Building Bridges Together
Cultivating Home-School Partnerships to Support Learning

Ron Mirr
rmirr@mac.com
319.430.4315

Nicole Kupser
nkupser@scholastic.com
480.215-1483
“Instruction alone is not a powerful enough intervention to help all students succeed.”

Paul Reville
Harvard GSE, Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration
Former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
What are learning supports?
Learning supports are the resources, strategies and practices that support intellectual, physical, social and emotional development to ensure student success.

Where are learning supports?
Learning supports are deployed in classrooms and school-wide to address barriers to learning and teaching, and to re-engage disconnected students.
Path to an Integrated Approach to School Improvement

Disconnected Supports Services

Organized but Separate from Instruction

Integrated with Instruction & Leadership

Pair & Share

Do you think instruction alone is enough to help all students succeed?

Where is your school/district on this pathway?
What is Family Engagement?

Family Engagement is a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children’s learning and development from birth through college and career.

---CT Department of Education

Why are home-school partnerships so important?
Impact on Students

- Adapt better to school and **attend** more regularly
- Exhibit faster rates of **literacy** acquisition

2015

- Students whose families received a home visit, one of the core strategies in the FEP, had **24% fewer absences** than similar students whose families did not receive a visit.

- These same students were more likely to **read at or above grade level** compared to similar students who did not receive a home visit.
Karen Mapp, Harvard GSE

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NOTE FROM ILENE

Jorge's reading progress.

Irene tells this story about a student in her second-grade class:

Jorge entered our second-grade classroom as a new student to the school. He is an English Learner, and Spanish is the language spoken at home. When Jorge arrived, he didn't yet know any of the sounds that letters make. On a reading assessment in late September, he scored at an early kindergarten level. At the mid-October family conference, both Jorge and his mother were in tears. It was devastating to be seven years old and not to be able to read. During the conference, Jorge set a goal to improve his reading. He pledged to read every chance he got, and his mother promised to sit with Jorge each night and to listen to him read. Jorge joined a reading intervention group at school, and I sent home many books for him to read, exchanging the books as he mastered them. In less than two months, Jorge could identify all the sounds the letters make, and he had increased his reading by two levels. In late November, Jorge was reading at an end-of-kindergarten level—with six months of the school year still ahead. At the next family conference, Jorge's mother spoke about how she renewed her commitment to listen to Jorge read at home once she understood its importance. Without a doubt, Jorge's ability to make reading progress was multiplied by the home-school connection.
Impact on **Students**

- Adapt better to school and **attend** more regularly
- Exhibit faster rates of **literacy** acquisition
- Have **better social skills** and behavior
- Enroll in **higher level** programs
- Are promoted more and earn **more credits**
- Earn **higher grades** and test scores
- **Graduate** and go on to higher education

Impact on **Families**

- Families’ perception of their “**job description**” shifts (their “role construction”)
- Families gain **confidence in their ability** to shape and influence their children’s learning and development (their “self efficacy”)
- Families develop an **increased sense of accountability** to their school or neighborhood, and advocate for all children versus their children
- Families are **empowered to take on new challenges** in terms of their educations and careers.
- Families link their personal growth with **civic and political action**.
Impact on **Educators**

- In elementary schools, teacher perceptions of parents as partners in students’ education are strongly related to their **decisions to remain** in their school.
- Students have **better behavior** in school.
- Increased **trustful relationships** with families.
- Increased **communication** with families.

Impact on **Schools**

![Five Essential Supports Diagram](image)
Shifts in Family Engagement

From keeping families at arm’s length

From school-to-home, 1-way communication

From random and one-and-done events

From school-initiated/led, preset formal meetings

From families as complications & obstacles

From one individual’s job

To trustful relationships, reciprocal in purpose and behavior

To positive, culturally sensitive, multi-modal, 2-way, systems of communication

To systemic, result—driven events & practices aligned with school plans

To collaborative learning, flexible hours and varied venues

To partners in student learning and success

To collective approaches and shared responsibility

How do we cultivate powerful partnerships between home and school?
Home-School Partnership Pathway

- **Step 1**—Assess
- **Step 2**—Strengthen
- **Step 3**—Enhance
- **Step 4**—Transform

**Step 1—Assess**
1. Determine **readiness**

2. **Map** current partnership activities

3. Conduct **comprehensive examination** of partnership practices by surveying stakeholders and reviewing the physical environment, documents, your web site, and social media

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**Comprehensive Examination of Practice**

**Family Engagement Assessment**

- A process to measure a school’s capacity for developing effective home-school partnerships and recommends solutions for enriching family engagement practices.

**How do we gather data?**

- Stakeholder **Surveys**
  - Families, Instructional Staff, Administrators, and Family/Parent Liaisons
- School **Campus Visit**
- School **Technology/Website** Review
- **Document** Review
- Shopper **Phone Calls**
The FEA Process

- Survey Data Collection
  - Instructional, Administrator, Parent Liaison surveys—online
  - Family surveys—online and paper
- 1st Site Visit
  - Walk through
  - Technology review
  - Document Review
  - Shopper Call
- Data analysis and report writing
- Access granted to dashboard
- 2nd Site Visit—Debrief and Data walk
  - ½ day training for school staff

Step 2—Strengthen
Strengthen

1. Explore **core beliefs**
2. Foundational **training**
   - Administrators
   - School staff
3. Strengthen **relational trust**
   - Among educators
   - Between educators and families
4. Secure “**buy in**” of all staff
5. **Define** home-school partnerships
6. **Align** partnership efforts with your school-improvement plan
7. **Revise** family engagement **policy**
8. **Clarify the role** of family engagement staff

Core Beliefs

- All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- All families have the capacity to support their children’s learning.
- Families and school staff should be equal partners.
- The responsibility for building and sustaining partnerships between school and home rests primarily with the school, especially school leaders.
Strengthen Relational Trust

- Trusting relationships are the foundation of effective home-school partnerships. Strong relationships build respect between home and school. When relationships are strong, families feel welcome and believe school staff care about the success of their children.

Nothing says “Welcome” like…
Strengthen Relational Trust

- Greet all families as they enter the building by using their name and shaking their hand.
- Have at least 1 staff person greet every family in their home language.
- Remember something about the family from a previous conversation and ask about it.
- Ask open-ended questions, not just “yes-no” questions.
- Listen more than you talk.

What could you add to this list?
Step 3—Enhance

Enhance

1. Form action teams that include educator and family voice
2. Foundational training for...
   - Action team members
   - Parent Liaisons
3. Integrate home-school partnership strategies into the School Improvement Plan
4. Integrate home-school partnership activities across the district (Title I, Title IV, etc.)
Foundational Training

What does it take to help a student master a new concept?

How do teachers learn?

Why do we provide instructional coaching for staff?
How should families learn?

I do

For Students
Teacher-led Whole Class Instruction

For Families
Demonstrate how families can support learning at home

You do

By Students
Student Independent Practice & Mastery

By Families
Families independently practice literacy & learning strategies to use at home

We do

Whole Child
Teacher-facilitated Small Group Differentiated Instruction

Whole Child
Interactive group activities for families to practice & receive feedback on literacy & learning strategies to use at home

Figure 2: The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships

THE CHALLENGE

Lack of opportunities for School/ Program Staff to build the capacity for partnerships

OPPORTUNITY CONDITIONS

Process Conditions
- Linked to learning
- Responsive
- Development vs. service orientation
- Collaborative
- Effective

Organizational Conditions
- Systemic across the organization
- Designed to support all domains
- Attenuated with resources and information

POLICY AND PROGRAM GOALS

To build and enhance the capacity of staff/families in the “A-C” areas:
- Accountability (skills and knowledge)
- Organizational (behaviors, norms)
- Engagement (self-efficacy)

FAMILY AND STAFF CAPACITY OUTCOMES

School and Program Staff who can:
- Honor and recognize families’ sense of knowledge
- Support family engagement to student learning
- Create welcoming, healing systems

Effective Family-School Partnerships supporting students’ Academic & Social Improvement

families who can negotiate multiple roles
- Supporters
- Encouragers
- Nurturers
- Advocates
- Decision-makers
- Collaborators
An important goal is to help all families grow in their ability to support their child’s academic success. All aspects of a school’s family engagement efforts should take advantage of the existing expertise of families. Once schools have tapped into existing strengths, they can work to build additional family expertise to support learning. A strengths-based approach increases confidence and empowers families to be active, knowledgeable and informed.
The event should be family-focused, not student- or school-focused.

- Ask families what skills they need help with.
- Differentiate the event for different levels of skill/knowledge among families.
- If extended family members are present, make sure all family members have the opportunity to share.
- Co-plan the training with families.
Supporting Learning

- Teachers use effective instructional practices in the classroom to help students learn and grow. A school’s family engagement efforts should be designed to support what students are learning in the classroom. When family engagement is linked to learning goals, families are empowered to interact with their children at home in ways that support student academic success.

Engaged families can answer...

- What are the 3 big things my child should know and be able to do by the end of year in literacy?
- How well is my child doing on these 3 things?
- What action am I taking at home to support what my child is supposed to know and be able to do?
Supporting Learning

- Tie activities to grade-level standards.
- Tie activities to what’s happening in the child’s class.
- Text parents specific questions to ask their child about what’s happening in class.
- Help families of secondary students know how to monitor their student’s progress using the parent portal.
- Help families of elementary students know how to support foundational literacy skills.
- Use parent ambassadors to recruit families.
- Encourage families to travel to the event with other families.
- Have families introduce themselves to other families from their child’s classroom and tell a little bit about themselves.
- Pair family members who don’t know each other to work on a task together.
- Have a team of families create a family bulletin board.

**Practice & Feedback**

- For adults to feel sufficiently competent with a new skill, 2 things are essential—practice and feedback. Confidence with a new skill does not come by watching a demonstration or trying the skill just one time. Adults need multiple opportunities to try out a new skill or behavior. To increase the likelihood that adults apply these new skills at home in interactions with their child, schools must coach and support families as they learn to master the desired skills.
“Our research indicates that it is **about more than access**, especially with younger kids who are still learning to read. Reading is most effective when parents or family members can provide reading guidance and make sure that kids understand what they’re reading.”

-James Kim, Harvard

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**Pair & Share**

What is the most important “take away” about family engagement?
Step 4—Transform

Transform

1. Expand home libraries
2. Re-tool existing events (Open House, Family nights, etc.)
3. Re-tool documents, website, and social media
4. Increase family voice and family leadership
5. Coach action teams and partnership staff
6. Identify additional initiatives to deepen partnerships
7. Measure growth over time
8. Revise action plan
“The single factor most strongly associated with reading achievement—more than socioeconomic status or any instructional approach—is independent reading.

Dr. Stephen Krashen, The Power of Reading
## Importance of Independent Reading

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Anderson, et. al., Reading Research Quarterly, 1998

## Read with your child...

What do teachers mean when they tell parents “**read with your child**?”

What would you tell families they should do to **support their child’s literacy?**
A.C.T. to Make Meaning

- Access
- Choice
- Time

- Talking & Thinking
- Use grade level literacy data to focus your efforts