

What We've Learned about Home-School Partnerships

Presentation to the Board
ANCS PTCA, March 2015

The Why for Students

- improvement in grades, test scores, attitudes, self-concept, behavior, social skills
- greater study habits and homework completion rates
- more engagement in classroom learning activities
- higher attendance rates
- reduction in suspension rates and discipline problems

The Why for Faculty and Staff

- more proficient in professional activities
- allocate more time to instruction
- become more involved with curriculum
- develop more student-oriented rather than task-oriented activities
- receive higher ratings on teaching performance evaluations by principals
- indicate greater satisfaction with their jobs

The Why for Parents

- a greater understanding of the work of schools and positive attitudes about school
- report increased contact and communication with educators and a desire for more involvement
- improve their communication with their children
- report improved parent-child relationships
- develop effective parenting skills
- become more involved in learning activities at home

Potential Barriers

Psychological	Structural
failure to see differences as areas to grow in	Organization of the school day that limits communication routines
fail to use perspective taking when interacting	Differences in language and/or cultural expectations
Fear of conflict and/or feelings of inadequacy	Scheduling challenges and time constraints
previous negative interactions	

Challenges

Educators

- ☑ Ambiguous commitment to parent involvement.
- ☑ Use of negative communication about students' school performance and productivity.
- ☑ Use of stereotypes about families, such as dwelling on family problems as an explanation for student performance.
- ☑ Doubts about the abilities of families to address schooling concerns.
- ☑ Lack of time and funding for family outreach programs.
- ☑ Fear of conflict with families.
- ☑ Narrow conception of the roles families can play.
- ☑ Lack of training for educators on how to maintain a partnership with families.

Families

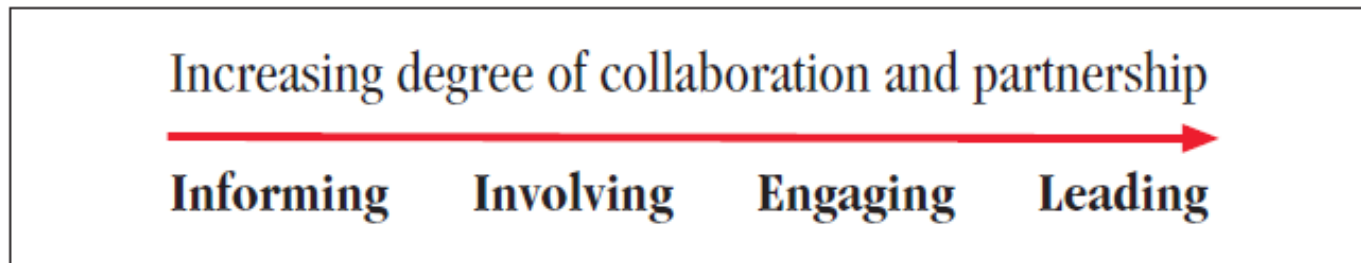
- ☑ Feelings of inadequacy.
- ☑ Adopting a passive role by leaving education to schools.
- ☑ Linguistic and cultural differences, resulting in less "how to" knowledge about how schools function and their role.
- ☑ Lack of role models, information, and knowledge about resources.

- ☑ Suspicion about treatment from educators.
- ☑ Lack of responsiveness to parental needs.
- ☑ Lack of supportive environment and resources (e.g., poverty, limited access to services).
- ☑ Economic, emotional, and time constraints.

Partnership

- ☑ Limited time for communication and meaningful dialogue.
- ☑ Communication primarily during crises.
- ☑ Misunderstanding differences in parent-educator perspectives about children's performance.
- ☑ Limited contact for building trust within the family-school relationship.
- ☑ Limited skills and knowledge about how to collaborate.
- ☑ Psychological and cultural differences that lead to assumptions and build walls.
- ☑ Limited use of perspective taking.
- ☑ Limiting impressions of child to observations in only one environment.
- ☑ Lack of a routine communication system.
- ☑ Previous negative interactions and experiences between families and schools.
- ☑ Limited understanding of the constraints faced by the other parties.

Increases by Degrees



Informing: One-way flow of communication from school to parents

Involving: Invitation to parents to support an agenda determined by the school

Engagement: Staff, students, parents, community create agenda, make decision, and take actions

Leading (AKA Partnering): All partners share in creating and implementing vision with a high-level of trust

4 Versions of Family-School Partnerships

Check the boxes that have the most statements under them marked or circled. Check only 1 box in each row

Partnership School	Open-Door School	Come-if-We-Call School	Fortress School
<p>All families & communities have something great to offer—we do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds.</p>	<p>Parents can be involved at our school in many ways—we're working hard to get an even bigger turnout for our activities. When we ask the community to help, people often respond.</p>	<p>Parents are welcome when we ask them, but there's only so much they can offer. The most important thing they can do is help their kids at home. We know where to get community help if we need it.</p>	<p>Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't support them enough. We're already doing our best. Our school is an oasis in a troubled community. We want to keep it that way.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Building Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family center is always open, full of interesting materials to borrow Home visits are made to every new family Activities honor families' contributions Building is open to community use & social services are available to families 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Building Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers contact families once a year Parent coordinator is available if families have questions or need help Office staff are friendly Staff contact community agencies & organizations when help is needed 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Building Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better-educated parents are more involved "Many immigrant parents don't have time to come or contribute" Staff are very selective about who comes into the school 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Building Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families do not "bother" school staff "Minority families don't value education" Parents need security clearance to come in It is important to keep community influences out of school
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Linking to Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All family activities connect to what students are learning Parents & teachers look at student work & test results together Community groups offer tutoring & homework programs at the school Students' work goes home every week, with a scoring guide 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Linking to Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers explain test scores if asked Folders of student work go home occasionally School holds curriculum nights 3 or 4 times a year Staff let families know about out-of-school classes in the community 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Linking to Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents are told what students will be learning at the fall open house Parents can call the office to get teacher-recorded messages about homework Workshops are offered on parenting 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Linking to Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum & standards are considered too complex for parents to understand "If parents want more information, they can ask me" "We're teachers, not social workers"
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Addressing Differences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translators are readily available Teachers use books & materials about families' cultures PTA/PTO includes all families Local groups help staff reach families 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Addressing Differences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office staff will find a translator if parents ask in advance Multicultural nights are held once a year "Minority" parents have their own group 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Addressing Differences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We can't deal with 20 different languages" "Parents can bring a translator with them" "This school just isn't the same as it used to be" 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Addressing Differences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Those parents need to learn English" "We teach about our country—that's what they need to know" "This neighborhood is going downhill"
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a clear, open process for resolving problems Teachers contact families each month to discuss student progress Student-led parent-teacher conferences are held 3 times a year for 30 minutes 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal will meet with parents to discuss a problem Regular progress reports go to parents, but test data can be hard to understand Parent-teacher conferences are held twice a year 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School calls families when children have problems Families visit school on report card pick up day & can see a teacher if they call first 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents don't come to conferences Problems are dealt with by the professional staff Teachers don't feel safe with parents
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents & teachers research issues such as prejudice & tracking Parent group is focused on improving student achievement Families are involved in all major decisions Parents can use the school's phone, copier, fax, & computers Staff work with local organizers to improve the school & the neighborhood 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents can raise issues at PTA/PTO meetings or see the principal Parent group sets its own agenda & raises money for the school Resource center for low-income families is housed in a portable classroom next to the school PTA/PTO officers can use the school office 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal sets agenda for parent meetings PTA/PTO gets the school's message out "Parents are not experts in education" Community groups can address the school board if they have concerns 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Sharing Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal picks a small group of "cooperative parents" Families are afraid to complain. "They might talk back to my kid" "Community groups should mind their own business. We don't know about education."

Any stakeholder may initiate a deeper partnership between families and schools, but all involved must work to sustain it.

“Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.”

Every school community must define parent/school engagement locally, recognizing that no two communities are identical.

“A shared vision of family engagement” is the first of five promising practices identified in a review of six large school systems with experience in systemic family engagement.

Specific training in communication skills and collaborative approaches should be a priority for teachers, administrators, and parents.

“It is far more effective to engage in preventative problem-solving than to address problems after they develop” Theories of conflict interaction suggest that once a problem arises, parties are likely to act defensively, thus setting up a dynamic of competition, not cooperation. Fix-Turkowski argues that personnel preparation is necessary to seed such prevention.

Schools, school districts, PTAs, and others should create policies, structures, and events to support family/school engagement, including informal opportunities for interaction of all stakeholders.

“Districts can structure their systems in a way that fosters the parent-school partnership so that in the end everyone is satisfied, especially the child.”