

**SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS
From Theory to Practice**

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The Center

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high-expectations instruction while the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures. The sorting perspective must be replaced by a “talent development” model that asserts that all children are capable of succeeding in a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes — ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students’ personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs — and conducted through seven research and development programs and a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, in collaboration with researchers at the University of California at Santa Barbara, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Chicago, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, University of Memphis, Haskell Indian Nations University, and University of Houston-Clear Lake.

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Abstract

To better understand how some secondary schools are working to encourage continued family and community involvement as children progress from elementary to middle and high school, twenty-two educators, parents, and students at two middle schools and two high schools were interviewed. The four schools are members of the National Network of Partnership Schools, which brings together and provides technical assistance to schools, districts, and states committed to developing comprehensive and permanent programs of school-family-community partnership. This report is organized in five sections. The first section discusses social networks, social capital, and a theory of overlapping spheres of influence to elucidate the conceptual foundation for school-family-community partnerships. The second section outlines and discusses essential elements of a comprehensive program of school-family-community partnerships. This section describes a framework of six types of family-community involvement and an action team approach to partnerships. The third and fourth sections of the paper describe partnership programs at two middle schools and two high schools, respectively. These sections report the schools' progress, and the challenges they face in developing schoolwide programs of partnership. The concluding section situates the study's findings within the broader context of current literature on school-family-community partnerships at the secondary level.

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Introduction

Schools are institutions that are responsible for the formal education of children and youth. However, schools that carry out this responsibility most effectively understand themselves and their students as part of a larger social system that includes families and communities. Research conducted for over a decade indicates that when schools, families, and communities work together as partners, students benefit. Partnerships between schools, families, and communities can create safer school environments, strengthen parenting skills, encourage community service, improve academic skills, and achieve other desired goals that benefit students at all ages and grade levels (see summaries of studies in Epstein, 1992; Rutherford, Anderson, & Billig, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Although some families maintain a strong partnership with schools throughout their children's education, many families' involvement decreases as their children progress from elementary to middle and high school. This decline occurs despite studies illustrating the importance of parental involvement for secondary students' school success (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Duncan, 1969; Lee, 1994).

To better understand how some secondary schools are working to reverse this decline, administrators, teachers, and parents at two middle schools and two high schools were interviewed. The four schools are members of the National Network of Partnership Schools, which brings together and provides technical assistance to schools, districts, and states committed to developing comprehensive and permanent programs of school-family-community partnership (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

The report is organized into five sections. The first section discusses social networks, social capital and a theory of overlapping spheres of influence that combine to provide a conceptual foundation for school-family-community partnerships. The second section outlines and discusses essential elements of a comprehensive program of school-family-community partnerships. This section describes a framework of six types of family-community involvement and an action team approach to partnerships. The third and fourth sections describe partnership programs at two middle schools and two high schools, respectively. These sections report the schools' progress, and the challenges they face in developing schoolwide programs of partnership. The concluding section situates the study's findings within the broader context of current literature on school-family-community partnerships at the secondary level.

Theoretical Support for School-Family-Community Partnerships

In the last decade, developments in social theory have provided greater insights into how strong connections between schools, families, and communities enhance children's learning and social and emotional growth and well-being. As Epstein notes (1995), current theory on school-family-community partnerships alters earlier understandings of the influence that each of these institutions has on children. It was commonly thought that there was a sequential influence of family, school, and community on the growth and development of a child. The family was viewed as primarily responsible for nurturing the child and laying the foundation for his or her entry into school. The school was seen as the socializing agent that prepared the child for his or her role in the larger community (see, for example, Parsons & Ballantine, 1985). Recent syntheses of many studies, however, indicate that from infancy, the home, school, and community simultaneously affect children's growth and development (Wasik & Karweit, 1994; Young & Marx 1992). The continued importance of these contexts through each stage of a child's development is delineated by a number of related perspectives. These include the social network paradigm, Coleman's concept of social capital, and Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

The social network paradigm highlights the importance of significant others in an individual's social system who provide support and resources such as information and money (Blau, 1964; Barnes, 1972; Leinhart, 1977). Although there are several definitions of social networks, the most common reference is to the linkages between individuals, groups, and institutions with which a person has contact and on which a person perceives he or she can depend for support (Bott, 1971). One of the primary functions of an individual's social network is to provide a buffer against negative stresses, thereby promoting greater psychological and personal well-being (D'Abbs, 1982).

In educational research, it has been found that children with well-developed social networks have more positive educational outcomes than children without them (Coates, 1987). Clark (1991) writes that social networks provide social support defined as "the ... availability of people on whom we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us" (p. 45). Clark contends that the greater an adolescent's social support, the greater the likelihood that he or she will succeed in school. She suggests that schools should strengthen in-school support systems for youth, especially poor and minority youth, by developing mentoring, tutoring, and coaching programs led by responsible and responsive adults in the school, family, and community.

Coleman (1987) refers to social networks as an integral component of social capital. Social capital is the informational, attitudinal, and behavioral norms and skills that individuals can spend or invest to improve their chances for success in societal institutions, such as schools. Individuals gain social capital through their social networks. Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) report that students in Catholic and other private schools achieve at a higher level in mathematics and verbal skills than students in public schools largely because of the transmission of common messages, expectations, and norms from the family, church and school. In this example, a social network comprising family, church, and school provides youth in Catholic schools with the social capital necessary for school success.

Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence also emphasizes the importance of schools, families, and communities working together to meet the needs of children. The theory integrates educational, sociological, and psychological perspectives on social organizations, as well as research on the effects of family, school, and community environments on educational outcomes. Acknowledging the "interlocking histories of the major institutions that socialize and educate children" (Epstein, 1992, pp. 1140-41), a central principle of this theory is that certain goals, such as student academic success, are of mutual interest to people in each of these institutions, and are best achieved through their cooperative action and support. Pictorially, this perspective is represented by three spheres symbolizing school, family, and community. The relative relationship between these institutions is determined by the attitudes and practices of individuals within each context.

The pictorial representation of the theory includes external and internal structures (Epstein et. al., 1997). The external structure can be pulled together or apart by factors such as the beliefs, experiences, and practices of families, schools, and communities, and the age and grade level of students. These factors influence the quality and quantity of shared activities between schools, families and communities. The internal structure of the model delineates where and how interactions occur within and across school, home, and community contexts. The results of interactions between family, school, and community members within the internal structure of the model are acquired and stored as social capital. Thus, social networks are strengthened and social capital is increased when partnership activities are implemented that enable families, educators, and community members to work cooperatively around children's growth and development (Epstein & Sanders, 1996).

From Theory to Practice: The National Network of Partnership Schools

Based on the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and years of research in schools across the country, a framework of six types of school-family-community involvement was created (Epstein, 1995). The six types of involvement are: 1) parenting — helping all families establish home environments that support children as students; 2) communicating — designing and conducting effective forms of communication about school programs and children’s progress; 3) volunteering — recruiting and organizing help and support for school functions and activities; 4) learning at home — providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with school work and related activities; 5) decision-making — including parents in school decisions, and 6) collaborating with the community — identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families. Different practices can be implemented to foster each of the six types of involvement. The objective, however, is for schools, families, and their surrounding communities to aid each other in rearing healthy, successful children.

To further assist schools in developing comprehensive and permanent programs of partnership, an action team approach for school, family, and community partnerships was developed (Epstein et al., 1997). Action Teams for School-Family-Community Partnerships consist of six to twelve members including family members, teachers, administrators, other school staff (i.e. counselors, nurses, parent liaisons), community representatives, and students (in the upper grades) to ensure that school, family, and community representatives share responsibility for the development, implementation, and evaluation of partnership practices. To organize its work, an Action Team selects a chair or co-chairs to coordinate and schedule meetings and to share information with the rest of the school community about partnership activities. Committee chairs or co-chairs oversee the work and progress on each of the six types of involvement, ensuring that at least one practice under each type of involvement is implemented or improved each year.

These two components — the framework of six types of involvement and the Action Team for School, Family and Community Partnerships — are the cornerstones of the National Network of Partnership Schools, begun in 1996. Each school in the National Network strengthens its program by addressing the six types of involvement and by using the action team approach. The four schools in the present study have been members of the National Network of Partnership Schools since its inception. The middle schools, however,

have been working on partnership activities using the framework of six types of involvement and the action team approach for three years as part of a research program that preceded the formation of the National Network.

This study uses interview data to examine how the four schools are working to develop stronger partnerships with their families and communities. More specifically, this study explores how these middle and high schools articulate, implement, and seek to improve school, family, and community partnerships to better serve their student populations.

Methods and Sources of Data

In April 1997, four schools — Southbend Middle School, Harbortown Middle School, Northshore High School, and University Park High School ¹ — were selected to learn how middle and high schools are working to develop stronger school, family, and community connections. These schools were selected based on their reports of progress shared at an annual end of year celebration and planning workshop, and the recommendations of district facilitators for school, family, and community partnerships who support and assist the schools in their work.

The schools were visited during May and June 1997. At each school visit, interviews were conducted, and when available, supporting documents were reviewed. The interviews were face-to-face and lasted approximately one hour. At each school, the chair of the Action Team was interviewed, as were other members of the school community who were either working on or affected by school, family, and community partnerships. The additional interviewees included the principal, the parent liaison, and two volunteers at Southbend Middle School; the parent liaison and an assistant principal at Harbortown Middle School; an assistant principal, two teachers, three students, and a parent member of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) at Northshore High School; and an assistant principal, a student, and two teachers, one a member of the Action Team, at University Park High School.

The interviews followed a semi-structured design to ensure that specific topics were covered, while unique or individual factors were also allowed to emerge. Precautions were taken to “avoid imposing...interests” on the participants (Seidman, 1991). The twenty-two participants were encouraged to elaborate on questions in order to provide more accurate and comprehensive descriptions of the goals, activities, challenges, and outcomes of their programs of school-family-community partnership (see Appendix A). To avoid the

¹ Pseudonyms are used to ensure the anonymity of the participating schools and the individuals interviewed.

distractions that often accompany taking detailed descriptive notes, interviews were audio-taped with respondents' permission and later transcribed.

Data Analysis

The raw data generated from the twenty-two respondents, which consisted of over one hundred pages of written text, were coded and analyzed. Data analysis was an ongoing and iterative process (Seidman, 1991). It consisted of reading through the written text to identify emerging themes related to the schools' development of partnership programs, and finding distinctions and connections among identified themes across the schools. The themes identified through this process are organized and discussed in narrative form for middle schools and then for high schools.

Middle Schools

Southbend Middle School

Southbend Middle School is located in a poor, industrial section of the city. It serves 412 students in grades six through eight. About 74% of its students receive free or reduced-price lunches, and 23% receive special education services. Approximately 40% of the student population is African American and 60% of the population is white. The mobility rate is high; about 14% of the student population entered and 36% withdrew from the school during the 1995-96 school year. The student average daily attendance rate is about 85%. During the past year, the school was assigned a new principal. Teachers, family volunteers, and the new principal have expressed the hope that this heralds a new era during which Southbend will become a school known for excellence.

For three decades, Southbend Middle School has had a reputation for vandalism, poor achievement, and high dropout. These features are seen as a contributing factor to the school's historically low level of parental and community participation. One teacher, Ms. Carl, notes:

A lot of people are afraid to come in because of the supposed reputation of the school. A lot of these parents went to the school and the reputation has gone way back. I remember when one lady at my church...gave me a newspaper from 1968 that said...[Southbend] was third in the city for vandalism.

The new principal, Ms. Harris, is working to improve the school's climate and reputation through a number of reforms to enhance student behavior, achievement, and

attendance. The school has moved from 50-minute to 80-minute classes to ensure more instructional time, and the principal now requires detailed lesson plans from all teachers to encourage more effective use of instructional time. The school has also established a nine-week twilight program for children with severe behavioral problems. The twilight program runs every day from 2:10 to 5:10 p.m. Students are transferred out of their regular classes to the twilight program only after other efforts fail to result in improved behavior, and the student support team, comprising counselors, psychologists, the principal, and the school social worker, agrees that it is the best solution. According to Ms. Harris, school-family-community partnerships and the school improvement efforts that she has initiated must occur simultaneously, "I think that family and community involvement and school improvement should be joint efforts. I think that they go hand in hand and support each other."

Harbortown Middle School

Harbortown Middle School has more than double the population of Southbend, serving 861 African American students in grades six through eight. About 86% of its students receive free or reduced-price lunches, and 18% receive special education services. The school's mobility rate is high, with about 16% of the student population entering and 26% withdrawing from the school during the 1995-96 school year. Average daily student attendance is about 82%. The school is located in an economically depressed area close to the city's growing cultural and commercial center.

Like Southbend, Harbortown Middle School is also facing change. As a result of school closings and subsequent re-zoning, common to an increasing number of urban and rural schools, the majority of the school's students live outside of the immediate area. Traveling to and from the school is difficult for many of Harbortown's families, which negatively affects parental volunteering and attendance at school meetings. Public housing reform and school restructuring promise to keep the school's student population in a state of flux. Ms. Ross, the school's assistant principal, explains:

A lot of our [neighborhood] kids are gone now because...[Green Acres Housing Complex] is closing down so they are moving...[families] out. We're losing about 100 kids next year, altogether.... The population gets smaller each year, and more and more elementary schools are now kindergarten through eighth grade so that pulls kids away from this school. People now want their kids in their communities. If...[Riverside Elementary, a nearby elementary school] should ever become K-8, that will have an even greater impact on our student population.

Effectively educating students in an uncertain environment is the school's stated mission. Ms. Ross sees school-family-community partnerships as central to achieving this goal, saying it is, "the only way that we can succeed really. The families and the community people are the ones who drive the image of the school. They're your spokespersons. The way people talk about the school outside is the impression that people will get forever."

The Importance of School-Family-Community Partnerships

Educators and parents interviewed for this study spoke about the importance of school-family-community partnerships for student success. According to Ms. Carl, teacher and Action Team chair at Southbend Middle School, partnerships are important because:

...[The] students have so many needs, you just can't take the student in isolation. You have to connect with the whole family, like when I do home visits and see their homes, or take the kids out on trips on the weekends and stuff like that. The students need the whole village. They need to have the whole village working with them.

Ms. Harris, Southbend's principal, believes that the school cannot run efficiently nor effectively without commitment and input from families and the community. As a result, she was very disturbed by the lack of family and community participation at the school when she first arrived. She explains:

...My first question when I walked into the building was, "Where are the parents?" They hadn't had a PTA or PTO in this building or meaningful parent involvement for the last five or six years. I said that we couldn't do this without the parents.... [Partnerships]...are important because this is a community school. Let me just say this, as close as we are to the community, kids would get upset and run across the street home. Then they would come back with their mothers and their mothers would be standing there angry as well. With the school being that close, shouldn't the community be in here having some say about what goes on in here?...I tell them all of the time, Southbend is a bunch of bricks and sheet rock. It can't walk, can't talk, can't hit anybody, can't curse anybody out. So, therefore, the community has to get in here and say what they want to happen. Don't sit and tell me on the outside how bad you think the school is. Come and help me.

An assistant principal at Harbortown expresses a different but equally compelling explanation for why families are so important for the success of students, especially those in middle school. According to Ms. Ross:

On the middle school level you have students who are going through hormonal and psychological changes. They need even more support, I would

think, than some of the elementary kids because they are not sure of what is going on with their bodies and with their worlds.... Parents sometimes make the mistake of thinking that, “Well now the child is moving toward high school so I can back off a little bit,” because...[students] will tell the parent that they don’t want them to come to the school. Some are even embarrassed to have their parents come because it makes their peers think that they’re being treated as a child. But inwardly, they really do like that type of “hands on” from their parents.

Harbortown’s Action Team chairperson and middle school liaison, Ms. Gunthrie, also sees family and community involvement in students’ education as important to students’ emotional as well as intellectual development. She explains:

I believe that family and community involvement is important because everyone loves to feel the security of being loved and cared for, and when there is someone at home who cares, it makes a difference.... There is somebody that students want to please, somebody that they want to make happy. Children with their parents in their lives or somebody, it doesn’t necessarily have to be a biological parent...think, “What can I do to make myself better, what can I do to improve in school because my mother is going to expect me to make good grades.” ...So...[family and community involvement] is very important. It makes for the whole, total child.

These women eloquently express the importance of “the village” rallying to make each student feel special, to motivate each child to do his or her best, to guide students through the maze of adolescence, and to create school communities that encourage and celebrate learning. Their eloquence is matched by their commitment to developing comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships. Each of these two middle schools is moving beyond the mere expression of the importance of partnerships to actions that ensure the realization of partnerships.

Putting Words into Action

The middle school respondents have a broad definition of the term “partnerships,” reflecting the range of family and community involvement included in the framework of six types of involvement — (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making, and (6) collaborating with community. Although the schools have not yet implemented activities for each of the six types of involvement, each school has made substantial progress toward developing a comprehensive program of partnership.

Type 1 — Parenting

Type 1 activities assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students. For example, parents play a key role in helping students get to school on time every day. Schools can help families understand and carry out this parenting responsibility in a number of ways. Southbend Middle School has hired two of its volunteers as paid attendance monitors. Ms. Stevens, a community member, and Ms. George, a parent, now work with students, teachers, and especially families to help improve student attendance. According to Ms. Stevens:

We do a lot of things as attendance monitors. We make home visits, and we call parents to find out why the child is not in school. We also call to encourage parents, and to let them know that they are the first and primary educators of their children. We encourage them to come in and volunteer time, find out why the child does not want to attend school, find out what the problem is.

Attendance monitors at Southbend Middle School help families to carry out their parental responsibility to monitor their children's school attendance. The school has implemented this Type 1 activity this year and is pleased with the results. According to Ms. Stevens, students have responded well to this partnership activity, and are aware that the school is working closely with their families to encourage regular school attendance. She explains:

Students may pretend that they do not care, but they care that someone is trying to find out why they are not in school.... When they see me in the halls, they say, "Oh, I have to go to class." When they see me in the hallway, they know that I have met with their parents. They know that they can't go home and say "Momma or Daddy, I don't know why Ms. Stevens is bothering me," because the parents know me.

Harbortown Middle School has also implemented Type 1 activities. To help families develop skills that they can use to improve their own educational and professional opportunities, and ultimately, opportunities for their children, the school has a computer class for parents every Tuesday. The Action Team chairperson, Ms. Gunthrie, reports that attendance at the computer class was good during the first semester of the school year, but tapered off during the second semester. She and others on the Action Team are working with a community group to find better ways to inform parents about the class and other services that the school offers.

Type 2 — Communicating

Type 2 activities include school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and students' progress. Harbortown has found that communicating with families helped the school to improve students' attendance and test scores. According to Ms. Ross, an assistant principal at the school and a member of the Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships:

What we do each year is to look at the objectives for the school improvement plan. The priorities for us this year were attendance and testing and we put a lot of effort in those two areas and we saw some growth in both. We did a lot of communicating with parents for both those things. For all of the major testing sessions, parents were notified about what their children needed to do to prepare, and what parents could do to help them prepare.

Harbortown Middle School is also proud of its communications system, which is called Parentel. Ms. Green, who is the parent liaison and also a member of the Action Team, explains the system in the following way, "Parentel is a phone system that we can feed school information to, and it will automatically call every parent in the school and provide that information." The Action Team chairperson for Harbortown, Ms. Gunthrie, further explains, "...Once a month, everything that is happening for the month that needs to be publicized, like immunizations, is on the Parentel. Our Parentel will dial parents until it gets an answer."

Because Southbend is working to change its long-standing negative reputation, communicating with its students' families is very important. But how does the school communicate with families who are unwilling to come to the school? Southbend decided to go to the families. Southbend school teacher and Action Team chairperson, Ms. Carl, describes the "Get to Know the Principal" teas as one of the school's "most important" partnership activities. To give families from the three different communities around the school the opportunity to meet and talk with the new principal, the Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships planned a series of teas. At the time of the interview, two of the three planned teas had been held. One tea was held at a health center, another at a recreational center, and the third will be held at a local church.

Although no parents attended the first tea, 15 parents attended the second tea. Despite the low turnout, Ms. Carl believes that the teas have been important because Southbend Middle School has been able to send a clear message about its desire to improve communications with its families. The school hopes that the 15 parents who attended the second tea will encourage others to meet Southbend's new principal, who has a vision of partnerships that she is anxious to talk about.

Type 3 — Volunteering

Type 3 activities enable families to give their time and talents to support schools, teachers, and children. The framework of six types of involvement includes attendance at school events and activities as a form of Type 3 involvement because family members are volunteering their time to celebrate the accomplishments and talents of students. Harbortown has very little trouble with this type of family and community volunteering. The parent liaison explains that although families may hesitate to volunteer their services at the school, they enjoy watching their children perform. Ms. Green states:

I have found that if the children are performing, if you have the children involved in something, you've got the parents' attention and they're right there. You would not believe the number of parents for the month of June who have been in this school because their children are either going on trips, are graduating, or singing in the choir. They come just to see their children perform. They are excited about those things. But just to come in here to see that they can go to the cafeteria, they can go to their child's classroom and help out, I don't think that they feel too comfortable with that. If they can just sit and watch their children perform, they're fine.... To really get them more involved, we have to first let the children perform. Then, talk to them about other things we would like for them to become involved in, and explain those things so that they can better understand them.

Southland is, however, identifying volunteer opportunities that will help provide students with meaningful learning opportunities in safe, nurturing environments. The school has developed a parent patrol. The school had a discipline problem and many students walked the halls when they should have been in their classrooms. The parent liaison and Action Team member, Ms. Taylor, believed that parents could assist school personnel in monitoring the hallways. Below, she explains how the parent patrol program began and has developed over the past year.

When I first got here, I envisioned a program where parents would come in and patrol the halls, because we had kids who would not stay in classes and would not listen to the staff. So I felt if parents were here at the school, they would work at keeping their kids in class, plus they'd help with other kids, getting them in the school.... Some parents came to volunteer. When the kids found out that their parents were coming to school volunteering, there was a big turnaround. And, it wasn't just fear, some of the students were proud that their parents were a part of the school. There were 25 parents who signed up...and this is just to start.

Southbend is planning a volunteer celebration for the families who assisted the school in monitoring the halls and in other activities.

Type 4 — Learning at Home

The type of involvement that families are most interested in is how they can help their children with learning at home (Epstein, 1995). Indeed, research in the United States (Lee, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) and abroad (see research summaries in Sanders & Epstein, 1996) has shown that when families get involved with students' learning at home, students' attitudes toward learning and school performance improve.

At this time, Southbend does not have well developed Type 4 activities. Harbortown, on the other hand, has established a homework line to assist families' in monitoring their children's homework. Each teacher in the school has a code number which parents are given at the beginning of the school year. When a parent wants to know his or her child's homework assignment, the parent can call the homework line and enter the teacher's code number. The school hopes that over time, more families will use the homework line. According to Ms. Gunthrie, the Action Team chair at Harbortown Middle School, "Some parents use the homework hotline, but for those parents who need more encouragement, we will focus on them next year."

Type 5 — Decision-making

Type 5 activities enable families to participate in school decisions that affect their own and other children. Family representatives on school councils, committees and other decision-making bodies, and in the PTA, PTO, and other parent organizations ensure that parents' voices are heard and incorporated into school decisions. Southbend and Harbortown have parent representatives on their school improvement teams and on their Action Teams for School-Family-Community Partnerships, but would like to reestablish strong parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) to encourage more family involvement in school decision-making. The parent liaison at Southbend, Ms. Taylor, plans to use the school's volunteer celebration to identify parents interested in establishing a PTO. She states:

The volunteer party that we are having at the end of the month, I am using it for several different purposes.... I am using it for recruitment because I told the volunteers to bring a friend. I also am using it to establish a PTO committee. I will have a list at the celebration that parents can sign if they are interested in being in the PTO. I am hoping for a good turn out, even if the 25 parent volunteers bring a parent, that is 50 parents. Even if all of them don't, I might get 30 or 40.

Harbortown Middle School is also working to reestablish its PTO. According to one of the school's assistant principals, Ms. Ross, the school hasn't had an active PTO in over a year. Ms. Gunthrie, the Action Team chair explains, "We had a nice PTO, but there was

a breakdown somewhere and the parents just lost interest in coming. Usually we have something going fine during the first part of the school year, then it falls off. We are looking to ourselves, maybe our interest dropped which caused the...[parents' interest] to drop.”

Harbortown is working to revive the PTO through other Type 5 decision-making activities, such as their community meetings. When the school had problems with student discipline on the school bus, they held meetings in the community to decide how to address the issue. According to Harbortown parent liaison, Ms. Green:

We decided that if the parents won't come to us, we'll go to them. So we went to the community. The first meeting we had was an excellent meeting because the parents had a real concern.... We had over thirty people. That was an excellent meeting and it was nice because we organized it so that it wasn't a gripe session. It was a session where you could air your concerns, but it was clear that we had to be a team on this and get things together. So some community members decided that they would volunteer to observe the students waiting for the bus. They would stand on the corner in the morning until the bus picked the students up. That was an excellent idea.

Ms. Gunthrie, the Action Team chairperson at Harbortown Middle School, hopes to “build a resource list” from participants at the community meetings. From the list, she hopes to recruit members to reestablish a strong parent-teacher organization at the school.

Type 6 —Collaborating with the Community

Type 6 activities facilitate cooperation and collaboration among schools, families, community groups, agencies, and individuals. Harbortown and Southbend have developed productive community connections. For example, Southbend worked with a national volunteer organization, Americorp, to create a parent room where parents can meet and volunteers can work or relax with a cup of coffee. The room is freshly painted with colorful decorations that create a warm and inviting atmosphere. Above the room's large windows is a banner that reads, “VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.” The room has a bulletin board listing the latest school news, a large work table, and books on child development. The room also has a refrigerator, a soda machine and a microwave oven.

Americorp volunteers helped to make the parent room a reality. The parent liaison, Ms. Taylor explains:

It was a gloomy room where teachers came to eat lunch and it was dull and boring. We had Americorp paint it. I ordered the banners. Parent volunteers designed and decorated the bulletin boards. The parents and Americorp workers changed the room. I was asked what I wanted in the room and I told them that I wanted the parents to be comfortable.

The school has also been able to provide students with additional counseling services through its partnerships with a local university and a counseling agency. The school's principal, Ms. Harris, plans to continue to reach out to community agencies and organizations to provide resources for Southbend's students and families. She states:

I want to see a health center in here. We need a health center because some of the children have asthma, lice, and other health problems, and we need a place that will provide preventive, non-emergency care to students and their families. I'd also like to have a daycare downstairs. Then we could say that we are of some service to families in the community.

Harbortown's community connections also have been beneficial to the school, its students, and their families. The school works closely with a team of individuals from several institutions, including a local college and the juvenile justice system. The group has worked with the school to survey families to better understand their needs and concerns, to plan community meetings, and to mentor students.

In addition, the school has developed connections with a local high school, which has proven mutually beneficial. Ms. Gunthrie, the Action Team chairperson explains, "As a part of our community involvement, high school students, especially those who...attended [Harbortown Middle School],...earn their service credits by working with our students and tutoring them. Or, if we have an affair and want parents to come, we let them help with babysitting."

According to the parent liaison at Harbortown, the school also has been able to develop a strong connection with the church located across from the school. Ms. Green states:

The church has allowed us to have our graduation there. They have come over and done things with our children.... We had a banquet over there. They say separate church and state, but it's not necessary for them to be separated because the church is not preaching to the students or trying to convert them. Our church is a safe haven to the children in this community.

Harbortown has other community connections that have resulted in the school being repainted and parents being taught more about managing household budgets. However, the school's administration hopes for still greater participation from the surrounding community. Ms. Ross, an assistant principal at Harbortown, describes her vision in the following way:

I would like to see more community participation. There are quite a few businesses around. We have the Black Professional Men who are very active with our boys, but I would like to see more businesses in the community provide human services to the school. Maybe once a month come in and have a basketball game or something so that the kids can see that others are taking an interest.

Improving the Process

Although Southbend and Harbortown Middle Schools have implemented a variety of partnership activities, there is room for improvement in each school's program. For example, each of the schools could add to the activities it now conducts to ensure that its program has at least one well-designed activity for each of the six types of involvement, and that the activities implemented are linked to specific school improvement goals. Further, each school could improve how it currently meets the challenges of the six types of involvement (Epstein, 1995), such as providing all families with regular, two-way forms of communication about school activities and concerns, and implementing a regular schedule of interactive homework to encourage family participation in children's learning at home (Epstein, Salinas & Jackson, 1995). Each school has acknowledged the gaps in its partnership program and has expressed the desire to make improvements.

A large part of each school's progress will be determined by the quality of its Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships, the action arm of the partnership program. A well-functioning Action Team ensures that planning, implementing, and evaluating partnership activities are responsibilities shared by administrators, teachers, parents, and others in the school and surrounding community. The team approach also reduces the likelihood of individual burnout and increases the likelihood that programs become permanent. However, developing a well-functioning Action Team is a process that takes time, commitment, organization, and excellent communication.

For example, Southbend's Action Team chairperson and the parent liaison, although ostensibly on the same team, do not communicate with each other about the activities that each is implementing. One reason for the poor communication is that the parent liaison came to the school after the initial Action Team had been formed, and she was never formally incorporated into the team. This is an important, indeed, imperative connection needed at Southbend. Furthermore, although training was available, the school's Action Team was not carefully selected nor trained in how to effectively carry out its partnership program. The chairperson of the Action Team did not know of her position until after the school year had

begun, and has found it difficult to coordinate the team and delegate to its members specific roles and responsibilities. She states:

I have been overwhelmed because I can't pull people in to do things, and they don't want to come to things. There is also a big transition in terms of who is going to be here next year; some people have already been let go and some people are being administratively transferred, so we don't know which staff members are going to be here. Once that is set, it would be nice to start the family action team the right way, getting people involved this summer and...planning for next year. Because how it happened before is that we waited until September or October. I mean last year I didn't know I was chair until the end of September. So if we can meet ahead of time, then members can plan when they have time instead of when they are overwhelmed with things to do.

Southbend's current principal, Ms. Harris, is committed to improving the partnership program. She is working with a district facilitator for school-family-community partnerships to carefully identify a new Action Team of which she will be a member. She is also working to schedule time during the summer when the team can create a three-year outline and the required One-Year Action Plan for the upcoming school year. By establishing a common agenda and clarifying goals, roles, and responsibilities of team members, Southbend's Action Team will be much better prepared to develop and carry out an effective, comprehensive program of partnerships.

Harbortown Middle School's Action Team has been more stable than Southbend's. The Action Team chairperson, Ms. Gunthrie, has been in the position for three years and has learned much about the process during that time. When describing her growth as Action Team chairperson, she states the following:

During the first year, I was the chairperson. I have been the chairperson for the last 3 years. I have learned from meeting with [the district facilitator] how to delegate authority rather than trying to take it on as a one man show, and so it's gotten a bit easier. I thought that if you were the chairperson and the committees didn't get it done, then you had to get it done. Now we have a chair for each of the types of involvement and that makes it easier. I oversee it all and just monitor what the team is doing.

Harbortown's Action Team, however, still has areas in which it can improve. For example, the team needs to ensure that all members are aware of the team's goals and objectives, as well as familiar with the team's members, their roles, and the skills and talents they possess. According to one of Harbortown's Action Team members:

We have an Action Team, but it is not operating as optimally as it should.... I am a member, but I can't name who all the members are.... I believe there's six or seven people on the team. We do not meet on a regular basis. We do not have a planned agenda, and we have not mapped out strategies. In order for anything to be successful, we have to be organized. We have to start meeting before the end of the school year or during the summer, making contacts for workshop speakers or whatever it is we want to do, have a calendar developed that can go out with the welcome back letters to the students.

All members of the Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnership should be able to articulate its structure, functions, and activities as well as the chairperson does. Further, each team member should be aware of all planned activities. To achieve these goals will require that the Action Team develop a regular meeting schedule to improve team awareness, planning, and communication.

Discussion — Middle Schools

The educators and parents interviewed at Southbend and Harbortown Middle Schools strongly believe that school-family-community partnerships are as important for young adolescents in middle school as they are for children in elementary school. The middle schools in the study have been using the framework of six types of involvement and the action team approach to partnerships for three years. During this time, they have made progress in developing their programs of school-family-community partnership. Each school presently conducts a variety of meaningful activities to involve families and communities in students' learning and development as it works to further improve its partnership program.

Program improvement, however, is an incremental, and often nonlinear, process. The schools face challenges, such as personnel changes and shifting student populations that require them to identify and train new Action Team members, modify partnership activities and strategies, and evaluate team effectiveness on a regular basis. The difficulties of the middle schools in this study call attention to the importance of Action Teams that are thoughtfully selected, well-organized, and trained to plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve programs of school-family-community partnership. With well-functioning Action Teams and time, these middle schools should be able to develop partnership programs that involve families and communities in ways that support all students' learning.

High Schools

University Park High School

University Park High School serves 1900 students in grades 9 through 12. About 57% of its students receive free or reduced price lunches, and 22% receive special education services. Approximately 60% of the student population is African American, 35% of the population is white, and 5% are Asian American or Latino. The mobility rate is high, with about 13% of the student population entering and 39% withdrawing from the school during the 1995-96 school year. The student average daily attendance rate is about 77%.

University Park High School serves a multiethnic, urban community. In 1995, the school developed a schools-within-a-school approach to improve student attendance and achievement. When students enter the ninth grade, they are assigned to a team and a mentor. The teams and mentors work with ninth grade students to help them successfully transition into high school. During the second semester, ninth grade students take a career inventory and engage in activities to select one of University Park's four career schools: Arts and Humanities, Business and Finance, Sports Studies and Health/Wellness, and Transportation and Engineering Technology. In 1996, the school became a member of the National Network of Partnership Schools to develop school-family-community partnerships that further encourage development and success.

Northshore High School

Northshore High School serves 2300 African American students in grades 9 through 12. About 52% of its students receive free or reduced price lunches, and 17% receive special education services. The mobility rate is high, with about 10% of the student population entering and 25% withdrawing from the school during the 1995-96 school year. The student average daily attendance rate is about 72%.

In 1996, Northshore also developed a schools-within-a-school approach, creating smaller career-focused learning communities to improve student outcomes. The ninth grade freshman class is divided into two teams and given special support and assistance to encourage good attendance and academic success. During the second semester, Northshore uses a process similar to that used at University Park High School to help students select one of the following career schools: Communication and Technology, Humanities, Fine/Cultural Arts, Business and Commerce, Business and Human Services, and Law-Related Education. In addition to its other reform efforts, the school joined the National Network of Partnership Schools in 1996.

The Importance of School-Family-Community Partnerships

Educators, parents, and students at University Park and Northshore High Schools agreed that family and community participation in students' education is important. Their reasons varied as did each individual's notion of the "ideal" relationship between the school, family, community, and students. However, all respondents spoke with conviction about their views on the topic.

For example, Mr. Douglas, a teacher at University Park and a member of the Action Team for School, Family and Community Partnerships, believes that family and school partnerships are necessary to prevent behaviors and activities that place students at risk for academic failure and school dropout. According to Mr. Douglas:

... When students are older, parents need to still have control.... If the student was just hanging out, skipping school everyday, not passing his classes, the parents wouldn't know until it was too late. Then if the student has to repeat something, the parents want to know why they weren't notified. If they are already involved in some type of communication with the school, or at least looking at what their child is bringing home, it wouldn't be a big pressure situation at the end when the student is in trouble....

Ms. Waters is principal of University Park's alternative school, which is held during the afternoon hours for students with behavioral problems, and the school's Action Team chairperson. She believes that the partnership between families and schools should begin when students enter school and end when they complete their formal education. Ms. Waters explains:

I think that it is important for families to be involved in their children's education because it continues the relationship with the parent as the primary person in charge of the minor's education. It also shows the school that there is interest not only in the student, but in school as a whole. I think that a parent should stay involved until the child finishes high school and if necessary until they finish college.

Candace, an eleventh grade student at University Park, strongly believes that her mother's continued involvement in her education has had much to do with her success. Candace is a member of the student council, and an above-average student who will be taking courses at a local community college next year. Upon graduation from University Park, she plans to attend a four-year college. In the following excerpt, Candace describes her mother's continued involvement in her education.

My mother has always been involved in my education. In elementary school, if I got a bad grade on my report card she would come up and see why I got a bad grade. She'd give the teachers her phone number to call her, and told them that if I did anything wrong she'd have all the problems straightened out.... Even now, she gets on my case if she needs to. My teachers tell her if I am doing something wrong, if I'm doing something good, and how I can improve what I'm doing in school.

In addition to school-family connections, Mr. Douglas and Ms. Waters view school-community connections as important to the growth and development of high school youth. Mr. Douglas believes that the latter connections, especially those with local businesses, benefit the students, the school, and the community. He states:

The students who are graduating, and those who are still in school — those are the ones businesses are going to have to employ for their operations, summer jobs, and those types of things.... If the students know what goes on in the businesses and they see that the people care about them, then there probably wouldn't be as much vandalism and that kind of thing....

Ms. Waters agrees that school-family-community connections are important. Yet, her definition of community is broader than Mr. Douglas'. She believes that the people in the community at large, not only local businesses, have a vital role to play in the development of youth. Describing her view of community involvement, Ms. Waters states:

The community can be involved not only by providing mentoring and internship opportunities but also by just being interested people involved in the citizens of tomorrow. Simple things, like when the kids are on their way to school, they can greet them, "Good morning, good afternoon." You know, to make the students feel like it is okay to be a kid in this community. The community should have something positive, not just something negative, to say to the kids....

Administrators, teachers, parents and students at Northshore also believe that school-family-community partnerships are important for secondary students' success. The word that resurfaced time and again in the respondents' discussions of partnerships was "support." The respondents agreed that high school is an important but difficult time, and students' success depends largely on the support they receive from significant others. The respondents also agreed that communication and cooperation between significant others at students' homes and in their schools and communities increase the likelihood that they will receive the support needed to complete high school and move on to the workplace, a postsecondary institution, or both.

Mr. King is Assistant Principal for a team of approximately 500 ninth grade students at Northshore High School. Below, he describes the importance of partnerships for the successful transition of students from middle to high school, and how his views on partnerships affect his interactions with families.

If you are going to change middle school behavior — and I say middle school because the behavior is still primarily middle school — you need parent involvement.... So I try to say to families, “Well, look, come on in and see what’s going on. It is not perfect here.... You need to find out what is happening.” ...I take the time. Sometimes, other teachers say, “You take a lot of time with parents.” But I have to sit down and talk with them because I need that parent on my side. Because if anything is going to change, it is going to change with the help of both of us or all of us. We all have to work together. And they [the families] have got to feel that they can talk to me. They can come to me and tell me or explain to me what is going on....

Ms. Smith, a teacher at Northshore and also an Action Team member, echoes Mr. King’s views on the importance of partnerships for supporting students. According to Ms. Smith:

High school is where students are preparing to go out there and do something with their lives, whether it is work, whether it is a postsecondary institution, whether it is a technical school.... Someone or some people need to be there for support. To say, “Now, come on, you can do it; you can do it. I know you can. Now, what do I need to help you with?”

The themes of support and encouragement also are expressed by Ms. Kennedy, an administrator at Northshore and the Action Team chair. As she discusses the importance of family involvement in the education of high school youth, she reveals a broad definition of “family” that is shared by many of the respondents, as well as a keen awareness that the ways that support and encouragement are expressed change as students mature. Ms. Kennedy explains:

As ninth graders, they don’t even want you to hug them closely because that reminds them of their baby years and they’re now grown, assertive, on their own, or would like to be. But, they have to know that you are there and they need you there to support them. Its interesting to see and I don’t care how old a child gets, if that child is being presented with something, there is still that looking out into the audience. Is that significant other there? And it doesn’t necessarily have to be mommy and daddy because many of our children, of course, are in independent living situations already. But is there somebody there? Whether it’s the advocate or the counselor or the buddy from the street, we all need that. It’s just human.

The tenth grade students who were interviewed agree that the support of family is important. Patricia, Anita, and Shaun see family involvement as important to their success at Northshore. The following dialogue serves as illustration.

Interviewer: Do you think that family involvement is important to your success?

Respondents: Yes (all three students)

Interviewer: Why?

Patricia: Because my parents or my mother encourage me to go to school, and I go. But if I had a parent who didn't encourage me, I don't think that I'd go.

Interviewer: Okay, Shaun?

Shaun: Parent involvement is important because if you don't have a parent to encourage you and support you — ask you about your grades and how you're doing — then you'd think they didn't care. Then you wouldn't have that motivation to go out there and try to get a hundred or a ninety, you'll take whatever you get because no one else is interested.

Interviewer: Anita, did you want to add anything?

Anita: I think that it's important because it'll help you be whatever you want to be in life. It'll help you along the way to reach your potential.

Students, faculty, and administrators at Northshore and University Park high schools agree that school-family-community partnerships are important at the secondary level. Partnerships are seen as ways to enhance the support and guidance provided to youth at a critical period in their educational careers. Each of these schools is working to develop well-designed partnership programs to ensure that all students receive the support they need to lead successful lives. The schools have begun the process of developing comprehensive programs of partnership by concentrating on a few practices to bring school personnel, students, families, and communities closer together.

Practices of School-Family-Community Partnerships

University Park and Northshore are in their first year of membership in the National Network of Partnership Schools. As such, they are just beginning to develop schoolwide programs of partnership, planned and implemented by Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships, that include activities for each of the six types of involvement. Individual teachers and various groups within the school connect with families and

communities in different ways. For example, the ninth grade administrator at Northshore, Mr. King, conducted a Type 5 decision-making activity to elicit parental input into a disciplinary policy for ninth grade students suffering from “spring fever.” According to Mr. King:

We were experiencing some negative behaviors in our classrooms as it was getting warm. So...we put a little letter together and wrote to the parents. We said, “We need you to come in and discuss what is going on and what we can do about student behavior.” ...I had about sixty parents that came and responded.... They came because they wanted to find out what their kids were doing. For those students who may have been cutting class, we discussed what we could do. For the ones who were fighting, and so on.... There were some parents who volunteered to come in and help patrol the halls.

However, practices of family and community involvement like the one described above are often sporadic and isolated, and are not part of a structured program of school-family-community partnerships. Northshore’s Action Team hopes to systemize the school’s outreach so that at each grade level and in each career school, there are planned activities that assist families and community members in becoming involved in the students’ intellectual and social development. A schoolwide program of school-family-community partnerships would not preclude individual teachers and programs from linking in their own ways with families and communities, but would provide a broader context from which these linkages could be understood, developed, improved, or expanded.

For example, as a first step in the development of their schoolwide partnership program, Northshore’s Action Team planned and implemented ‘Parents Night,’ an occasion to provide families with information on their teens’ courses and the school’s need for volunteers. Ms. Smith, teacher and Action Team member at Northshore, describes the event in this way.

We had the parents gather in the auditorium. We had them visit their child’s academy, where we issued courses of study, the kinds of things we were going to be doing throughout the year. We begged for support. We shared with them the kinds of things we need for parents to do and the kinds of things that we are doing.... We did special things to increase parental attendance, like the homeroom that had the most parents got a pizza party or got to watch movies. We are planning for next year and hoping to improve things. We are looking at what worked well, what did not work well, and what other things we can do to get parents more involved.

The Action Team at University Park High School also conducted a Type 2 activity as its major event for the year. This activity — Park Fest — was held at the school and its

goal was to encourage positive, fun interactions between students, educators, parents, and the community. Mr. Douglas, teacher and Action Team member at University Park, describes the activity as follows:

...[Park] Fest was a carnival. The students were dismissed from school at 12 on Friday afternoon and went outside to the booths and the rides.... [The Fest] was here on the school grounds. It went until 8 in the evening and on Saturday, it was all day until about 8 that evening. The community was invited and everyone came out to enjoy themselves.

Mr. Douglas and Ms. Waters agree that the Fest was a worthwhile event and a giant step forward for partnerships at University Park. In the words of Ms. Waters:

...[The Fest] established a tighter link between the business community, the school itself, the alumnae, and the new faculty — because some of the faculty didn't know anything about the alumnae association. It did establish a stronger link between all of those parties that were involved.

Mr. Douglas and Ms. Waters, the Action Team chair, have evaluated the activity and identified several ways to improve the Fest for next year.

Mr. Douglas: The publicity could have been a little better to increase parent involvement. Parents were notified of the event. There were a couple of signs outside the school, but as far as sending something home or calling parents, that didn't happen.... We had different vendors, and each...[career school] had a fund raiser going on. We had a few businesses. But if we had a booth for parents to come and give their input, ask questions, or make comments for the different academies, that would have meant a lot. That would have been a lot more helpful than trying to identify and speak to the parents individually who did come up.

Ms. Waters: Next year, I think that we would like to have greater participation.... I think the community basically did a pretty good job, I think we need more parental, student, and faculty input next year. We are going to have to talk it up more and keep explaining the positive results of us all participating in this activity.

Evaluation, improvement, and further planning and implementation of activities are needed for schools to develop well-designed and comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnership. This process occurs within the context of a long range vision that guides the steps that each school takes in developing its partnership program.

Visions of School-Family-Community Partnerships

Parents, teachers, administrators, and students have clear ideas on the types of partnership activities they would like to see implemented at Northshore and University Park High Schools. At University Park, teachers and administrators express the need for better communication between families and the school. When explaining his vision, Mr. Douglas asserts:

Ideally, we would have some type of communication to the parents at least once a month, a newsletter or an invitation to the school at least once a month. If they kept on top of things and knew what was going on, knew that the quarter was ending in three weeks, knew all of these things ahead of time, they would benefit a lot more instead of just getting the report card or just getting the newsletter two days before an event occurs....

Teachers and administrators at University Park also envision developing a comprehensive volunteer program. Mr. Whiting, another teacher at the school, and Mr. Douglas believe that volunteers are needed to monitor student attendance and to call families to notify them of their teens' absences. Ms. Waters, the Action Team chair, also sees the need for volunteers in other areas. According to Ms. Waters, in an "ideal" University Park:

I would not have to seek out parents. I would see them visibly in the school. They could monitor the cafeteria. They could help with after-school activities, all the sports activities. They could help with the newsletter that we want to establish. I mean anything that goes on in this school, parents should be actively involved. When we have the practice sessions for the functional math tests, they should be there. Not only can they help, they can also learn things that they may not know themselves, to help themselves. If they come in and volunteer in a class, they are not only helping students to learn, they can be learning themselves. It should be a give-and-take atmosphere, where the parents come in and give their time, but they take away very valuable experiences themselves.

Candace, a student at University Park, also would like to see parents more involved in the PTA. Ms. Waters agrees that there should be a stronger PTA at the school. She states:

We should have much greater parent involvement in a PTA or PTO, whatever the school would establish as that parental force. I think that parents need to let the students as well as the school and community know that they are an integral decision-making body as far as the school is concerned. When they don't take charge of the situation, after the fact, they're saying what they wanted or what they wished had been done. Whereas if they were a viable part of regular, everyday school activities, and became involved in the decision-making, then they would not have to wait until after the fact. They

would be getting what they wanted because they would make it known before anything happened. They have to take a stand and say, “We will be involved!”

Teachers, parents, and administrators at Northshore also have ideas on how they might improve their program of partnerships. Teachers, parents, and students alike see the need for improved communication. Mr. Keith, who has a ninth grader at Northshore, is an active member of the PTA. He believes that an “ideal” partnership program at the school would include regular communication between the school and families. How best to achieve this goal? According to Mr. Keith:

I guess an ideal way would be a regular mailing.... I’ve always found that the best way is to bombard people with information, and if they keep getting it, just by chance they will read it. But the more information that you get out through radio, television, mail, newsletter, handouts from the students, the better.

The students at Northshore also see a need for improved communication. However, Shaun feels that the communication needs to improve not only between the school and families, but within the school, between administrators, teachers, and students. Shaun explains:

To let parents know what is going on, first, you have to get the people at school to know what is going on. You can ask the question, “When is the last day of school?” “I don’t know?” Teachers and administrators don’t know.... Nobody knew when the exams were, whether or not we will have half-days on Thursday. They might not know until Wednesday. So it’s not just parents who need more information, students and teachers need more information too.

Teachers and administrators at Northshore would also like to see more volunteers at the school. According to Mr. King, one of the school’s assistant principals, “The more that parents are in the school and involved, even to the point of just walking and helping with hall monitoring and cafeteria duty, the better the school will be.” Ms. Smith, a teacher at Northshore, would also like more family and community volunteers to come in as guest speakers and share their experiences and expertise with the students.

Lastly, the school would like to enhance and expand its activities under Type 5 involvement — decision-making. Mr. Keith, a parent member of the PTA, would like to see the PTA and the school’s Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships work more closely together to involve families and communities in the education and development

of Northshore's students. Mr. King feels that a more active PTA would provide a forum from which parents could advocate for school resources. He states:

We were short in some areas that I thought were critical. I work for the city; no matter how much I scream and yell that we need this or that, that is not going to get the kind of response that a parent group would get. I pointed to other schools where just parents being visible; we do not need a whole lot of parents, just parents being visible and being vigilant and saying "I want this for my son or daughter" makes a big difference. That is the kind of ideal situation that I...envision.

Obstacles to School-Family-Community Partnerships in High Schools

There are obstacles for Northshore and University Park to overcome, however, in order to develop the types of partnership programs that they envision. According to Ms. Waters, Action Team chair, primary obstacles to improved school-family-community partnerships at University Park High School are misguided perceptions and attitudes. She explains:

I think parents might think that they are not welcomed. I have often wondered why. I don't know what gives them the impression that they're not welcomed, maybe its intimidating to them. A lot of parents may not have been successful in school themselves and therefore they have a slight phobia about coming into the school. So we have to have a paradigm shift in the attitudes of the parents toward the school and the school toward the parents....

I see the paradigm shift taking place slowly. I think that sometimes teachers and professionals see parents as coming in when they've had a problem when we need to see parents as an asset. You know, what is it that these parents can bring to us positively. Everyone has to have an attitude adjustment, an 'attitudectomy,' if you want to call it that. They have to stop only seeing parents when it is a problem. That may be one reason why parents don't want to come, because the only time they get called to come is if it's a problem.

Mr. Douglas, teacher and Action Team member at University Park, believes that families' attitudes toward their teens also have to change in order for the school to develop a stronger partnership program. According to Mr. Douglas:

The parents seem to cut the cord, and I think that they are cutting the cord just a little early as far as the kids are concerned. They say, "Well he's 15 or 16. He's adult enough." But, he's acting like he's 12 or 13, mentally, when he's in school. Some parents think that they can just leave it to the teachers because their work is done, and it's not done, because we are not getting the correct results.

Mr. Douglas and Mr. Sims, another teacher, also see lack of time as an obstacle to be overcome in order to improve partnerships. The respondents agreed that both parents and teachers have limited time to carry out their varied responsibilities. Mr. Sims explains the time constraints of teachers in the following way:

...Every teacher is basically responsible for notifying absent students' parents everyday, but it doesn't happen because we are supposed to do this in addition to making sure the halls are cleared, in addition to the lesson plans, in addition to other responsibilities. For example, I am a second year teacher..., a new dad..., and I coach varsity sports. I find it exceedingly difficult to make the time to call.... [I] want to, but between lesson plans, and making out final exams, it's hard.

As a parent of two children, Mr. Douglas also recognizes that families may have little time for extra responsibilities, like volunteering. He explains, "Most parents have so many other things going on, they wouldn't have the time to volunteer at the school. Like my son's school asks me to do a lot of things, and I haven't had the time to do them...."

Members of the Northshore school community also identify attitudes and time as major obstacles to be overcome in order to improve their programs of partnerships. For example, Mr. King, a ninth grade administrator at the school, believes that some of the parents of ninth grade students at Northshore have the attitude that family involvement at the high school level is unnecessary. Ms. Smith, a teacher at the school and Action Team member, agrees that some parents may have the wrong attitude toward family involvement at the high school level. She states:

Having been in middle school, and made the change from middle school to high school, I have seen the difference in parents' reactions. In middle school, more parents are there with the children from grades 6 through 8. For some reason, and I do not know what this reason is yet, when their teens go to high school, it is more of a hands-off approach. I think that some parents think, "Now they are in high school, they are young adults and can be on their own."

Mr. King also acknowledges that some school personnel have negative attitudes toward family involvement. He states, "I believe that we must always keep hammering and selling the idea that the [school] doors are always open. Some teachers and some adults that work in the school system may be intimidated by that." Mr. King further acknowledges that some school personnel wrongly assume that poor, urban families do not want to get involved in their children's education, or judge families' interest in school-family-community partnerships by their attendance at school meetings. He asserts:

... We cannot make the assumption that just because we work here in the city, the parents are not interested. That is wrong. The parents are interested. They just do not know how to avail themselves of the system.... [Professional educators] never took the time to ask, really ask the parents to get involved. In other words, many want to. They are working parents, they do not have a lot of time. And we assume that because they did not make this PTA meeting or that PTA meeting that they do not want to get involved. They will come. But we have to keep calling them, we have to keep getting them information, because they want their son or daughter in school.... They want them learning.

Mr. Peters, PTA member at Northshore, also sees lack of time as an obstacle to improved partnerships. According to Mr. Peters:

A major obstacle is time. We scheduled PTA meetings from 3 to 5 and many people don't get off until five. Then they tried to schedule them from 6 to 8 but the teachers complained because that meant they would have to go home and come back. Trying to get a time that is convenient for parents and teachers is difficult.

The primary barriers to improved school-family-community partnerships that were identified by the respondents were misguided attitudes and lack of time. However, these barriers can be overcome with a comprehensive partnership program that includes activities for the six types of involvement, and meets the challenges that accompany each of the types (see Epstein, 1995; Sanders, 1996). Studies and field tests indicate that teachers' and families' negative attitudes about each other become more positive after partnership practices are implemented (Epstein 1986). A well-designed partnership program ensures that all families, even those with limited time, are given the opportunity and the information necessary to be involved in their teens' education in meaningful ways. To develop comprehensive programs of partnership, however, schools require the efforts and leadership of a core group of parents, teachers, students and administrators to serve on the Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships.

Continued Development of Action Teams for School-Family-Community Partnerships

The Action Team approach ensures that the work of developing a partnership program is shared by many, which is important when time is limited. Action Team members at Northshore and University Park High Schools state that the action team approach to partnerships is the best way to ensure that a comprehensive program of partnerships develops and grows. However, modifications are necessary in order for their Action Teams to be most effective. University Park High School's Action Team needs more members, especially

family and community representatives. Mr. Douglas, an Action Team member at University Park, believes that adding more members will increase the Team's ability to carry out, monitor, and evaluate more partnership activities. He states:

This year, ... [the Action Team] is not fully functional and that is the best way to explain it. We don't have the number of people available that aren't doing ten other activities to get it to function the way that it is supposed to function. We have one parent member (Candace's mother)... She is great as far as getting things done.... The more parents we get involved, even if they just do some small things, it frees up someone to do something else. And for community members, it's the same.

In addition to family and community members, Candace believes that students should be on the Action Team, "So that teachers and parents can get their views on things and what is going on."

In addition to including more parent, community, and student representatives as members, the Action Team at University Park has to determine the organizational structure that will allow it to function most effectively in a large high school organized into separate schools or academies. During its first year in the National Network of Partnership Schools, University Park's Action Team has been doing just that. After experimenting with the basic Action Team structure, the school decided to make an important change. According to the Action Team chair, Ms. Waters:

With trial and error we have decided that next year each academy will have a mini Action Team. Each academy's Action Team will have a chairperson, who will be a member of the school wide Action Team.... Each academy chair will report to the chairperson of the schoolwide Action Team so that when that person goes to School Improvement Team meetings, he or she will report on all partnership activities at the school.

Reflecting on her first year as University Park's Action Team chairperson, Ms. Waters is generally optimistic. She believes that great strides have been made, is aware of the work that has to be done to achieve an 'ideal' program of partnerships for the school, and is confident that the school's partnership program will continue to improve. She states, "I am optimistic about the progress we will make next year. This is the new ... [University Park High School]. Of course we're going to do better next year!"

Northshore is going through a similar process of determining how best to structure its Action Team. Northshore's original Action Team was identified before the school began its schools-within-a-school restructuring, and therefore, has to change. According to Ms. Smith, next year, the work of building a comprehensive partnership program will be

conducted by an Action Team with a new structure very similar to the one described by University Park's Action Team chair, Ms. Waters. In the following excerpt, Ms. Smith describes the Action Team structure that she believes will be used at Northshore next year:

The Action Team for next year will have one person from each career school. And for the ninth grade academy, there may even be two because they are in different parts of the building.... I see them sitting down as a career school Action Team first to say these are the kinds of things that we want to do with our parents and our community. Then I see them meeting as a schoolwide Action Team to share, to get everything down on paper, and to go from there and make it happen....

Northshore is in the process of determining who will represent each school, when and how often they will meet, and specific activities they will implement. Like Ms. Waters, Ms. Kennedy is optimistic for the partnership program's continued improvement and growth. She believes that this first year has helped the school reach a point of "readiness." According to Ms. Kennedy, "I think that across the board we are at a different level for embracing everything. It can work."

Discussion — High Schools

The high schools in the study have been working on developing programs of partnership for only one year as members of the National Network of Partnership Schools. They face challenges to involvement that center around the attitudes that many parents and professional educators have toward school-family-community partnerships in high schools, limited time, and limited experience partnering with families and communities. Despite these challenges, the respondents maintain a strong belief in the importance of school-family-community partnerships to students' success in and beyond high school. This belief has fueled the schools' efforts to reach out to their families and communities.

Many of the partnership activities that high school teachers and administrators in the study identify as important are similar to the activities that many elementary and middle schools implement. High school teachers and administrators need assistance with monitoring attendance as much as teachers and administrators at elementary and middle schools. Similarly, high school teachers and administrators need to communicate more regularly with families about students' performance and school programs. High schools need families' input into school decisions as much as elementary and middle schools. Although the respondents recognize that adolescents need more independence than children in the lower grades, they also recognize that they need the guidance and support of caring adults in the home, school and community.

To organize their programs of partnership, the high schools are developing more responsive action team structures. This should help the schools take ownership of their partnership programs and tailor activities to meet their specific goals and needs. As they do so, their school-family-community partnerships should expand to include activities for each of the six types of involvement that enhance students' learning and development. In addition, the high schools should link to feeder middle and elementary schools to promote smoother transitions for the students they serve.

Conclusion

Family involvement practices at home and at school have been found to influence middle and high school students' academic achievement (Clark 1983; Ginsburg & Hanson 1986), school attendance (Astone & McLanahan 1991; Epstein & Lee, 1993), homework effort (Keith, Reimers, Fehrman, Pottebaum, & Aubey 1986), and graduation and college matriculation rates (Delgado-Gaitan, 1988; Conklin & Dailey 1981). Like these research findings, this study's respondents highlight the importance of family participation in the education of youth. The students, parents, teachers, community members, and administrators who were interviewed reported that family and community connections with their schools are essential for students' personal and educational success.

Research suggests that the decline in parental participation for secondary students, in part, reflects weaker family involvement practices at the secondary school level. Dornbusch and Ritter (1988), for example, found that the majority of high school teachers (60%) reported contacting almost none or few parents. Of the contacts made, most were with parents of students who were academically successful, or those who were at risk of failure or described as discipline problems. Similarly, Purnell and Gott (1985) found that secondary teachers, though noting its importance, felt that they did not have sufficient time to implement effective practices of family involvement.

This study, too, finds that professional educators and families feel that time is limited for their work on partnerships. The study also suggests that the attitudes of educators and families can present obstacles to effective school-home-community partnerships. The study further indicates, however, that with the right support — a framework of involvement and a team approach for action — teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members can work together to build effective programs of partnership.

This latter finding is supported by a recent study analyzing parent data from six high schools — two rural, two urban, and two suburban — working to build comprehensive

school-family-community partnership programs (Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, in press). Data from parents showed that high schools' programs of partnership positively influence families' attitude toward the school. It also showed that different types of partnership practices result in different parental involvement behaviors. The results remained significant even after controlling on family and student background characteristics such as race, gender, academic performance, and parental employment and educational background. The study thus highlights the need for high schools to invest in the development of partnership programs, which include practices for the six types of involvement, in order to ensure greater family involvement in teens' learning at home and at school.

However, schools cannot expect to have their ideal programs overnight. Indeed, this study shows that even middle schools that have been working on their partnership programs for three years have areas in which they can improve. Through annual action plans, improvements in the effectiveness of their Action Teams, and regular evaluation of their activities, the partnership programs at each of the schools should continue to grow and improve. Incremental progress of this kind has been observed and reported in other schools (Sanders, 1996a/b).

The four schools in this study are among over 1,000 in the National Network of Partnership Schools (Epstein et. al., 1997) that are working to build permanent and effective school-family-community partnerships. The National Network enables educators and parents to learn from each other about successful practices and solutions to major challenges. Participating schools share information, concerns, and "best practices" so that each school can continue to improve its program of partnership. Participating schools also have opportunities to participate in research on how programs of partnership affect student outcomes. Increasing numbers of elementary, middle, and high schools are working hard to build successful partnerships because they know from theory, research, and practice that schools can most effectively educate students at all ages and grade levels with the help and support of families and communities.

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APPENDIX A - Interview Protocol

The following questions comprised the core of interviews with educators, parents, and students. Follow-up questions were asked when appropriate, and respondents were allowed to speak freely about any related topics.

Interview Questions for Administrators and Action Team Members

1. When did your school become involved in the Baltimore School-Family-Community Partnership Program?
2. Do you think that school-family-community partnerships are important to secondary school students? Why or why not?
3. What do you hope to accomplish through your program of school-family-community partnerships?
4. Describe the partnership practices implemented during the past year:
 - A. Why did you select these practices?
 - B. What were your goals for the practices?
 - C. What individuals were key in making the practices successful?
 - D. What challenges did you face in implementing the practices? How did you deal with them?
 - E. Was there an evaluation built into the practices? If not, what information would you have liked to gather to better evaluate the practices? If so, what methods did you use? What were the measurable results? Would you change your evaluation next time; if so, how?
5. What challenges have you faced in developing your school's partnership program? How do you hope to overcome these challenges?
6. Describe a successful program of partnerships? What do you believe a successful school-family-community partnership program will contribute to your school?

Interview Questions for Parents

1. How many children do you have at the school? In which grades?
2. Do you think that school-family-community partnerships are important for your child(ren)'s success? Why or why not?
3. Would you like this school to implement school-family-community partnerships? If so, what kinds of partnership activities would you like to see this school implement? How do you believe that (a) you, (b) your child, and/or (c) the school would benefit from such activities.
4. What type of partnership activities have you been involved in during this year? Did you find them rewarding? Why or why not?
5. What do you believe are some barriers that prevent greater family involvement in the education of secondary school students? How do you believe these barriers can be overcome?

Interview Questions for High School Students

1. What grade are you in?
2. Do you think that school-family-community partnerships are important for your success and that of your friends? Explain.
3. What kinds of partnership activities would you like to see this school implement? How do you believe that (a) you, (b) your friends, (c) your family, and/or (d) the school would benefit from such activities.
4. Has your family been involved with your education? How so?
5. Has your family been involved in school activities this year? If so, what type of activities has your parent been involved in during this year? Do you think that these activities were important? Why or why not?
6. What do you believe are some barriers that prevent greater family involvement in the education of secondary school students? How do you believe these barriers can be overcome?

