. Indeed, enough groundwork has been laid to inform and guide the efforts of enterprising school administrations eager to help families conduct the type of activities that will benefit their children. Nevertheless, the body of research on this topic has not yet evolved to the point where all of the questions posed above can be answered satisfactorily. Although experts in the field agree about the importance of linkages between families and schools, researchers emphasize the need for more rigorous study to help educators predict the precise outcomes of implementing particular strategies for involving families in their children's education. In particular, considerably more information is needed on parent involvement at the middle and high school levels. To a great extent, the family-school partnerships of the future hold the answers. They alone can inform and improve practice.

In the interim, educators, parents and community leaders can cling to several truths:

- Parent involvement plays an important role in improving students' success in school.
- Parents often want to be more involved in their children's education but are uncertain how to do so.
- Teachers want to involve parents in schools but need guidance and support in promoting this union.
- Community organizations and groups, many of which are already engaged in helping children and their families outside schools, often have weak links with schools.

What schools do to foster parent involvement is critical in determining whether, which, and how parents will participate in their children's schooling, and ultimately how students will benefit. Despite the need for more and better research, there is much that is known about what schools can do to build the partnerships necessary to ensure that students reach their potential.

II. THE BENEFITS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

A. What the Research Shows

1. Families are Important for Children's Success in School. The premise that strong family-school linkages improve children's educational outcomes has acquired almost axiomatic status. Research studies abound documenting the association between parents' involvement in their children's schooling and a host of benefits accruing not only to students themselves, but to their schools and parents as well.

Among the documented findings are strong positive correlations between parental involvement in children's schooling and improved student attitudes, achievement, and attendance. Various studies report higher grades and test scores, more homework completed, fewer placements in special education programs, higher graduation rates, more positive attitudes and behavior, and increased enrollment in post-secondary education for students of parents who were involved to

varying degrees in their education. Among the benefits accruing to schools from successful parental involvement activities are better reputations in the community, improved teacher morale, higher parental ratings of teacher performance, and increased support from families. Involved parents reap benefits as well, including increased confidence in their abilities to parent, help their children learn at home, and communicate effectively with schools. For some parents, involvement in their children's education prompts them to pursue further education themselves. Studies reveal that teachers not only hold involved parents in higher regard than uninvolved parents, but they also have higher expectations for their children. (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

2. Parental Involvement and Family Background. Significantly, the practice of parental involvement has also been shown to help offset other possible impediments to children's success in school. Studies demonstrate that a child's educational outcomes are not solely a function of cultural background or such socio-economic status (SES) factors as family income and parental levels of education. While researchers acknowledge a strong direct relationship between SES and academic achievement, they also claim that motivated families, regardless of their SES, can and do help their children improve school performance through several types of involvement. Research documenting the effects of parental involvement at home and in school concludes that differences in the achievement levels of working class and middle class children is more effectively explained by the nature of *child-parent* and *parent-school* interactions than by characteristics of SES (Ziegler, 1987). A review by Henderson and Berla of sixty-six studies, reports, and reviews on the subject of parental involvement concludes that the most accurate predictor of students' achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which families are able to: create a home environment that supports learning; communicate high (and reasonable) expectations for their children's achievement; and become involved in their children's schools. Programs designed to foster linkages between families and schools have been shown to help compensate for limited family resources and effectively alter the traditional relationship between SES and school performance (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

3. School-Home Links for Underserved Families. It is worthy of note that although parents from low-SES backgrounds can improve their children's educational outcomes through their involvement at home and in schools, these outcomes do not reach the levels achieved by students with similarly involved parents from high-SES backgrounds. Researchers attribute this phenomenon to the fact that there exists a disconnect between the home cultures and school cultures of low-SES students. In these instances, what is occurring in the home and in the school are not mutually reinforcing. While certain classes and cultures reinforce the values taught in schools, others do not. Other studies suggest that parents from certain backgrounds have greater difficulty relating to schools and teachers or hold deeply ingrained beliefs that activities conducted in schools and in the home should not overlap. Researchers are quick to point out that what parents from these groups require is not a re-orientation of values or parenting classes to compensate for deficiencies but rather partnership relationships with educators to foster understanding and help bridge differences (Lareau, 1996; Kellaghan et al., 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1997).

B. The Power of Parental Involvement in the Home

A substantial body of evidence confirms the power of the home environment—where children spend a significant portion of their waking hours—in affecting children’s educational outcomes. In fact, family practices in the home that stimulate and support learning have a more significant impact on student achievement than such other factors as family structure (e.g. single parent families) or socio-economic status (Henderson & Berla, 1997).¹ An education-friendly home environment affects not only children’s achievement levels but their interest in learning and future educational plans as well (Kellaghan et. al., 1993). Researchers point to a number of supportive home processes that range from strong family values and routines to active involvement by parents in schoolwork. The most frequently cited processes include stable family routines, parental support and encouragement about schoolwork, discussion of ideas and events, high parental aspirations and standards for children’s achievement, quiet places to study, emphasis on family literacy, monitoring of after-school activities, tapping of community resources as needed, communicating or modeling of positive behaviors, and knowledge of school experiences (Kellaghan et. al., 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1997; and U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

There is ample evidence from the field confirming the value of each of the above family practices. Clark’s study of low-income, African-American families and their high school children finds that parents of high achievers monitored their children’s home-study behaviors more rigorously and had higher expectations for their children’s education. High achievers also had greater access in the home to such supplemental learning aids as dictionaries (Clark, 1993). A study of 1,400 Southeast Asia refugee families revealed that family values and home environments that support learning facilitate academic success (Caplan et. al., in Henderson & Berla, 1997). Several researchers observe that the availability of reading material in the home is directly associated with children’s achievement in reading comprehension (Becher, 1984; Hannon, 1995; Lee & Croninger 1994). The U.S. Department of Education reports that academic achievement drops sharply for children who watch more than ten hours of television each week (U.S. Department of Education, 1987). In another study, Clark finds that high achievers from all backgrounds spend roughly twenty hours per week engaged in constructive after-school learning activities (Clark, 1990). Several studies link frequent, open discussions between parents and their older children to academic success (Barton & Coley, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

While the vast majority of studies of the home environment focus on parental involvement and educational outcomes for preschool and elementary children, several researchers emphasize the importance of such family practices as monitoring of homework, television watching, and extracurricular activities for middle and high-school level students. Some researchers stress that, at the secondary level, it is what parents do *at home* with respect to homework and television monitoring that appear to have the greatest impact on student outcomes (NCREL, 1995). Scholars also point to the value of parental guidance in ensuring that their secondary schoolers pursue challenging courses and receive some form of career counseling (Hollified, 1995; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

C. The Level of Parental Involvement

Although the research does not establish which family processes are more beneficial than others in improving student achievement, it does indicate that the more practices adhered to, the better off students will be. One examination of the experiences of Indochinese families found that children whose families had strong values about education and *acted upon* those values by helping their children learn at home or contacting their schools did better than children whose families had strong values but did not act upon them. (Mitrosomwang & Hawley in Henderson & Berla, 1997). Henderson and Berla point to a number of studies indicating that the more comprehensive (covering a wider range of activities) and intense (over longer period or with greater frequency) parental involvement, the greater the impact on student outcomes. The researchers conclude that when parents are involved not just at home, *but in school as well*, their children achieve more.

The list of supportive family practices extends well beyond what families can do in the home. Becher concludes that the children of families who are in regular contact with schools regarding issues of progress, homework, school events, etc., become higher achievers (Becher, 1984). Armor and others, in a study of twenty low-income elementary schools, showed that the more comprehensive the schools' efforts to involve African-American parents and the community in all aspects of the schools (where parental involvement ranged from requesting parents to become involved to providing special projects for parents to providing space for parents in the schools equipped with services useful to the community), the better sixth graders did in reading (Armor et. al., in Henderson & Berla, 1997).² Eagle's study of high school students and beyond showed that twenty-seven percent of students whose parents were highly involved during high school (defined as frequency of communication with teachers, monitoring of schoolwork, and planning for post-high school activities) attained bachelors' degrees. Only seventeen percent of students with moderately involved parents and eight percent of students with uninvolved parents achieved similar levels (Eagle, 1989). Gillum's study of three Michigan school districts, which implemented parent participation programs with varying levels of involvement, revealed that the district with the most comprehensive program of involvement achieved the greatest gains in reading test scores (Gillum, 1977).³ Irvine's study of a pre-kindergarten program revealed that the more parent involvement hours, the better children performed on cognitive development tests. (Irvine in Henderson & Berla, 1997).

With respect to the duration of parental involvement, the research shows a precipitous decline in the parental involvement once children reach middle and high schools. A variety of reasons are posited for this decrease, including: the more complicated structure of schools at these levels, the fact that students work with many different teachers, the distance between schools and homes, and parents' perceptions that their children need more autonomy (Hollifield, 1995). Although the studies of parental involvement are markedly fewer at this level, they do, nevertheless, reinforce the value of parental involvement at this stage in children's educational careers. Rumberger and colleagues show that high school dropout rates are higher for children whose families are less involved in their education (Rumberger et al. in Henderson & Berla, 1997).⁴ A nationwide study of high schoolers and educators points to parental involvement as the critical factor determining students' aspirations and achievement (McDill, 1969).⁵

D. The Type of Parental Involvement

Generally speaking, only a few studies show certain types of parental involvement activities to be more strongly associated with improving student outcomes than others (Waegenaar, 1977). The overall research in this field does not yet strongly endorse one strategy over another. The results of several studies lead Henderson and Berla to conclude that the more parent involvement programs resemble true partnerships—where family involvement is not limited to certain activities but rather integral to all aspects of school life, including decision-making—the more successful these programs are in raising student outcomes. Perhaps the best examples of the true partnership programs are Henry Levin's accelerated schools program and James Comer's School Development Program (SDP) which, in addition to a number of other school improvements, includes parents in social events, education classes, volunteer programs, and decision-making subcommittees and teams (Comer & Haynes, 1992). Studies of SDP programs, which now operate in over 375 school districts across the country, reveal student improvement in reading and math skills, behavior, and self-concept. Like many other studies of parental involvement, however, studies of SDP programs do not control for the effects of other school improvements that may be occurring simultaneously with parental involvement strategies.

Various types of parental involvement will be specifically discussed in the following section.

III. BUILDING EFFECTIVE FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS: *Challenges, Strategies, and Outcomes*

A. The Challenge in Designing Effective Interventions

Given that most of children's development and socialization occur within two primary contexts—families and schools—it seems intuitive that linking these two spheres of influence so that they are mutually reinforcing and jointly supportive of children's progress would yield many positive results for children. Dr. Joyce Epstein, a leading researcher in the field of parent involvement and presently the director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, makes this point in her theory of “overlapping spheres of influence.” Epstein posits that the most effective families and schools share responsibilities for the children in their care, and, as a consequence, a portion of their work must be conducted collaboratively (1987).

Having established that families are indeed important for student success in school, researchers like Epstein focus their energies on the programs that schools can design and pursue to help families undertake the kind of activities that will most benefit their children. The challenge, however, in designing such interventions lies primarily in the fact that causal links between certain parental involvement behaviors and specific educational outcomes have yet to be borne out by the research.⁶ Moreover, the research does not define parental involvement or the outcomes it produces in any uniform way. Quite simply, there are many types of parental involvement. The studies cited above all define parental involvement differently. These same studies also measure educational outcomes in a variety of ways. Benefits accruing to students as a result of parental involvement can range from students' self-perceptions to their interests, motivations, achievement-related choices and performance. Finally, since parental involvement is a correlate of children's educational outcomes, researchers express concern that it may

disguise other, deeper issues about family structure and processes, which might call for an entirely different set of interventions (Bierman, 1996).

B. Defining Parental Involvement

1. The Six Types Framework. Defining parental involvement has been the subject of many national symposia and conferences. Epstein's framework of six major types of parental involvement is among the most useful tools developed by the field thus far for defining parental involvement practices and linking them with certain types of outcomes. This widely accepted framework is proffered as a guide to help educators develop comprehensive family-school partnerships. The six types of parental involvement include: 1) *parenting* (helping families with child-rearing and parenting skills); 2) *communicating* (developing effective home-school communication); 3) *volunteering* (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school); 4) *learning at home* (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula); 5) *decision-making* (including families as decision-makers through school-site councils, committees, etc.) and 6) *collaborating with the community* (matching community services with family needs and serving the community) (Epstein, 1995). Each type of involvement encompasses a variety of practices to be undertaken by teachers, parents, and students and is theoretically linked with a variety of distinct outcomes for students, teachers, and parents as well. Executing each type also carries with it unique challenges. (See Tables 1-3 at the end of this document.)

Educators, along with parents, are encouraged to select those practices likely to produce the types of outcomes that coincide most closely with their needs, goals, and capacities. Epstein emphasizes that not *all parental involvement leads to improved student achievement*, “the selected results [produced by each of the six types] should help correct the misperception that any practice that involves families will raise children’s achievement test scores” (Epstein, 1995, p.707).⁷ She further notes that while certain practices are likely to influence students’ test scores, others are designed to produce outcomes related to attitudes or behaviors. Epstein notes that many of the possible secondary or indirect effects of a particular parental involvement practice are not yet understood (Epstein, 1996). For example, parental involvement in type three (Volunteering) or type five (Decision-making) activities may result first in parents' feeling more connected with their children's schools, which may, in turn, lead to other types of involvement that will eventually produce outcomes related to student achievement. There is little evidence, for example, suggesting that placing parents on advisory councils alone improves their children's grades. However, as noted earlier, programs that create a true partnership by involving parents in *both* decision-making and learning support roles are associated with greater gains in student achievement than programs restricting parents solely to learning support (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

2. The Predictors of Parental Involvement. Parent involvement can and should take different forms in order to increase the number of parents who are deeply involved in their children's education. Programs that offer a wide variety of opportunities for involvement increase the chances of tapping different parent skills and accommodating varied parent schedules. Researchers repeatedly emphasize, however, that the care with which strategies are planned and implemented is more significant than the specific form the involvement takes (Eccles & Harold,

1996; Henderson & Berla, 1997). The better parent involvement programs are designed, the greater the number of parents who become involved in multiple ways that benefit their children.

Well-planned strategies designed to involve a variety of parents must be responsive to the various factors that influence parents' decisions to become involved. There exists no shortage of research on the predictors of parental involvement, which range from characteristics of the parents, children, and communities to the quality of the school climate (U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Eccles & Harold, 1996). Parents with less formal education, parents of adolescents, single parents, and fathers tend to be among the least involved.⁸ Time and transportation constraints, cultural and language barriers, and parents' perceptions and beliefs about themselves, their children, and their role in their children's education all influence the level of parental involvement. Many parents experience feelings of uncertainty or even inadequacy about their ability to help their children because of their own poor educational skills. Others harbor negative recollections of their own school days. Finally, those from certain cultural backgrounds may not understand schools' expectations of their children or how they can become involved.

Studies also point to neighborhood characteristics that may impede parental involvement. They suggest that many families living in high-risk, low-income neighborhoods tend to be preoccupied with survival strategies that either focus inward on the family or do not permit them to pursue the types of parenting strategies that might involve greater school involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

Finally, and most significantly, studies have focused on school and teacher characteristics and practices that influence parental involvement. A school climate that does not make families feel welcomed, respected, needed, and valued risks alienating parents. Larger, more bureaucratic school environments, typical of those normally encountered at the middle and high school levels, tend to discourage parental involvement. Additionally, educators' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, parents may facilitate or impede their involvement. Some educators are skeptical of parental involvement, which they fear signals an incursion into their domain. They are especially reluctant to have parents assume decision-making roles. Studies have even shown that educators have actively discouraged parental involvement in middle and high schools (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Some school staff want parent participation limited to certain functions and specific occasions. Teachers who view parents as deficient or reluctant participants in their children's education rather than potential supporters of the educational process damage parent involvement. More often than not, however, teachers who are uncomfortable with parent involvement have not received sufficient training and support in working with parents.

C. School and Teacher Practices Matter Most

Researchers point to a growing body of evidence demonstrating that the *quality of links* between teachers and families and between communities and schools influences children's academic success (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Dauber and Epstein in their study of over two thousand inner-city elementary and middle school parents conclude that the best predictor of parental involvement is what the school does to promote it. "The data are clear that the *schools' practices*

to inform and involve parents are more important than parent education, family size, marital status, and even grade-level in determining whether inner-city parents stay involved with their children through middle school" (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Epstein stresses that single parents, parents living in poor communities, **and** parents of adolescents will *not* be among the least involved if schools implement appropriate practices to engage them. *Even the most difficult-to-reach parents can be reached through the appropriate school and teacher practices* (Epstein, 1995).

To a great extent, the responsibility for generating effective parent involvement lies with schools. While parents clearly must make time for involvement in their children's education, schools must provide the opportunities for parents to become involved in children's schooling. School districts and schools alike must establish clear policies on parental involvement.⁹ They must design and implement strategies that seek to engage parents on a continuing basis in their children's schooling. They must consider special efforts to engage low-income families and others who are reluctant to approach schools on their own.

D. Essential Components of Successful School-Family Partnerships

Although programs will necessarily vary from school to school, successful parental involvement strategies do share a number of common characteristics. Davies' cites three central themes that run through the most effective strategies: providing success for all children, serving the whole child, and sharing responsibility for children's development among schools, parents, and communities (Davies, 1991). Most strategies focus foremost on the nature of communication between parents and teachers and the school climate, specifically the way in which parents are treated at school. For full partnerships to work, relationships must be characterized by mutual trust and respect and parties must engage in an on-going exchange of information, agree on goals and strategies, understand one another's expectations, and share rights and responsibilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Epstein lists the commonalities of successful programs as: an understanding of the "overlapping spheres of influence" that schools, families and communities have on students' development; a commitment to a variety of types of involvement so that opportunities for collaboration are maximized; and the creation of an **action team** responsible for coordinating each school's parental involvement strategy (Epstein, 1995). In her extensive work on school-family-community partnerships, Epstein outlines schools' responsibilities with respect to each of the six types of involvement established in her framework (Epstein & Connors, 1992). A few sample practices are mentioned for each type of involvement. There are, however, many more practices corresponding to each type of involvement.

1. Type One: Parenting. Schools must help families create home environments that support learning by providing them with information about such issues as children's health, nutrition, discipline, adolescents' needs, parenting approaches, etc. At the same time, schools must seek to understand and incorporate aspects of their students' family life into what is taught in the classroom. Schools are challenged to ensure that all families who need this type of information receive it in appropriate ways.

Outcomes associated with Type One activities include improvements in students' behavior, school attendance, time management skills, and awareness of the importance of school. Parent outcomes encompass improved confidence in, and understanding of, parenting practices, awareness of the challenges in parenting, and a sense of support from schools and others. Teacher-related outcomes include foremost a better understanding of, and respect for, their students' families (Epstein, 1995).

Examples of Type One practices include the establishment of parent resource centers, parent rooms, or parent clubs either on or off school premises. Centers often make books, videos, classes, special workshops, and other learning materials available to parents. Community organizations can be especially helpful in working with schools to provide parents with needed information. (See Type Six: Collaborating with the Community, below.) Other examples of Type One practices include *parent education*, which may be conducted through home visits (especially for the difficult-to-reach) or through workshops.¹⁰

Families acquire important information about their children's development through *parent education programs*. Effective programs are guided by a firm belief that parents are capable of learning new techniques for working with their children (Becher, 1984). Topics addressed include parenting skills, strategies for helping children learn at home, and ways to become involved at school. One database of promising practices in improving parental involvement identifies twenty-seven successful programs. Of these, nineteen focus on educating parents (NCREL, 1995).¹¹ Becher, in her review of parent education literature, concludes that parent education programs, particularly those focused on helping low-income parents to work with their children, improve children's behavior, language skills, and test performance. They also improve parents' teaching skills, the ways parents interact with their children, and parents' ability to create a stimulating home environment (Becher, 1984). Furthermore, parent surveys indicate that parents would become more engaged in helping their children with home learning activities if they received training in how to do this most effectively. (Epstein, 1987 in U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Elements of effective training programs include: a) clear goals and monitoring processes, b) flexibility in designing activities to fit specific parent-child dynamics, c) strong emphasis on equipping parents to teach their children, d) concrete tasks for parents, e) home visits, especially at the preschool level, and f) long-term training, no shorter than 18 months (Becher, 1984). Experts caution, however, that the value of training programs designed to involve parents in their children's education is greatly diminished without genuine links to schools. Schools must have structures, programs, and staff to work with trained parents.¹²

2. Type Two: Communicating. The more frequent and positive the messages parents receive from teachers, the more involved they are likely to become in their children's education (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Some schools have taken special steps to ensure that parents are brought to the schools early in the academic year, before students develop problems, so that their first communication with them can be positive in nature. Schools must employ a variety of techniques for communicating with parents about their children's progress, decisions affecting their children, and school programs in general. These include parent-teacher conferences, open houses, phone contact, report cards, newsletters, curriculum nights, parent centers, etc. Some

schools sign contracts with parents in which expectations for students, teachers, and parents are clearly delineated.

Outcomes associated with Type Two activities include students' improved awareness of their own academic progress, more informed decisions about courses, and an understanding of school policies related to their conduct. Parents are likely to grow in their understanding of school programs and policies. They will develop familiarity in interacting with teachers and a greater capacity for monitoring their children's progress and responding to their problems. Teachers are expected to develop diverse mechanisms for communicating with parents and an ability to tap the parent network to elicit family views on children's progress (Epstein, 1995).

A number of innovative Type Two practices capitalize on such technology as voice-mail systems that enable teachers to leave messages for parents describing classroom activities and daily homework assignments. Use of these systems in Indiana showed that parent-teacher contact increased by eight-hundred percent (Bauch, 1993 in U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Audio tapes and video tapes can be used as alternatives to written communication. The National Parent Information Network, a national electronic information service for parents, also offers a range of materials to support parents' efforts to understand their children's schooling. Finally, the Indianapolis public schools operate the Parents In Touch program, which employs parent-teacher conferences and other frequent communications with parents. In some cases, it issues contracts signed by parents, teachers, and students indicating their shared commitments to students' progress. Communication practices are designed to accommodate parents' demanding schedules.

Schools implementing Type Two activities are challenged to reach a variety of families with appropriate, intelligible information. Doing this effectively may require rethinking family stereotypes. Educators at the middle school and high school levels are especially challenged to ensure that appropriate information is exchanged about the socioemotional development of adolescents, as well as their academic and future occupational or educational plans (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

3. Type Three: Volunteering. Schools enhance their connection to families by encouraging them to volunteer in school activities and attend school events. Families who volunteer grow more familiar and comfortable with their children's schools and teachers. Volunteering efforts that tap parental talents enrich school programs and, particularly in upper grades, facilitate individualized learning. The use of a volunteer coordinator is advised especially at secondary school levels, where coordination of volunteer talents and time with teacher and student needs becomes increasingly complex. Schools are challenged to define the term "volunteer" broadly enough to accommodate a wide range of parental talents and schedules. They are also challenged to encourage older students to volunteer in their community as part of the learning process.

Type Three activities are designed to enhance students' skills in communicating with adults; provide them with exposure to a wide variety of adult skills, occupations, etc. and help them develop their own skills with the support of volunteer tutors and mentors. Parents are likely to develop a greater appreciation for the work of teachers, develop their own skills, and grow increasingly comfortable in working with their children and interacting with others at school.

Finally, teachers will be able to pay more attention to individual students as a result of volunteer help. They are also likely to become more open to involving parents in varied ways and develop an appreciation for the parental talent base (Epstein, 1995).

Type Three practices include the establishment of *parent centers*, where parents can gather to help one another and assist the school, receive assistance, or exchange information. Some parent centers further entice parent involvement by offering them such services as GED or language courses or the use of such equipment as sewing machines or computers. Other activities might include using the center as a place for a small library, clothing exchange, referral service to social service agencies, or special events designed, for example, to involve more fathers in their children's education. "The tone and content of school conversations about parents and their communities change when parents are physically present in the building" (Davies, 1991, p.378). Literature on designing a successful parent center in an urban school emphasizes the need for parents to assume the lead in planning and staffing their center and its activities. School staff are encouraged to use the center frequently as a place to interact with parents. Some experts recommend that a parent center assume responsibility for much of the school's dealings with parents. Finally, the center must enlist *all* parents in both teaching and learning activities. All parents must feel welcomed and valued (Davies, 1991; Yates, 1993).

4. Type Four: Learning at Home. Most parental participation in children's education occurs in the home. Schools must capitalize upon what parents are already doing by helping them to assist and interact with their children on home learning activities that reinforce what is being taught in school. Schools should aim to increase parents' understanding of the curriculum and the skills their children need to develop at each stage in their schooling. Schools must also inform parents about their systems of tracking students and other practices so that parents can help make decisions that are in their children's best interests. Type Four activities can help bridge any cultural or class disconnect between home and school environments.

Successful parent involvement programs must recognize the parent-child relationship as distinct from the teacher-child relationship. What works at school will not always work at home (Becher, 1984). Parents should be relied upon as supporters and monitors of the learning process so that their children can become effective independent learners. Schools should encourage open discussions among all partners about the school curriculum and homework. Parent surveys show that more parents talk with their children about schoolwork and help their children develop skills when homework is designed to involve families (Epstein & Sanders, 1998; Epstein, 1992). Schools are thus challenged to design a menu of interactive work that taps parents' support skills and involves them in the learning processes. Schools must also work with parents to ensure that upper-level students set academic goals, prepare for career transitions, and make appropriate course selections.

Outcomes associated with Type Four activities include improved student test scores and other skills linked to homework. Students are also more likely to view themselves as learners and to see their parents as teachers. Type Four activities are also associated with more homework completed and better attitudes toward schoolwork. Parents may begin to perceive their children more as learners and develop confidence in their own abilities to teach and support the educational process. They are also more likely to engage in discussions of schoolwork with their

children. Type Four practices can help teachers develop better homework assignments. Among other things, teachers are expected to develop greater satisfaction with family involvement as they witness the support all types of families are able to provide students (Epstein, 1995).

Examples of Type Four involvement include *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS)*. This program, developed by the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and employed in Baltimore area schools, works with teachers to involve parents in interactive homework assignments. The assignments require students to talk with someone at home about the things they are learning in school. TIPS activities include formats for student-family interaction in math, science/health, and language arts. Surveys of parents who participated in TIPS homework activities reveal that parents became more aware of their children's learning processes. Teachers report that students complete TIPS homework more frequently than other assignments (Epstein, 1992).

Family Math and Family Science Programs, in use throughout the country, offer parents and children in workshops designed to stimulate them to undertake joint learning activities at home. Studies of these programs reveal that more parents become involved in learning activities with their children and children enjoy sciences more (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

One ambitious project, *The Buddy System Project* in Indiana extends learning beyond the classroom by seeking to place computers in the home of every Indiana child in grades 4-12. *The Bridge Project*, a national experiment with homework hotlines, used a hotline to give parents tips on helping their children with schoolwork or discussing the day's lessons. Half of the parents who used the system report being more involved in their children's schooling and that their children did more homework (Viadero, 1997).

Yet another option for supporting home learning are summer learning packets that provide students with opportunities to practice skills and continue learning during the summer with parental support. Evaluations of this activity demonstrate that some students who complete the assignments experience improved performance when school resumes in the fall. One study of parental involvement claims that low-income children fall behind their wealthier peers specifically during the summer months (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996). Parental involvement strategies that equip the formers' parents to work with them outside of the school year may help to compensate for this shortfall.

5. Type Five: Decision-making. Involving parents in governance, decision-making, and advocacy roles is yet another strategy for fortifying links between schools and parents. As mentioned earlier, parental participation in decision-making, when it is part of a comprehensive program involving parents in learning support activities as well, is associated with improved student outcomes. Parent and community involvement in decision-making also helps make schools more accountable to the community. Parental participation in school decision-making can be strengthened by including parents in school site councils, parent-teacher associations, and other committees. For example, Chicago's public schools each have an independent council with parent representatives. California school councils are also required to have parent representatives.

Outcomes from Type Five activities include the benefits of policies that are enacted on behalf of students. Students are also likely to become aware of family representation in school decisions. Parents are expected to develop opportunities for input, feelings of ownership, an understanding of policies, and a sense of connection with other families. Teachers will likely become increasingly aware of the role of parents' perspectives in policy development (Epstein, 1995).

Experts stress the need for parents, who truly have their children's best interests at heart, to become advocates for their children.¹³ Schools are challenged to tap parent leaders from diverse backgrounds and to ensure that those serving in decision-making capacities truly represent all parents.

One powerful way in which parents are assuming a leading role in their children's education has been through the establishment of *local education foundations* (LEFs). These foundations, funded through the generosity of local businesses and individuals, cite connecting schools to communities as one of their primary purposes. Distinct from parent involvement in booster clubs, in which parents help raise money to support their own children's schools, local education foundations are 501(c)(3) organizations, run by boards of local citizens and educators, committed to improving education for all students.

Current estimates of the total number of LEFs across the country is approximately 2,500. Most LEFs in California were conceived in the early 1980s in response to budget shortfalls precipitated by property tax caps. In California, some 400 LEFs are members of the California Consortium of Education Foundations (CCEF). This organization serves as a voice for these organizations, facilitates networking, and provides training in forming LEFs. According to CCEF's Executive Director, LEFs are a vehicle for communities to have input into how money is used at schools, although LEFs and schools generally collaborate closely to determine the best use of funds.¹⁴

Generally, LEFs raise modest amounts of money for such purposes as mini-grants to teachers for innovative projects, curricular reform, extracurricular activities, and scholarships. Some larger LEFs have actually funded teaching positions or raised teacher salaries (although most districts prohibit the use of LEF money this purpose.) One study estimated the amount raised by the average foundation at 0.3 percent of the school district budget. The most successful generate only about \$100 per student, rendering concerns that LEFs will replace the need for local tax revenues or circumvent statewide equity requirements unfounded (Mertz & Frankel, 1997). Indeed, while affluent communities may raise LEF money with greater ease, communities of all types have created LEFs.

Overall, the relationships between LEFs and the school districts in which they operate vary. Some schools provide LEFs with office space and help from support staff. Although school administrators may be board members, many hold only ex-officio status. Most LEFs rely heavily on volunteer staff and incur little overhead. Some serve many school districts, others serve a single district or a single school (De Luna, 1998). Their ability to involve community members in their activities is essential to their survival. How funds are raised and how LEFs operate is greatly influenced by the communities that create them.

6. Type Six: Collaborating with the Community. Schools and families must draw regularly upon community resources to support their efforts to educate children. In fact, community representatives and resources may be tapped for each of the other five types of involvement: communicating with families, volunteering, supporting learning, and participating in school committees. For example, the participation of prominent community leaders is almost essential in creating an effective LEF. Student outcomes are greatest when families, schools, and community organizations and leaders work together. Children are provided with more opportunities for learning and for linking school knowledge with real world opportunities. They associate with individuals, other than their parents and teachers, who reinforce the importance of learning. Clark's research indicates that the difference between high and low achieving youngsters may be explained by how and with whom they spend time outside school (Clark, 1990).

Outcomes associated with Type Six activities include increased skills and talents for those students participating in productive extra-curricular programs. Students may also develop a better understanding of the real world and career options. Parent-related outcomes include an awareness of local resources they can tap to support their children and families. They will also be more likely to interact with other families in the community. Teachers are expected to develop an understanding of resources available to enrich the curriculum. They should also develop a capacity for working with and tapping a variety of community partners (Epstein, 1995).

Community-based organizations, religious organizations, other government agencies and philanthropically-minded individuals can and do reinforce students' learning through after-school programs, summer learning programs, and a variety of family support services. They help make communities safe from drugs and violent crime, encourage people to mentor youth, and provide a range of educational and training opportunities for both parents and youth. Studies have long shown the benefits of such programs as Head Start and the Even Start Literacy programs. Parents as Teachers, which makes a parent-educator available to parents in the home, has been associated with children's language and school success. (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). The National Urban League operates a national initiative, Partners for Reform of Science and Math, to involve parents in advocating for local school reforms and creating improved home environments. Dorothy Rich's MegaSkills Program has trained thousands of parents across the country in ways to facilitate their children's development. Groups like the PTA, the Junior League, the Foster Grandparents Program, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program all support children's educational outcomes through mentoring programs and other activities. Organizations, like New Beginnings in San Diego, bring social services to students and families through on-campus satellite offices. Still other groups, like the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund, encourage parents to assume advocacy and decision-making roles in their children's schools.

One interesting example of collaborating with the community is a practice called a *community walk*—a critical step in overcoming home-school barriers. This practice has been designed with two primary purposes in mind: a) to increase educators' understanding of the community in which students live, and b) to provide families, communities, and teachers with a chance to

interact with one another on the others' "turf." One such walk conducted in El Paso by a local middle and high school covered thirty blocks. Participants visited housing projects, community centers, and social service agencies. Teachers reported the event helped them gain confidence in their relations with parents. Both schools reported more success in getting parents to attend school events, while parents report they understand the school better for having met the teachers through the walk (McCollum, 1997).

The challenges for schools in working with community-based organizations include issues related to communication and turf. Neighborhood organizations must understand the needs of schools, parents, and students and be flexible in assuming the roles required to meet those needs. Community participants, families, and schools must be open to each others' viewpoints, agree upon goals and strategies, and share decision-making responsibilities and rights.

E. Using the Framework

1. Forming the Action Team. Epstein and her colleagues assume that partnership activities will correspond to the rubrics established in the six types framework, but that specific practices conducted by each school will vary depending upon the specific needs, interests, talents, and grade levels of students and the families they are designed to serve (Sanders, 1997). While Epstein's framework assumes that schools and families will seek to form full partnerships in which parents participate in all aspects of school life, other less-ambitious philosophies of collaboration might envision more limited roles for parents and would not necessarily include all of the types of involvement.

There are several critical steps in the implementation of the above framework. The following recommendations are based on the experiences of schools that have implemented parental and community involvement strategies with the support and guidance of The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Through its National Network of Partnership Schools, the Center currently works with eight hundred schools and over one hundred districts to improve partnership programs. (See Tapping Resources).

Under this framework, a school's primary vehicle for building partnerships is the *Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships*. This 6 to 12 person team, which can be a subcommittee or an arm of an existing school council, should include parents, teachers, administrators, upper-level students, and community representatives. The team's primary charge is to identify what types of involvement are needed to meet specified school goals. Together, team members assess existing practices of involvement to determine which ones are effective and which ones should be expanded, modified, or added to the school's inventory of practices. Several tools have been developed to help teams ask the appropriate questions about existing efforts. Telephone surveys, questionnaires, and panels represent a few strategies for obtaining the needed information.

The action team also clarifies what each of the involved parties expects from the partnership. It assesses its menu of practices according to which families are presently being reached and which are not yet involved. This often includes incorporating special strategies for reaching difficult parents.¹⁵ Finally, the action team links practices of involvement with specific goals by

examining the indicators of success for students and determining which practices are most closely associated with which types of goals.

Once school goals have been clearly identified and agreed upon, schools develop a three-year plan that guides the action team's work with respect to each type of involvement. The plan establishes a coherent package of activities to meet the needs of the entire school community, all grade levels, difficult-to-reach families, etc. Separate subcommittees are charged with developing strategies for each type of involvement. A more detailed one-year work plan is developed to guide the first year's efforts. Action team members decide what will be accomplished in year one in each area of involvement, who will be responsible for developing and implementing each type of involvement, and how efforts will be financed and evaluated. Educators, students, parents, and community leaders who are not on the action team are called upon throughout the year to support the implementation of specific types of involvement. Plans are updated annually to ensure that the action team continue to build productive partnerships.

2. Observations about the Partnership-Building Process. Firstly, *progress is incremental*. Partnership building is a long-term process. For example, The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships' experience has shown that it takes three to five years to create and maintain a strong program of partnership. Not all types of involvement activities will be implemented at once. Many will require time before they produce concrete outcomes (Epstein & Connors, 1992). Becher's study of parent involvement programs reveals that the most effective programs aim for optimum (most efficient) rather than maximum involvement.

Secondly, *partnerships should be connected to and support on-going curricular improvements*. Partnerships that strive to boost student achievement may be supported with public funds designated for curricular and instructional reform (Epstein & Connors, 1992). For example, partnerships may be structured around supporting a school's or district's focus on literacy. Researchers found that formal parent-school involvement was the single factor most closely associated with the development of all literacy skills (Snow et al., 1991). Parental involvement efforts that support curricular reforms focused on literacy are deemed critical for elementary school students, especially through the third grade.¹⁶ Experts have shown that the development of reading skills is more dependent on home learning activities than the development of math or science skills (U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Epstein, 1991).

Thirdly, *the action team approach is, in effect, an active form of training teachers, administrators, and parents* to become "partnership experts" for their schools. They learn firsthand about the process of working collaboratively (Epstein & Connors, 1992). The fact that many educators have received little or no training in working with families complicates the work of partnership development. In fact, the reluctance of many teachers to engage in parental involvement has been attributed to their lack of training in how to work best with parents (Epstein & Sanders, 1998). Adequate staff training—in-service and pre-service—are needed to equip teachers for their roles as partners.

3. Training Teachers. Most educators, principals and teachers alike, are not prepared to lead successful partnership efforts. Research by the Harvard Family Research Project shows that teacher training programs at the university level presently lag far behind primary and secondary

schools in efforts to promote family involvement. There is "a serious discrepancy between pre-service preparation and the types of family involvement activities that teachers were increasingly expected to perform in schools" (Bradley, 1997).¹⁷

Given that a considerable portion of the burden for actualizing effective partnerships lies with administrators and teachers, training can make a big difference. It can help teachers change dated perspectives about parental involvement and modern family life and teach strategies for communicating with parents, understanding families and students from diverse cultural backgrounds, overcoming barriers to parental involvement, and helping parents to support their children at home. The most effective parent involvement programs value teachers for the skills they already possess and offer them ongoing support in implementing programs, assistance in resolving conflicts with parents, and outlets for expressing their concerns. Successful programs also encourage teachers to pursue involvement practices that coincide closely with school goals (Becher, 1984).

4. Financing School-Family Collaboration. The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships suggests several funding sources that may be tapped to fund the efforts of an action team. These include such federal, state, and local programs as those established under Titles I, II, VII, and Goals 2000, all of which support family-school collaboration efforts. Funds from these sources may be used to hire state and district-level coordinators to support schools' efforts. They may also be used to pay for staff development activities related to actualizing partnerships. Allowable expenses might include hiring lead teachers at each school or establishing demonstration programs. School discretionary funds and special fundraising efforts have also been used to support the work of action teams. In addition to financial support, action teams require strong support from district leaders and principals to conduct their meetings and activities.

F. Evaluating School-Family Partnerships

Schools must have effective methods for assessing their partnership programs so that goals and objectives can be refined, programs modified accordingly, and the value of partnerships in achieving certain goals made apparent to all stakeholders. Experts recommend employing a combination of techniques for evaluating family-school connections. Time and budget constraints will necessarily dictate which techniques may be implemented. Evaluation options might include (Pryor, 1996):

- informal observation of the way in which parents and teachers interact,
- identification of existing data relevant to program goals that can serve as a baseline (e.g., numbers of parents serving as volunteers, attending events, frequency of outreach functions to parents, grades, test scores, etc.),
- identification of new data to be collected to measure future progress, (data processing and analysis efforts may be supported by community leaders, university faculty, and school social workers),
- focus groups with parents, teachers, or students to determine how each group feels about the state of school-family connections,

- mailed surveys to homes (the San Diego County Office of Education has developed a useful survey for this purpose, as have other national organizations),
- in-school surveys of teacher and students (well-developed questionnaires also exist for this purpose),
- telephone surveys (may limit survey value if all families do not have phones), and
- radio call-in shows.

Epstein stresses that when evaluating school-family partnerships, it is not sufficient to study family-school contacts alone: e.g. numbers of parents involved. The results of the effort to reach out must be measured as well —e.g. how well goals have been met. However, these results should not be limited to grades and performance on achievement tests. There are a variety of desirable outcomes produced by parent involvement that relate to student motivation and other personal qualities that are critical to student success as well. These might well include the development of productive extracurricular activities, for example.

Data must be interpreted carefully, since certain correlations between parent involvement and specific outcomes may be misleading.¹⁸ In addition to determining whether the goals for student achievement and parental participation have been reached, programs should seek to assess such things as the quality of management, the flow of information, and accountability issues.

Since the burden of effective evaluation can be substantial for schools and researchers alike, a number of collaborative approaches have evolved in which researchers and educators work together to study actions taken to improve schools. Collaboration has occurred between researchers and education policy leaders, as well as between researchers and school teams. With respect to the latter grouping, Parent-Teacher Action Research Teams involve teachers and parents in the design and conduct of research on specific practices used in their programs. Paid facilitators assist with this work, which has been pioneered by the Institute for Responsive Education in its Schools Reaching Out Project (Davies, 1991).¹⁹

Epstein's action teams involve team members themselves in assessing and sharing progress. Every year, action teams assess their progress as part of their efforts to develop one-year plans for the following year. This exercise involves evaluating both the processes and various practices they are employing to develop partnerships. The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships has developed a list of key questions to facilitate this process. The Center also provides schools and districts with opportunities to participate in voluntary projects that focus on evaluation issues. The results of these projects, which have focused on the experiences of many schools in evaluating outcomes related to attendance, math achievement, and behavior, are available to schools participating in the Center's National Network of Partnership Schools.

G. Tapping Resources

Educators and parents have at their disposal a range of resources designed to facilitate the journey toward full partnerships. Growing research affirming the importance of parental involvement has fueled the development of a variety of initiatives and organizations focused on studying and supporting various facets of parental involvement. The attached resource list

includes many groups in the field. The work of a number of these groups is worthy of special mention.

The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnership's National Network of Partnership 2000 Schools presently links state, district, and other leaders responsible for helping schools implement partnerships. In exchange for meeting certain requirements for participation, Partnership 2000 schools are supported in their efforts to apply the framework of six types of involvement to their own schools and communities. They are supported regularly by facilitators, training workshops, newsletters, and e-mail and web-site assistance. Partnership schools benefit from a strong research base and institutionalized knowledge of "best practices." They play a role in building the body of research on family-school links.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement (NCPIE) counts many of the education, community, and public service organizations focused on parent involvement among its membership. Dedicated to developing and strengthening school-based partnerships, NCPIE represents its organizations at the national level on parental involvement issues and provides its members and the general public with information about publications, training, and other services available to promote community involvement in education.

The Center for Law and Education has long advocated for federal policy to strengthen parent involvement through Title I²⁰, school-to-work and other programs. Through its program, Community Action for Public Schools (CAPS), it has formed a national network of people working to improve schools and develop stronger parental involvement policies. Among its publications are *Parents are Powerful* (1997), *Learning from Others: Good Programs and Successful Campaigns* (1996), and *Taking Stock: The Inventory of Family, Community and School Support for Student Achievement* (1993).

The Institute for Responsive Education operates the Schools Reaching Out Program. This program, focused on expanding the concept of parent involvement beyond the traditional fundraising and volunteer roles reserved for parents in the past, works with a network of elementary and middle schools across the country. It espouses a three-part strategy for schools moving toward partnerships: 1) the creation of parent centers, 2) the establishment of a home visitor program, and 3) the use of action-research teams.

Chicago-based National Parent Information Network, in collaboration with the ERIC/Center for Urban Education, makes articles and studies on parental involvement issues available via the Internet. The National PTA has developed national standards for parental involvement. The Parent Institute for Quality Education publishes newsletters, videos, and booklets on involvement directed toward parents and educators.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, initiated in 1994 by Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, brings together employers, educators, families, and community organizations across the nation to improve schools. It facilitates sharing of "best practices," strengthening efforts to help children learn, keeping its members informed about the latest information and activities nationwide, and recognizing outstanding efforts at the state, local, and national levels.

Three other organizations merit mention. The National Center for Family Literacy is presently implementing a \$2.7 million program to develop a family literacy program for U.S. elementary schools. The ASPIRA Association has developed a workshop series focused on parent training in the home and school-based involvement and leadership. Finally, Communities in Schools supports efforts to connect community services with schools.

IV. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Policymakers, researchers, educators, students, families, and community leaders are equally challenged to make education a genuine community enterprise. State and district policies must continue to encourage the development of school-family-community partnerships as an essential component of larger school improvement efforts. Some states have already earmarked funds specifically for partnership initiatives. Researchers and practitioners must continue to equip schools with a range of tested practices for involving parents and improving student outcomes. At the school level, experience has shown that the best efforts are comprehensive, seeking to involve all families in a variety of roles. They are well-planned, elucidating clear goals and expectations and incorporating the views of all stakeholders. They empower all players through training, time, and support. They value parents for the perspective's they bring with respect to their children's needs and for their own special skills. Finally, they are long-lasting, reflecting a long-term investment in building the structures and cultivating the practices that will help children reach their full potential. Ideally, parents must begin their involvement when their children are in pre-school and continue to be involved throughout middle and high school. More research is needed regarding the best ways for families to support their children at each grade level.

There is powerful evidence linking parental involvement to school success. There is also limited but growing evidence about the effects of specific parental involvement programs and practices. Parents are already making significant contributions to their children's development. However, they lack the supports they once enjoyed of extended family and close-knit communities. It is incumbent upon schools and communities to play a role in helping parents to expand upon what they are already doing. Despite the evidence about the value of parental involvement, far too many parents continue to lack sufficient information about their children's schools. Many educators fail to understand their students' families and many communities are not closely linked with their local schools. The cost in terms of student outcomes not achieved is incalculable.

¹ See studies in Henderson & Berla by Milne, Eagle, Sattes, Clark, and Benson et al.

² The authors did not find a similar improvement for Mexican-American students. They attribute this to the language barrier which prevented schools from understanding fully the needs of the Hispanic community.

³ The type of parental involvement activities ranged from conducting general information sessions and community information programs for parents and the community in District A to an intensive in-service training program for parents and educators on their children's education, cooperation with the school, and strategies for reinforcing the program at home in District C. District C demonstrated the highest gains in achievement on standardized tests.

⁴ Parental involvement was defined as monitoring and helping with homework; attending school conferences and functions; and providing a supportive learning environment at home.

⁵ Parental involvement was defined by teachers according to whether parents seemed apathetic to school policies, interested in children's progress, or asked for appointments with teachers. Student achievement was measured by math achievement and college plans.

⁶ One critical assessment (Baker and Soden, 1998) of over 200 research studies in the field of parental involvement finds that much of the research suffers from one or more of the following flaws: use of nonexperimental design, lack of isolation of parent involvement effects, inconsistent definitions of parent involvement, and nonobjective measures of parent involvement. Although many of these criticisms may be justified, overcoming them will not be easy given funding limitations and the complexity of parent involvement.

⁷ Also telephone interview with Joyce Epstein, November 25, 1998.

⁸ An October 1997 U.S. Department of Education study surveyed 17,000 children in grades K-12 and found that children do better academically when their fathers are actively involved in schools. Involvement included attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at the school, attending general school meetings, or attending a school event. Highly involved fathers participated in three or more activities. The research does not establish whether fathers were involved because their children were doing well or whether children did well because their fathers were involved.

⁹ It is worthy of note that, in addition to appropriate school-level practices, supportive policies and actions at the state, county, and district levels can also foster parental involvement. Researchers and practitioners point to written policies by the boards of education, boards' recruitment strategies, the sponsoring conferences and workshops, the awarding of incentive grants, recognition of outstanding efforts, and the provision of information to parents as useful ways to increase the chances for effective parental involvement. (Crispeels, 1991; Thompson and Weiss, 1995; and Becher, 1984.)

¹⁰ See Davies 1991 for more on the use and value of home visits.

¹¹ Database of Promising Practices, 1995, available on the internet at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/pidata

¹² Interview with Anne T. Henderson, Center on Law and Education, January 5, 1999

¹³ Interview with Anne T. Henderson, Center for Law and Education, January 5, 1999

¹⁴ Interview with Susan Sweeney, Director California Consortium of Education Foundations, January 7, 1999.

¹⁵ Specific strategies for reaching hard-to-involve parents include recruiting staff or volunteers from diverse backgrounds, implementing programs to enhance skills of parents who had negative school experiences, developing special strategies for providing information to non-English speakers. See White-Clark & Decker, 1993.

¹⁶ Interview with Anne T. Henderson, Center on Law and Education, January 5, 1999.

¹⁷ See also Angela M. Shartrand, Heather B. Weiss, Holly M. Kreider, and M. Elena Lopez, "New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement," Harvard Family Research Project, 1997.

¹⁸ Epstein points to data that showed lower achievers spend more time on homework; or that frequent teacher-parent contact is linked with parents' poor perception of schools.

¹⁹See Davies, D., Palanki, A., & Burch, P., Getting started: Action research in family-school-community partnerships (Center Rep. No. 17), Baltimore: Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, John Hopkins University, 1993.

²⁰Title I funding, available to school districts in high poverty areas, makes eligibility for funding contingent upon schools and families developing partnerships in support of children's learning.

²¹Epstein, Joyce L. *School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share*. Phi Delta Kappa, 1996. pp. 76, 701-712.