

Priority Schools Campaign

Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0 Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning



This publication was produced by a team of NEA staff and consultants.
Special thanks to all the state and local NEA affiliates for their contributions.

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The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary school teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

Foreword



Jennifer Pasillas. Henrietta Parker. Sarah Gebre. Bryan Sanguinito. Paty Holt. Rhonda Johnson. Their names may not be familiar now. But if their recent work is any indication, they will be soon. They are just a few of the amazing educators, parents, and Association and community leaders featured in *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning*.

NEA's core belief is that all students deserve great public schools. And these dedicated individuals embody the spirit of partnership and collaboration between educators, parents, and community leaders that is critical to student success.

Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0 outlines 10 strategies that are the foundation for creating effective partnerships, like building one-to-one relationships between families and teachers that are linked to learning. That tactic was the key to success for the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project in Sacramento, which is now being replicated in school districts across the country with support from NEA. The program grew out of a desire to disrupt the cycle of blame between families and schools, and it is now recognized as a national model.

One of this report's greatest values is its portrayal of the broad range of school personnel involved in these efforts – from school bus drivers and teachers, to administrators and cafeteria workers. Regardless of job category, educators are helping create and sustain essential partnerships with their communities.

The examples in *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0* are impressive, and we know there are many, many more to be found. NEA will continue to collect, disseminate, and elevate such examples because we believe families, schools, and communities are fundamentally and positively interconnected. This guide will also be an important resource for the educators, community members, and parents who have joined NEA's Priority Schools Campaign in 39 of the nation's most under-resourced, underfunded schools. They are currently examining these strategies with an eye toward sparking new thinking about what's possible in their own communities.

Finally, we commend our allies who share our vision of collaboration: the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Coalition for Community Schools, the Harvard Family Research Project, Communities In Schools, the National PTA, and the National Network for Partnership Schools, whose programs in the field of family-school-community partnerships continue to contribute to our efforts. Thank you for joining with us to improve the odds for our nation's students.

Dennis Van Roekel, President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis Van Roekel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

National Education Association

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Executive Summary

In local communities across the country, NEA affiliate members and leaders are working closely with parents, families,* and community members to close achievement gaps, improve low-performing schools, and transform relationships between schools and their communities.

This report identifies and describes key partnerships that Association members have forged in 16 communities and includes the Association perspective on these efforts.

Part I of this report reviews recent research on school and family collaboration and presents 10 key strategies for creating effective family-school-community partnerships that are focused on advancing student learning. It also includes recommendations for moving this important work forward.

Part II contains profiles for each of the 16 partnership programs. In many cases, Association members have been catalysts for or taken on key roles in these effective programs. These profiles demonstrate very clearly that family-school-community partnerships with a central focus on advancing student learning can have a powerful impact.

Methods

To learn more about local family-school-community partnerships, an interdepartmental NEA work group reviewed a host of parent and community engagement initiatives designed to advance student learning in schools and districts represented by NEA's local and state affiliates. In this first scan, the team identified 16 partnerships that meet the following criteria:

- ▶ Educators and leaders who are active members in NEA local and/or state affiliates
- ▶ A two- to five-year track record
- ▶ Success in engaging families and/or community organizations
- ▶ Evaluation plans in place to measure student outcomes
- ▶ Increased family or community involvement over time
- ▶ Reasonable costs and potential for others to replicate the program

Three Types of Initiatives

The 16 programs profiled in this report fall into one of three categories:

- ▶ **Community and family-community programs:** These are efforts to engage the community (including families, local residents, and community organizations) in advancing student learning.
- ▶ **Programs to engage parents and other family members:** These are programs/efforts to engage families in children's learning and development.
- ▶ **Wraparound social and community services programs:** These are programs that provide social and health services to strengthen and support children and families.

* Throughout this report, we define "parents" and "families" to mean any family members, legal guardians, or other adults acting in a parental role to a student.

Ten Key Strategies for Effective Partnerships

Across these programs, the NEA team identified 10 major strategies and approaches that define the direction of program efforts and appear to be critical to their success.

Strategy #1 - Agreeing on core values: Taking time at the beginning to think deeply and reflect about what participants believe, and why they think the efforts will work.

Strategy #2 - Listening to the community: Identifying priorities and developing an action plan in a collaborative way that creates community consensus around what needs to happen and in what sequence.

Strategy #3 - Using data to set priorities and focus strategies: Looking closely at current achievement trends and addressing areas of weakness in students' knowledge and skills.

Strategy #4 - Providing relevant, on-site professional development: Basing professional development on data and conversations among stakeholders, in a way that builds both educator-educator and educator-parent collaborations.

Strategy #5 - Building collaborations with community partners: Pulling in strategic partners and developing community buy-in—with colleges, social service agencies, community groups, faith-based organizations, local leaders, public officials, and businesses—to improve student learning and other outcomes.

Strategy #6 - Using targeted outreach to focus on high-needs communities, schools, and students: Identifying groups that need special attention, learning about their concerns and needs, and responding in culturally appropriate ways.

Strategy #7 - Building one-to-one relationships between families and educators that are linked to learning: Taking time to have conversations and reach agreement on how best to collaborate in order to improve student achievement.

Strategy #8 - Setting, communicating, and supporting high and rigorous expectations: Making it clear that success is the norm by creating pathways to college, especially for students at risk and those at the margins, and providing students with support to succeed.

Strategy #9 - Addressing cultural differences: Providing support for teachers and education support professionals to bridge barriers of culture, class, and language.

Strategy #10 - Connecting students to the community: Making learning hands-on and relevant to students' lives while also showing that students and schools serve the community.

Conclusions

These initiatives to engage families and advance student learning, many of which are led by teachers and education support professionals, are a positive development, but they are not yet a trend. They do, however, show that NEA and its affiliates can leverage significant change in local communities. This work is in the beginning stages and it deserves to be studied further and scaled up, with guidance from the research.

More infrastructure and capacity-building are needed at the state and district levels to support, evaluate, replicate, and report on this work. Finding ways to fund

development, dissemination, and implementation of the effective strategies discussed in this report is also part of the challenge.

Identifying these 16 successful programs is a first step in what will be a yearly effort to collect more examples of Association-supported practices that strengthen family-school-community ties in ways that transform schools and advance student learning.

Following are recommendations to scale up and strengthen this work so it becomes a focus for the Association and other organizations committed to creating great public schools for all students.

Recommendations

1. At the local level: Build capacity in schools

- ▶ Use professional development to enhance educators' knowledge and skills in collaborating with families and community members.
- ▶ Bargain contract language or create Memorandums of Understanding that provide time, opportunities, and reimbursement for teachers, as a way to support stronger and deeper teacher-parent connections. Work with the school district to support capacity-building for educators on family engagement, using district professional development days.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance on appropriate use of Title I funds for teacher-parent collaborations to achieve the goals of the school improvement plan, such as using the School-Parent Compact required under Section 1118.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance for educators to show parents how to use data to monitor and support their children's progress.
- ▶ Identify cultural brokers in the community who can help enhance communication between teachers and families and develop shared expectations around learning.

2. At the school district level: Work collaboratively on policies and practices

- ▶ Support districtwide policies that promote effective family-school-community partnerships and commit resources such as funding and professional development to make them work.
- ▶ Support wraparound community services to address the health and social needs of students, as well as their academic ones.
- ▶ Ensure that needs of families from diverse cultures are addressed in a systemic way, and provide needed translation and interpretation services.

- ▶ Give first priority to those sites with the greatest needs.
- ▶ Create structures such as action teams and regular community conversations to ensure student progress.

3. At the state level: Provide opportunities for dialogue and offer technical assistance

- ▶ Train local facilitators to conduct communitywide conversations that can leverage change, focusing first on the neighborhoods with the greatest needs.
- ▶ Disseminate information on appropriate and effective use of Title I funds to further engage families in partnerships that advance student learning.
- ▶ Use the strategies described in this report to make recommendations to public officials and policymakers.

4. At the national level: Promote research-based strategies on family-school-community partnerships

- ▶ Place family-school-community partnerships at the center of school reform.
- ▶ Include provisions for family-school-community partnerships in proposed legislative and policy language, in comments on federal regulations, and in policy forums and conferences.
- ▶ Continue to advocate for meaningful, research-driven family-school-community partnerships in federal legislation.
- ▶ Disseminate the strategies for family-school-community partnerships recommended in this report throughout the Association.

These recommendations are provided to support and inform NEA's mission to create a great public school for every student and to give priority attention to the schools and communities with the greatest need.

Overview

In local communities around the country, Association members and leaders are working closely in supportive relationships with parents, families,* and community members to close achievement gaps and improve student learning.

These efforts are growing steadily, thanks to careful cultivation by the National Education Association (NEA) and its state and local affiliates and members. And the results are becoming apparent. In many communities, we can already see clear benefits for students, such as increased attendance and engagement in school, improved work habits and behavior, higher enrollment in college preparatory classes, better grades and test scores, and higher graduation rates.

This report documents the partnerships that local Association members have forged in 16 communities and offers a perspective from the state or local Association. It also lays out 10 key strategies to consider in establishing any effective family-school-community partnership with student learning at its core. In addition, it provides recommendations for enhancing and replicating programs like the ones profiled here.

The Research Is Clear: Families and Communities Matter

Despite two decades of education reform, only about one-third of U.S. students are proficient in reading and math, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. That percentage is rising, but progress has been slow. The title of Charles Payne's recent book sums up the situation: *So Much Reform, So Little Change*.

Organizing Schools for Improvement, a new study from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, identifies strong family and school partnerships as

one of five key elements in accelerating progress (Bryk et al., 2010). This rigorous study compared Chicago public schools that had made significant improvements with those that had stagnated or declined, over two separate five-year periods. The characteristics of the improved schools in both data sets were the same.

From these characteristics, Anthony Bryk and his colleagues gleaned five "essential ingredients" to the success of turnaround efforts. They found that all five ingredients contribute about equally to a school's improvement and that a school's chances for success declined precipitously with the loss of only one or two elements. One of these five essential ingredients is "close ties with families and the community." When a school establishes close ties, its educators are familiar with students' cultures and community concerns. They conduct home visits, become knowledgeable about the community and its culture, invite parents to observe in classrooms, and see strong attendance by parents at school events.

The Chicago study confirms that engaging families and communities in student learning is a core strategy for school reform, and that its impact on a school's prospects for success are as powerful as the impact of strong leadership and quality teaching. This finding builds on 30 years of research about the impact that engaging families can have on student outcomes.

A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002) is a comprehensive review of the research. It concludes:

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement. When schools, families, and community

* Throughout this report, we define "parents" and "families" to mean any family members, legal guardians, or other adults acting in a parental role to a student.

groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.

The Henderson and Mapp review includes the following key findings:

- ▶ Students whose families are involved in their learning earn better grades, take higher-level classes, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education.
- ▶ Children do best when parents can take on various roles in their learning: helping at home, participating in school events and activities, guiding their children through the system, and taking part in key decisions about the school program.
- ▶ When families actively support learning, students have more positive attitudes toward school, attend more regularly, and behave better.
- ▶ Children from diverse backgrounds tend to do better when families and school staff collaborate to bridge the differences between home and school cultures.
- ▶ Middle and high school students whose families remain involved make better transitions to their new schools, maintain the quality of their work, develop realistic plans for the future, and are less likely to drop out.

These findings hold true at all ages from birth through high school and across all socioeconomic backgrounds. Studies have found that all families can support their children's success and that most families do so. School improvement efforts are far more effective when schools enlist families in the process and when schools link activities for families to what students are learning and doing in class.

When parents become involved in their child's school, they tend to become more active in their community

and take advantage of local resources such as libraries and adult learning programs. Well-planned family learning and support activities tend to increase parents' self-confidence, and parents and family members often go on to pursue a high school diploma, additional job training, and higher education.

Community groups are also critical partners. A key difference between high- and low-achieving children is how, and with whom, they spend their time outside of school. Community groups offer important resources for students and families, and schools can provide a critical link to those resources (Henderson, Mapp, et al., 2007).

Dr. Joyce Epstein, a noted education researcher and director of the National Network for Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, sums up her findings this way: "Schools, families, and communities all contribute to student success, and the best results come when all three work together as equal partners."

Helping Educators Connect

Despite this large body of convincing research, not enough attention has been paid to the issue of connecting schools and families. Teachers report they need more training to work with families, especially with those from class and cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. According to the 2005 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, educators say that engaging families is a key challenge and that it is an area where they feel under prepared.

"Family engagement is often avoided or ignored because schools don't have the tools or strategies to implement effective services to families."

Maria Paredes, founder, Academic Parent-Teacher Team Program, Creighton, Arizona

NEA recognizes the barriers schools face in fostering partnerships that focus on student learning. In collaboration with its state and local affiliates, the Association is committed to addressing this issue. By working with its members and affiliates at the site, local, state, and national levels, NEA can be a powerful partner in formulating solutions that support all students in fulfilling their learning potential.

How Were the 16 Profiles Chosen?

To learn more about local family-school-community partnerships, an interdepartmental NEA team reviewed a host of parent and community engagement initiatives designed to improve student achievement in schools and school districts represented by NEA's state and local affiliates. NEA intends to repeat this scan annually. The goal is to collect more examples of effective family-school-community partnerships that are transforming schools and improving student outcomes.

The NEA team found many positive examples of family and community outreach, but not every program used a systematic approach or was designed specifically to improve student learning. For a program or initiative to merit inclusion in this report, it had to meet six essential criteria:

- ▶ Educators and leaders who are active members of an NEA local or state affiliate Association or both
- ▶ A two- to five-year track record
- ▶ Success in engaging families, community organizations, or both
- ▶ An evaluative component tied to student outcomes
- ▶ Increased family or community involvement over time
- ▶ Reasonable costs and the potential for other schools or districts to replicate the program

Three Identifying Characteristics of the Programs

1. Program type: Each of the 16 programs we profiled fits into one of three categories:

- ▶ **Community and family-community programs:** Three of the programs involve efforts to engage the community (including families, community residents, and community organizations) in supporting student achievement. Two of those three operate across the district, and one focuses on an underachieving middle school.
- ▶ **Programs to engage parents and other family members:** Ten of the programs engage families in children's learning and development. Some are based in a single school, and some operate districtwide.
- ▶ **Wraparound social and community services programs:** Three programs provide social and health services to strengthen and support children and families. All of those three operate districtwide.

2. Program reach: Some programs were based in individual schools while others were implemented across the district or county.

3. Program longevity: The third characteristic is how long each program has been operating and how well established it is. Programs are classified in this way:

- ▶ *Mature* programs are well established and defined by their tenure of more than 10 years. Six of the featured programs fall into this category.
- ▶ *Established* programs have been in place for at least four years. Five of the programs fall into this category.
- ▶ *Emerging* programs are promising but are in the early stages of development. They are included because they are engaging families and community members in innovative ways that align with research on effective practice. Five of the programs fall into this category.

Ten Key Strategies for Effective Partnerships

Across these programs, the NEA team identified 10 major strategies and approaches that define the direction of program efforts and appear to be critical to their success.

STRATEGY #1: Agreeing on core values: In effective programs, participants take time at the outset to think deeply and reflect about what they believe and why they think their efforts will work.

Examples:

The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Program (PTHVP) in Sacramento, Calif., was initiated after Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT), a community organizing group, began asking families what would make their community a better place to raise children. This inquiry brought to the surface a deep distrust of the schools. The PTHVP partners (the school district, the Sacramento City Teachers Association, and Sacramento ACT) took time at the outset to reach agreement about their attitudes and beliefs and to identify the following core values:

- ▶ Families and teachers are equally important co-educators. The family is the expert on the child; the teacher is the expert on the curriculum.
- ▶ Before teachers can effectively share important information about academics, teachers and parents must establish positive communication.
- ▶ Teachers must visit all students and families, because targeting only the challenging students will perpetuate the cycle of mistrust.
- ▶ All parents can assist in their children's academic success; effective family involvement can happen in every home.

Successful Transitions at Upper Merion Area Middle School in King of Prussia, Pa., is designed to smooth the crucial transition from elementary to middle

school. It is a year-long program of meetings, visits, tours, correspondence between pen pals, and peer mentoring, so that students and parents become familiar with the middle school culture. Parents, staff, students, and community partners all had a hand in developing the program.

The program is rooted in the choice to be a *Community of Caring* school, where the school community subscribes to the core values of caring, respect, responsibility, trust, and family. These values are integrated throughout the school's curriculum and activities. In recent years, the school has seen improved test scores and steady decreases in suspension rates and bullying incidents.

“The students get so excited. The parents are more anxious than the kids. That's one reason why we need to have a lot of face-to-face time with parents. We assure them that safety is the No. 1 priority.”

*Dr. Karen Geller, principal, grades 5 and 6,
Upper Merion Area Middle School*

The *Community-School Programs* in the Evansville Vanderburgh school district in Indiana are driven by the vision that to succeed in closing achievement gaps, schools must become full-service community centers for students, parents, and other family members. The local Association, the school district, and all its partners agree that home, school, and the community are jointly responsible for students' well-being, and that to close academic achievement gaps, they must meet the needs of the whole child.

Evansville Teachers Association President Keith Gambill put it this way: “Our community had high hopes for its children, but if we were honest, some kids were being left behind. So educators had to

find a different, more comprehensive way of working with parents and our community. And it has paid off in terms of relationships with families and improved outcomes for our students.”

STRATEGY #2: Listening to the community: In effective programs, participants identify priorities and develop action plans collaboratively, which creates community consensus around what needs to happen and in what sequence.

Examples:

Putnam City West High School in Oklahoma City, Okla., began its *Compadres in Education* program for Hispanic families following a series of NEA-supported community conversations about closing achievement gaps. Leaders of the Oklahoma Education Association, with technical assistance from NEA, trained local community members to facilitate and record the conversations. In these conversations, parents said they did not feel welcome at the school, and they asked for more bilingual staff members who could share information with them in Spanish. Parents also requested more information about college admissions and all course information in Spanish, especially information pertaining to classes required for college. Finally, they requested NEA’s professional development assistance to better equip all teachers in serving the needs of English Language Learner (ELL) students.

In response, the school has taken several actions:

- ▶ Adding bilingual staff members, so that now 25 percent of staff are bilingual, including the crucial positions of receptionist, ELL graduation coach, and instructional assistants in ELL, algebra, and English classes.
- ▶ Holding quarterly Hispanic Family Nights, which focus on the pathways to college, and providing course descriptions and college entrance requirements in both Spanish and English.
- ▶ Offering professional development for educators, to help enhance teaching of ELL students that takes into account specific cultural priorities and needs.
- ▶ Expanding opportunities for students to engage in service-learning (community service activities aligned with the curriculum), with special outreach to students deemed at risk for dropping out.

The school’s bilingual teacher and ELL graduation coach, Jennifer Pasillas, comments:

“When our school started listening and responding to the parents’ requests such as more bilingual staff and resources, our school began to reflect the community it serves, thus increasing community parental participation and involvement, as well as student success.”

Since the *Compadres* program’s inception in 2007, the graduation rate among Hispanic students has risen by nearly 70 percent.

“The bottom line is, ‘What can I do to help my students to graduate, go on to secondary schools, and be successful?’ We are committed to our partnership between the school, the families, and the community. And it’s working!”

*Melanie Pealor, assistant principal,
Putnam City West High School*

The *Community Learning Centers* (CLC) program in Lincoln, Neb., has a tiered structure designed to ensure that activities and services for each school are tailored to local community needs and priorities. Ten different lead agencies offer a variety of services that local communities can select. Each CLC site has a School Neighborhood Advisory Committee that represents the diversity of its neighborhood and shapes the school’s program. In addition, action teams focus on specific issues such as public and family engagement.

STRATEGY #3: Using data to set priorities and focus strategies: Effective programs look closely at current achievement trends and address areas of weakness in students' knowledge and skills.

Examples:

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) in Creighton, Ariz., provide a structure for parents to meet with teachers, converse with other parents, and learn ways to support their child's academic skill development.

At the team meetings, the teacher models activities that parents can do at home with their children. The teacher also presents academic performance data for the class and gives parents individual information about their own child's performance. Test data show significant short-term gains among first graders in APTT classes. Among students tested in the fall of 2009, oral reading fluency scores in APTT classrooms rose nearly 25 points, compared to only 10 points for other students.

“Many parents wonder what the parents of kids at the top of the class are doing at home to make that happen. Parents give other parents ideas for successful practice at home. It forms a community.”

*Maria Paredes,
founder of the APTT program*

Revitalizing the School-Parent Compact required by the federal Title I program inspired teachers at Geraldine Johnson Elementary-Middle School in Bridgeport, Conn., to link activities for families to the School Improvement Plan. Teachers meet twice a month for 30 minutes in grade-level “data teams” to discuss how students are doing. At the beginning of the school year, each team identifies two or three skills on which to focus and develops strategies that families can use to promote learning at home. Based on those conversations, teachers design workshops

and home learning activities, such as questions to ask while watching a movie or ideas for using math at the grocery store.

The workshops and activities become part of a written School-Parent Compact in which teachers and families agree to collaborate. Nicole Fitzsimmons, a sixth-grade teacher, says, “The compact ties things together and brings us closer. Math workshops refresh parents' skills in solving equations and other areas of sixth-grade math. It's fun, not stressful.”

“I applaud the efforts our members are making to establish school-family partnerships through the Title I School-Parent Compact. We all realize that this type of collaboration is a key component in our students' success.”

*Gary Peluchette, president,
Bridgeport Education Association*

SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) Service System, in Oregon's Multnomah County, is a “wraparound” service model that uses 60 neighborhood schools as delivery sites for a comprehensive range of educational and social services for students, families, and community members. Core services at each site include academic support, social and health services, and recreation and enrichment activities.

Centering services at the school site allows close collaboration among schools and agencies that provide the educational and social services to support the success of children and their families. Students' growth targets and academic performance are monitored and evaluated annually. Among the 7,500 students who participated in SUN Service programs for 30 or more days in the 2009-2010 school year, average scores in reading and math exceeded state goals.

Furthermore, at least 75 percent made gains in reading and math test scores that exceeded state goals. More than 80 percent of seniors graduated, compared to less than 60 percent for the district as a whole.

STRATEGY #4: Providing relevant, on-site professional development: Effective programs base professional development on data and conversations among stakeholders in a way that builds both educator-to-educator and educator-to-parent collaborations.

Examples:

After Hispanic parents participating in *Compadres in Education* requested that the school's programs for ELL students be improved, Putnam City West High School in Oklahoma City created enrichment classes for ELL students in all core subjects in ninth and tenth grades. To enhance their teaching skills with ELL students, teachers are learning effective techniques for visual presentation of information and use of hands-on activities. They are also learning to create environments in which students and parents who are still learning English are comfortable speaking English together.

Bringing Learning to Life is a professional development program in Columbus, Ohio, that helps teachers infuse student service projects in the community that are aligned with the curriculum. The program benefits from a community outreach and engagement agreement between the Columbus Education Association, Columbus City Schools, and The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Education and Human Ecology. The program provides district K-12 teachers with tuition-free professional development. A government grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service makes it possible for these teachers to be eligible for mini-grants to implement hands-on community projects with students.

“What I love about this program is that it provides both students and teachers an opportunity to tackle real community problems, and at the same time develop 21st century skills like collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communications.”

*Rhonda Johnson, president,
Columbus Education Association*

STRATEGY #5: Building collaborations with community partners: Effective programs pull in strategic partners and develop community buy-in—with colleges, social service agencies, community groups, faith-based organizations, local leaders, public officials, and businesses—to help improve student learning and other outcomes.

Examples:

The *Wicomico Mentoring Project* in Salisbury, Md., draws mentors who work one on one with students from more than 50 local government agencies, colleges, businesses, civic organizations, and faith-based groups, as well as the schools themselves. To keep local interest high, a monthly newsletter includes information, a calendar of events, and resources for mentors. News of activities, profiles of participants, and inspiring quotes help to build support and buy-in from current and potential mentors. About half of the mentors are teachers and education support professionals, such as bus drivers and cafeteria workers.

In the Washoe County School District, which includes Reno, Nev., and the surrounding area, the *Infinite Campus Parent Portal* relies on its many partners to get information to parents who want to track their student's progress. Parents learn how to open an account and use the information on the district website. The Nevada State Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) provides training to enable

more parents to use the portal. The Boys & Girls Club and county libraries offer computer kiosks where parents can log in to check their child's progress. In addition, the district works with Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Northern Nevada to provide mentors with access to the parent portal if the family has given permission.

The Parent Portal program also benefits from a partnership with AmeriCorps, which provides volunteers who serve as Parent Involvement Facilitators (PIFs) at the 12 comprehensive high schools. The PIFs reach out to the families of students at risk, provide support and training on how to use the online tool, and broker conversations with teachers.

“Infinite Campus is ... removing barriers and making it easy for parents to see what is occurring in the classroom. The instantaneous nature of Infinite Campus creates many more opportunities for parents to engage their learner and the teacher in the course material and assignments. Once parents' and teachers' goals are aligned in pushing learner achievement, the learner can't help but be more engaged.”

*Glenn Waddell, math teacher,
North Valleys High School, Reno, Nevada*

The three wraparound programs profiled in this report—*Community Learning Centers* in Lincoln, Neb.; *SUN Service System* in Portland, Ore.; and *Community-School Programs* in the Evansville Vanderburgh district in Indiana—all excel at developing strong and sustained partnerships with community members and with a wide variety of organizations. For example, the *Lincoln Community Learning Centers* program has a comprehensive infrastructure: key community leaders work together

in a coordinating body, under which serve School Neighborhood Advisory Committees at each school; action teams focus on particular issues in the school and across the neighborhood; and the Neighborhood Action Team links back to the Mayor's Strong Safe Neighborhoods Initiative, bringing communication full circle.

“The Lincoln Community Learning Centers provide an invaluable resource serving families and schools in our community. They are great partners focusing on the needs of the whole child so they are better equipped to reach their full learning potential.”

*Jenni Absalon, president,
Lincoln Education Association*

STRATEGY #6: Using targeted outreach to focus on high-needs communities, schools, and students: Effective programs identify groups of students that need special attention, learn about their concerns and needs, and respond in culturally appropriate ways.

Examples:

Daly Elementary School in Germantown, Md., serves a pocket of high need in a county known for its affluence. To connect with Hispanic families, the school began offering monthly workshops, in Spanish, to address topics suggested by the parents, such as reading and math instruction, state assessments, bullying, gang prevention, and Internet safety. These workshops have led to the creation of the *Hispanic Parents Council*.

During the summer, the school offered weekly evenings of literacy activities, arts and crafts, computer activities, and sports at a county recreation center near the trailer park community where many of the Hispanic families live. When the recreation

center closed for a two-year renovation, the school arranged scholarships or tuition waivers for the neediest students to attend its regional summer school program for students from Daly and other county schools. To maintain contact with the Hispanic families, school administrators and teachers hosted a “meet and greet” in the parking lot of the trailer park in May and again shortly before the start of the 2010-2011 school year. Several bilingual parents volunteered as interpreters.

Hispanic family involvement has increased significantly, and the school is meeting its AYP targets for Hispanic students.

“At its most meaningful, parent involvement is about creating a community of trust, a school culture in which families want to give back to the school as much as they may need to take from it.”

*Susan Zimmerman-Orozco, assistant principal,
Daly Elementary School*

James A. Shanks Middle School in rural Quincy, Fla., had been chronically under-performing. A series of NEA-supported community conversations guided by Douglas Harris, an organizer for the Florida Education Association, led to an action plan for change that is transforming the school. Under *Making Parents Count*, a number of strategies to reach families and community members have been employed to improve outcomes for the students, 80 percent of whom are African American. To bolster Hispanic family attendance, the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, which offers services to migrant farmworker families, conducted focused outreach and provided translators at all community conversations. Families and educators came together to renovate the school—a move that increased personal ownership and pride and saved the school district more than \$100,000 in services and materials expenses.

To follow up, parents and community members created the Strategic Organizing Group (SOG), whose members agreed to take responsibility for developing and carrying out action plans. One SOG activity, designed to build family involvement, was to mount a door-to-door campaign during the summer of 2011 to welcome families of students who would be entering Shanks in the fall, establish relationships with them, and ease the transition to middle school for students and their families.

STRATEGY #7: Building one-to-one relationships between families and educators that are linked to learning: In effective programs, participants take time to discuss and reach agreement on how they can meaningfully collaborate in order to improve student achievement.

Examples:

Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School in Elmont, N.Y., is deeply committed to providing additional support to students through programs beyond the school day. Since 2005, the *Before- and Afterschool Support Programs* have been expanded to target junior high school students and are staffed by Interdisciplinary Team Center teachers. Students can use the time to complete homework, get extra help from a teacher, or make up missed assignments.

“Everything stems from personalized student attention, and you can’t do that without the parents.”

*John Capozzi, principal,
Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School*

Communication with parents is an integral part of these support programs. Teachers meet with parents before and after school hours to discuss student progress; they also meet with parents during their planning time. Parents are included in the process of developing individualized academic intervention plans for students

who show academic difficulty. When speaking with parents at team meetings, teachers can offer before- and afterschool sessions to students as a way to make up missed work, study for a test, or practice skills.

The local union takes pride in having developed the arrangements between teachers and the school that make these services possible.

“The Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers is very proud of this work... Teachers at the school understand the diversity of the students and work diligently to meet the educational needs of all. The union and the district continue to work together to ensure our students receive the best education possible.”

*Rosanne Mamo, president,
Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers*

The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Program (PTHVP), based in Sacramento, Calif., trains teachers to make home visits to families that will build relationships and foster parent-teacher collaboration focused on improving student achievement. Participation is voluntary, and teachers are paid for their time.

At the elementary school level, home visits take place in the fall and spring. At the end of the first visit, teachers invite the family to come to the school and they develop a plan to communicate throughout the year. The second visit occurs just before spring testing. In middle and high school, teachers visit the homes of students in the seventh, ninth, and tenth grades, and the focus is on key transitions. The second home visit takes place in eleventh and twelfth grades and focuses on timely graduation and career or college planning. Evaluations have found that the visits lead to increased student attendance, improved test scores, and reduced suspension and expulsion rates.

Middle school teacher Tarik McFall made a home visit in which the mother told him that she hoped her son, DeJanerio, would do well in school and go to college. The son heard what his mother said. “I think hearing her say those words to his teacher really influenced him to do well in school. For the rest of the year, DeJanerio really evolved into an excellent leader and even scored ‘proficient’ in math on the CST!” McFall comments.

STRATEGY #8: Setting, communicating, and supporting high and rigorous expectations: Effective programs make it clear that success is the norm by creating pathways to college, especially for students at risk and at the margins, and they provide students with support and services to succeed.

Examples:

For *Making Parents Count*, Shanks Middle School, in Florida’s Gadsden County, adopted a goal of helping the entire community embrace consistent educational principles and practices. As Juanita Ellis, principal of Shanks, explained, “Our goal is to move the school to a higher level by setting high expectations, engaging students in meaningful activities to promote literacy, and using data to drive instruction.”

The Strategic Organizing Group (SOG) of parents, community members, school leaders, and educators developed a nine-point document of expectations for students, which is focused on preparing them for college. Among the shared values that emerged from community conversations are these:

- ▶ Respect for the importance of families in raising academic expectations and self-discipline among students.
- ▶ Commitment to the inclusion of English Language Learners.
- ▶ Consistency of educational messages throughout the school, home, and community.

“Making public our collaborative efforts towards excellence, through billboards, use of radio and news announcements, and through active reiteration by the local clergy, has made all the difference in getting us all on the same page—parents, students, and community.”

*Arnitia Grice-Walker, president,
Gadsden County Classroom Teachers Association*

Founded in 2009, the *Math and Science Leadership Academy* (MSLA) is a collaboration among teachers, their union (the Denver Classroom Teachers Association), and the Denver Public Schools. The school promises a rigorous education with a focus on math and science to its predominantly low-income and Hispanic student population. In addition to traditional academics, students engage in hands-on learning and service-learning projects in the community. The school has been adding one grade per year with the goal of being a K-5 school beginning in 2012–2013. Faculty and staff attribute the school’s growing numbers of students and families to its focus, rigor, inclusive culture, and high expectations.

Results from the Parent Satisfaction Survey for 2009–2010 show that more than 90 percent of parents give the school positive ratings, well above the district average in all categories.

“One of the key strategies that makes MSLA work is the mutual agreement of all partners—families, educators, community—to set the bar high for our students. It’s worth re-thinking your approach to involving parents, particularly if students aren’t working up to their potential. What’s even better is if your approach is grounded in what’s been shown to work.”

*Henry Roman, president,
Denver Classroom Teachers Association*

STRATEGY #9: Addressing cultural differences:

Effective programs provide support for teachers and education support professionals to bridge barriers of culture, class, and language.

Examples:

To help engage parents in their children’s education and give families a voice in the school community, a coalition of groups, including the Reading Education Association, in Reading, Pa., established the *Parent and Community Outreach Initiative*. One of its goals is to establish a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in all 24 schools in the district.

Parent engagement is important in Reading, where the school district has been facing severe budget challenges and changing demographics. Reading was recently identified in the *New York Times* as a “struggling city of 88,000 that has earned the unwelcome distinction of having the largest share of its residents living in poverty, barely edging out Flint, Mich., according to new Census Bureau data.” Reading’s growing Hispanic population, currently around 80 percent, includes many highly mobile students whose families often relocate to find work or affordable housing. Parent organizations can help boost student achievement by helping to break down language barriers and by fostering a sense of community among parents and educators.

Forming a parent organization has been effective in increasing schools’ responsiveness to families in Reading. Miriam Feliciano first became involved in organizing parents at Ford Elementary School after her son was rushed to the emergency room for dehydration caused by severely overheated school classrooms. She collected evidence about conditions in the building, gained support from other parents and from school staff, and presented the school’s case at a school board meeting. The next day, contractors arrived to install air conditioning.

“If we have an established parent organization at a school, that opens a door for further parent involvement. Only with buy-in from teachers, parents, and administrators will we truly be able to do what is right for our students by doing what is right for the community: promoting total involvement in the educational success of our city’s future leaders.”

*Bryan Sanguinito, president,
Reading Education Association*

The *Hispanic Parents Council*, led by Hispanic parents at Daly Elementary School in Germantown, Md., offers monthly workshops, conducted in Spanish, to address topics suggested by parents, such as reading and math instruction, state assessments, bullying, gang prevention, and Internet safety. The Council also is becoming a full partner in school improvement efforts. For example, when parents expressed an interest in computer literacy, a Hispanic parent volunteered to teach a computer class. Parents also expressed a need for afterschool programs during the winter months, and the school began offering afterschool fitness instruction on campus, with tuition scholarships arranged through partnerships with instructors in the community. But the programs that most directly advance student achievement are the afterschool instructional programs to help students prepare for state testing. They are run by teachers and meet twice a week from January through March.

STRATEGY #10: Connecting students to the community: Effective programs make learning hands-on and relevant to students’ lives while also showing that students and schools serve the community.

Examples:

Bringing Learning to Life in Columbus, Ohio, is a program that provides professional development—through The Ohio State University College of

Education and Human Ecology—to local K-12 teachers, so that teachers can help students apply what they learn in the classroom to community service projects of their own design. The program concept evolved from an NEA-supported project through which the Columbus Education Association conducted two community conversations where parents and students expressed frustration over their local high school’s lack of connectedness to the community. A grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service helped address this issue by providing additional support.

As part of this professional development training, Te’Lario Watkins, a teacher at Linden-McKinley STEM Academy, is working with students on a project they call, “*Water, Water, Everywhere.*” The students are investigating how improper disposal of hazardous materials affects water quality. They study the community water supply and work with organizations in the community that focus on reducing contamination and improving local water quality. Students then present what they have learned and make proposals for achieving a clean water supply in the Linden neighborhood of Columbus.

As Watkins states: “Our project will give my students the opportunity to connect in a meaningful way and give valuable information back to their community. My students and their parents have both expressed their excitement about the project and their involvement in working with and helping their neighborhood.”

Through such projects, students become informed citizens who can contribute to the ongoing work of community-based organizations, using what they learn in class to analyze and address real-life community challenges.

At the union teacher-led *Math and Science Leadership Academy* (MSLA) in Denver, Colo.,

students not only learn traditional academics, but they also engage in hands-on learning using knowledge gained in the classroom to conduct real-world, community-based projects. The program develops leadership skills and encourages civic responsibility.

Upper Merion Area Middle School in King of Prussia, Pa., has an ethic of community service and partnerships with more than 30 community organizations. The local Rotary Club, for example, has been spending \$2,000 per year on books for the school library on topics such as “heroes and respect” and “diversity and good citizenship.” All staff and students perform service-learning or community service activities. Parents and community members also engage in volunteer activities.

These 10 strategies, all interconnected, build upon and reinforce practices that lay a foundation for making a school a great place to learn and work. The highest priority of such initiatives is to create a learning community that fosters trusting relationships among all its members.

In her coaching work with teachers on revitalizing their school-parent compacts, Patti Avallone, a former Connecticut teacher of the year who now works as a consultant with the state Department of Education, found that teachers began to look at parents differently once they got to know each other.

“After having conversations with parents about how to improve student learning, teachers said they appreciated how much parents were willing to help,” Avallone said. “As teachers, they came to realize that they had not been specific about the learning skills and strategies that they wanted parents

to do at home. Teachers said, ‘We often assumed that there was no support. Boy, were we wrong! Our relationship with families grew stronger and finally, we were all on the same page.’ This is the kind of collaboration that strengthens student achievement.”

Getting More Strategic About Engaging Families

The National Working Group on Family and Community Engagement has observed that far too many efforts to involve parents are rooted in outdated thinking and faulty assumptions. The Working Group, a leadership collaborative created to inform federal policy on family, school, and community engagement in education, includes the Harvard Family Research Project and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. This group has proposed a framework for moving these efforts from traditional thinking to new strategies that are systemic and strategic.

Using the Working Group’s framework, the following chart illustrates how the programs profiled in this report have moved away from outdated thinking to create new and vibrant partnership approaches to advance student learning.

Traditional Family Involvement Activities	Strategic Family Engagement Programs
Individual responsibility: Sending home a flier that tells parents to make sure their kids get to bed on time before the state tests next week.	Shared responsibility: Holding a team meeting with parents to share data on student progress and model learning strategies parents can use at home to improve specific skills. (<i>Academic Parent-Teacher Teams, Arizona</i>)
Deficit-based and adversarial: Putting up “no trespassing” signs around the school and offering parenting classes.	Strength-based and collaborative: Holding community conversations to hear family members’ ideas for improving student learning, and following up on suggestions such as adding more bilingual staff and improving the ELL program. (<i>Compadres in Education, Oklahoma</i>)
Random acts of family involvement: “Let’s send home backpacks with school supplies inside!” “We could ask parents to chaperone the field trip.” “The parent group could hold a bake sale to raise funds for new band uniforms.”	Systemic program linked to learning: Creating a Parent Portal to the district website so that parents can access information about their children’s progress, and providing training to help families use it and connect with teachers when problems arise. (<i>Parent Portal, Nevada</i>)
Add-on: Referring struggling students to a local tutoring program	Integrated: Building partnerships with local community organizations and social service agencies to offer tutoring and enrichment programs that are linked to the school curriculum, and monitoring student progress jointly with community partners. (<i>SUN Service System, Oregon</i>)
Compliance: Running the district-drafted boilerplate Title I School-Parent Compact past the PTA for “approval,” then putting it on a shelf.	Shared ownership: Holding data team meetings to identify skills that students need to strengthen. Then conferring with parents about workshops and information they would like to improve their children’s skills. Finally, creating a Title I Compact that lays out their shared responsibility. (<i>Compact Revitalization, Connecticut</i>)
One-time project: Holding a Family Fun Night once a year.	Continuous improvement: Forming a committee that focuses on creating a positive and inclusive school climate and surveys families each year to get feedback for improvement. (<i>Math and Science Leadership Academy, Colorado</i>)

Expanding Strategic Partnerships

The 16 programs and initiatives described in this report show how the National Education Association and its affiliates can leverage significant change in local communities. In the schools and local school districts profiled, the role of the Association has ranged from willing and active individual member, to key initiator, to lead partner. NEA aims to support its affiliates in taking on new and important roles as problem-solvers and leaders in school improvement efforts.

Through its network of state and local affiliates, NEA has both the experience and the capacity to:

- ▶ collaboratively develop programs that transcend traditional ways of doing business
- ▶ create new strategic and systemwide approaches for building and sustaining family-school-community partnerships.

In addition, the meaningful dialogue between educators and family members created by NEA-supported community conversations and transformation efforts can give local educators a new perspective on possibilities for collaboration with families. It can help both the school and the community determine their mutual priorities and take action.

Building an Infrastructure

These initiatives to engage families and improve student outcomes—many of which are led by teachers and education support professionals—are a positive development, but they are not yet part of a national trend. Many of these efforts are in their beginning stages, and they merit further study and scaling up, with guidance from the research.

Educators say that engaging families is their No. 1 challenge and that it is the part of their job for which they feel the least prepared. There is a tremendous

need for capacity-building, not just for classroom teachers and education support professionals, but also for school and district administrators to understand how to encourage and support collaborations with families and community members.

This work will not happen on its own. What is needed is the infrastructure at the state and district levels to support, evaluate, replicate, and report on this work. Finding ways to fund development, dissemination, and implementation of the effective strategies discussed in this report is part of the challenge.

Recommendations

The following recommendations identify a number of ways to scale up and strengthen this important work, so that it can become an intentional focus for the Association at the local, state, and national levels:

1. At the local level: Build capacity in schools

- ▶ Use professional development to enhance educators' knowledge and skills in collaborating with families and community members. For example, build collaboration with nearby institutions of higher learning such as colleges of education to provide practice guidance and professional development programs for which teachers can receive graduate credits.
- ▶ Bargain contract language or create Memorandums of Understanding that provide time, opportunities, and reimbursement for educators, as a way to support stronger and deeper educator-parent connections. Work with the school district to support capacity-building for educators on family engagement, using district professional development days.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance on appropriate use of Title I funds for educator-parent collaborations to achieve the goals of the school improvement plan, such as using the School-Parent Compact required under Section 1118.

- ▶ Provide technical assistance to educators on showing parents how to use data to monitor and support their children's progress.
- ▶ Identify cultural brokers in the community who can help enhance communication between educators and families and develop shared expectations around learning.

2. At the school district level: Work collaboratively on policies and practices

- ▶ Support districtwide policies that promote effective family-school-community partnerships and commit resources such as funding and professional development to make them work.
- ▶ Support wraparound community services to address the health and social needs of students, as well as their academic ones.
- ▶ Ensure that the needs of families from diverse cultures are addressed in a systemic way, and provide needed translation and interpretation services.
- ▶ Give first priority to those sites with the greatest needs.
- ▶ Create structures such as action teams and regular public meetings to ensure student progress.

3. At the state level: Provide opportunities for dialogue and offer technical assistance

- ▶ Train local facilitators to conduct communitywide conversations that can leverage change, focusing first on the neighborhoods with the greatest needs.
- ▶ Disseminate information on appropriate and effective use of Title I funds to further engage families in partnerships that improve student learning outcomes.
- ▶ Use the strategies described in this report to make recommendations to public officials and policymakers.

4. At the national level: Promote research-based strategies on family-school-community partnerships

- ▶ Place family-school-community partnerships at the center of school reform.
- ▶ Include provisions for family-school-community partnerships in proposed legislative and policy language, in comments on federal regulations, and in policy forums and conferences.
- ▶ Continue to advocate for meaningful, research-driven family-school-community partnerships in federal legislation.
- ▶ Disseminate the strategies for family-school-community partnerships recommended in this report throughout the Association.

These recommendations aim to support and inform NEA's continuing mission to create a great public school for every student and to give priority attention to the highest-need schools and communities.



Community and Family-Community Programs

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Making Parents Count

School:

Shanks Middle School

District:

Gadsden County School District

Location: Quincy, Fla.

Grades: 6-8

Enrollment: 610

Free/reduced-price lunch: 92%

Setting high and consistent expectations

Making Parents Count

James A. Shanks Middle School

Quincy, Florida

In 2007, Florida Education Association (FEA) organizer Douglas Harris applied the FEA campaign message, “Making Our Schools a Priority,” to his work in rural and economically depressed Quincy, Fla. Shanks Middle School was a focal point for local change efforts because it had a strong leader committed to increasing parent involvement and its mid-county location could help promote improvement throughout the area.

Harris and a community organization partner guided a series of public conversations with the Shanks community, which led to a wish list and action plan for change that is transforming the school. For the first time, Shanks students now perform above the district average in reading and math. Eighty-one percent of Shanks students are African American. Another 18 percent are Hispanic, most of whom are children of migrant agricultural workers.

“Our goal is to move the school to a higher level by setting high expectations, engaging students in meaningful activities to promote literacy, and using data to drive instruction,” says Shanks Middle School Principal Juanita Ellis.

How the program works

With a \$10,000 grant from the National Education Association, Harris collaborated with Gadsden Coalition for Change, a community-based organization committed to educational equity and social justice, to guide a series of community conversations with Shanks parents and community members. Partners included businesses, media outlets, elected officials, prominent citizens, and members of the school board and PTA. To boost attendance by Hispanic families, the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium, which offers services to migrant farmworker families, targeted its outreach to families and provided translators at all community conversations.

The first community conversation became the starting point for all ensuing activities. To develop and carry out action plans, parents and community members organized the Strategic Organizing Group (SOG), whose members agreed to take responsibility for following up. Because parents’ first priority was improving the school building and grounds—a goal that would unite the whole

Community and Family-Community Programs

community—the SOG first addressed that need. Some 500 volunteers spent eight days painting walls, replacing floors, installing sod, and planting trees. Their sweat equity and donated materials saved the school district more than \$100,000, and their example inspired students to aim high. The initiative led to further changes coordinated by SOG, with a collective goal to promote parent involvement, increase student achievement, and improve graduation rates.

Evidence of effectiveness

According to the Florida Department of Education:

- ▶ James A. Shanks Middle School earned a total of 508 points on the 2011 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), moving up from 433 in 2008. The school's grade moved from D in 2008, to C in 2010, and then to B in 2011.
- ▶ The percentage of students meeting high standards in reading and math rose steadily from 2008-09 to 2010-11, as did the percentage of students making learning gains. Students in the lowest quartile made the most notable gains, increasing from 63 to 76 percent in reading and from 66 to 77 percent in math.
- ▶ Despite these gains, the school did not quite make Adequate Yearly Progress for Title I accountability purposes, although the school has met 82 percent of the necessary criteria.

Exemplary practices

Consistently communicating high expectations:

To help the entire community embrace consistent educational principles and practices, the SOG and school leaders developed a nine-point document of expectations for students that is focused on preparing for college.

Ensuring that the PTA remains parent-focused and inclusive: Earlier, PTA meetings at Shanks had been a forum for the principal to report on school business. Under the leadership of Shanks PTA President Gwen Forehand, who is also a SOG leader, parents now run the meetings, freely discuss their challenges, and create student-focused solutions. To ensure that all public meetings at Shanks are welcoming to ELL parents, the district has invested in translation equipment to serve the needs of its Spanish-speaking families.

Agreeing on core values: The community conversations and SOG meetings have encouraged shared values:

- ▶ Respect for the importance of families in raising academic expectations and self-discipline among students
- ▶ Belief that the physical condition of a school has an impact on student and family engagement
- ▶ Commitment to the inclusion of English Language Learners
- ▶ Consistency of educational messages throughout the school, home, and community.

Using targeted outreach: To sustain parent and family involvement, SOG mounted a door-to-door campaign during the summer of 2011 to personally welcome families of students who would be entering Shanks in the fall.

Identifying high-level advocates for change: The SOG has reached out to powerful partners who are willing to promote success at Shanks. These include the chairman of the board of education, the superintendent, the local state representative, and the director of the Gadsden Coalition for Change.

Community and Family-Community Programs

Starting a service-learning program: Shanks's math teacher Roosevelt Sea secured a service-learning grant from NEA in partnership with FEA for students to plant a community garden. Students will hone skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) as well as give back to their community by donating the garden produce to needy community residents.

Outlook

The commitment of the community and its leaders is high, and the school is making steady progress.

Association perspective

The Gadsden County Classroom Teachers Association is a major partner in the effort. Local President Arnitta Grice-Walker says, "Making public our collaborative efforts towards excellence through billboards, use of radio and television, and through active reiteration by the local clergy, has made all the difference in getting us all on the same page—parents, students, and community."

Local contact

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Related information

Florida School Grades: <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>

NCLB Public Accountability report for Shanks:
<http://bit.ly/qVf3e0>

Shanks Middle School website: <http://www.jasms.gcps.k12.fl.us/?PageName=%27AboutTheSchool%27>

QUINCY, FLORIDA



Great Public Schools for Every Student

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Community and Family-Community Programs

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Wicomico Mentoring Project

District:

Wicomico County Public Schools

Location:

Salisbury, Md., and surrounding area

Grades: PreK-12

Enrollment: 14,400 students in the district, including 754 WMP students

Free/reduced-price lunch: 85% of WMP students

Developing volunteer mentors

Wicomico Mentoring Project

Wicomico County Public Schools

Wicomico County, Maryland

In 1994, the Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce, the Wicomico County Board of Education, and a group of business and professional leaders called the Greater Salisbury Committee, began looking for a way to help raise high school graduation rates. Together, they formed a task force that came up with the idea of a mentorship program for students at risk of school failure. With funding from an AmeriCorps grant, the task force hired Henrietta Parker to administer the Wicomico Mentoring Project (WMP).

This one-on-one mentoring program, which Parker continues to oversee, has grown from 27 mentors in three schools to 754 mentors serving the county's 26 schools. Mentors include college students and volunteers from more than 50 local government agencies, businesses, civic organizations, and faith-based groups, as well as the schools themselves. In fact, 55 percent of the mentors are teachers or education support professionals. The superintendent also serves as a mentor.

How the program works

The Wicomico Mentoring Project is funded by the Wicomico County Board of Education as part of the Student Services Team. Its 11-member Advisory Board is comprised of mentors from a range of backgrounds. The project coordinator and two staff work closely with coordinators at each school. Students are referred to the program by teachers, guidance staff, or others who know them well. Mentors choose a school—usually based on proximity to home or workplace—and commit to meeting one hour per week for the school year.



Mentors act as role models and provide support for students' social, emotional, and academic growth. They can sit in class with their student, read, play board games, eat lunch together, take a walk and talk together, or do whatever is comfortable. WMP schedules summer activities for students and mentors, such as roller-skating, baseball games, and field trips.

Mentors undergo a background check and two hours of training. They also receive a toolkit that includes ice breakers, activities, and other resources. Supplemental training with other mentoring programs is also available.

Community and Family-Community Programs

Mentoring may begin at any grade level and may continue through high school. Currently, about half of the mentored students are in elementary school, a third are in middle school, and the rest are in high school. Of the students being mentored, 69 percent are African American, 27 percent are white, and 5 percent are Hispanic. The school district as a whole is about 55 percent white, 37 percent African American, and 7 percent Hispanic, Asian, or other.

The WMP annual budget (\$177,000 for 2009-2010) covers salaries for the project coordinator and two staff, as well as materials, mentor background checks, and printing. In addition, the Advisory Board raises about \$6,000 in community donations each year to cover the cost of activities, food, and transportation.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Data for the 2009-2010 school year show that compared to the previous year, 41 percent of WMP students had improved grades, 46 percent had improved attendance, and 27 percent showed improved behavior.
- ▶ The 2010 graduation rate for mentored high school seniors was 99 percent. For the school district as a whole, the graduation rate rose from 78.7 percent in 2009 to 83 percent in 2010.
- ▶ Survey data shows that 75 percent of mentored students' teachers saw personal growth, 73 percent saw improved work habits and effort, and 72 percent saw improved academic achievement.
- ▶ Among parents surveyed, 92 percent saw improved work habits in their mentored children; 91 percent said their child had a positive feeling about the mentor; and 89 percent observed personal growth in their child.

- ▶ The Wicomico Mentoring Project has won numerous awards, including the 2008 Leadership Award in Education from the Shore Leadership Alumni Association and a First Place Award of Excellence from the Office of the Attorney General's Spotlight on Prevention. In addition, America's Promise Alliance, a national network that aims to ensure that all young people graduate from high school ready for college, named Wicomico County one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People in 2010—the fourth time the county has received this recognition.

Exemplary practices

Using targeted outreach: Students are usually referred to the WMP by their guidance counselors for reasons such as poor attendance, lack of self-confidence, delinquent behavior, or life circumstances that limit involvement of their parents. Referrals also come from teachers, parents, and even students themselves.

Building community support and buy-in: A monthly newsletter includes information, a calendar of events, and resources for mentors. News of activities, profiles of participants, and inspiring quotes help to build support and buy-in from current and potential mentors.

Developing personal relationships: The training program helps mentors form reliable relationships that help motivate and support the students. Mentors make a one-year commitment, which they may choose to renew at the end of the school year. More than 20 WMP mentors have remained active for 5 to 15 years. Feedback from students and mentors shows that more than 90 percent are satisfied with their pairing. Ninety-four percent of students reported a great or good relationship with their mentor, and 97 percent wanted to keep their mentor for the next year.

Community and Family-Community Programs

Outlook

Demand for WMP mentors is high: In addition to those in the program, another 1,070 eligible students are on a waiting list. Recognizing the potential for other districts to replicate the program, Parker has shared information and copies of the toolkit with other counties.

Association perspective

As the local Association president, Dave White, puts it: “The Wicomico County Education Association is a critical WMP partner organization, and many of its members—including classroom teachers and education support professionals—serve as mentors. The Association and district have worked out an agreement that allows school staff the necessary time to mentor students.”

Local contacts

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Related information

WMP website: www.wcboe.org/programs/mentoring

Report card: <http://bit.ly/qxJwX1>

WICOMICO COUNTY, MARYLAND



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Community and Family-Community Programs

SNAPSHOT

Program:
Bringing Learning to Life

District:
Columbus City Schools

Location:
Columbus, Ohio

Grades: PreK-12

Enrollment: 51,000

Free/reduced-price lunch:
77%

Making student learning relevant to everyday life

Bringing Learning to Life

Columbus City Schools

Columbus, Ohio

In survey after survey, students cite boredom and lack of experiences that connect schoolwork to the real world as underlying reasons for disengagement from school. Bringing Learning to Life is a program that helps students apply what they learn in the classroom to service projects in the community. The program received a three-year federal grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service that enhances an existing professional development agreement between the Columbus Education Association (CEA), Columbus City Schools, and The Ohio State University (OSU) College of Education and Human Ecology.

To increase academic success, especially among students in high-poverty schools, CEA and OSU teamed up to provide professional development to K-12 teachers in service-learning, a practice that unites academic instruction and learning with student-focused service in the community. The three-year grant allows Columbus teachers to enroll in a three-credit graduate course taught by an award-winning OSU faculty member.

In addition, these teachers are also eligible for mini-grants to implement hands-on community projects with students. Through the projects, students become leaders who contribute action to deserving community-based organizations, using what they are learning in class to analyze and address real-life community challenges. Typically, students become more engaged in school as they begin to see themselves as civic and socially responsible agents of change. Over the course of the three-year project period, nearly 2,000 Columbus City students will experience civic engagement and academically aligned community service firsthand.

How the program works

Bringing Learning to Life evolved from an NEA-supported project that involved two community conversations in the Linden-McKinley neighborhood. Through those discussions, parents and students expressed frustration over the high school's lack of community connectedness that could help students visualize themselves as contributing adults. The program will help connect the school with the community.

NEA and the NEA Foundation provide project direction as well as grant administration and supervision. The OSU College of Education and Human Ecology

Community and Family-Community Programs

is responsible for instruction, the syllabus, evaluation, and assessment of teacher mini-grant applications. CEA handles purchase and distribution of materials, mini-grant dissemination, project promotion among members, and teacher recruitment for the program.

The first course offered by OSU took place during spring 2011, with 31 teachers who were chosen among 70 applicants. Another 35 teachers began their 10-week course in the summer of 2011. To expose teachers to potential service-learning partners, class sessions meet in the buildings of various community organizations in Columbus.

As part of this training, Te'Lario Watkins, a teacher at Linden-McKinley STEM Academy, is working with students on the project, "Water, Water, Everywhere." The students are participating in real-world hands-on investigations focusing on how improper disposal of hazardous materials affects water quality. They study the community water supply and work with organizations in the community that focus on reducing contamination and improving local water quality. Students then present what they have learned and make proposals for achieving a clean water supply in the Linden neighborhood of Columbus.

Evidence of effectiveness

According to the National Youth Leadership Council's K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, effective service-learning initiatives include meaningful service, have explicit links to the curriculum, incorporate reflective practice, promote diversity, include youth voice, and engage in collaborative partnerships. The design of Bringing Learning to Life is aligned with this research and focuses on four primary goals:

- ▶ Gains in student achievement and other academic outcomes

- ▶ Improvements in student peer interactions, school attendance, enrollment in challenging programs, and participation in community service
- ▶ Improved relationships with parents, teachers, and community members
- ▶ High-quality service-learning initiatives and partnerships.

Exemplary practices

Providing meaningful professional development for teachers

- ▶ OSU's relationship with the district and the local affiliate offer a replicable model of high quality professional development.
- ▶ Teachers benefit from tuition waivers, free materials, and meeting at potential community-service sites.

Focusing on high-needs schools

- ▶ Teachers in high-poverty schools are given preference in the selection among applicants for the course.

Building community support and buy-in

- ▶ Community support is enhanced by the establishment of a project advisory board consisting of members from the board of education and a variety of key community organizations.
- ▶ The superintendent of Columbus City Schools is an important project advocate and has volunteered to host an initial principals' advisory meeting to increase administrative support.

Scaling up the program

- ▶ The project aims to broaden the use of service-learning throughout the district by establishing a culture of service-learning supported by formal policies and academic practices—first at the classroom level, then schoolwide, and eventually districtwide.

Community and Family-Community Programs

Outlook

Many aspects of this project can be replicated in any school district that establishes a partnership with an institution of higher learning. The program will seek additional funding from private foundations beyond the three-year government grant period.

Association perspective

The program is a partnership between the Columbus Education Association, the Columbus City Schools, and The Ohio State University. As local president Rhonda Johnson puts it: "What I love about this program is that it provides both students and teachers an opportunity to tackle real community problems, and at the same time, develop 21st century skills like collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communications."

Local contacts

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Related information

Report card: www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2009-2010/DIST/043802.pdf

Bringing Learning to Life flier and application:
<http://bit.ly/qp3XwK>

NEA Foundation website: www.neafoundation.org/listings/news-release/nea-foundation-awarded-550k-to-develop-national-model-for-service-learning/

More information on service-learning

Corporation for National and Community Service:
www.nationalservice.gov

Learn and Serve Ohio: www.serveohio.org/NationalService_LS.aspx

Ohio Campus Compact:
www.ohiocampuscompact.org/

Ohio United Way: www.ouw.org

National Network for Youth: www.nn4youth.org

Youth Service America: www.ysa.org

COLUMBUS, OHIO



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

District:

Creighton Elementary School District

Location: Phoenix, Ariz.

Grades: K-8

Enrollment: 6,800

Free/reduced-price lunch: 90%

ELL: 40%

Coaching parents as team members

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

Creighton Elementary School District

Phoenix, Arizona

When parents are engaged in their child's learning, they can help their child strengthen academic skills outside of school. Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) provides a structure for parents to meet with the teacher and converse with other parents while also learning ways to support their child's academic skill development. Founded in 2008, APTT resulted from efforts to increase student learning through support beyond the school day.

The program replaces traditional parent-teacher conferences with three classroom team meetings for parents and one 30-minute individual parent-teacher conference (or more if needed). At the team meetings, the teacher models activities that parents can do at home with their children. The teacher also presents academic performance data for the class and gives parents individual information about their own child's performance.

"Many parents wonder what the parents of kids at the top of the class are doing at home to make that happen," says Maria Paredes, who started the program and until recently was the district's director of community education. "Parents give other parents ideas for successful practice at home. It forms a community." Opportunities for parents to network with one another are especially important in the Creighton Elementary School District, where 85 percent of students are Hispanic and 40 percent are English Language Learners.

How the program works

The program is led by the school district's director of community education, who provides ongoing professional development to school administrators, teachers, and parent liaisons (each school has a parent liaison on staff). Teachers participate in the program voluntarily, and 90 percent of teachers in the district are now participating.

In place of traditional, twice-a-year parent-teacher conferences, there are three 75-minute classroom team meetings and one 30-minute individual parent-teacher conference each year. Teachers send personal letters inviting parents to the meetings.



Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

At the team meetings, the teacher models activities that parents can do at home with their children, and parents practice the activities together in small groups. The teacher also presents academic performance data for the class as a whole and gives parents individual information about their own child's performance. The teacher helps parents set 60-day parent-student academic goals for their child.

At the 30-minute individual conference, parents and teachers create an action plan to optimize learning. Additional conferences may be arranged if needed. Because many of the parents speak only Spanish, the program provides translators for the team meetings, and when possible, makes materials available in the parents' home language. The program receives funding from the federal Title I program.

Joshua Briese, a fourth-grade teacher at Excelencia Elementary School, began using APTT last year and found it especially useful for opening a communication channel with parents early in the school year. "If I can get students doing anything at home related to what we do at school, it will have an impact," he says.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Teacher participation has grown quickly. The program began with 12 teachers in 2009-2010 and expanded the next year to include 97 teachers. All nine schools in the district are participating. For the 2011-2012 school year, 173 teachers—90 percent of all teachers in the district—have been trained to participate. Many parents have encouraged their children's teachers to take part in the program.
- ▶ Test data show remarkable short-term academic gains among first graders in APTT classes. Among 188 students tested in the fall of 2009, oral reading fluency (ISTEEP ORF) scores in APTT classrooms rose nearly 25 points, while in non-APTT

classrooms, oral reading fluency rose only about 10 points. In August 2009, all classes averaged about 15.55; by November, the ISTEEP scores in APTT classes averaged 40.31, while scores in non-APTT classrooms averaged about 25.

- ▶ Paredes says the rate of participation among fathers is higher at the team meetings than at conventional parent-teacher conferences. Fathers have said that they are very interested in academics and wanted to be involved in understanding their children's progress.
- ▶ Preliminary data shows a 92 percent parent attendance rate at the team meetings, which is much higher than participation at conventional parent-teacher conferences in the Creighton district, according to Paredes.

Exemplary practices

Encouraging teacher collaboration: Teachers meet three times a year for 90 minutes before each team meeting to plan, problem-solve, and share practices. Grade-level teams also have planning time to analyze data, develop goals, and share ideas. These meetings are facilitated by a school data expert and Title I coordinator.

Sharing student performance data with parents: The class-level and individual-level student data that teachers share with parents becomes each student's academic goals. Parents' access to student performance data encourages high expectations and increases efforts to help students practice academic skills at home.

Reaching out to families: Teachers send all families a personalized invitation to the team meetings on school letterhead and follow up with personal calls. Students also encourage their parents to come. If a family cannot attend, teachers must find an

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

alternative time to share the information with them. The opportunity to receive coaching and support encourages parents to become more involved.

Forming partnerships: The APTT program has established meaningful partnerships with the local community college, Arizona State University, APIRC, Helios Education Foundation, and Rio Salado College. The partners are collaborating on a policy initiative to set higher standards for family engagement programs in Arizona.

Outlook

The APTT program has been spreading to other districts in Arizona and beyond, including Nevada, Colorado, California, and Washington, D.C. Several additional states have shown interest. The model is sustainable because teachers and parents become experts in implementing it, and because it can be supported with Title I funds.

Association perspective

Jason Schnee, president of the Creighton Education Association (CEA), says, "We in CEA fully support the APTT model and encourage all of the individuals who wish to use it to indeed do so. It is a great model and one which has sound research behind it."

Local contacts

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Note: Paredes owns the copyright to APTT materials. Contact her for more information.

Jason Schnee, president,
Creighton Education Association
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Related information

Report card: www.creightonschools.org

"Preparing Teachers to Engage Families Around Student Data," Harvard Family Research Project, <http://hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/preparing-teachers-to-engage-families-around-student-data>

PHOENIX, ARIZONA



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project

District:

Sacramento City Unified School District

Location:

Sacramento, Calif.

Grades: K-12

Enrollment: 48,200 students

Free/reduced-price lunch: 66%

ELL: 25%

Boosting student success through home visits

Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project Sacramento City Unified School District *Sacramento, California*

Founded in 1998, the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP) is collaboration among three partners: the school district, the Sacramento City Teachers Association, and the faith-based community organizing group Sacramento ACT. Designed to address the chronic low performance of local schools and a pervasive cycle of blame between school staff and community members, PTHVP trains teachers to make home visits to families, which build relationships and foster parent-teacher collaboration to improve student achievement.

Participation is voluntary, and teachers are paid for their time. Evaluations have found that the visits lead to increased student attendance, improved test scores, and reduced suspension and expulsion rates. More than 80 percent of students in the district are of color, and 25 percent are English Language Learners. The program is being adopted in several other states, including Colorado, Massachusetts, Montana, and Ohio.

Sarah Gebre, a parent who emigrated from Ethiopia, says, "After the home visit, I felt very respected and comfortable. I started to participate in my child's school. I felt more comfortable to talk to the teachers and ask them questions about my son."

How the program works

PTHVP is a nonprofit organization with four staff members and a cadre of about 30 parent and teacher trainers. Participating schools have a site coordinator; teachers make visits in teams of two and receive one hour of compensation for each visit. Before making visits, the teachers receive instruction and support from PTHVP trainers.

At the elementary school level, home visits take place in the fall and spring. At the end of the first visit, teachers invite the family to come to the school and they develop a plan to communicate throughout the school year. The second visit occurs just before spring testing. In middle and high school, teachers visit the homes of seventh, ninth, and tenth graders and focus on key school transitions. The visits that take place in eleventh and twelfth grades focus on timely graduation and career or college planning.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

Middle school teacher Tarik McFall recounts a home visit in which the mother told McFall that she hoped her son would do well in school and go to college someday. The son was present and heard what his mother said. "I think hearing her say those words to his teacher really influenced him to do well in school," McFall says. "For the rest of the year, DeJanerio really evolved into an excellent leader and even scored 'proficient' in math on the CST!"

PTHVP receives its funding from foundations and corporations and from fees for its training and materials offered in other districts. PTHVP covers the cost of training teachers. The district is responsible only for coordinating the program and compensating teachers for the visits, which is largely covered by the federal Title I program.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ A 1998-2001 study of 14 pilot home visit schools, by Dr. Geni Cowan of California State University at Sacramento, found the program to be associated with improved student performance, increased parent involvement, and enhanced communication between home and school. The schools credited PTHVP with making "a critical difference" in improving student STAR scores.
- ▶ A 2003 evaluation of PTHVP training and materials by EMT Associates found successful implementation of the program. Teachers identified several benefits, including increased parent involvement, improved parent-teacher relationships, and improved student achievement.
- ▶ In 2007, the Center for Student Assessment and Program Accountability, Sacramento County Office of Education, found that the home visit pilot project "has been associated with positive attitudinal shifts among students and parents toward school and the

future, as well as with positive behavioral changes associated with improved academic outcomes."

- ▶ Recognition and awards include a citation from former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley; numerous stories in local, state, and national media; and recognition in the September 2005 issue of *Edutopia* magazine as "one of ten big ideas for better schools."

Exemplary practices

Building collaborative relationships: Working from a community organizing model, PTHVP places a premium on relationships. Teachers visit K-12 families with two main goals:

1. To build connection and trust by listening to families and understanding their expertise and strengths
2. To share information about the child's academic status and offer tools for parents to work with students at home.

Agreeing on core values: The PTHVP partners took time at the outset to reach agreement on their attitudes and beliefs. They identified the following core values:

- ▶ Families and teachers are equally important co-educators. The family is the expert on the child, and the teacher is the expert on the curriculum the child needs to master to be successful.
- ▶ Before teachers can effectively share important information about academic status, teachers and parents must establish positive communication and address any communication barriers.
- ▶ Teachers must visit all students and families because only targeting challenging students will perpetuate the cycle of mistrust.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

- ▶ All parents can assist in their children's academic success; effective family involvement can happen in every home.
- ▶ Participation in the project should be voluntary, and teachers receive compensation for their time.

Getting buy-in from the district and teachers' union:

Through a series of conversations with local families and community members, Sacramento ACT learned that families felt unwelcome and disconnected from their children's schools. ACT approached the school district and the Sacramento City Teachers Association and convinced them to become partners in planning and implementing the program. This collaboration allowed the home visit initiative to be developed with teacher and parent input within the framework of the existing collective bargaining contract.

Outlook

PTHVP has formed a national collaborative that holds monthly teleconferences and meets annually to share best practices. School communities around the country are participating, and several districts in California and other states now offer the program. These include schools and districts in Alaska, Montana, California, Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Ohio, Washington, Massachusetts, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. In support of this expansion, PTHVP is developing regional training teams to increase training capacity for existing sites and availability for new communities.

Association perspective

The Sacramento City Teachers Association was one of the original core partners in establishing this project. In addition, the California Teachers Association (CTA) Institute for Teaching actively supports PTHVP. The NEA Foundation has supported the expansion of the project to other sites, and it has hosted annual meetings of site teams in Washington, D.C.

Says Scott Smith, president of the Sacramento City Teachers Association: "The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project is an evidence-based model of collaboration. It underscores the importance of school-family collaboration in improving student outcomes. We are proud to have been at the table in co-designing PTHVP with community partners, and we encourage our fellow Association members around the country to work toward building effective strategies that boost parent and community involvement."

Local contact

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Related information

Report card: <http://bit.ly/p5Dlmh>

Project website: www.pthvp.org

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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Revitalizing the Title I School-Parent Compact

School: Geraldine W. Johnson Elementary-Middle School

District: Bridgeport, Conn.

Grades: K-12

Enrollment: 840

Free/reduced-price lunch: 100%

ELL: 42%

Linking the school-parent compact to school improvement goals

Revitalizing the Title I School-Parent Compact

Geraldine W. Johnson Elementary-Middle School

Bridgeport, Connecticut

When Johnson Elementary-Middle School opened as a new school in 2008, Principal Marlene Roberts wanted the School-Parent Compact mandated under Title I to play a vital role in the school community. That same year, the Connecticut Department of Education announced a program to refresh school-parent compacts. Roberts seized the opportunity to link her school's compact to school improvement goals and engage families in ways that would truly help students succeed.

Now teachers and families are collaborating to bring students' academic skills to grade level. In fact, the effort involves the whole school community, including classroom teachers, the School Leadership Team, and the parent organization. Each grade level has its own compact for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

According to Roberts, "We found that parents want to know how to help. They ask: 'What is our role to prepare our kids for college? How can we be involved in middle school?' Now teachers are making themselves available to confer with parents, and our families are becoming more engaged each year."



How the program works

Teachers meet about twice a month for 30 minutes in grade-level "data" teams to discuss how students are doing. At the beginning of the school year, each team identifies two or three skills on which to focus and develops strategies that families can use to promote learning at home. Based on those conversations, teachers design workshops and home-based learning activities, such as questions to ask while watching a movie or ideas for using math at the grocery store. The workshops and activities become part of a written school-parent compact in which teachers and families agree to collaborate.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

"The compact ties things together and brings us closer," says Nicole FitzSimmons, a sixth-grade teacher. She finds that the math workshops refresh parents' skills in solving equations and other areas of sixth-grade math. "It's fun, not stressful," she adds.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Student performance at Johnson remains uneven, but scores for students in third, sixth, and eighth grades are improving. In 2011-2012, the focus will be on reading. According to Assistant Principal Deborah Tisdale, some of the youngest teachers have been particularly active in the program. "Our new teachers are energetic and enthusiastic, and they have led the effort, although all teachers are more willing to open their doors to parents and to help each other by working as a team," she says. "Teachers are spending more time with students after school to help them with homework, and parent involvement is increasing each year."
- ▶ Data from the Connecticut State Department of Education show that the quality of compacts at Geraldine Johnson has improved dramatically, according to Judy Carson, the director of the state's School-Family-Community Partnerships Project. On a rigorous rating scale designed by Carson, the school's compact has jumped from a rating of 10 to 18 on a 20-point scale. Because the school is new, long-term student achievement data are not yet available.

Exemplary practices

Linking to data: Grade-level teams steadily track student progress and identify areas where students' skills need strengthening. Thanks to the communications process set up through the compact, parents receive information regularly from teachers, and they use it

to work with their children at home. Teachers offer workshops and family learning activities tied to improving student performance in key skill areas.

Personally inviting families to participate: The Johnson school community and the United Way created a phone squad to call families and offer personal invitations to the workshops. Workshops begin at 5:30 p.m., immediately following the Lighthouse afterschool program. Parents are recruited at the door, and participating families receive a pizza dinner and a basket of five books.

Building on existing practice: Teachers' data team meetings take place about twice a month while the students are at a special class. Teachers also have planning time scheduled twice a month. The time that teachers spend developing compacts is coupled with meetings that are already on the schedule and in the teacher contract.

Outlook

Title I law says that each school must have a School-Parent Compact that describes how teachers and families will work to improve student learning. The Bridgeport school district now requires all schools to revamp their compacts and link them to the school improvement plan. In addition, the district offers technical assistance and support to help schools develop and carry out high quality compacts. The Connecticut State Department of Education is so pleased with the success of Geraldine W. Johnson Elementary-Middle School and the other 15 schools in the state pilot program that it plans to offer training and technical assistance on revitalizing School-Parent Compacts to all schools in the state, starting in the 2011-2012 school year.

Association perspective

As Bridgeport Education Association President Gary Peluchette puts it: “I applaud the efforts our members are making to establish school-family partnerships through the Title I School-Parent Compact. We all realize that this type of collaboration is a key component in our students’ success.”

Local contact

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Johnson Elementary-Middle School
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Related information

Report cards:

<http://ctayp.emetric.net>
www.ctreports.com

BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:
Climate and Culture Committee

School:
Math and Science Leadership Academy

District:
Denver Public Schools

Location: Denver, Colo.

Grades: K-4

Enrollment: 265

Free/reduced-price lunch:
More than 90%

ELL: 60%

Making family collaboration integral to the school culture

Climate and Culture Committee
Math and Science Leadership Academy
Denver, Colorado

The teacher-led Math and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA) engages all members of the school community, including parents, in all aspects of school life. Founded in 2009, MSLA is a collaboration among teachers, their union (the Denver Classroom Teachers Association), and Denver Public Schools. In addition to traditional academics, students engage in hands-on learning and service-learning projects using knowledge gained in the classroom to conduct real-world, community-based projects. The program develops leadership skills and encourages civic responsibility.

The school's vision includes a culture of deliberate partnerships with parents and community groups. About 90 percent of the students are Latino; 60 percent are English Language Learners; and more than 90 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school currently has 16 teachers serving 265 students in K-4. While maintaining small class sizes, the school has been adding one grade per year to reach K-5 in 2012-2013. MSLA's Climate and Culture Committee (CCC) plans activities—in collaboration with the school's Parent Teacher Organization—which are designed to engage families fully in the school culture.

How the program works

Led by a core group of six staff members, the CCC coordinates MSLA's family engagement programs in collaboration with a core group of parents. One program, for example, focuses on the school's constructive discipline program, "Conscious Discipline." CCC members explain the program's philosophy to families to help them adopt the practices at home. CCC co-chair Paty Holt often does home visits to deepen relationships with families.

The evening before school starts in the fall, MSLA has an open house for students and families, with an orientation program and a chance to meet the teacher. Once a month, the school also invites families to an evening of activities for parents and children to do together, which are set up in different stations around the school. Each month has a theme, such as math, science, literacy, or the arts. "The focus is on supporting kids' learning at home," says co-

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

lead teacher Lori Nazareno, who notes that a majority of students' family members have been attending the monthly evening events. Each spring, the school invites incoming students for the fall to a barbecue/open house for the whole family.

MSLA has an open door policy that welcomes parents to volunteer in the classroom or simply visit and observe. The CCC is developing a curriculum for training parents as classroom helpers.

The school also has an independent Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that plans and carries out its own activities in collaboration with the CCC. Last year, PTO leaders included four moms who met regularly with one of the teachers, CCC co-chair Paty Holt. "We planned a very popular Literacy Day and Night with a bunch of fun activities. The moms really wanted the Cat in the Hat to come and read stories to kids, so we were able to convince Lori [co-lead teacher] to dress up as the Cat. The children were so happy, and the event was a huge success," says Holt.

MSLA is funded by the school district through its per-pupil allocation. It also is a Title I school.

Evidence of effectiveness

For the 2010-2011 school year, MSLA expanded to include a third grade, which was the first class subject to state standardized tests. Two years' worth of test scores, beginning at third grade, are required to measure growth. Next year, the school will receive its first rating under the School Performance Framework.

Meanwhile, parents attest to their children's academic growth:

- ▶ One parent of a third grader said of her son, "He's grown a lot—leaps and bounds. His skills have improved all across the board."

- ▶ Another parent talked about her son's reading success: "He's had issues with his reading, and now he's up to grade level. I'm very pleased with the school."

The school has added a fourth grade for the 2011-2012 school year.

Results from the Parent Satisfaction Survey for 2009-2010 show that in nearly every category, more than 90 percent of parents give the school positive ratings, which is well above the district average in all categories. For example, under school culture, 97 percent of families say the school is a place where parents are treated with respect, compared with the district average of 89 percent.

Exemplary practices

Creating a welcoming environment

- ▶ Open door policy: the school welcomes parents to volunteer in the classroom or simply visit and observe.
- ▶ The CCC plans activities designed to fully engage families in the school culture.

Establishing collaborative relationships

- ▶ Teachers as co-leaders: Two teachers take on administrative duties as "lead teachers," performing the traditional role of a principal.
- ▶ Parents as co-leaders: Student recruitment is parent initiated and parent driven. Parents asked the school for fliers, which they use informally to spread information about the school.
- ▶ The CCC is composed of six staff members and meets regularly with the PTO.
- ▶ The CCC is developing a curriculum for training parents as classroom helpers.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

Setting high expectations for students and families

- ▶ Faculty and staff attribute the school's growing numbers of students and families to its focus, rigor, high expectations, and inclusive culture.

Outlook

MSLA has been expanding by one grade per year, with the goal of becoming a K-5 school by 2012-2013.

Association perspective

Denver Classroom Teachers Association President Henry Roman summarizes his union's support: "One of the key strategies that makes MSLA work is the mutual agreement of all partners—families, educators, community—to set the bar high for our students. It's worth re-thinking your approach to involving parents, particularly if students aren't working up to their potential. What's even better is if your approach is grounded in what's been shown to work."

Local contact

Lori Nazareno, co-lead teacher, MSLA
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Related information

School website: www.msladenver.org

CNN: "Teacher turns 'crazy idea' into new school,"
<http://bit.ly/eMdZjG>

DENVER, COLORADO



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Hispanic Parents Council

School:

Capt. James E. Daly Jr. Elementary School

District:

Montgomery County Public Schools

Location: Germantown, Md.

Grades: PreK-5

Enrollment: 580 (2011-2012)

Free/reduced-price lunch: 62%

ELL: 30%

Creating a community of trust and cultivating parent leadership

Hispanic Parents Council

Capt. James E. Daly Jr. Elementary School

Germantown, Maryland

When Nora Dietz became the principal of Daly Elementary in 2007, she found a growing number of English Language Learners from low-income families. Many of these students were at high risk for school failure, so she was determined to connect with their families. Together with faculty, staff, and Assistant Principal Susan Zimmerman-Orozco, Dietz began several initiatives that led to the creation of the Hispanic Parents Council: a summer program that encourages rapport with parents, afterschool programs that involve community partnerships, and monthly workshops for parents, conducted in Spanish. Dietz's next goal is to create an African American Parents Council.

In a county known for its affluence, 62 percent of Daly Elementary School's student body is eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and 30 percent are English Language Learners. Nearly 40 percent of students are Hispanic, 35 percent are African American, 12.5 percent are white, and 8 percent are Asian.

"Parent outreach is...much more than ticking off a checklist of prescribed action steps for building home-school connections," wrote Zimmerman-Orozco in a recent *Education Leadership* article about the school. "At its most meaningful, parent involvement is about creating a community of trust, a school culture in which families want to give back to the school as much as they may need to take from it."



How the program works

The Hispanic Parents Council evolved from grassroots efforts run by the school. Teachers, school staff, administrators, and others volunteer their time in a variety of ways. For several summers, the school offered a weekly evening of literacy activities, arts and crafts, computer activities, and sports at a county recreation center near the trailer park where many Hispanic students live. Many parents attended along with their children, which helped establish strong rapport and trust between home and school.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

The current closing of the recreation center for a two-year renovation presented a challenge. The school responded by arranging scholarships or tuition waivers for the neediest students to attend a regional summer school program hosted by the school for students from Daly and other schools in the county. To maintain contact with the Hispanic families, school administrators and teachers hosted a meet-and-greet event in the parking lot of the trailer park in May and again shortly before the start of the 2010-2011 school year. Several bilingual parents volunteered as interpreters.

During the school year, Daly Elementary offers monthly workshops, in Spanish, which address topics suggested by the parents, such as reading and math instruction, state assessments, bullying, gang prevention, and Internet safety. The school offers free pizza and child care to families that attend.

These workshops have evolved into the Hispanic Parents Council, organized by Hispanic parent leaders. The council is now becoming a full partner in school improvement efforts. For example, when parents expressed an interest in computer literacy, one of the Hispanic parents volunteered to teach a computer class in Spanish. Parents also identified a need for afterschool programs during the winter months. The school arranged for afterschool karate and Latin dance fitness instruction on campus, with scholarships arranged through partnerships with instructors in the community. In addition, afterschool instructional programs run by teachers include extended study twice a week, January through March, to help students prepare for state testing

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Although Daly Elementary did not fully achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2010, the school did reach its targets for Hispanic students and all

other subgroups except special education and Free And Reduced Meal Service (FARMS) students.

- ▶ More than 90 percent of parents responding to a survey indicated that the school does a good job of welcoming and respecting diverse families. <http://bit.ly/nXJU9U>
- ▶ The administration reports significant behavior improvement—the number of referrals dropped from more than 300 in 2009-2010 to only 98 in 2010-2011.
- ▶ Administrators report significant growth in the participation of Hispanic parents in all facets of school life, from volunteering in the classroom to accompanying their child's class on field trips and attending parent-teacher conferences.

Exemplary practices

Adopting a culturally sensitive approach

- ▶ School leaders recognize that Hispanic culture and values emphasize personal interaction, a relaxed sense of time, and an informal atmosphere for communication. At meetings with Hispanic families, parents and staff share their hopes and dreams for the children and discuss how to make them a reality.
- ▶ The leadership team at Daly has been proactive in making home visits to greet parents and listen to their concerns. Teachers sometimes intervene in situations that put a child's health or safety at risk.
- ▶ Hispanic Parents Council meetings are conducted in Spanish, and parents set the agenda and topics for discussion.

Creating an inclusive climate

- ▶ The school believes and acts upon its core commitment to "creating a welcoming school climate and nurturing personal relationships." Sharing this commitment is a condition for being a teacher there.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

- ▶ Adults at the school get to know the children and their families on a personal level. If a child has missed several days of school, they check in with the family.

Drawing on community support

- ▶ The afterschool karate and dance-fitness classes were arranged with community partners in response to a concern expressed by Hispanic parents about the need for more activities after school in the winter.

Outlook

Daly Elementary School's success at cultivating parent leaders to engage fellow parents sets an inspiring example for other schools. In July 2011, Dietz and two parents of Hispanic students at Daly were invited to a Community Leaders Forum at the White House.

Association perspective

Montgomery County Education Association President Doug Prouty sums up the success of this program: "What makes this program work is the incredible trust it generates between families, educators, and administrators. MCEA is proud of the level of engagement by our members at Daly Elementary School and their contributions and commitment to improving student outcomes."

Local contacts

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GERMANTOWN, MARYLAND

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Related information

Report card: <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/about/MCPSResultsBook.pdf>

"A Circle of Caring: Success in engaging Hispanic parents depends on creating a school culture that welcomes all," article by Susan Zimmerman-Orozco, assistant principal at Daly, accessible to ASCD members at www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may11/vol68/num08/A-Circle-of-Caring.aspx



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Infinite Campus Parent Portal, Ninth Grade Outreach Program

District:

Washoe County School District

Location:

Reno, Nev.

Grades: PreK-12 with focus on 9th grade

Enrollment: 62,431 students, including 18,854 in high school

Free/reduced-price lunch: 41%

ELL: 18%

Helping families use data to support high school students

*Infinite Campus Parent Portal,
Ninth Grade Outreach Program
Washoe County School District
Reno, Nevada*

Monitoring a child's grades, homework completion, and attendance is often one of the best things parents can do to guide a child's progress in middle and high school. In 2008, Washoe County School District (WCSD) introduced online access for parents to view their child's attendance and achievement data, but soon the district realized that parents did not have equitable access to the information. For many families, especially those with limited English or limited formal education, lack of Internet access at home and lack of computer literacy skills were formidable barriers.

During the 2009-2010 school year, district staff for family engagement began checking usage data to identify families that had not accessed the online tool. Among students who receive free or reduced lunch, 72 percent did not have an active parent account; among ELL students, 74 percent did not have an active parent account. Because ninth grade is a critical year for students, family engagement staff at the school and district levels developed a program to reach families with no activated account and support them with training and access to the online tool.

Glenn Waddell, a math teacher at North Valleys High School in Reno, says that the Infinite Campus (IC) Parent Portal is removing barriers and making it easy for parents to see what is occurring in the classroom. "The instantaneous nature of IC creates many more opportunities for parents to engage their learner and the teacher in the course material and assignments," he says. "Once parents' and teachers' goals are aligned in pushing learner achievement, the learner can't help but be more engaged."

Now, families report they can have well-informed conversations with their children about how they are doing in school and can collaborate with teachers to help students make up missed assignments. Ana Barajas, mother of a ninth grader, said, "The parent portal helped me to check his grades and open the communication between his teachers and me. It really helped me to be part of his education. I'm trying to show him that I care about his education." Only

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

about 45 percent of Hispanic students in Washoe County graduate from high school with their cohort.

How the program works

The program is staffed by three members of the district's Family School Partnership Office, as well as staff from the state's Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) and school-based parent involvement facilitators at the 12 comprehensive high schools. Using the district's Risk Index for students, families of all ninth-grade students with a score above three (on a one-to-10 scale) were targeted. The parent involvement facilitators, who are AmeriCorps volunteers, reach out to the families on the list for their high school and provide support and training on how to use the online tool.

The portal has real-time information for each student, with red flags identifying problem areas. The information includes:

- ▶ Attendance for each class, including excused and unexcused absences and tardiness
- ▶ Grades for assignments, quizzes, and tests in each class
- ▶ Upcoming assignments for each class.

Workshops for parents explain what information is available and how to access and use it. The workshops are kept small, so that facilitators and district staff can have individual conversations with parents and develop an action plan for each student. For example, a student whose attendance falls below 90 percent in any class will not receive credit for that class. Parents learn how to track attendance and press their children to attend class and earn credit. They also learn how to obtain tutoring and other academic support to help their child make up assignments.

The district has created resources that schools can use

to inform parents about the Infinite Campus Parent Portal. A training toolkit, support videos, and kiosk materials are available in English and Spanish. District bond funding also provided the resources to establish a kiosk at each of the district's 94 schools and at local libraries and community centers.

Evidence of effectiveness

The district is still studying the impact of the program. The 2010-2011 school year was the first that WCSD could correlate parent portal activation and student achievement data. This first year, the focus has been to reach out and support the families of the district's 1,322 ninth graders who were deemed "at risk" based on the district's Risk Index. Of these, 582 parents have activated their parent portal account, and 397 have logged in more than once. By the middle of the 2010-2011 school year, 601 students on the Risk Index list had earned three or more credits to be on track for graduation.

Exemplary practices

Providing support for parent-teacher collaboration:

Teachers can determine which parents in their classes do not have active parent portal accounts and contact parent involvement facilitators—many of whom are bilingual—to help families open their accounts. The parent involvement facilitators also encourage families to contact teachers and schedule conferences about how to help their students. Washoe County high schools offer parent-teacher conferences only upon request.

Targeting areas of specific need: The program is primarily targeted to ninth-grade students who are at risk. Using the parent portal, families can identify the classes in which their students are struggling and focus on helping to raise attendance and assignment completion rates. The trainings have led to conversations about attendance, unexcused absences, missing assignments, credits earned, and how these matters relate to high school graduation.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

Building community support and buy-in: The state's Parent Information and Resource Center at the Education Alliance helps to provide training to enable more parents to use the portal. The Boys & Girls Club and county libraries offer computer kiosks where parents can log in to check their child's progress. The district also has worked with Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Northern Nevada to provide mentors with access to the parent portal if the family has given permission. The mentors often serve as a bridge between school and family.

Aligning information with the teacher evaluation process: Washoe County has a federal grant to upgrade its teacher evaluation system. The new evaluation criteria include several items on family engagement: helping families to navigate the educational system; sharing information about the instructional program; helping families to support learning; sharing information about the instructional program; and understanding cultural differences. Helping families use the parent portal and participating in the district's Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project are among the criteria for showing evidence of effectiveness. After a positive home visit, family members often log in to the parent portal.

Outlook

During the 2010-2011 school year, the district transitioned from using Edline for middle and high schools to using the Infinite Campus Parent Portal for all 94 schools. The district is establishing baseline data on the number of students at each school who are associated with at least one active parent account. The district will be setting targets and asking each school to achieve growth in the number of active parent accounts during the 2011-2012 school year. District staff members look at usage data internally to determine growth, and they collect parent evaluations from workshops.

RENO, NEVADA

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Association perspective

The Washoe Education Association (WEA) is a key partner in the school district's family engagement efforts. In addition, WEA worked with the school district in establishing criteria for teacher-family engagement. WEA supports the Infinite Campus Parent Portal outreach initiative and is also a partner in the local adoption of the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project model.

Dana Galvin, WEA president, offers a personal perspective as well: "My younger daughter is a senior who attends one of Washoe County's high schools. I have been using the Infinite Campus Parent Portal for over a year now. It is easy to navigate. I can leave and receive messages from her teachers, and it is updated frequently."

Local contact

D'Lisa Crain, administrator, Family School Partnerships
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Related information

Report card: www.nevadareportcard.com/profile/pdf/09-10/16.E.pdf

Parent resources: www.washoe.k12.nv.us/parents/parent-involvement/school-resources

Harvard Family Research Project Issue Brief, "**Breaking New Ground: Data Systems Transform Family Engagement in Education**," January 2011, www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/breaking-new-ground-data-systems-transform-family-engagement-in-education2



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Before- and Afterschool Support Programs

School:

Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School

District:

Sewanhaka Central High School District

Location: Elmont, N.Y.

Grades: 7-12

Enrollment: 1962

Free/reduced-price lunch: 35%

Providing personalized student and parent support

Before- and Afterschool Support Programs

Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School

Elmont, New York

Elmont Memorial Junior-Senior High School's before- and afterschool support programs take a personalized approach to student and parent support. Initially, the school's afterschool programs were created to provide additional support for class work and for the New York State assessments and New York State Regents Examinations. Over the past six years, the programs have expanded to address the diverse needs of Elmont students, particularly at the junior high school level. Before- and afterschool programs in grades seven and eight are organized around the junior high school's Interdisciplinary Team Centers and staffed by Team Center teachers. Students can use the time to complete homework, get extra help from a teacher, or make up missed assignments. Some seventh- and eighth-grade students are also selected for Achievement Academy classes, which provide small group instruction.

Communication with parents is an integral part of the support programs for seventh and eighth graders. "Everything stems from personalized student attention, and you can't do that without the parents," says John Capozzi, Elmont's principal. Teachers meet with parents before and after school hours to discuss student progress and also meet with parents during their planning time. Parents are included in the process of developing individualized academic intervention plans for students who show academic difficulty.

The support programs also provide much-needed adult supervision beyond school hours, an especially important resource for the school's many single-

parent households. Elmont Junior-Senior High School has a large immigrant population, including a high percentage of families from the Caribbean. Although more than 90 percent of students in the Sewanhaka district are white, Elmont's student population is about 77 percent African American, 13 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian, and 1 percent white. Sewanhaka Central High School District is geographically large. It serves students from multiple elementary school districts in the western portion of Nassau County. Elmont students have access to specialized courses at other high schools in the district.



Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

How the programs work

All the school's before- and afterschool support programs are staffed by Elmont teachers, including the seventh- and eighth-grade Team Center teachers who run the programs for those grades. More than 70 Elmont teachers currently work in the various programs, which are open to all students. When speaking with parents at team meetings, teachers can offer before- and afterschool sessions to students as a way to make up missed work, study for a test, or receive extra skill practice.

The programs involve regular communication with family members of the 600 or so seventh- and eighth-grade students at Elmont. Close contact between school and home continues in the high school years. Operation Success, for students in grades nine through twelve, offers course-specific instruction beyond regular school hours, as well as Regents Exam and state assessment review classes.

In addition to home-school communication, the programs rely on strong cooperation between teachers and the administration. Teachers are given autonomy over the content of before- and afterschool review sessions and can assign sessions to students as an academic intervention. Teachers create their own review materials for class sessions and tailor the instruction to students' needs.

The budget for these programs in 2010-2011 was \$138,000; funds come primarily from Title I but also include state and district sources.

Evidence of effectiveness

▶ Elmont has a more diverse student body than other high schools in the Sewanhaka district, and its student academic success is impressive. In 2010, Elmont had a graduation rate of 97 percent, compared to a rate of only 76 percent for New York state. Some 91 percent of Elmont graduates

entered college. In addition, 49 percent of Elmont students received advanced Regents diplomas in 2010, compared to only 31 percent in 2006. (Data for 2011 will be available in January 2012.)

▶ The school consistently makes Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), but because of changes in N.Y. state standards, current student performance data is not comparable with past data.

Exemplary practices

Emphasizing communication with families: Frequent interaction between teachers and families of seventh and eighth graders continues beyond grades seven and eight with a program for at-risk ninth graders. The high school's eight guidance counselors meet frequently with families to provide support ranging from academic intervention to college counseling.

When meeting with parents or speaking with them on the phone, teachers can offer academic support programs for students as a way to make up missed work, study for a test, or receive extra skill practice.

Developing individualized intervention plans: Teachers develop individualized intervention plans for students who show academic difficulty, and parents are included in the process of developing these plans.

Coordinating classroom performance with afterschool programs: Teachers can prescribe afterschool classes to address a student's academic needs. The afterschool programs are taught by Elmont classroom teachers, who are free to tailor the instruction to students' needs.

Outlook

Each year, the school evaluates the programs' effectiveness based on student achievement, attendance records, and teacher feedback. Even if

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

there were cuts in Title I or other funding, the school would give precedence to its before- and afterschool support programs. “We make it the top priority,” says Assistant Principal Alicia Calabrese. “We think it’s our charge to provide these support systems for our students.”

Similar programs would be feasible in other school districts that have access to funding and give it sufficient priority.

Association perspective

Local union president Rosanne Mamo was involved in planning and organizing the Before- and Afterschool Support Programs from the outset. She sums up her perspective: “The Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers is very proud of this work.... Teachers at the school understand the diversity of the students and work diligently to meet the educational needs of all. The union and the district continue to work together to ensure our students receive the best education possible.”

Local contacts

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Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers
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Related information

Sewanhaka Central High School District report card:
<https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2009-10/AOR-2010-280252070000.pdf>

State report card, Elmont Memorial Senior High School: <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/files/2009-10/AOR-2010-280252070002.pdf>

ELMONT, NEW YORK



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Compadres in Education

School:

Putnam City West High School

District:

Putnam City Schools

Location:

Oklahoma City, Okla.

Grades: 9-12

Enrollment: 1,600

Free/reduced-price lunch: 73%

ELL: 10%

Holding community conversations with Hispanic families

Compadres in Education

Putnam City West High School

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Putnam City West High School serves a rapidly changing, ethnically mixed cross-section of Oklahoma City, Okla. The student body turns over at a rate of 40 percent per year, and more than 70 percent of students come from low-income families. In 2007, with support from the National Education Association (NEA) and the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA), the high school staff and administrators began convening a series of community conversations about closing achievement gaps at the school. The result is Compadres in Education, a program of outreach to Hispanic families.

Since the program's inception in 2007, the graduation rate among Hispanic students has risen by nearly 70 percent and participation at Noche de Padres Hispánicos (Hispanic Family Night) has increased from 50 to more than 250 people. Use of service-learning, a proven means of motivating students, is growing. Putnam City West's student body is 39 percent white, 25 percent African American, 25 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Native American, and 3 percent Asian.

Assistant Principal Melanie Pealor says, "The bottom line is, 'What can I do to help my students to graduate, go on to secondary schools, and be successful?' We must have a partnership between the school, the families, and the community. And it's working!"

How the program works

NEA staff joined Dottie Hager, OEA's associate executive director, in training local community members to facilitate and record community conversation and building local capacity to sustain the program. In 2007, the school held three such conversations with Hispanic families and community members. Parents who attended the first conversation said they did not feel welcome at the school and needed information in Spanish about how the high school works. They asked the school to hire more bilingual staff members who could share information with them. In the ensuing conversations, parents asked for more

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

information about college admissions and requested improvements in the English Language Learners (ELL) program.

As a result of this feedback, the school began to hold meetings with its Hispanic families through a series of evening events called Noche de Padres Hispánicos or Hispanic Family Night, each focusing on a specific topic. One evening each quarter, the school opens its doors to students and their families. Many sessions focus on increasing graduation and college attendance rates:

- ▶ Presentations demonstrate the economic value of higher education, showing that students who have a bachelor's degree earn more than those who have only a high school diploma or a GED.
- ▶ Local colleges talk about their programs and encourage students to apply.
- ▶ Teachers help students and their families complete college financial aid forms, including the notorious FAFSA (federal aid application), and applications for Oklahoma's Promise, a state scholarship program for students from low-income families.

Other Hispanic Family Nights have addressed topics such as the legal rights of immigrants, the challenges of raising teens, and tips for success in high school and college.

The school has taken several actions in response to concerns raised in the community conversations:

- ▶ Adding bilingual staff members. Currently, 25 percent of staff are bilingual, including a receptionist, an ELL graduation coach, and instructional assistants in ELL, algebra, and English classes.

- ▶ Offering professional development to enrich teaching of English Language Learners and enhance learning among ELL students
- ▶ Providing course descriptions in both Spanish and English and descriptions of college entrance requirements in both languages
- ▶ Expanding opportunities for students to engage in service-learning (community service activities aligned with the curriculum), especially for students who are at risk of dropping out
- ▶ Adding specific classes as needed in ninth and tenth grade core subjects for ELL students: a bilingual assistant translates for the teacher and provides extra support for the students. During Parent Night, parents visit these classrooms and meet the teacher and the bilingual assistant.

Evidence of effectiveness

From 2010 to 2011, end-of-instruction test pass rates among Hispanic students rose dramatically in several subjects, including: from 63 to 72 percent in Algebra I; from 82 to 95 percent in Algebra II; from 53 to 71 percent in Biology I; and from 84 to 96 percent in English III.

Assistant Principal Melanie Pealor says that since the inception of Compadres in Education in 2007:

- ▶ The graduation rate among Hispanic students has increased by nearly 70 percent.
- ▶ The Academic Performance Index for Hispanic students has risen by nearly 30 percent, from 893 to 1,151 (on a 1,500-point scale).
- ▶ Attendance at Noche de Padres Hispánicos (Hispanic Family Night) has increased from 50 to more than 250 attendees.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

Exemplary practices

Providing professional development that focuses on communicating with ELL students: Teachers are learning effective techniques involving visual presentation of information and use of hands-on activities. They are also learning ways to create an environment in which students and parents who are still learning English are comfortable speaking English together, even if they make mistakes.

Listening regularly to parents and families: At Hispanic Family Nights, families and school staff engage in continuous dialogue on topics suggested by families and community members. This regular communication is helping teachers work more effectively with family members and helping families feel more comfortable approaching school staff.

Building community support: The principal and her team have met with representatives from Hispanic organizations, Oklahoma City Community College, Oklahoma State University, faith-based communities, and various community organizations and encouraged them to attend Hispanic Family Night. Their involvement has led to growing numbers of academic and athletic scholarship offerings for Hispanic students and a rising graduation rate.

Outlook

Biannual community conversations and quarterly Hispanic Family Nights have become part of the school culture. Next, Pealor plans to begin a similar initiative for African-American students and families. Many of the practices adopted already have contributed to improved performance among all students at the school and more effective communication with all families.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

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Association perspective

This project was brought to life through collaboration across all levels of the Association (local, state, and national). Its success at the site level relies on administrator and member buy-in and in the Association's willingness to listen to the community.

"I am proud that the staff at Putnam City West High School is working so effectively with Hispanic students and their families. The outcomes for students have been impressive," says Linda Hampton, president of the Oklahoma Education Association. "To ensure that all families and students feel welcome at school, we're expanding this successful partnership model into the African-American and Native-American communities as well. Our goal is to provide the support to ensure that every child has the opportunity to realize his or her potential."

Local contacts

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Melanie Pealor, assistant principal,
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Related information

Oklahoma school report cards:
www.schoolreportcard.org



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Successful Transitions

School:

Upper Merion Area Middle School

District:

Upper Merion Area School District

Location:

King of Prussia, Pa.

Grades: 5-8 (program begins in grade 4)

Enrollment: 1,135

Free/reduced-price lunch: 25%

Easing the transition to middle school

Successful Transitions

Upper Merion Area Middle School

King of Prussia, Pennsylvania

Founded in 2000, the Successful Transitions program at Upper Merion Area Middle School is designed to smooth the transition from elementary to middle school by helping students and their families adapt to their new, larger school and its culture. In a year-long program of meetings, visits, tours, correspondence between pen pals, and peer mentoring, students and parents become familiar with the middle school campus; school day routines and schedules; and the school's teachers, administrators, staff, and older students.

"The students get so excited," says Dr. Karen Geller, the school's principal for grades five and six. "The parents are more anxious than the kids," she adds. "That's one reason why we need to have a lot of face-to-face time with parents. We assure them that safety is the No. 1 priority."

Successful Transitions was developed by parents, staff, students, and community partners serving on the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). In recent years, the school has seen improved test scores and steady decreases in suspension rates and bullying incidents.

How the program works

Each year, about 300 fourth graders from four different elementary schools move to Upper Merion Area Middle School for fifth grade. Each fourth grader gets a fifth-grade pen pal. Throughout the school year, the pen pals send each other handwritten letters and drawings.



In February, the fourth-grade classes attend a drama production at the middle school and get a chance to meet the cast, ask questions, and learn about ways to become involved in school activities. All middle school students are welcome to take part in drama productions, and the visitation program encourages student and parent participation in a variety of middle school activities.

In the spring, fourth-grade classes at each elementary school are visited by one of Upper Merion Area Middle School's three

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

principals. The principal answers questions and talks about the middle school schedule, expectations, safety, clubs, and other aspects of middle school life.

In May, each elementary school's fourth-grade class spends a day at the middle school. The middle school teachers give school tours. The students meet their pen pals, have lunch in the cafeteria, and learn how to use a locker. They also attend 15-minute classes in art, physical education, consumer science (cooking and sewing), and tech ed (engineering, robotics, computer, and industrial arts). Later in the month, fourth graders and their parents are invited to an evening at Upper Merion, where they tour the school and meet the school's three principals, who are available to answer questions.

In August, shortly before the school year begins, the incoming fifth graders and their parents are invited to another meeting at the middle school, where they meet the teachers. Students receive their schedules and become familiar with the building as they walk around and find their classrooms. Parents can purchase gym uniforms and school supplies at the school store.

After each event, parents, students, and teachers complete evaluation forms. The school's Action Team for Partnerships meets regularly to assess Successful Transitions, and the program is adjusted each year. Action Team members include parents, staff, teachers, counselors, and community partners.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Successful Transitions was recognized by the 2010 National Network of Partnership Schools in the category, "Collaboration with Partners, Promising Practice."
- ▶ The school has received numerous awards, including National Blue Ribbon School of

Excellence, Department of Education Secondary School of Distinction Award, National Community of Caring School of Excellence, 2010 National School of Character (Character Education Partnership), 2011 National Network of Partnership Schools Award, and others.

- ▶ The school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the past five years. Standardized test scores show clear progress from fifth to eighth grade: In the spring of 2006, fifth graders averaged 71.37 in math and 68.35 in language arts. As eighth graders, the same class in the spring of 2009 averaged 81.25 in math and 86.72 in language arts.
- ▶ Suspensions have continued to decrease yearly, from a high of 315 in 2001-2002 to a low of 49 in 2010-2011.
- ▶ Incidents of bullying decreased by 20 percent in 2007-2008, then by an additional 5 percent each year between 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011.

Exemplary practices

Building a supportive school community: The school's meaningful, challenging academic curriculum aims to respect all learners, develop their character, and help each student succeed. "We work for the success of the whole child, and particularly...for the success of students transitioning to the middle school," says physical education teacher Joy Power. The school strives to provide a comfortable, stress-free, and nurturing environment and to foster students' self-motivation.

Welcoming the whole family: Families of rising fifth graders visit the school during the spring of fourth grade and again in August, just before the new school year begins. Upper Merion treats families as partners not only for academic pursuits but also in the school's character-building efforts.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

Agreeing on core values: As a Community of Caring school, Upper Merion integrates that program's core values—caring, respect, responsibility, trust, and family—throughout the school's curriculum and activities.

Forming community partnerships: The school has partnerships with more than 30 community organizations. The local Rotary Club, for example, has donated \$2,000 per year for books for the school library on topics such as "heroes and respect" and "families, diversity and good citizenship." All staff and students perform service-learning or community service activities. Parents and community members also engage in volunteer activities.

Outlook

The Successful Transitions program began in 2000, when the school also launched its Community of Caring initiative. The Successful Transitions program is highly popular among parents and students. The Action Team for Partnerships will continue to evaluate each aspect of the program and make improvements based on parent, student, and teacher feedback. Program costs are minimal and are covered by the regular school budget.

Association perspective

As Jerry Oleksiak, vice president of the Pennsylvania State Education Association, puts it: "Having worked for many years at Upper Merion Area Middle School myself, I can attest to the effectiveness of the Successful Transitions and Community of Caring programs. It's easy to forget how daunting moving from elementary to middle school can be for families and students. I'm proud to see that these programs continue to grow and thrive."

KING OF PRUSSIA, PENNSYLVANIA

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Related information

AYP report on school: <http://paayp.emetric.net/School/Overview/c46/123468402/3394>

Student performance data for the district:
<http://bit.ly/pd8DeK>

School website: <http://umasd.schoolwires.com/umams/site/default.asp>



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Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Parent and Community Outreach Initiative

District:

Reading School District

Location:

Reading, Pa.

Grades: PreK-12**Enrollment:** 17,860**Free/reduced-price lunch:**

82%

ELL: 19%

Establishing strong parent organizations in every school

Parent and Community Outreach Initiative

Reading School District

Reading, Pennsylvania

To help engage parents in their children's education and give families a voice in the school community, a coalition of groups in Reading, Pa., is working together to establish a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) in every school in the district. Parent organizations were once prevalent in Reading, but when many affluent families moved to the suburbs, the district's tax base shrank and parent involvement declined. Many parents in Reading felt uninvolved and uninvited, cut off from their students' schools and educators by cultural or language barriers. Establishing a PTA in every school in Reading could help break down these barriers by promoting communication and collaboration between parents and educators.

"It had been hard for parents to get engaged in the school community because they didn't know how to begin," says Ginny Wade, the Pennsylvania PTA regional vice president. "Sometimes the empowered parent wasn't real welcome." Now, the Reading Education Association (REA) and partner organizations are recruiting concerned parents to help establish a PTA in each of the district's 24 schools as part of the district's Parent and Community Outreach Initiative. Over the past two years, the REA, the Reading School District, and the Pennsylvania PTA have worked together to develop new PTAs in two elementary schools. Also active in the Parent and Community Outreach Initiative is Miriam Feliciano, who founded a Parent Teacher Organization at Thomas H. Ford Elementary School and serves as its president. PTAs will be established in additional schools this fall.

Parent engagement is particularly important in the Reading public schools, where the district has been facing severe budget challenges and changing demographics. The district is the poorest in Pennsylvania, and Reading's growing Hispanic population includes many students who move from school to school and from district to district as families relocate to find work or affordable housing. Parent involvement in PTAs can help to boost student achievement by encouraging parent engagement, helping to break down language barriers, and fostering a sense of community among parents and educators.

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

How the initiative works

This year, the Reading Education Association Community Committee (REACC) formed a parent engagement subcommittee to lead the effort to engage and organize parents. REACC was joined by the state and regional PTA, the Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center, and other community stakeholders. Major operational support has been provided by Lorenzo Canizares, a local organizer for the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA). Parents and community volunteers have produced a newsletter and provided additional support.

The coalition has been meeting with principals and interested parents throughout the district to discuss what PTAs can do. Although teachers were immediately receptive, Wade says it took longer to get the superintendent on board. Now, under acting Superintendent J. Drue Miles, the district not only supports the Parent and Community Outreach Initiative but has even added to the effort with a district outreach program.

The coalition works to identify active, engaged parents and provide the training and support they need to establish a PTA in their school. To start a PTA, it takes at least two parents—to serve as president and treasurer. Members must pay nominal national and state dues, which Wade says helps to instill a sense of ownership among parents.

At Amanda Stout Elementary School, 30 parents joined the new PTA at the outset. To bring together families at the school, the group held an ice cream social and a game night, to which families brought board games to play with one another.

Starting a PTA was more of a challenge at Sixteenth & Haak Elementary School, where family income is lower

and many parents speak only Spanish. Still, the PTA attracted 14 initial members and hosted a book fair for the school community.

Evidence of effectiveness

Having a PTA at their child's school gives parents a sense of empowerment and belonging. "If we have an established parent organization at a school, that opens a door for further parent involvement," says REA President Bryan Sanguinito.

Forming parent organizations has also proven to be effective in increasing schools' responsiveness to families. Feliciano first became involved in organizing parents at Thomas H. Ford Elementary School after her son was rushed to the emergency room and found to be dehydrated because school classrooms were severely overheated. She collected evidence about conditions in the school building, obtained 200 signatures from parents and school staff, and presented her case at a school board meeting. The next day, contractors arrived at the school to install air conditioning.

The Parent and Community Outreach Initiative has also opened doors between the union and the school district. When the program began two years ago, there was a high degree of tension between the two sides, according to Canizares. Now their relationship is very healthy, he says.

Exemplary practices

Engaging parents and families in learning: One of the best ways to improve the quality of education throughout the district is to engage more parents and family members. Yet many parents in Reading felt uninvolved and uninvited, cut off from their students' schools and educators by cultural or language barriers. An established PTA in every school in Reading can help break down these barriers,

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

promoting greater communication and collaboration between parents and educators.

Forming a coalition: Initial discussions leading to the Parent and Community Outreach Initiative took place at joint meetings of the REA Parent Engagement Committee, the Reading School District, state and regional PTA leaders, the director of the Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center, and other education stakeholders. By coming together to tackle parent engagement, the groups have motivated one another to work together and expand the initiative.

Outlook

The coalition aims to have PTAs established in every school in the district by 2013. Acting Superintendent Miles is directing every principal in the district to begin pursuing that effort by November 2011.

Association perspective

REA and PSEA leaders have been actively involved in the program. They are an integral part of the Rebuilding Reading Commission, which came up with the idea for the Education Summit that was held in March 2011. The meeting brought together 70 education stakeholders to brainstorm ideas on engaging parents and other community members.

Bryan Sanguinito, REA president since June 2011, is an enthusiastic supporter of the Parent and Community Outreach Initiative. "Only with buy-in from teachers, parents, and administrators will we truly be able to achieve our noble and lofty goals," he says. "We will then be able to do what is right for our students by doing what is right for our community: promoting total involvement in the educational success of our city's future leaders."

READING, PENNSYLVANIA

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Related information

Report card: <http://bit.ly/qhggSp>

REA website: www.WeAreREA.com (includes link to BCTV.org, which features a video report on the district's community outreach efforts)

"Union and parents join forces to improve school conditions," NEA Priority Schools Campaign, May 20, 2011,
<http://neapriorityschools.org/2011/05/20/union-and-parents-join-forces-to-improve-school-conditions/>



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Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

SNAPSHOT

Initiative:

Community-School Programs

District:

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Location:

Evansville, Ind.

Grades: PreK-12**Enrollment:** 23,000**Free/reduced-price lunch:** 56%

Enticing the community to share responsibility

Community-School Programs

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Evansville, Indiana

Evansville's wraparound services programs are driven by the concept that if schools are to succeed in closing achievement gaps, they must become full-service community centers for students, parents, and other family members. In the words of Vince Bertram, the school district's superintendent from 2007 to June 2011, "The schools cannot succeed alone...when you look at the factors that affect achievement. The way I believe we improve our schools is getting to the individual students, addressing needs in an individual way." A majority of the students at Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; 74 percent are white, 22 percent are African American or multiracial, and the rest are Hispanic or Asian.

Cathlin Gray, EVSC associate superintendent for family-school-community partnerships, started Evansville's initial wraparound services program in the 1990s at Cedar Hall Elementary School (now Cedar Hall Community School) with a grant from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment to the United Way of Southwestern Indiana. She was a teacher at the time, but in 1994, she became principal of the school. In 2000, a U.S. Department of Education grant allowed the services to expand to five schools. Today, the entire district participates, and the offerings include early childhood learning centers, afterschool and summer programs, a college-access network, health and dental care, social and emotional support, alternatives to suspension/expulsion, and more.



How the initiative works

The School-Community Council, headed by Gray, administers EVSC's community-school programs. The Council, also known as the Big Table, has members representing more than 70 local nonprofit, business, social service, education, and faith-based organizations that provide services.

The Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships houses multiple wraparound services furnished by local organizations, which augment the ongoing work of teachers,

Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

nurses, counselors, and other school staff. The services include everything from free wellness, medical, and dental care to preschool, afterschool, and summer programs.

Private donations provide only a small portion of the financing. Since 2000, the district has secured \$30 million in federal grants, mainly from 14 programs funded through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which are administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

In 2010, ED's Full-Service Community Schools Program awarded EVSC a \$2.5 million grant to create five full-fledged community schools similar to the well-known Harlem Children's Zone. Evansville sites include McGary Middle School, part of NEA's Priority Schools Campaign, and Cedar Hall Community School. At Cedar Hall, which served as the original model, the current focus is on physical and mental health, recreation, and educational and vocational studies, under a "circle of caring" theme.

Evidence of effectiveness

The district achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in 2010. Furthermore, a 2010 study by Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services, Inc., found the following:

- ▶ Parents, teachers, and the students themselves reported that behavioral concerns had declined and adjustment had improved among students receiving school social work services.
- ▶ The focus on early childhood development, through community partnerships, has contributed to an increase in the percentage of students entering kindergarten who meet the district's early literacy benchmarks. More than 50 percent met the benchmarks in 2010, compared to 39 percent in 2006.

- ▶ Students who participated in afterschool and summer programs for 30 or more days had better attendance records than those who did not. Those who participated for 60 or more days had higher overall grade-point averages, based on an analysis of 1,500 students.

Exemplary practices

Agreeing on core values: The school district and its partners all agree that home, school, and the community are jointly responsible for students' well-being. They also agree that to close academic achievement gaps, they must meet the needs of the whole child.

Building community support and buy-in: The school system has spent more than a decade fostering relationships with the local organizations that provide services and support. Since 2009, a local bank, Old National Bank, has been leasing its large building at 123 Main Street to the district and its community partners for \$1 per year. The building serves as the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships, a one-stop source of services and support. It is also the headquarters of the School-Community Council.

Engaging parents and families in learning: The Center offers parent education, family, and financial literacy programs; provides access to computers; and helps low-income families enroll in Hoosier Healthwise, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, and other government assistance programs.

Using targeted outreach: For at-risk students from low-income families, the Center offers mentoring, counseling, and connections to agencies that work with school staff to address attendance, behavior, and other problems. St. Mary's Children's Services provides free dental care, physical examinations, and immunizations for uninsured, school-age children.

Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

Setting high expectations for students and families:

The district's Expectations for Excellence, adopted in 2010, is a pledge for the district to "deliver rigorous and relevant learning experiences" and also a pledge for students to "come to school daily, on time, and ready to engage in meaningful learning."

Outlook

Community commitment is especially strong in Evansville, as evidenced by the more than 70 community partners and use of the building donated by a local bank. Since the initiative has required less private funding than community-school models elsewhere, it may offer a feasible model for many other communities with relatively little access to private funding.

Association perspective

Evansville Teachers Association President Keith Gambill sums up his perspective: "Our community had high hopes for its children, but if we were honest, some kids were being left behind. So, educators had to find a different, more comprehensive way of working with parents and our community. And it has paid off in terms of relationships with families and improved outcomes for our students."

Local contact

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Related information

Report card: www.doe.in.gov/data/

Education Week: "School's a Community Effort in Indiana District," April 19, 2011, <http://bit.ly/hWE56k> (\$2.95; free for EdWeek subscribers)

EVANSVILLE, INDIANA



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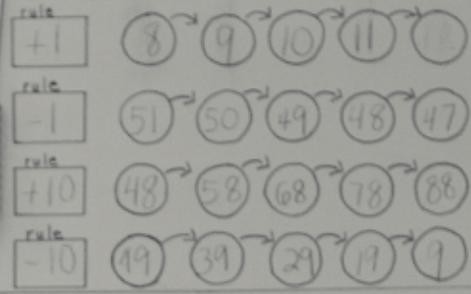


DECEMBER

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Frames and Arrows



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Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

SNAPSHOT

Program: Lincoln Community Learning Centers (CLCs)

District: Lincoln Public Schools

Location: Lincoln, Neb.

Grades: K-12

Enrollment: 5,326 in Lincoln CLC schools, including 2,369 CLC regular attendees

Free/reduced-price lunch: 42% of district; 67% of CLC attendees

ELL: 7% of district; 10% of CLC attendees

Collaborating to serve student learning and the community

Lincoln Community Learning Centers

Lincoln Public Schools

Lincoln, Nebraska

Founded in 2001 by the local school board, the Lincoln Community Learning Center (CLC) initiative was inspired by the idea that education is a community-wide responsibility. The program brings together community partners to focus on student learning, youth development, and strengthening families and neighborhoods. CLCs provide support and services to students, families, and neighborhoods through collaborative partnerships that offer services at 25 local school sites in the Lincoln district.

CLCs provide low-cost, well supervised before- and afterschool activities and care. They also offer weekend and summer enrichment opportunities for children, youth, families, and neighborhood residents. Funding for the initiative comes from a 21st Century Community Learning Center (Cohort 6) U.S. Department of Education Grant, the Lincoln Public Schools Foundation, and matching resources from local funders and community-based organizations.

How the program works

Before- and afterschool enrichment programs at each center range from cultural learning and talent-building activities to academic work. Services may also include parent engagement and support programs, early childhood programs, recreation, summer activities, health services, housing assistance, counseling, career development, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Each of the 25 CLCs is unique in its offerings and responds to the particular needs of its community as well as the capacities of partnering agencies. The 10 lead agencies—Cedars Youth Services, Family Services, Lincoln Housing Authority, Lincoln Parks and Recreation, YMCA, Clyde Malone Center, Northeast Family Center, Williard Community, Boys & Girls Club, and Lincoln Public Schools—are assigned to various sites where they help to manage and deliver services. The number of sites managed is based on the organization's capacity. For example, Family Services manages five sites. The YMCA and Lincoln Parks and Recreation each manage four sites, and the Lincoln Housing Authority manages one site.

Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

The CLC initiative uses leadership groups to mobilize and support its activities at the school-based Community Learning Centers:

- ▶ The CLC Leadership Council guides the initiative's development and long-term financing. The Leadership Council's Executive Committee includes the chair, the mayor of Lincoln, the superintendent, and local funders.
- ▶ Each CLC site has a School Neighborhood Advisory Committee (SNAC), which is responsible for assisting in the planning, communication, oversight, and services of the site. Each SNAC reflects the culture and diversity of its school neighborhood. Each includes broad representation and active participation from parents, youth, neighborhood residents, educators, community-based organizations, and local service providers.
- ▶ Subgroups focus on specific issues such as evaluation, communications and public engagement, identification of best practices, professional development for the CLC workforce, and family engagement.
- ▶ The CLC Neighborhood Action Team works in partnership with the Mayor's Stronger Safer Neighborhoods Initiative to identify resources and strategies to support community development.

Evidence of effectiveness

The Continuous Improvement Process Data Snapshot for Lincoln CLC schools in 2010-2011 reports program ratings well above the threshold for quality in all six categories: administration; relationships; family partnerships; school and community collaboration; environment, safety, and wellness of students; and programming. Ratings are based on the Observations for Quality, Nebraska State Evaluation for 21st Century Programs, developed at the Monroe-Meyer Institute, University of Nebraska Medical Center. Based on

observation of each program site, the overall score for Lincoln CLCs was 4.30 on a scale of 1 to 5.

The 2010-2011 Data Snapshot also shows improved student behavior in all categories: turning in homework on time, attending class regularly, being attentive in class, getting along well with others, and more. Assessments are based on teacher observations over the course of the school year.

In 2010-2011 classroom teacher survey outcomes, 71 percent of students enrolled in Lincoln CLCs met or exceeded state writing standards; 74 percent met or exceeded state reading standards; and 84 percent met or exceeded the mathematics standards. This survey is completed in the spring of each year and is based on teacher perceptions of student progress and proficiency. The local evaluator is currently completing an analysis of CLC student performance and scores on state assessments in reading and writing.

Exemplary practices

Working with a diverse range of partners: A wide range of organizations have come together to support CLCs as places where families, school staff, and other partners work together. Programs are well-organized, clearly connected, and easy to access. Working with 10 different lead agencies allows a high level of before- and afterschool services. At Elliott Elementary School, for example, about 130 students receive before- and afterschool care each day, donated by the YMCA. "In-kind and direct support from these organizations is essential to the progress of the sites," says Lincoln CLC co-coordinator Lea Ann Johnson. Supervisors of each site meet bimonthly to share information and plan together.

Tailoring services to local community needs and concerns: Establishing a School Neighborhood Advisory Committee that represents the local community helps to ensure that the program is responsive to those it will serve.

Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

Tying services with school improvement goals: Each CLC site comes up with its own annual plan, which is closely tied with school improvement goals. CLC activities support CLC initiative goals as well as school improvement plan goals.

Outlook

The initiative is supported by a blend of federal, state, and nonprofit funding. “We work collectively to braid these funds together,” says co-coordinator Johnson. The goal is not to depend too much on a single funding source or sector.

Association perspective

In 2009, the Lincoln Education Association (LEA), with support from NEA, joined with the United Way, the Malone Institute, Lincoln Public Schools, and the Lincoln CLCs to form a partnership on family, schools, and community. Resulting community conversations led to a focus on student transitions between preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school. Some of the conversations drew up to 300 parents.

There’s great synergy between the Association and the CLCs, and LEA President Jenni Absalon is proud of the collaboration: “The Lincoln Community Learning Centers provide an invaluable resource serving families and schools in our community. They are great partners focusing on the needs of the whole child, so students are better equipped to reach their full learning potential.”

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

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Related information

Report card: <http://reportcard.education.ne.gov>

Lincoln CLC website: www.lincolnclc.org

U.S. Education Department’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers website: www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html



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Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

SNAPSHOT

Initiative:

SUN Service System

District:

Portland Public Schools and Multnomah County's 7 other school districts

Location:

60 schools in Multnomah County, Ore.

Grades: K-12

Enrollment: 18,000 students annually, with 7,500 participating regularly

Free/reduced-price lunch: 74%

ELL: 26%

Delivering vital community services at neighborhood schools

SUN Service System

Multnomah County, Oregon

Multnomah County's SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) Service System uses 60 neighborhood schools as delivery sites for a comprehensive range of educational and social services for students, families, and community members. Services include before- and afterschool tutoring and sports, family engagement programs, early childhood education, meals, health and social services, and adult education. Services aim to empower parents to become actively involved in their children's education and to encourage a sense of community among families connected to the schools.

"No question about it: I'm going to college," said one student who had been on a trajectory toward dropping out until he got involved in a SUN afterschool basketball program. His experience is not unusual.

In the mid- to late 1990s, increasing poverty and ethnic diversity in Multnomah County were associated with a growing achievement gap in the schools. In 1999, the city of Portland and Multnomah County worked with the state government and local schools to create SUN Community Schools. The goals were to support education and school success while also improving family self-sufficiency by offering school-based health care, social services, and other forms of support. Initially, the services were offered at eight schools in the county.

In 2004, the program became part of SUN Service System, which provides social, health, and other support services. The system includes: SUN Community Schools; Parent Child Development Services, serving children from birth to age five; Self Sufficiency Programs for homeless and low-income households; and Social and Support Services for Educational Success, which mostly serves young adolescents.

In 2009-2010, SUN Community Schools served nearly 18,000 youth and about 3,700 adults in enrolled programming, and more than 70,000 people attended family and community events. Among the 7,500 students served for 30 or more days: about 74 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch; 70 percent were students of color, compared to 45 percent for the district as a whole; and 40 percent spoke a language other than English at home.



Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

How the initiative works

Each SUN Community School serves as a support hub where schools and communities work together to promote the success of children and families through a comprehensive array of services. Core services at each site include academic support, social and health services, and extended-day recreation and enrichment activities. The sites provide a vital link with community centers, libraries, parks, neighborhood health clinics, area churches, and local businesses.

The county manages SUN Service System as a partnership with the 60 SUN Community Schools. Each school site is jointly managed by the school principal, a full-time site manager, and a nonprofit or community organization that serves as the lead agency. Each school also employs extended-day staff and activity leaders/teachers. In addition to the site managers, each school has a site advisory group, which includes representatives of the school, youth, families, and the community.

Costs amount to several hundred dollars per student, which come from a mix of county, city, state, and federal funds. Portland even has a “children’s levy” that amounts to about \$60 added to the property tax for most homes, and some of that money goes to SUN. The tax dollars invested in SUN Community Schools leverage twice as much in resources from districts and local governments as well as substantial cash and in-kind contributions from community organizations and businesses.

Evidence of effectiveness

Outcomes for SUN Community Schools are based on data for students who participate regularly. Among the 7,500 students who participated in SUN Community Services programs for 30 or more days during the 2009-2010 school year:

- ▶ Average gains in reading and math test scores

exceeded state goals. About 75 percent showed increased state scores in reading, and 77 percent in math.

- ▶ Some 88 percent of students improved in at least one interim academic or youth asset measure: 64 percent improved homework completion; 54 percent improved classroom behavior; and 60 percent came to school more motivated to learn.
- ▶ Average daily attendance was 94.3 percent, compared to the state benchmark of 92 percent.
- ▶ More than 80 percent of seniors graduated, compared to less than 60 percent for the district as a whole. Furthermore, 92 percent either graduated or returned for a fifth year of high school, and 95 percent of ninth, tenth, and eleventh graders returned for the next school year.

Exemplary practices

Forming school-community partnerships: Schools and communities work together to provide the comprehensive educational and social services necessary to support the success of children and their families. Students’ growth targets and academic performance are evaluated annually.

Engaging families in culturally appropriate ways: Adult education is among the core services of SUN Community Schools, and programs are geared toward the particular needs of each community. For example, early childhood education services at Alder Elementary School include two culturally specific programs involving parents: Parents as Teachers (PAT) for Hispanic families delivered by El Programa Hispano and for African-American families delivered by Self-Enhancement, Inc.

Grounding the program in the local community: Each local school becomes a hub of community life. The local site advisory group that guides the program

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includes members who represent families and community residents.

Outlook

Beginning with a five-year investment by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, more than \$7 million in funding has been brought annually to the SUN Service System over the last four years through co-investment and leveraging efforts of its city, county, school district, and federal partners. Individual schools and nonprofit partners have also been able to leverage significant cash and in-kind resources, using SUN as an infrastructure.

Leaders hope to expand the initiative to all 150 schools in the county, making every school a SUN Community School.

Association perspective

Portland Association of Teachers President Gwen Sullivan says teachers have been closely involved in the SUN initiative since its inception. Sullivan sums up the Association's viewpoint: "Programs like these that address the needs of the whole child are critical to advancing student learning. Involving the family is key, and strengthening the relationships between schools and families improves both teaching and learning."

Local contact

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Related information

Report card: <http://web.multco.us/sun/research-and-evaluations>

SUN Service System website: <http://web.multco.us/sun>

"Schools Uniting Neighborhoods: Successful Collaboration in an Environment of Constant Change," Marjory Hamann with Diana Hall, 2003 report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, <http://bit.ly/ndSjNs>

"SUN Shines on Portland Students," NEA Priority Schools Campaign, December 2010, <http://neaprioritieschools.org/2010/12/02/sun-shines-on-portland-students/>

