Parent-Teacher Partnerships:
Creating Essential Connections for Children's Reading and Learning

By Sandy Christenson, University of Minnesota

Purpose

The content of this module focuses on parent-teacher relationships and home-school strategies to enhance students' reading success. The module is designed to provide teachers with knowledge about characteristics of effective partnerships and efficient, effective strategies to enhance home support for reading. Teachers are in daily contact with students, the first line of communication with parents, and considered by parents as the most important link to improving children's reading and learning.

Goals

- Create and maintain positive relationships with parents.
- Enhance the degree to which home environments are literacy rich.
- Increase student's out-of-school reading time.

Outline of Course Content

- Summer 2002 Session – Overview of essential information about critical process variables for creating and sustaining parent-teacher connections (i.e., approach taken, attitudes held, atmosphere present, actions taken) specifically to enhance students' reading success. Participants to read the module.

- Study Groups in September 2002 – May 2003 – Fourteen study group activities are offered in this module so that participants may choose 5 activities that best meet their needs for developing parent-teacher connections for children's learning. This module is designed to provide teachers with essential information about critical process variables for creating and sustaining positive parent-teacher relationships. Participants should consider the instructor a resource for gathering additional information on topics of specific interest and need. The following recommendations with respect to selection of activities are made to ensure the participants benefit fully from the content of the module:

    - Complete the Individual Activity because it serves as an advanced organizer for the content of the parent-teacher partnerships module and provides an opportunity for self-reflection.
    - Complete one Study Group Activity for # 1-4 for *approach* taken.
    - Complete one Study Group Activity for #s 5-7 for *attitudes* held.
    - Complete one Study Group Activity for #s 8-13 for *atmosphere* present.
    - Complete Study Group Activity # 14 (a home support for reading program) for *actions* taken.

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- Optional Graduate Credit (one credit) – Individuals will complete additional readings and write a paper related to some of these readings. Students will select 10 supplemental readings of their choice from the module on the REA website. Students will critically analyze the result of implementing home support for reading for a successful and unsuccessful case relative to content in the module and selected readings (i.e., case report).

Note: This module has been drawn from previously published material, specifically the book, *Schools and Families: Creating Essential Connections for Learning,* **by Sandra Christenson and Susan Sheridan (2001). In many places, the material has been used exactly or slightly modified to fit the parent-teacher relationship.**

Parent-Teacher Partnerships as a Protective Factor

The goal of family involvement with education is not merely to get families involved, but rather to connect important contexts for strengthening children's learning and development. Understanding the unique aspects of home-student-classroom contexts and implementing processes important to establishing positive connections between parents and teachers to enhance children's reading in grades K-3 is the specific focus of this module. An inventory to be used by teachers to engage in self-assessment of personal attitudes and classroom practices guides the content. Focusing on process variables is important for partnering with parents; perhaps more important than implementation of specific parent involvement activities in isolation. Activities provide good ideas; however, not all good ideas work in every parent-student-teacher context. A goal in selecting activities to enhance children's reading (and learning) is to achieve a match or goodness of fit for the parent, teacher, and student.

Four components: approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions describe conditions necessary for this goodness of fit. The components are defined as follows:

➢ Approach: *The framework for interaction with parents*
➢ Attitudes: *The values and perceptions held about parent-teacher relationships*
➢ Atmosphere: *The climate for parent-teacher interactions*
➢ Actions: *Strategies for building shared responsibility for students' reading progress and success*

These four A's serve as a guide in the development of parent-teacher connections for children's reading and learning. They represent a process that teachers can use to be context-sensitive. Consider the following:

➢ What *approach* will be used to foster parent-teacher connections for children's reading (and learning)? How can the approach be communicated and implemented flexibly to allow for different or unique situations?
➢ What *attitudes* about parent involvement, and among teachers, parents, and students are evident? How can positive attitudes be enhanced to promote healthy home-school relations?

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- In what type of *atmosphere* will parents, teachers, and students interact? How can the atmosphere facilitate a constructive home-school interface?
- What *actions* will be taken to achieve a balanced, collaborative relationship to address reading progress for students? How will these actions address the primary goal of promoting partnerships for children's reading and learning?

Productive parent-teacher relationships can take many forms. Given the influence of context, "parents and teachers working as partners" is a concept, not an exact prescription or prescribed set of steps or activities. Working as partners depends on careful consideration of school-based practices for connecting with families. It is beneficial for teachers to think about the following: What kind of relationship is desired in this parent-student-teacher context? What are the rights of parents, students, and teachers? What are the roles and responsibilities of parents, students, and teachers? What are the resources each brings to enhance learning experiences and reading outcomes for students?

Individual Activity: Completing the Inventory for Creating Parent-Teacher Connections
As you read the Inventory for Creating Parent-Teacher Connections, think about the characteristics of and process for creating partnerships. The inventory provides an opportunity to engage in self-reflection. Rate the degree to which the varied characteristics are present in your classroom. Engage in other study group activities throughout the school year. At the end of the school year, rate again, and compare similarities and differences in your ratings. Reflect on what you have learned from this experience and changes you would make for the next school year. The inventory is in Appendix A.

Approach: The Framework for Interaction with Parents

Dialogue questions: How do families help you to do your job better? Be more successful?

Approach: The framework for interaction with families – or the approach – that is supported by several theories and research findings views parents as *essential, not merely desirable,* for children's optimal reading performance in school. This framework requires a new way of thinking about factors that promote children's success in school and new school-based practices for connecting with parents. For example, teachers will reach out to parents in a variety of ways because parents are at different places; they have different skills, knowledge, and time for supporting their children's reading. How educators support families for their roles for home support for reading and literacy will differ.

This approach recognizes the *significance of families and contributions of schools* to the reading and learning success of students. We know that children from birth to age 18 spend 90% of their time outside of school (Walberg, 1984) and that once children start kindergarten they spend 70% of waking hours outside of school time (Clark, 1988; 1990). How students use their time and what learning opportunities and supports they receive outside of school highly influence their reading progress and performance in school.

Two research studies are particularly powerful for understanding the learning rates of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

➢ Hart and Risley (1995) studied parent-child interaction of 42 families who differed as a function of income. They observed each family for one hour weekly for two years. They found that the amount and richness of language differed significantly for professional, working class, and welfare families. Children in professional families heard, on average, 2,150 words per hour, whereas children in working class (1,250 words) and welfare (620 words) families were exposed to many less words. Extrapolating these differences to one year of life, children in working class families have 6 million words of language experience, while children in welfare families have 3 million words. The data were very consistent. By three years of life, children in welfare families were exposed to one third of the words than children in professional families (10 million vs. 30 million).

The authors noted that families, regardless of income talked with their children and used similar language patterns. However, the differences reflected cultural priorities that parents transmitted through talking. Professional parents seemed to be preparing their children to live in a world of symbols and problem solving. Parents devoted time and practice to language by asking questions, encouraging their children to respond, using a lot of different words, and ensuring a richness of vocabulary exposure. Welfare parents engaged in a lesser amount of talk, more parent-initiated topics, and used more imperatives and prohibitions. They seemed to be concerned with teaching socially accepted behavior; obedience, politeness, and conformity were emphasized. Working class parents were characterized by a mix of cultures. The researchers observed upwardly mobile families in which children were prompted and cued like professional families and families that used imperatives and prohibitions to establish obedience and conformity. The cumulative language experience for children by age 3 differed in amount and kind, and these differences were highly correlated with children's accomplishments at ages 9-10 in reading and language. Pre-existing differences in children's literacy experiences before entrance to school has an astounding effect on their learning progress during the early school grades.

➢ In the Beginning School Study in Baltimore Schools, Entwisle and Alexander (2000) have demonstrated that low income children made comparable grade equivalent gains in reading and math during the academic school year as do middle income children. The differences in children's achievement was due to pre-existing differences upon entrance to kindergarten and the experiential learning and home resources (e.g., books, computers, learning opportunities) available during the summer months in particular. It is not atypical for parents from middle class backgrounds to take their children to museums, plays, movies, libraries, and bookstores, and to play educationally oriented learning games. Differences in achievement between low- and middle-income students were relatively small at the end of kindergarten, however; the gap widened across school years due to the differential effect of out-of-school learning experiences. Low-income children lost ground and middle-income children continued to improve their learning performance during the summer.

These studies lend support to the importance of what teachers do. There is no question that the use of evidenced-based reading practices makes a difference in students' reading

achievement. We also know that parents – or how time is used outside of school hours – do not replace teachers in terms of achievement gains. Families do play a meaningful role in children's educational success, and the interface of home and school is an element that must be accounted for when examining children's school performance. It is helpful to view parents and teachers as educators, but to remember that not all education is schooling. Bronfenbrenner (1991) appropriately has stated, "The *informal education* that takes place in the family is not merely a pleasant prelude, but rather a powerful prerequisite for success in *formal education* from the primary grades onward" (p. 5).

Both parents and teachers have an important role to play; their roles do not replace but rather complement and reinforce the other's role, thus providing the student with a consistent message about reading and learning. Thinking of parents and teachers as "partners" refers to this mutual effort toward a shared goal. It also implies shared responsibility of parents and teachers for supporting students as learners (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Defining features of a constructive parent-teacher relationship are:

- A *student-focused philosophy* wherein the teacher and parent cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance learning opportunities, educational progress and school success for the student in four domains: academic, social, emotional, and behavioral.

- A belief in shared responsibility for educating and socializing children---both the teacher and parent are *essential* and provide resources for children's reading and learning progress in school. There are no prescribed roles or activities for the family or teacher relative to the student; rather, options for active, realistic participation are created.

- An emphasis on the quality of the interface and ongoing connection between the parent and the teacher. Creating a constructive *relationship* (how the family and the teacher work together in meaningful ways) to execute their respective roles in promoting the reading success of the child is most important.

- A *preventive, solution-oriented* focus, one where the family and teacher strive to create conditions that encourage and support reading and student engagement.

Why emphasize parent engagement in children's reading?

The considerable amount of research on family-school relationships has led to several commonly accepted conclusions (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Selected conclusions are:

➤ *Definitions for parent involvement have broadened.* Involvement refers to participation at school and at home. New definitions, particularly in urban settings, replace "parent" with "family," because the most significant adults in the lives of many children may be siblings, relatives, or even neighbors who provide child care. Options for involvement have moved beyond the "big three" (volunteer, homework helper, fund raiser) or only what the teacher desires for the parent to do.

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➢ *Home environmental influences are positively associated with the kinds of benefits desired by teachers for students.* When parents are involved, students show improvement in grades; test scores, including reading and math achievement; attitude toward schoolwork; behavior; academic perseverance; completion of homework; attendance and participation in classroom learning activities. Other benefits for students include fewer placements in special education, greater enrollment in postsecondary education, lower dropout rates, fewer suspensions, and greater realization of exceptional talents.

➢ *Families do not determine, but rather foster students' school success.* Some examples of how families facilitate learning are:
- Encouraging and discussing leisure reading.
- Monitoring and joint analysis of television viewing.
- Showing interest in children's academic and personal growth.
- Engaging in frequent dialogue with children.
- Encouraging children's academic pursuits.
- Setting clear and consistent limits.
- Monitoring consistently how time is spent.
- Communicating regularly with school personnel.
- Attending and participating in school functions.
- Displaying parental warmth and nurturance toward the child.
- Providing quality reading materials and math experiences.
- Modeling learning by reading and using math in daily life.
- Reading with children.
- Believing children's effort, not luck, will result in learning.
- Orienting a child's attention to learning opportunities.

➢ *What parents do to support learning predicts scholastic ability better than who families are.* Social class predicts up to 25% of variance in achievement, whereas family support for learning or interaction style predicts up to 60% of variance in achievement (Walberg, 1984). Also, White (1982) analyzed 101 studies and concluded that the following aspects of the home environment had a greater impact than socioeconomic status (SES) on students' school performance:
- Parents' attitudes, guidance, and expectations for their children's education.
- Quality of verbal interaction.
- Participation in cultural and learning-related activities.
- Overall stability in the home.

➢ The specific actions families take to facilitate their children's educational success, referred to as the "curriculum of the home" by Walberg (1984), chart a course for intervention. There is little to no consensus about a prescription for the precise ways families help to facilitate student learning. Rather, research findings suggest that families can and do play different roles in supporting children's reading and overall learning. For example, note the various indicators of four family correlates of positive school performance – structure, support, expectations, and enriching environment:

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Correlate	Indicators
Structure	• Priority given to schoolwork, reading, and learning.
	• Consistent monitoring of how time is spent.
	• Authoritative parenting style.
	• Developing a reflective problem-solving style.
	• Availability of learning materials and a place for study.
	• Delay of immediate gratification to accomplish long-term goals.
	• Routine for completing home tasks.
	• Communicate regularly with school personnel.
	• Attendance at school functions.
	• Parental knowledge of child's current schoolwork and strengths and weaknesses in learning.
Support	• Parental responsibility to assist children as learners.
	• Encouragement and discussion of leisure reading.
	• Modeling learning by reading and using math.
	• Positive emotional interactions.
	• Responsiveness to child's developmental needs/skills.
	• Expression of affection.
Expectations	• Expectations for child success.
	• Use of effort and ability attributions.
	• Interest in and established standards for children's schoolwork
Enriching Environment	• Frequent dialogue.
	• Informed conversations about everyday events.
	• Opportunities for good language habits.
	• Orienting children's attention to learning opportunities.
	• Reading with children.
	• Monitoring and joint analysis of television.
	• Enriching learning experiences.

Teachers increase the probability of family involvement when they value each role and help parents see the importance or benefits of different roles. Obtaining a match between parents' availability and what they can and are likely to do is critical.

➢ *Involving parents in reading activities has been linked to positive gains for students and/or greater parental and teacher satisfaction.* Consider selected findings drawn from studies summarized in Appendix B:
  - Hannon and Jackson (1987) reported that teachers of students in grades K-3 believed relationships with parents and children's attitudes toward reading were more positive after they had visited with parents in their homes.
  - The use of a training video that explained how to read with young children to parents was shown to be effective in improving parents' verbal (questions, requests about print, comments) and nonverbal (pointing to print, tracking print while reading) references to print (Justice & Ezell, 2000).

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- Koskien and colleagues (2000) have demonstrated that book-rich environments enhanced the reading comprehension of native English speakers and ELL first grade students. Also, benefits of re-reading for fluency and motivation were found.
- Leslie and Allen (1999) found that four factors: number of rhymes taught, story grammar instruction, number of words the child read at home, and parental involvement in reading at home were predictive of reading growth for at-risk readers in grades 1-4.
- A coordinated home-school family literacy program resulted in more reading with adults and in their free time for students in grades 1-3 in urban schools ((Morrow & Young, 1997).
- Adequate training of parents in effective book sharing methods helped increase the interest in reading and gains in language skills for preschoolers enrolled in Head Start. Importantly, training enhanced parents' self-confidence and knowledge about normative literacy development (Primavera, 2000).

➢ *Creating consistent messages about learning across home and school helps increase the probability students will perform their best.* What helps students develop positive habits of learning? What helps students do their best in school? What conditions enhance the probability that students will be optimally successful in school and engaged as learners?

The All Parents Are Teachers Project, funded by the Minnesota Extension Service at the University of Minnesota, sought to answer these questions by conducting a comprehensive literature review of family, school, and community influences on children's learning in grades K-12 (Christenson & Peterson, 1998). Based on this review, project personnel concluded that students perform most optimally when they experience these factors in school – from teachers, and outside of school – from parents and their community: Standards and Expectations, Structure, Opportunity to Learn, Support, Climate/Relationships, and Modeling. The factors are:

- <u>Standards and Expectations</u> -- the level of expected performance held by key adults for youth. Student success in school is facilitated when parents and teachers clearly state expectations for student performance, set specific goals and standards for desired behavior and performance, discuss expectations with youth, emphasize children's effort when completing tasks, and ensure youth understand the consequences for not meeting expectations.

- <u>Structure</u> -- the overall routine and monitoring provided by key adults for youth. Students' success in school is facilitated when families and schools provide a consistent pattern of events and age appropriate monitoring and supervision. Students perform better in school when they understand their schedule of daily activities, directions for schoolwork, rules for behavior, etc.

- <u>Opportunity to Learn</u> -- the variety of learning options available to youth in the home, at school and within the community. Student success in school is facilitated when youth are provided with various tools for learning such as reading materials, access to clubs and organizations, varied teaching strategies and time to practice/master new skills. Also, it is enhanced when the key adults in the youth's life communicate with each other.

- Support -- the guidance provided by, the communication between, and the interest shown by adults to facilitate student progress in school. Student progress is facilitated when adults give frequent verbal support and praise; provide the youth with regular, explicit feedback; talk directly to youth about schoolwork and activities; and teach problem solving and negotiation skills. It is *what* adults do on an on-going basis to help youth learn and achieve.

- Climate/Relationships -- the amount of warmth and friendliness; praise and recognition; and the degree to which the adult-youth relationship is positive and respectful. Student success at school is enhanced when students experience cooperative, accepting environments; a non-blaming relationship between home and school; and encouragement, praise and involvement from key adults. Continuity in relationships and interactions between adults at home and at school will greatly influence the degree of academic achievement of youth. Climate/Relationships is *how* adults in the home, in the school and in the community work together to help youth learn.

- Modeling -- how adults demonstrate desired behaviors and commitment/value toward learning and working hard in their daily lives. Student success at school is enhanced when teachers establish an academically demanding classroom that has clearly defined objectives, explicit instructions and an orderly and efficient environment, and when the parent(s) or other adults read, ask questions, discuss the importance/value of education, set long term goals, and are able to intervene and be involved with the youth's school.

These factors help parents and teachers develop a common language about conditions that enhance student success. The factors also reinforce the importance of both home and school.

Study Group Activity # 1: Ensuring Teacher Commitment. Discuss with colleagues the following question: What are the pros and cons of establishing co-roles for parents and teachers with respect to reading and educational outcomes for students? Benefits must outweigh limitations for the effort by teachers to be perceived as worthwhile.

Study Group Activity # 2: Communicating the Essential Role of Home Support for Reading/Learning. Using research findings and considering your context (parents, students, and teachers), design a message to share with parents about the conditions that help children read and learn. In a way, you will be answering the question: How would you explain the notion of formal and informal education for children's reading success? Decide how to disseminate this message at each grade level (multiple ways, multiple times).

Study Group Activity #3: Design a Handout that Illustrates Roles Played by Key Stakeholders. Read the handout, titled *Creating Conditions for Success*, found in Appendix C. Either adapt this handout for examples of roles specific to fostering children's reading or design a different handout that illustrates many ways parents and teachers can foster children's reading and learning. Consider adding a student role. Consider creating the handout with parents. Distribute the handout in several, viable ways to reach the specific audience (e.g., newsletter, face-to-face conversation, parent support parent groups, parent volunteers for home visits).

Study Group Activity # 4: Home Support for Reading Skills. Identify critical reading skills at your grade level (e.g., phonemic awareness (letter sounds), alphabetic understanding (sounds to print), fluency/automaticity, vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation). Identify reading strategies that can be used by parents, simply, routinely and systematically (e.g., shared book reading, repetitive reading books, vocabulary development, phonic games). Design how to explain critical reading skills to parents and create a "restaurant menu" - or the many things that can be done at home to foster reading performance.

Summary: Schools and teachers alone seldom help students achieve their full academic potential. This is not an indictment of schools and teachers. Rather, this is a fact of child development. Students' personal investment in and interest for learning, for example, are influenced by parental messages (Bempechat, 1998; Coleman, 1987). Therefore, the approach for interacting with families is characterized by focusing on the importance of the relationship and establishing meaningful co-roles for the partners. Working as partners is a way of thinking about how to create constructive connections between parents and teachers. Forming connections means developing an intentional and ongoing relationship between teachers and parents that is designed to enhance children's reading and learning, and to address the obstacles that impede it. It requires delivery of the right message: "that mutual respect and interdependence of home, school, and the community are essential to children's development" (McAfee, 1993, p.21).

Attitudes: The Values and Perceptions Held About Parent-Teacher Relationships

Dialogue questions: What is the role of attitudes in productive family-school connections? What teacher attitudes help to build constructive relationships with parents? What parent attitudes help to build constructive relationships with teachers?

Attitudes: Working constructively with parents requires more than activities – it requires positive and open attitudes. The development of positive and constructive attitudes between parents and teachers is an important component of collaborative activities and the responsibility of both teachers and parents. Attitudes are perceptions parents and teachers hold about one another and, consequently, the relevance of the parent-teacher relationship for children's learning. Attitudes manifest the way teachers think about parents, and the way parents think about the teacher and the classroom. They can be positive and promote effective relationships or negative and preclude constructive relationships. The good news is that parent and teacher attitudes for working as partners are known, and existing attitudes can be altered or modified.

Establishing a collaborative ethic

To be true partners, parent and teacher interactions must embrace collaboration as a central mode of operating. The common denominator is the establishment of a "collaborative ethic" as an attitudinal framework for parent-teacher interactions. The "collaborative ethic" (Phillips & McCullough, 1990) is a guiding belief, philosophy, or set of values about the importance and essential nature of family participation in educational efforts. The emphasis is on relationships

between parents and teachers, rather than distinct roles that each may play. Both teachers and parents are viewed as essential for the reading growth and success of children.

Examples of complementary teacher and parent attitudes necessary for positive home-school relations include:

➤ Teacher Attitudes:

- Families are important facilitators (not determinants) of children's educational success.
- Families must be recognized for their essential role in influencing student success.
- Families across income levels support their children's education, although in different ways.
- Stereotypes and judgments about students and families must be suspended.
- Families need information about the children's reading program, school policies and practices, and what they can do to support their children as "budding" readers.
- Assumptions about families can build walls. Open and clear communication with parents is needed.

➤ Parent Attitudes:

- Teachers do not determine, but facilitate a student's school success by providing a classroom climate where support and guidance for learning are established.
- Teachers bear the responsibility for creating a climate that allows parents to partake in the educational development of their children. Parents have a responsibility to play a role in support of their child's reading progress.
- There are several ways that a home environment can support children's reading.
- Stereotypes and judgments about teachers and schools must be suspended.
- Teachers need information about how they can best support a child's unique development, reading progress, and family demands.
- Assumptions about schools and teachers can build walls. Clear communication with teachers and school personnel is needed.

Attitudes are manifested in the way parents and teachers act toward and speak to one another. Collaboration portends a constructive attitude when working together across systems. It includes mutual respect for skills and knowledge, honest and clear communication, open and two-way sharing of information, mutually agreed upon goals, and shared planning and decision making. In practice, collaboration is demonstrated and modeled by teachers and parents by the following:

- Listening to one another's perspective.
- Viewing differences as strengths.
- Focusing on mutual interests.
- Sharing information to co-construct understandings and interventions.
- Respecting the skills and knowledge of each other by asking for ideas and opinions.
- Planning together and making decisions that address parents', teachers', and students'

needs.
- Sharing in decision making about a child's educational program.
- Sharing resources to work toward goal attainment.
- Providing a common message about schoolwork and behavior.
- Demonstrating a willingness to address conflict.
- Refraining from finding fault.
- Celebrating "our" successes.

Effective collaboration is dependent on the belief that the parent-teacher relationship is a priority. There is shared ownership for identifying and working toward solutions and goals (e.g., improved reading skills and scores). Likewise, there is recognition of and respect for individual and cultural differences in developing and adapting to changes that come out of mutual and shared decision making. Collaboration involves both *equality* – the willingness to listen to, respect, and learn from one another, and *parity* – the blending of knowledge, skills, and ideas to enhance the relationship, and outcomes for children. Thus, parents and teachers "share joint responsibilities and rights, are seen as equals, and can jointly contribute to the process" (Vosler-Hunter, 1989, p. 15). There is a commitment to *interdependence*; that is, parents and teachers in collaborative relationships depend on one another equally and reciprocally (Welch & Sheridan, 1995). One person cannot achieve to the best of his or her ability and contribute fully without the other. That is, teachers cannot bear the sole responsibility for educating children to their greatest capacity without the active involvement of families, and vice versa.

In collaborative patterns of interaction, there are clear and flexible boundaries. Each individual (parent, teacher) defers to the other in their respective domain, works together in a reciprocal and complementary fashion, and complements each other's efforts (Power & Bartholomew, 1987). Three important characteristics of collaboration identified by Power and Bartholomew include:

- The understanding of inherent constraints of systems (home and school demands).
- Negotiable and clearly defined boundaries between home and school (no uniform, rigid roles and responsibilities).
- The opportunity to voice concerns without being perceived as a "problem" parent or "problem" teacher.

Teachers reaching out to parents

Although both parent and teacher attitudes are influential, most programs suggest that the responsibility for creating partnerships lies with educators, and the responsibility for sustaining relationships is shared between parents and educators. Beliefs have been identified as crucial for creating a partnership. Specifically, Liontos (1992) summarized new beliefs and principles about families that can foster healthier relationships between homes and schools:

- ➢ All families have strengths, and their assets and strengths rather than their deficits are emphasized.
- ➢ Parents can learn ways to help their children if they are provided with the opportunity and necessary support.

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- Parents have important information and perspectives about their children that are needed by teachers.
- Schools and families influence each other.
- A no-fault model is necessary -- blame is not attributed to the family or school because there is not a single cause for any presenting concerns.

Also, through their communications and actions, teachers can convey concern for and attention to family needs and perspectives, and understanding of family constraints. Six attitudinal dimensions of family-centered practice, which is defined as: "a friendly, respectful partnership with families that provides (a) emotional and educational supports, (b) opportunities to participate in service delivery and to make decisions, and (c) activities to enhance family members' capacities to carry out their self-determined roles," have been specified by McWilliam, Tocci, and Harbin (1998) to be influential for collaboration between parents and service providers. They are:

- Family Orientation: "Opening the door"
    - A willingness to orient services for the child to the needs of the family system.
    - Using sensitivity and good rapport to establish enough trust with parents to be able to ask them about their own concerns.

- Positiveness: "Thinking the best of families"
    - A philosophy of thinking the best about the parents without passing judgment.
    - Belief in parents' abilities, a nonjudgmental mind-set, an optimistic view of children's development, and an enthusiasm for working with families, including a genuine willingness to try parents' suggestions.

- Sensitivity: "In the parents' shoes"
    - Demonstrating an understanding of families' concerns, needs, and priorities.
    - Knowledge about families, including cultural differences, working through interpersonal challenges with parents, and recognizing parents' aspirations for themselves.   Putting oneself in the parent's position to anticipate how families may feel, and not prejudging them.

- Responsiveness: "Doing whatever needs to be done"
    - Attending to parents' concerns.
    - Paying attention and taking action when parents express a need.
    - Paying attention and taking action when parents express a complaint.
    - An individualized and flexible approach to service delivery; over-regard for standard operating procedures does not deter adapting activities to particular parents' concerns.
    - A willingness to provide options.

- Friendliness: "Treating Parents as Friends"
    - An extension of rapport.
    - Participating in a friendship-based, rather than professional-based, relationship.

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- Developing a reciprocal relationship, building trust, taking time to talk to parents about concerns, listening to parents, encouraging them, offering practical help, and conveying caring for both parents and the child.

➢ Child and Community Skills: Being a Resource
  - Knowledge about helping children become engaged with school and learning, especially reading.
  - Knowledge of community resources.
  - Eagerness to establish collaborative relationships with other community agencies.

Implicit in these new beliefs and family-centered principles is the notion of empowerment. Empowerment implies that many competencies are already present or possible to develop. From an empowerment perspective, a failure to display competence is not due to the deficiencies of families and/or children, but rather to a failure of social systems, including schools, to create opportunities for competencies to be displayed. To be "empowered," parents must be actively involved in making decisions and choices related to their personal lives. It is important that parents believe that changes that occur are a result of their own efforts. Therefore, strengths and competencies of families related to their abilities to share in decision making and problem resolution are central. Attention is placed on the shared strengths of the home, school, and child, rather than efforts on "fixing" children or families.

Power of perspective taking

Teacher attitudes of and about *all* families, including those who differ from the majority culture, are important. Each family is unique in terms of its ethnic heritage, level of acculturation, socioeconomic status, language practices, belief systems, religious and lifestyle orientation, and involvement with extended family members, to name a few. Collectively, these characteristics provide a family with an inherent uniqueness that defines who they are, and must be recognized as special to that family. It is likely impossible for individuals who fit more comfortably into the predominant culture to understand all families whose cultural make-up differs from their own. Nevertheless, it is essential that sincere efforts be made to understand all families for *who* they are rather than *what* they are or are not. One way to accomplish this is to acknowledge and embrace differences among families and to be open to the practice of taking multiple perspectives.

To engage in perspective taking and to refrain from labeling, it has been found helpful for teachers to:
- Self assess and reflect on personal attitudes toward families.
- Learn *about* a family's uniqueness but also learn *with* and *from* them.
- Show a personal interest in the child and family.
- Remember that different perspectives are expected – the total picture for understanding child behavior depends on co-constructing the picture across home and school environments.

It is also helpful to use the golden rule: *Treat the parent as you would like to be treated.* If feeling judgmental, it helps to ask:

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- "If I had a child in school, what specific information would I want to hear from the teacher at the beginning of the year?
- How and when would I want to be approached about a problem?
- How would I want to be spoken to? Listened to?
- Would I like to hear from the teacher when my child is doing well or only when there is a problem? " (Canter & Canter, 1991, p. 14).

Perspective taking is an important activity when working with all families, and not simply those who represent diversity on various socio-demographic variables (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic class, primary language, marital arrangement, household composition). Differences in the manner in which some families are able to participate in their child's education also must be considered. Educators must be sensitive to all family members with whom they interact, and attempt to put themselves into the place of the other. For example, some parents are limited in their ability to engage openly and regularly in their child's education because they lack custodial rights, travel frequently, or work several hours. When considering perspectives, it is important to recall that both parents and school personnel are interested in the welfare of the student. Further, perspectives are always couched in a particular context. That is, each perspective has a distinct reality to the individual holding it, formed in relation to the context and lenses through which it is viewed.

Perspective taking is also important from the vantage point of dialoguing about what parents and teachers need from each other in order to help children become successful learners. This highlights the notion that individuals within the home and those in schools are always in relationship with each other, sharing common goals. It also emphasizes that neither parents nor teachers can fully support learning alone. However, clear communication about what parents need from teachers and what teachers need from parents is essential, and possible if both are able to accept the perspective of the other.

A challenge facing teachers

One challenge that teachers face is reflected in the comment from parents, "It is the school's job. I don't have time." This comment may surface even if positive attitudes are portrayed and time is taken to develop a relationship with parents. It may be true that the parent has very little time; however, it is not true that children's reading is only the teacher's job. It may well be that the biggest challenge is helping parents think about, accept and value their critical role in education or what can be thought of as supporting parents to make education a priority in the home.

We know that parents who have a low sense of self-efficacy are less involved. We also know that the kinds of invitations from the school and the child are important for parents' participation (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Involvement increases when invitations are personalized, parents see the link between their efforts and the child's performance, children are "featured" (e.g., an opportunity to perform), and tasks are interactive, fun, and can be carried out within the family routine. Dorothy Rich (1988) speaks of helping parents understand the value of teachable moments.

Sometimes teachers believe that parents cannot help with schoolwork because of their personal skill level and knowledge. There is truth to this belief; however, this does not preclude a way to enhance learning at home. Due to the personal contact and relationship that can be established with parents, teachers are in an ideal position to empower parents and to reach some of the families that are at highest risk for having children who experience little school success due to reading difficulties and behavior problems. An important goal is to find a meaningful role for families, and to support the family as they make a greater investment in their children's reading and school success.

<u>Parental Investment/Engagement as a Process</u>

Education must be made a salient issue in many homes. For some families, education and schoolwork get "lost," whether to excessive family and work demands, previous negative interactions with school personnel, or negative personal school experience. Teachers can:

➢ *Help parents keep and sustain a focus on the salience of education* by negotiating a consistent, feasible way for the family to support the student's reading and learning.

➢ *Rethink the traditional role for parents*. Consider how parents help by developing *habits of learning* (i.e., motivational support), not only by reinforcing and completing academic work (i.e., academic support). Teachers can encourage parents to provide academic and motivational support for learning.

➢ *Help parents encourage their children to persist in the face of challenges.* Bempechat (1998) advocates the importance of effortful learning. Children need to hear that learning is a process requiring sustained effort; persistence and diligence in face of challenge; practice and understanding that mistakes are part of the process; and delay of gratification. It is important for parents to maintain a strong conviction in the academic potential of their children, to believe in their children's ability to learn and achieve. Although effort is important for children's learning, it appears that believing in children's ability and not simply telling kids to "just work harder" is also important. School is not always fun and "failures" (i.e., learning from mistakes) must be viewed in a positive light. The key here is that the student puts forth effort to improve oneself---not only one's school performance.

➢ *Foster parental engagement at school and with learning.* Families do not need to be fixed--- they need to be supported in their efforts to educate their children in ways they see fit (importance of goal setting with families, being a resource to families to achieve what they want). Teachers can:
  • Help parents to navigate the school system (e.g., understand policies and practices)
  • Be available as a resource for their questions/needs/desires
  • Encourage parents to ask specific questions about their child's reading performance
  • Foster a positive learning environment at home

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Home Support for Learning vs. Supporting Families to Enhance Learning

How teachers support families to enhance learning is different than parental home support for learning. To effectively support families (and thus partner with families), the following are offered for the consideration of teachers:

➤ *Meet the family where they are.* Ask yourself:
  - How hard does the child have to try to do well in school?
  - How have the parents prepared the child for the tasks in school?
  - What is the parental understanding of the schooling process?
  - What is the parental understanding of their roles and responsibilities?
  - How do the parents encourage their child's success in school?
  - How have negative attitudes about learning developed?

➤ *Individualize the information on successful home learning environments.*
  - For example, if parents cannot help due to specific circumstances (e.g., working two jobs), a supportive strategy is to identify with the parents an individual who serves as a contact with the school and supports the student's reading after school hours.
  - There are many ways parents can foster learning at home; the key is finding what works for this child and this family.
  - The intensity and frequency with which the home environment is a learning environment must be considered.
  - Actions should not only be directed at what families can do; sharing information on academic and motivational support at school and the congruence between home and school messages for learning are equally important.

➤ *Consider these guidelines for enhancing learning at home:*
  - To share information about successful home learning environments cast it as the effect of children's out of school time on school performance.
  - Provide information on ways or conditions to foster children's reading and learning at school *and* at home.
  - Design individualized home-school learning programs.
  - Involve parent in ways that children perceive as helpful. Too much parent involvement may be seen by children as parents trying to be controlling and intrusive.
  - Guide and show parents different ways to support their child's reading; avoid simply telling parents what to do.

Encourage Academic and Motivational Support for Learning

The classification of parental roles by Scott-Jones (1995a; 1995b) is very helpful. She has suggested that parents can enhance learning at home and performance in school by:
  - Valuing,
  - Mentoring,
  - Helping, and
  - Doing.

Thus, educators can find a way to affirm all parents' participation as well as consider over-participation by some parents (i.e., doing the work). For example, if parents can't help with the home support for reading program and/or homework because of literacy or work issues, their value for learning can be demonstrated by helping to find an individual who could assist or by discussing with students what they are studying.

Bempechat (1998) has suggested an extremely helpful distinction for the parental role; namely, academic and motivational support for learning. Consider this definition of academic and motivational support for learning:

- Academic Support refers very broadly to the ways in which parents foster their children's intellectual and cognitive development. It is what parents do that is *directly* related to their children's experience in school.

- Motivational Support refers to the ways in which parents foster the development of attitudes and approaches to learning that are essential for school success. It is what parents do that is more "*indirectly"* related to school success (yet still obviously key). Across school years and during long summer vacation months, parents play an important role in their children's learning through the activities and guidance provided. In addition, the emotional support – how parents get their children to believe that they are capable, competent, important individuals – is critical in setting the stage not only for children's confidence in school, but in all of life.

Clearly, there are many roles for parents. The motivational support roles may be underutilized by parents, when, in fact, they may be the most important for the child to be prepared for learning in the classroom. These roles should not be forgotten by educators; they can be highlighted in coordinated home-school interventions.

Why?

- ➢ *Information is available about the reasons parents are not engaged at school or with their children's learning.* The information varies, depending on the study reported. For example:
  - Finders and Lewis (1994) interviewed parents who were considered "hard to reach" to understand how the diverse realities of their lives affected home-school relationships. These parents reported that their own school experiences, economic and time constraints, and differences in linguistic and cultural practices presented important roadblocks.
  - Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) found that parents can display their involvement in their child's school life in multiple ways, and that the manner in which parents are involved in their children's school experiences may vary according to background characteristics. They found that background variables such as educational level of the parents may distinguish between some but not all measures of parent involvement. Thus, according to these researchers, "the stereotype of the low involved, less educated parent may not hold true for all types of involvement… attitudes teachers hold about parents can have important ramifications for how they treat them, and, in

particular for whether or not they try to involve them… [however] involving parents is not a strategy restricted to highly educated families" (pp. 248-249).

- Parents, especially those with less formal education and ethnically diverse backgrounds, wait to be directed from the school. And yet, we know parents want a friendly, collegial relationship – not one based on a parent-professional hierarchy (Lindle, 1989).

➢ *Too often the belief that family structures, values, or practices are the culprit for lack of meaningful parental involvement dominates discussions. It is less frequent that various school policies and procedures that actually limit opportunities for involvement are recognized.* In other words, too often the responsibility (or blame) for lack of participation is placed on the family without due consideration given to school factors. Davies (1993) found that educators across three countries identified parents as "hard to reach" and named parental characteristics as the source of the problem. School practices were rarely raised as a contributor to poor parent-school relations. However, Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that teacher practices were better than family characteristics at predicting which parents were involved in their child's education.

➢ *Teacher practices have been the focus of some research investigating family involvement levels.* Epstein and Dauber (1991) concluded that "when teachers make parent involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents increase their interactions with their children at home" (p. 289). Teacher self-efficacy and training in parental involvement practices are also important (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Swick & McKnight, 1989). Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris(1997) found teacher practices to have their strongest impact when other factors (e.g., context, parent attitudes) were optimal. Parents who saw themselves as teachers and felt efficacious, as well as those in more optimal contexts, became more involved when teachers were active users of involvement. Parents who did not see themselves in this manner or were in difficult contexts were less affected by teachers' attitudes and behaviors. It is important to note, however, that school and teacher practices are a more important predictor of parent involvement than family status variables (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

➢ *Research has yielded mixed results regarding the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and parental involvement. Most research has concluded that SES is not related to overall family involvement, however the type of involvement varies as a function of SES.* In general, it is believed that school-based family involvement is significantly related to SES, whereas home-based involvement is not (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992). For example, some parents may be unavailable to come to programs or conferences at school, but still able to engage in interventions related to reading with their child at home. According to the Metropolitan Life Survey (Binns, Steinberg, & Amorosi, 1997, students report that their parents are available to help regardless of ethnicity, although parents in urban areas tend to be less involved at the school building. This may be related to logistical or psychological variables, such as work or transportation conflicts, comfort level coming to school, perceptions that parents have about their roles and efficacy in relation to their child's education, and school practices to invite and involve parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

➢ *Several researchers have found that parents who have well-developed, positive perceptions of their own efficacy tend to demonstrate higher levels of involvement* (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Swick, 1988). That is, parents who believe that they are important and efficacious in their children's learning tended to demonstrate higher levels of involvement (Ames, 1993). School personnel who communicate the importance of parental activity directly, help parents recognize the usefulness of several practices, and believe in their ability to help in various ways (i.e., not only in "traditional" ways) may be more successful in achieving relevant levels of participation.

➢ *Perceptions that parents hold of teachers and schools are related to their involvement.* The extent to which parents believe that they are wanted and invited to participate may be relevant here. Specifically, parents in classrooms where teachers engage in many high parent involvement activities, and who work to involve all parents, are generally more positive about school and more aware of teachers' interest in their involvement (Epstein, 1986). In a related way, parents who hold positive perceptions of schools and education are more likely to be involved (Lindle, 1989).

• *Invitations for parents to be involved may come also from students.* According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), children may influence their parent's participation due to their "emotional influence over parental decisions because of the personal relationship involved" (pp. 27-28). Specific invitations by the children for their parents to attend meetings, review homework, or participate in special events provides an "overt affirmation of the importance of parental approval and participation" (p. 28) that can facilitate action on the part of parents. There may even exist a reciprocal relationship -- if parents are involved proactively (e.g., participate as a result of child or school invitations) rather than reactively (e.g., hear from school only when problems persist), children may value and accept family involvement more when support is needed.

Study Group Activity #5: Positive or Negative Assumptions. Working with parents and families can be a rewarding and frustrating experience for teachers. Mostert (1998) delineated 10 assumptions that can enhance or damage teachers' relationships with parents and families. Read and discuss the assumptions relative to your practices with parents. The assumptions are:

• It is important that you work under the assumption that parents generally wish to cooperate with you and your colleagues in the best interests of their child. Beginning with such an assumption invites parents and families to collaborate, communicates that you are willing to consider their point of view, and conveys the expectation that they are valued collaborators in solving their child's problem.

• Begin your work with the family with the assumption that the parents and other family members know a great deal about the student that you might not know. Parents and caregivers usually possess a great deal of important information that can expedite treatment interventions.

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- It is crucial to understand the distinction between what you know about each student and what the parents know about their child. These perspectives are likely to be different but overlapping sets of information.

- Students only spend minimal amounts of time under direct supervision of any professional and a much greater proportion of their time in other situations where family members are in much closer contact. Professionals rely heavily on the support of families to carry through with interventions outside school and when direct professional supervision is impossible.

- The nature of each educational intervention is often modified or changed according to the unique needs and configurations of each individual family.

- You have a professional obligation to include families wherever possible in the entire decision-making process that leads to effective intervention with their child. Family members, especially parents, have a legal and ethical right to be fully aware of the potential implications of any intervention and their responsibilities before, during, and after any intervention.

- Guard against stereotyping parents for any reasons whatsoever. Remember, there is much you don't know about families' lives, and to be helpful you need to view each family as a separate entity with its own unique set of strengths, weaknesses, and life history.

- While it is essential that you accord families and parents appropriate respect, it is equally important not to be overwhelmed or intimidated by parents who might be aggressive, overly passive, or in some way socially inappropriate.

- In all of your interactions with parents, be forthright about your limitations as a professional. Parents must sometimes be reminded that there are practical, legal, and ethical parameters within which you must operate. This can help to communicate your role in assisting them and their child.

- Be aware that in any collaborative venture with parents and families, there is a continuum of involvement that overlays any action you, the parents, or your colleagues may take. The continuum of parent involvement can stretch from absolute noninvolvement on the one hand to excessive over-involvement on the other. Wherever parents fall on the continuum of involvement, it is important to remember that there are many reasons, often unknown to school personnel, for any level of involvement or disengagement (pp. 156-159).

Discuss: What assumptions are made about or between the partners? What assumptions do parents and families make about working with school personnel? Differentiate constructive and destructive attitudes for the parent-teacher partnership. What can be done to redirect existing negative attitudes and/or assumptions about either partner?

Study Group Activity #6: Effect of Labels. Discuss these questions:
- If school personnel speak about "dysfunctional" families, is it possible for them to create partnerships with the families to whom they refer?

- How does our language affect our attitude and subsequent behavior?
- Are there times and places when parents may hear negative labels applied to other parents (e.g., teacher's lounge)? What is the effect on parents hearing these labels?

Design a plan of action to address "labeling" for your classroom, grade level, or school.

Study Group Activity # 7: Support for Learning. Read the examples of parental academic and motivational support for learning provided in Appendix C. Consider these examples for the purpose of discussing how to establish roles (i.e., options) for every parent.

- Discuss how the differentiation between academic and motivational support may be helpful for creating options for parent participation, options that are responsive to parent need and encouraging to parents who are initiating home support for learning activities.
- Generate other examples. Consider creating a "restaurant menu" to share with parents for their information and to have them select what works best for them to be involved.
- Discuss how there may be three categories of parents: Those who need only a suggestion or information, those who need information plus attention to a specific family concern, and those who need information and ongoing support to make education a priority in the home. What are helpful encouraging teacher responses to this categorization of parents? What should teachers do?

Summary: Working together in collaborative relationships with parents is crucial to a child's optimal reading success. Attitudes are among the most salient and powerful precursors to healthy partnerships with parents. Constructive attitudes allow teachers to ask: How can we work *together to address a concern or shared goal?* Constructive attitudes allow for the development of effective listening, nonblaming messages, and trust. Positive attitudes allow parents and educators together to identify concerns, analyze situations, develop and implement plans, and evaluate goal attainment. Problem solving, information gathering, and resource sharing are all heightened. The attitudes parents and educators hold about each other set the stage for an atmosphere conducive for the formation of effective relationships. School personnel that attempt to put programs into place in the absence of constructive attitudes and a healthy atmosphere will likely experience limited success.

Atmosphere: The Climate for Parent-Teacher Interactions

Dialogue questions: What helps parents feel welcome at school? What helps parents to be more involved in their children's reading and learning?

Atmosphere: The atmosphere (or climate) in and around schools must be conducive for parents and teachers to establish healthy relationships. In other words, an atmosphere that is open, trusting, and inviting provides an important, supportive infrastructure within which attitudes can be shared and actions implemented. Two characteristics that are particularly notable about a school's atmosphere that serve as essential prerequisites are the frequency and quality of interactions among its participants (i.e., communication), and feelings of trust and respect existing within the school community (Haynes et al., 1996). A classroom atmosphere that

facilitates parent-teacher partnerships is characterized by trust, effective communication, and a mutual problem solving orientation (Christenson, 1995).

Trust building between parent and teachers

A prerequisite to any effort to involve parents in educational partnerships is an atmosphere characterized by <u>trust</u> (Haynes et al., 1996). Trust is defined as "confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive outcomes for students" (Adams & Christenson, 1998; p. 6). Some parents may avoid interfacing with school personnel due to their own feelings of insecurity or uncertainty about what the school promotes or believes. They may view the school as an institution that is static, unwelcoming, distant, and inflexible. This is particularly likely for parents whose previous experiences with schools and other agencies have been adversarial, intimidating, or otherwise uncomfortable.

Also, trust between family and school personnel is far too infrequent for students who are experiencing difficulties making a successful school adjustment. After a problem-solving conference with parents and educators, it is common to overhear teachers say, "They [parents] won't follow through." Also, parents may feel suspicious about the educational program offered. Both parties are feeling a lack of trust, and yet they want to cooperate and know they should cooperate. They wish they trusted each other. Partnerships and student achievement do not thrive in a climate of mistrust (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996).

It is consistently recommended that schools must be welcoming, "family-friendly" communities (Moles, 1996; Tomlinson, 1996). Welcoming is essential because it can be thought of as "a climate for participation" (Batey, 1996). Closely aligned with welcoming is the concept of trust. In fact, Weiss and Edwards (1992) refer to trust building as climate building between family and school. Like welcoming, trust building creates the conditions or climate that foster participation and a positive working partnership. According to Davies (1991), trust is the "essential lubrication for more serious intervention."

Relationships and interaction variables are critically important to parents in determining welcoming school environments (Zorka, Godber, Hurley, & Christenson, 2001). Of 27 choices, a sample of ethnically diverse parents in a large Midwestern urban school district indicated their "top 10" variables for creating a welcoming environment were:

1. Experience when talking with their child's teacher
2. The relationship between their child and his/her teacher
3. Meetings with school personnel to address concerns
4. The overall "feeling" in their child's class
5. The overall "feeling" in their child's school
6. The relationship between families and teachers
7. Parent-teacher conferences
8. Cleanliness of the school
9. Initial contact when families first enter the school
10. How differences of opinion or conflict are handled

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How does trust between homes and schools develop? Trust is an intangible characteristic that develops *over time*. A teacher's ability to develop and foster an on-going personal relationship with parents does much toward establishing trust and sending a message that the school is a friendly, warm, and open environment (Finders & Lewis, 1994). The need to allow trusting relationships to develop often runs counter to practices in schools wherein quick and efficient solutions are sought. In many such circumstances, efficiency is valued over the interaction process that requires time to build trusting relationships and get to know one other. It is important that interactions with parents be considered in the context of whether they facilitate the development of trust or inhibit the formation of relationships.

Some families may be willing to trust school personnel more readily than others, particularly if they are accustomed to the traditional practices and norms established in schools. Family members who vary in terms of culture, values, or language may appear more hesitant to interact freely and openly. "One-shot" events or interactions with family members do not allow teachers to learn about family beliefs, practices, values, or preferences. They do not allow families to explore their feelings about the school, or their comfort level with adults in that environment who may be different from them on a number of important dimensions. And, they do not provide ongoing opportunities to allow parents and educators to learn from and about each other, share and demonstrate mutual concerns for the child, increase acceptance of each other, and build trust with each other. There are many benefits for students when parents and teachers like each other.

Trust does not occur accidentally or coincidentally; rather, it develops as educators engage in certain actions that promote trust. Such behaviors include:

- Accepting parents as they are.
- Sharing information and resources.
- Focusing on parents' aspirations, concerns, and needs.
- Keeping their word.
- Discussing objectives openly.
- Preparing for meetings.
- Focusing on the interactive process with parents.
- Using structured problem solving approaches.
- Listening empathically.
- Creating opportunities to build personal relationships with families.
- Creating opportunities to be co-learners with parents.
- Engaging in shared decision making with parents.
- Developing effective conflict management strategies.
- Maintaining a focus on student outcomes (Adams and Christenson, 1998; Margolis and Brannigan, 1990).

If heeded, suggestions by these researchers can guide school personnel to send strong messages and engage in outreach activities geared toward building trusting relations with families. First, however, some personal reflection is necessary. Questions that teachers can ask themselves include:

- Do I accept parents as they are, or try to change them to "fit" a predetermined parent role?
- Do I try to build relationships or stay aloof in my interactions with parents?
- When I tell parents that I will do something, do I follow through?
- Am I always trying to teach parents something, inform them of something, or instruct them about something, or do I also try to learn from them and about them?

Effective communication strategies

Open, two-way communication is another important element of an atmosphere that is conducive for effective parent-teacher partnerships. According to Weiss and Edwards (1992), an underlying goal of communication is "to provide consistent messages to families that the school will work with them in a collaborative way to promote the educational success of the student" (p. 235). Accordingly, all communications should strive to convey at least four consistent themes to families:

- The desire to develop a working partnership with parents.
- The crucial nature of parental input for children's educational progress.
- The importance of a strong learning environment at home and outside of school for children's success in school.
- The importance of working together to identify a mutually advantageous solution in light of problems.

Communication is complex, and given the demands placed on parents and educators, strategies must be streamlined by using both system-wide and individual communication strategies. System-wide strategies such as school-wide use of assignment books or homework journals, parent-teacher grams, homework hotlines, electronic technology (class listserv) and school-family newsletters are useful for disseminating school-based information relevant to specific grade levels or classes and reach many families effectively. In contrast, individual strategies will emphasize personal contact through home visits, phone calls, and personal notes, and are used with a smaller proportion of parents. Personal contact has been found to be the most effective way to reach families who are uninvolved with or disengaged from schooling or who feel disenfranchised. Many schools use good news phone calls, which are very powerful for exciting families about their children's learning progress. In many schools, students also place calls to parents to report their progress.

Frequent, effective communication is necessary for a number of reasons. It is required for parents and teachers to share information about children's progress, needs, and interests. Through two-way communication, parents and teachers can be informed of what is expected relative to student behavior, achievement, and discipline. This can in turn set the stage for establishing shared goals and mutual decision-making, avoiding misunderstandings, and helping parents understand how to reinforce learning and reading in the home. The probability for miscommunication between parents and school personnel is high for a number of reasons, namely infrequent contact, emotionally-charged situations, and ineffective communication (Christenson & Hirsch, 1998).

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Guidelines and practices that can be followed for effective communication between teachers and parents are consistently described in the literature, and include:

➢ Strive for a positive orientation rather than a deficit-based or crisis orientation.
➢ Consider tone as well as content of your communications.
➢ Develop and publicize regular, reliable, varied two-way communication systems.
➢ Emphasize a "win-win" orientation rather than placing blame.
➢ Keep the focus of communication on the child's performance.
➢ Ensure that parents have the needed information to support children's educational progress.
➢ Create formal and informal opportunities to communicate and build trust between home and school.
➢ Underscore all communication with a shared responsibility between families and schools (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

Although these are not "sure-fire" ways to guarantee clarity of communication, they can minimize the chances that miscommunication will occur. It is important to reiterate that following these guidelines in the absence of a constructive attitude and welcoming climate will not result in the intended goal. Parental involvement practices, or activities, are nested within the larger framework of the attitudes and atmosphere present in the school. That is, the attitudes and atmosphere drive the activities, and not vice versa.

Power of "Friend-like" Interactions

What do parents prefer? Parents have specific desires about the nature and tone of communication with school personnel. Parents report wanting teachers to feel approachable, meaning person-to-person interactions (not a professional-parent hierarchy) that characterize family-centered services (see attitudes). They appear to value sincere interaction with school personnel over highly structured programming. Less professional, more personal interactions with schools that promote communication and parental sense of ability are preferred over formal interactions that suggest that the parents have deficits to overcome. According to one parent quoted in Finders and Lewis (1994): "Whenever I go to school, they want to tell me what to do at home. They want to tell me how to raise my kid. They never ask me what I think. They never ask me anything" (p. 53). Lindle (1989) reported that sincerity and a desire to be helpful were more important to parents than a desire for a standard or set approach to parent-teacher interactions.

Power of Solution-Oriented Language

Effective communication is personalized, solution-oriented, nonblaming, and based in problem solving. Canter and Canter (1991) describe the critical importance of considering how teacher concerns are expressed to parents. When teachers have a concern to present to parents, it is essential to do so in a way that is not interpreted as evaluative of the parents. The language used by educators must be inviting of parents' contributions and input for a solution. This can be accomplished by using statements that express concern for the student and state the specific behavior. For example, a statement such as "I'm concerned about how Brian gets along with the other students" is more positive, inviting, and constructive than "Brian's behavior with other

students is getting worse and worse." Similarly, "I'm concerned about how little work Tess is doing" is more inviting of parental input than "I'm not at all pleased with Tess' progress." Parents do not want to hear what is wrong with their children. On the other hand, parents tend to be quite realistic and appreciate specific, behavioral descriptions of what their children are doing *and* how they can learn to respond more accurately or appropriately. Parents also want to know that teachers care for their child.

Educators are using more solution-oriented language when communicating to parents about student-related concerns. Solution-oriented language:

➢ Focuses on solutions, not problems. It is a way of thinking that represents a conceptual shift from problem resolution to solution identification. It includes:
   • A focus on what is working already or exceptions to behavior.
   • A focus on participants' strengths and resources.
   • A focus on what is possible.

➢ Emphasizes non-blaming descriptions. Examples include:
   • Teachers/parents speak of difficulties/concerns; not problems/deficits.
   • Teachers/parents speak of a problematic situation (that requires all of our attention), not of problem individuals.
   • Use of "video" talk to describe behavior what the child does), not labels
   • Reframes school- or parent-based concerns as learning goals for the student.

➢ Strives to have a doable plan. Aspects include:
   • Constructing solutions that fit personal constraints of both systems.
   • Allowing individuals to define what is desired.
   • Emphasizing student progress and improvement toward goals.
   • Clarifying roles and responsibilities for parents, teachers, and students.

Communication must help parents view their children as learners, enhance parental beliefs that they can be helpful and make a difference (i.e., positive sense of self-efficacy), and enhance parents' comfort level at school and with educational issues. It is beneficial to phrase communication in such a way that a *message of hopefulness* is evident to the parent. Negative messages from school (e.g., "your child is having trouble;" "your child is not motivated") tell parents their children are not doing well and may encourage them to give up hope on their children instead of trying to help by becoming involved. Optimistic messages, on the other hand, help parents believe their children can learn and want to learn.

Adopting a Mutual Problem Solving Orientation

Differences are not necessarily detrimental to the relationship; in fact, different perspectives are healthy in collaborative relationships (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Differences in opinions and viewpoints are inevitable in encounters between parents and school personnel. Parents and educators, by virtue of their respective relationship with the child, hold different perspectives. For example, parents are concerned with their child's individual progress and needs, and they have an emotional involvement with their child. Educators, on the other hand, are concerned

with the progress and needs of the whole class or group, and they are able to distance themselves from the child, taking a more rational/cognitive approach. These contextual differences can result in potential communication difficulties if the differing perspectives are not discussed and understood. Also, both parents and educators primarily see the child in only one environment and assume the child's behavior is similar in other environments. Thus, when a parent says, "We don't have that problem at home," that may be a true statement. Or if educators say, "That parent is way too emotionally involved," perhaps what is forgotten is that children need a strong attachment to their parents. In reality, signs of frustration and perhaps limited problem solving are being expressed with these statements.

Engaging in problem solving between home and school fosters non-blaming interactions. A useful template for problem solving with parents includes these steps: Identify and define the concern, analyze conditions surrounding the concern, brainstorm alternative solutions; select the most appropriate solution and develop a specific plan; implement the plan; and evaluate outcomes. Two problem-solving structures that incorporate solution-oriented language and perspective taking are illustrated.

Example 1: Parent-Educator Problem Solving (PEPS)

Introduction:
- Rapport Building
- Describe school (or parent)-based concern: *I am concerned about Sally's difficulties with learning sounds for different letters.*
    - Express concerns as learning goals (what the child needs to learn; what we want to teach the child). *I want to teach Sally the sounds for the letters __ and __ in the next two weeks.*
    - Invite parent assistance and express interest in working as partners (opportunity to explain family influences and synergism between home and school on children's learning). *I believe if she could practice these at extra times at school and at home she will learn the sounds. This will help her keep up with the class in reading assignments. Will you be able to assist with this extra practice at home?*

Identification:
- Identify all concerns and perspectives related to school-based concern:
    - Gather parent input and reframe as learning goals. *Have you noticed anything about Sally's reading work that we should talk about?*
- Identify mutual learning goals: *It appears we have both are concerned about her learning these sounds.*
    - List and prioritize goals.
    - Select one goal to work on collaboratively. *We will both work on the sounds for these letters.*
    - May decide parent and teacher will work independently on some goals. *Are there reading activities you want to do? What works for you? She will have other reading work at school, and if you can also read the books every night this will help Sally develop her vocabulary and reading fluency.*
- Check for understanding:

- Restate mutual goal as a discrepancy between actual and desired child behavior/performance.
- Goal is to establish a common effort to close this discrepancy.
- Check on other contributing factors relevant to concern.

Selection:
- Generate possibilities for a solution by brainstorming, listing all ideas, and engaging in no evaluation. *Used if the parent and teacher need to change activities or who might implement the activities.*
- Select idea(s) from the list
- Parent and teacher choice is essential.
- Provide supportive facilitation: Ask of parents and teachers*: What resources and/or information would you find helpful for attaining the goal?*
- Mutual decision-making for community resource involvement often occurs.

Implementation/Evaluation:
- Describe the solution plan.
- Review roles and responsibilities.
- Engage in perception checking.
- Determine an evaluation date.
- Implement the plan.
- Identify ways to make contact if necessary (e.g., no phones).
- Follow-up by a case manager.
- Evaluate effectiveness of the plan.
- Determine whether the discrepancy closed?
  - If not, replan (no blaming).
  - If so, celebrate!

_____

Christenson, S.L. (1995).

Example 2: Perspective Taking and Problem Solving

Teachers and parents have found a structured problem solving approach that actively practices perspective taking to be helpful in addressing concerns or priorities (Swap, 1993). If so, consider using:
- Stop. Think about the concern at home and at school.
  - Describe the concern in each setting.
  - How does the concern affect the teacher/classroom?
  - How does the concern affect the parent/home?
- What are some choices/options for changing the current practice?
- Choose one after considering consequences for each system.
  - What consequences does the teacher envision?
  - What consequences do the parents envision?
- Try the option.

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- What resources or support does the teacher need?
- What resources or support do the parents need?
- How did it work?
  - What were the benefits for the student, teacher, and parents?
  - What changes should be made? (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

Adopting a problem solving orientation reduces the probability of conflicts between parents and teachers, particularly pseudo-conflict which is due primarily to misunderstanding and communication difficulties. However, when substantive conflict is present, newer school practices use a non-adversarial approach for managing conflicts. Such an approach is guided by the following questions:

- What is the issue/concern?
- What do I need to say about the issue (specific, observable language)?
- What do I need to understand from the parent about the issue?
- How can we develop a better plan/practice to address the concern?

Also, three well-developed skills are also helpful in conflict resolution. First, teachers are finding that structured problem solving that aims toward establishing consensus (i.e., agree to try the plan) and satisfying the needs of parents, teachers, and the student facilitates constructive interactions. Using nonblaming language is helpful when problem solving and resolving conflicts.

Second, teacher use of negotiation skills, such as viewing the person separate from the concern/issue, to develop a win-win perspective is helpful. It is important to focus communication on mutual interests by asking, "How can we work together because it is important for the future learning and reading success of the student?"

Third, teachers can employ helpful strategies when a parent is angry. Some examples include meeting with parents as soon as possible, allowing parents an opportunity to tell their story paired with empathic listening, acting as a problem solver, and focusing on present and future interactions.

Why?

Selected relevant research findings on trust include:

➤ Parents and educators consider trust as very important for an effective partnership to promote children's learning (Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hamby, 1992).

➤ In a study that explored trust between homes and schools, Adams and Christenson (1998) surveyed 123 parents of regular and special education students and 152 teachers in three urban middle schools. Slightly over half of the parent sample reported their ethnicity as European American; the majority of nonwhite participants self-identified as African American. Approximately half of the sample was eligible for free or reduced lunch (an indicator of income) and 45% of the sample represented parents of students receiving some

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special educational services. They found that parent trust of teachers was significantly higher than teacher trust of parents. Furthermore, parents who were characterized as "high trust" reported significantly more behavioral indicators of parental involvement than parents characterized as both moderately and low in trust. Parents of students who received more intensive special education services reported higher levels of trust than parents of students receiving less intensive special education services. Contrary to predictions, however, there were no significant differences between groups who differed on the variables of income, ethnicity, or type of educational service (special education vs. regular education).

➢ Similar results were found in a subsequent study in which 1,234 parents and 209 teachers from one school district were surveyed. Adams and Christenson (2000) found that parent trust was higher than teacher trust at elementary, middle, and high school grade levels; however, significant differences between parents and teachers emerged only at elementary and high school levels. They also found that parent trust for teachers was significantly higher at the elementary than the middle or high school levels, and teacher trust for parents was significantly higher for elementary than for high school teachers. Regardless of school level, parents and teachers identified communication and parental dedication to education as important means to increasing mutual trust between families and schools, and satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship was a predictor of trust for both parents and teachers. Finally, parent trust for teachers was significantly correlated with credits earned per year, GPA, and attendance for students in grades 9 - 12.

➢ Most recently, Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy (2001) found that teacher trust in students and parents was a significant positive predictor of differences among 47 elementary urban schools in student achievement.

➢ Of 33 family-school partnerships activities, parents across the United States rated the activity, "Create time for parent and teacher to share information about children, school requirements, and family needs," as one they value and would use routinely (Christenson, Sheridan, Hurley, & Fenstermacher, 1997). This activity was ranked fifth. Similarly, the activity, "Create more time for parents to meet individually with teachers," was ranked tenth.

Selected relevant research findings about communication and problem solving include:

➢ In an interesting study, Ames (1993) investigated the manner in which communication between school and home influenced parents' beliefs and practices across a number of dimensions (including their awareness of communication efforts, children's motivation to learn, self-reported involvement, and comfort with the school). Teacher self-report on the use of communication strategies and feelings of self-efficacy were also assessed. Teachers communicated with parents by sending weekly messages specifying the classroom goal, student progress, and suggestions for home support learning. Ames found:

- Parents of children in elementary schools whose teachers communicated at a high level found these teachers to be more effective than parents who did not experience high levels of communication.

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- Teachers who self-reported being "high users of school-to-home communications" (p. 46) reported higher levels of their own teaching efficacy.
- Compared to parents who received little communication from teachers, parents whose children were in "high users" classrooms reported greater belief in their own ability to influence their children, viewed their children as more motivated, and reported higher levels of involvement in their child's learning.
- Interestingly and importantly, children's self-ratings of academic competence and interest were strongly related to each other and to their parents' involvement. Ames hypothesized that teachers' communications may have influenced "how parents talked to their children about school, whether they monitored their schoolwork, and how much time they spent helping their children learn; in other words, their involvement in their children's learning" (p. 47).

➢ Ames' study highlighted the importance of sending an optimistic and hopeful message to parents about their child's education and what they can do to help.

➢ Comer schools address the total developmental and learning needs of students through implementation of three problem solving and decision making teams that abide by the principles of consensus, collaboration, and no-fault interactions – what Comer refers to as a healthful climate. Significant gains in academics and behavior have been reported for Comer schools compared to comparison schools (Comer et al., 1996).

Study Group Activity # 8: Communication as the Foundation of the Partnership. Read the handout in Appendix E for the purpose of designing your communication strategy with parents. Share your strategy with teachers at your grade level. Ask three parents to react to and modify your plan.

Study Group Activity # 9: Guidelines and Practices for Effective Communication. Read the guidelines and examples of practices provided. Offer a suggestion for a practice for each guideline that is specific to promoting reading progress and success of students in your class. Identify the guidelines that are most important for successful implementation of the home support for reading program. Discuss with colleagues to determine consensus between classrooms within a grade level as well as between grade levels.

Guideline	Possible Practices
Strive for a positive orientation rather than a deficit-based or crisis orientation.	• Good news phone calls • Invite and incorporate parent reactions to policies and practices. • Contact parents at the first sign of a concern • Communicate an "optimistic" message about the child
Consider tone as well as content of your communications.	• Reframe language from problems to goals for student • Focus on a parent's ability to help.

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Develop and publicize regular, reliable, varied two-way communication systems.	• System-wide family-school communication/assignment notebooks • Shared parent-educator responsibility for contacts • Handbooks • Newsletters • "Thursday folders" including relevant home and school information • Telephone tree • Electronic communication technology
Emphasize a "win-win" orientation, rather than placing blame.	• Discuss and focus on mutual goals and interests. • Use words such as "we," "us," and "our," vs. "you," "I," "yours," and "mine."
Keep the focus of communication on the child's performance.	• Bi-directional communications regarding classroom activities, progress, suggested activities for parents • Home-school notebooks/notes • Family-school meetings with students present • Shared parent-educator monitoring system (e.g., educational file, contract)
Ensure that parents have needed information to support childrens' educational progress.	• Several orientation nights with follow-up contact for nonattendees • Parent support groups to disseminate information on school performance • Home visits • Home-school contracts with follow-up • Curriculum nights • Monthly meetings on topics of mutual interest
Create formal and informal opportunities to communicate and build trust between home and school.	• Multicultural potlucks • Grade-level bagel breakfasts • Family fun nights • Committees designed to address home-school issues • Workshops where parents and school personnel learn together • Principal's hour
Underscore all communication with a shared responsibility between families and schools.	• Communicating the essential nature of family involvement • Sharing information about the curriculum of the home • Discussing co-roles (e.g., co-communicators) and implementing shared practices (e.g., contracts, common language about conditions for children's

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success)
- Back to School Night – establish shared goals

Study Group Activity # 10: Different Perspectives. Consider how parents and educators may hold slightly different perspectives, and how these differences can result in communication difficulties and misunderstandings.

Parents:	Educators
· Are concerned with their child's individual progress and needs	· Must focus on whole class or group
· Are concerned with what their child is learning	· Have knowledge of what the child has mastered
· Have a perspective of how far the child has come	· Are concerned with present development of the child
· Have an emotional involvement with their child	· Are able to distance self from the child; more rational/cognitive approach
· Want to have their child approached and taught as an <u>individual</u>	· Look for one best method, way to work with all children

Ask yourself: How do these differences increase social and physical distance between me and my students' parents? Have these differences resulted in increased negative attitudes toward uninvolved parents? Have I labeled some families? Have some families potentially labeled me as difficult to talk to or unconcerned?

What differences in perspectives exist between parents (i.e., parental perspective) and the school (i.e., an institutional perspective)? Share your observations and reflections with your colleagues for the intent of designing an action plan to address communication difficulties.

Study Group Activity #11: Inviting Parent Input and Maintaining an Optimistic Message.
Read the structures for communicating positively with parents that have been developed by Canter and Canter (1991) for expressing a student concern immediately and for building a relationship with a parent of a "potential' problem student. See Appendix F. Make 2-3 calls to parents using these structures. Evaluate the success of gathering parent input and expressing confidence about working together to promote the student's progress toward a goal.

Study Group Activity # 12: Using Techniques for Blocking Blame. Read the techniques for blocking blame in Appendix G. Generate examples specific to discussions with parents about children's reading progress. Create a list of non-blaming statements that can be used by teachers at your school when problem solving with parents.

Study Group Activity #13: Communication about *STAR* Readers. Decide on communications to parents that can be handled at a systems level vs. individual level with respect to the school wide goal of having star readers. How can the goals of enhancing students' reading success be communicated consistently throughout the school year to parents? Which

parents are not responding to the systems level messages? How can the communication strategies change to ensure that all families receive the information?

Summary: An atmosphere that facilitates collaborative parent-teacher partnerships is one that is characterized by trust, effective communication, and a mutual problem-solving orientation. It is the responsibility of both teachers and parents to communicate openly and honestly to build a climate conducive for meaningful and effective interactions on behalf of children. The tangible and interpersonal atmosphere is prerequisite to the implementation of effective strategies, or actions, that move parents and educators forward in their collaborative work. However, it is important to note that the atmosphere is a necessary, *not sufficient* factor in promoting successful reading experiences for children. Approach, attitudes, and atmosphere are the "backdrop" for the actions to be taken to develop shared responsibility for children's reading progress and performance.

Actions: Strategies for Building Shared Responsibility for Students' Reading Success and Progress

Dialogue Questions: In the ideal world, what are the characteristics of an effective home support for reading program? What works for teachers? What works for parents?

Actions: Actions are purposefully distinguished from activities, because actions focus on the parent-teacher relationship or connection for children's school performance, whereas activities represent a narrow focus on how to involve families in education. Thus, actions are oriented toward building shared responsibility for educational outcomes, particularly reading outcomes. To be successful in this goal, teachers consider the approach adopted toward the role of parents, the degree to which constructive attitudes between parents and teachers exist, and the atmosphere or climate present for participation and interaction between parents and teachers in their particular school context. Approach, attitudes, and atmosphere are the "backdrop" for the actions described.

Of utmost importance in thinking about actions is the focus on teachers examining their practices for partnering with parents and their willingness to include parents and to be responsive to parental input and desires with respect to children's reading and learning experiences. To build a working partnership that lasts, school personnel realize that "Trust-building starts with reaching out to families, a sometimes difficult task when *(some)* families are accustomed to an adversarial relationship with schools or community services" (Carter, 1994, p. 9; italics added). Or, when families are uninvolved. In creating these actions, teachers recognize that:

- parents want relevant information about their children's reading,
- teachers need to pay attention to parent requests and unique needs for participation, and
- parents require varying amounts of support for them to actively participate in their children's education and to support literacy development at home.

Opportunities for meaningful dialogue provide the basis for mutual understanding across home and school about the reading/literacy experiences and performance of children. Strategies for

shared responsibility depend, in part, on finding ways to ensure parents have access (i.e., parental right to inclusion in decision making processes), voice (i.e., feeling of parents that they were heard and listened to at all points in the process), and ownership (i.e., parents agree with and are contributing to any action plan affecting them) (Osher, 1997).

Actions to Enhance Home Support for Reading: The actions described should be thought of as a template or as guidelines for creating a home support for reading program. Therefore, modifications are encouraged and expected. This template has been created by using the existing literature on effective parent-teacher partnerships, and is based heavily on *STARS: Sit Together and Read Something* (Christenson, 2001). *STARS* is a program that is being developed and currently implemented on a federally funded research project. The program, *STARS,* is focused on literacy development.

Examples of how to implement the actions are provided. It is impossible to include all available examples. More can be provided upon request. Actions to enhance home support for reading and literacy include:

➢ **Be proactive! Reach out to parents and make a friendly, positive introductory contact before any specific reading or student concern arises.** This provides an opportunity to:

- Set a positive tone.
- Share information about the student's talents.
- Show interest in the student by gathering parent perceptions about talents.
- Set parent, teacher, and student goals.
- Establish an ongoing way to contact each other.

Examples

"Before School Starts" Greeting: Introduce yourself by saying a friendly hello. Drop a line (letters or postcards) to incoming students and their parents. You don't need to say much; you want to let them know you are enthusiastic about the upcoming year (Canter & Canter, 1991, p. 37).

> Dear Parents(s) name:
>
> Just a quick note to let you know I'm looking forward to working with _____ this year, and to getting to know you. Please feel free to drop by the classroom on the first day of school, September __. I'd like to say hello!
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Dear (Student name):
>
> Welcome to room 120! I'm looking forward to a terrific year and I hope you are too. Enjoy the rest of your vacation. I'll see you on September ___.

Sincerely,

Goal Setting and Positive School Message: This strategy can be implemented with individual or a group of parents. It was developed by Howard Weiss to set a tone for partnership at back to school nights. The strategy involves sharing goals to ensure that the student has the best possible school year and a "fool-proof" way to contact each other – to share good news and when concerned. The steps are:

- Share goals for the child's performance.
    - Teacher shares his/her goals for the school year. These should include reading (i.e., Having each child be a reading star) and other goals. "*My goals are to have each child read at grade level, enjoy listening to stories, and like coming to school."*
    - Parent(s) shares his/her goals for the child for the school year.
    - Student shares his/her goals to make sure it it's the best school year.
    - Consensus is noted by the teacher. "*It seems like we all agree that learning to read is an important goal. We also want to _____."*
- Ask parents to provide their children with an important message: *Your teacher cares about you, Your teacher believes I am important for helping you learn to read, and We have agreed to work together to make this a great school year.* Some schools have put this message on a magnet or a sheet of paper for the refrigerator. Note: Teachers tell parents there are different ways they can help their children with reading and the parent will select the best way (e.g., reading with your child to encouraging your child to read to you to having an older sibling or friend read to the child).
- Establish a way to always be able to contact each other. Teachers can establish "office hours" when they are always available to take a call or have a drop-in visit. For non-English speaking parents, the use of a postcard with a stoplight (red = get together immediately, yellow = get together in the next week, green =everything is fine) might be helpful to signal the need to discuss concerns or progress of the child. Parents should be asked to fill out a contact card that indicates their preference of method and time of communication. Teachers provide parents with the message outlined above and the way to contact teachers with good news and at the first sign of a concern.

Sharing Students Talents: Parents have much information about their children that is helpful to creating a better learning environment for students. Ask the parent to share information about his/her child. Consider using or adapting the *STAR Talent* to obtain information from the parent (available upon request). This form could serve as the stimulus for creating a positive relationship with the parent – one that focuses on how the teacher and parent share common goals, need to share information about the child over the school year, and can be supportive of each other during the school year – even when the child is having difficulty learning to read.

➢ **Invite parents to partner and explain the conditions under which learning to read is most optimal for students.** Help the parent(s) understand that he/she knows his/her child the best, and you know curriculum and how to teach reading. Both sets of knowledge and expertise are essential for the child to perform optimally. State your belief that if we can

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partner, their child will make the best progress this year. Remember, parents feel involved if they are informed and included.

Examples

STARS **Invitation**: Our goal is to help (child's name) have the most successful school year possible. For this to happen, we need to work together. It will help _____if he/she reads at school and outside of school. Learning to read takes practice and many times students need to learn to persist in face of challenges and failure – or when the "going gets tough." *STARS* is a program that means *Sit Together and Read Something.* It is important for _____to read everyday. I will send home books and reading activities. They will take about 15 minutes. Would you like to be involved? Is there someone else in the home that could also be involved? I know if we can work out a program that works for both of us, _____will make greater reading progress this year.

Obtain parent input. For some parents it might be helpful to discuss how you can work together to create a "reading star" or having their children make the greatest progress in reading. Sometimes asking the following questions helps to support parents so they can carry out mutually determined reading activities at home:
- What kind of reading activities do you find most enjoyable to do at home?
- How much time do you have available to focus on reading support with your child?
- What kind of information would be helpful for you to support reading at home?
- Are there resources that would help you to focus on reading and language development for your child?

Explain the value of out-of-school reading time. Discuss the importance of out-of-school reading time for student success and explain that working together to support the child's reading will create conditions for student success. Information provided in Approach and study group activities #2, 3, and 7 and 13 will be helpful.

Many teachers have found it helpful to tell parents that children perform the best when we ensure that the curriculum of the school (good reading instruction) is paired with the curriculum of the home (reading time at home and language games) and our communication is positive – always giving the student a consistent similar message about working hard to learn to read. If we have any concerns or conflict, we can handle them right away. This message could be described as an equation:

Reading Success = Reading in school + Reading at home + Parent-teacher communication

Partnership for Children's Reading. Parent involvement is expected. Teaching all students to read is a school wide goal, and parents are seen as vital for making this happen. The leadership team will be helpful in establishing a school wide goal. The importance of a parent-teacher partnership for enhancing children's reading success and school experiences are explained to each parent. It might work to begin: "We know students perform the best when both parents and teachers participate actively in children's learning to read. There are many ways you can support your child as a reader. What works best for you to encourage your child to read? (List options

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linked to the reading activities that will be sent home). Parent selects the options and the future discussions about the child's reading always include what is happening at school and home to support the child as a reader.

Problem Solving with Parents. Reading programs can be put in place and sometimes there is limited follow through by parents or the teacher finds the program must be changed. Perhaps there are other factors that might need to be considered across home and school to foster the student's reading (e.g., behavior). In these situations, it is helpful to describe the teacher-based concern for the child. Express your concerns as learning goals (what the child needs to learn; what we want to teach the child, what reading skills need to be developed and practiced). Again, invite parent assistance and express interest in working as partners. Reinforce the influence of family on the child's school performance, and the positive effect of synergism between home and school for children's learning progress. The problem solving steps described in the atmosphere section will be helpful in designing an intervention with parents.

➢ **Create a plan for home support for reading. Offer parents the opportunity to react to and modify the plan to fit their situation.** As formal educators, it is important for teachers to explain the kind of activities (skill level for the child, evidence based reading practices) that have the greatest probability of helping the child learn to read and develop language. Because so many students have the same skills to develop, it is very beneficial if the program is efficient, routine, and simple for parents to implement and teachers to monitor. Also, the greater link between the child's daily skill development in classrooms and home support for learning – what can be referred to as cross setting instructional match for the student – the greater the chance for the child's reading improvement.

Name your reading program. You may use *STARS* provided you cite it appropriately. Select a name that fits your context. *STARS* reflects flexibility (i.e., read something) and also connotes a positive tone…creating a reading star. As you design the program, it is important to consider the following:

- Use the empirical base in reading from which to design varied options for parents. These would include:
    - Shared reading experiences (repetitive, interactive)
        - Error correction procedures
        - Simple questions to ask about the story
    - Phonemic awareness (games to emphasize individual sounds)
    - Alphabetic principle (activities to reinforce the concept of sounds to print)
    - Ways to develop fluency and automaticity
    - Vocabulary (read to the child, create a family bank of words)
    - Comprehension strategies
    - Motivation

It is important that teachers design simple activities that have been shown to make a difference for students' reading progress. Parents benefit when the activities are routine, and teachers benefit when they are simple to send home and monitor. It is critical that teachers meet with parents who are not implementing the activities on a regular basis to make necessary

modifications. The goal is to involve all parents in some way. Teachers cannot control what happens at home; however, they have control over their persistence in letting parents know the value of out-of-school reading time. They can be willing to work as partners with all families.

➢ **Consider holding a curriculum night where students present the evidence based reading practices.** Parents' attendance at school functions is higher when students are featured, the session is offered at multiple times, transportation and daycare are provided, and the importance of attending is linked to the child's learning. Explain you reading program and have students demonstrate what the parent-child would do together. Make home visits or phone calls for nonattendees.

An effective home support for reading program does not need to consist of many activities. For example, the teacher may decide, given his/her classroom, that mainly two types of activities would be most important to encourage parents to use. They might be:

- Increasing word recognition and reading fluency: Read with student (repeated reading, shared book reading); send book home to be read again with someone (older sibling, grandma, neighbor) at home

- Increasing vocabulary: Create a family bank of words that builds on child's experiences (e.g., Favorite toys and foods, Questions to ask parent, Words for rhyming, flash cards, draw pictures, etc.) or use of flash cards linked to sentence writing.

➢ **Consider creating a 'success for all' approach – or a classroom goal on reading and an atmosphere that celebrates students' reading improvement and progress.**
There are advantages to placing students "in charge" for getting the home support for reading activities done. We want to build student responsibility and ownership in reading, with teachers and parents supporting the student to get the reading done. The use of a class-wide (or school-wide) parent-teacher-student partnership agreement is often helpful. Also, setting class goals based on improvement, not only performance, followed by rewards (i.e., oral reading of an exciting book, pizza party) can be used.

➢ **Allow parents to make modifications and/or select from several options for the home support for reading program.** Many parents will choose to use the standard, recommended activities. As the informal educators, parents have a very important role to play; however, the activities must be feasible for parents to implement in terms of resource availability, time, skills, and knowledge. Provide parents with several options. Be willing to create activities that fit the unique situation for some parents. However, be persistent about delivering a message that reflects the importance of outside reading and language activities for children's reading progress and development. Some schools have provided parents with general ideas for improving a child's reading through a regular newsletter sent home.

➢ **As the program is implemented, maintain a focus on the progress and performance of the child.**

- Provide parents with good news, such as good news phone calls, mailing *STARS* postcards, or having students engage in "Show off time" where the child teaches/shows the parent what he/she has learned. The parent can send back a *STARS* certificate to be posted in the classroom.

- Contact parents at the first sign of a concern.

- When the program does not seem to be working for the student, meet with parents to re-plan for home and school support for reading. Tell parents: I am concerned about _____'s reading progress. Let's decide what else we can do, as I know _____can make faster progress.

➢ **Maintain relationships with parents through two-way communication. Provide information and obtain their feedback about how the reading support program is working.** Consider providing information on the progress of the individual child on a regular basis (e.g., 4-6 week assessments) and the average for the whole class. Incorporate parents' suggestions.

➢ **Maintain a check on your attitudes especially if parents' are not implementing the program.** Consider the following:
  - Ensure that you are non-blaming and nonjudgmental. *This is a problematic situation that needs the attention of the teacher, student, and parent to find a new way to get back on track. There are no problem individuals.*
  - Portray attitudes that are encouraging to parents. *"I know we can solve this together." I know we can find a reasonable way for Thomas or Tarnika to get extra reading outside of school."*
  - Portray willingness to change your home support for reading activities, but always provide a direct, clear, persistent focus on the importance of home support for reading or enhancing student's out of school time in literacy activities. Be relentless on this point! Problem solve if the parent cannot do these – who is the designated surrogate?

➢ **Strive for a standardized program (i.e., most parents carry out an activity), but also employ "extras" for unique situations.** Extras might include modifying the home activities, providing parents with specific resources, and finding a role for every parent whether – academic or motivational support for learning.

➢ **Be realistic.** Teachers can and should be willing to change their practices in realistic ways to foster parent engagement in reading at home. There will be children whose parents may be uninvolved or have difficulty following through despite repeated attempts on the teachers' part. In these situations, teachers have two main options: Discuss with others ways to reach uninvolved parents and continue to provide a consistent, persistent message about the importance of parental engagement in reading at home.

There is a common quandary for teachers. Some families believe they have little to contribute to their children's reading and learning. These quotes help to illustrate this issue:

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- "The difference between parents who participate and those who do not is that those who do have recognized that they are a critical part in their children's education." (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991)

- "Making education a priority in the home and the family-school relationship a priority for children's school success recognizes that how students spend their time in school and out-of-school is critical for their level of school performance. It also recognizes the significance of families and the contributions of schools to children's learning." (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001)

- "Much like partners in business, partners in education must work hard to clarify their mutual interests in the children they share." (Epstein & Connor, 1995)

It is important for teachers to convey a persistent message: namely, how students spend their time in and out-of-school makes a difference for how well the child performs at school. Keep interaction focused on a genuine interest in improving the child's reading/school success and experience. Find ways to link parents' efforts to their goals for their children's education. Make regular, ongoing contact with parents, providing friendly reminders. There are families who stay uninvolved, despite many attempts by teachers. Keep making the attempts, with a clear focus on the concern for the student's reading progress. Other ideas are found in Appendix H.

Study Group Activity # 14. Using the guidelines presented in the module, create a home support for reading program. Implement and evaluate the program. Consider areas in which change needs to be made to ensure that more families participate actively.

Summary. The broad actions to be taken to create essential connections between parent and teachers in terms of promoting children's reading success must be contextualized. The buy-in for some parents, especially those outside the social mainstream is more complex and challenging (Comer et al., 1996). However, if educators change their traditionally oriented practices with families to those that are characterized by inclusion and dialogue, disconnected families *and* educators will be able to form positive, realistic connections to socialize and support learners. Actions for connecting with uninvolved families are not necessarily qualitatively different. Rather, they may require more time, multiple efforts, and a variety of approaches. They may be more frequent and persistent, such as asking for help repeatedly over time, and not just once. According to Epstein (1995), a characteristic of successful family-school-community partnerships is incremental progress. "Progress is incremental, including more families each year in ways that benefit more students" (p. 710). Creating a norm of shared responsibility for children's reading will take several years.

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Annotated Bibliography

Canter, L., & Canter, M. (1991). *Parents on your side: A comprehensive parent involvement program for teachers.* Santa Monica, CA: Lee Cater & Associates.

This book is filled with practical suggestions and specific illustrations for working with parents as allies. It covers such topics as first day objectives, back-to-school night, positive communication, homework, documenting concerns, home-school contract, discipline, and problem solving conferences as well as teacher attitudes and roadblocks between home and school. A resource materials workbook (e.g., forms) is also available.

Christenson, S.L., & Sheridan, S.M. (2001). *Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning.* New York: Guildford Press.

This practical volume is designed to help school practitioners and educators build positive connections with families and enhance student learning. The book describes four critical process variables that underlie strong partnerships: approach, attitudes, atmosphere, and actions; and provides a useful self-assessment inventory to guide practitioners in evaluating these variables in their own programs and schools. In particular, key pathways by which professionals and parents can develop common goals for learning and behavior, a shared sense of accountability, better communication, and a willingness to listen and value different perspectives in the design of educational programs are emphasized.

Comer, J. P., Haynes, N. M., Joyner, E. T., & Ben-Avie, M. (1996). *Rallying the whole village: The Comer process for reforming education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

This inspiring, practical book describes the highly successful School Development Program (SDP) developed by Comer and initiated in the New Haven, Conn., school district in 1968. Since its initiation, the SDP has been implemented in more than 700 schools and has resulted in improved achievement of its students. The book describes three principles that guide the SDP: consensus, collaboration, and no-fault. The program involves three teams: the Parent Team, School Planning and Management Team, and Student and Staff Support Team, which carry out three operations: Comprehensive School Plan, Staff Development, and Assessment and Modification. The goal of SDP is described as child and adolescent growth along six developmental pathways: physical, psychological, language, ethical, cognitive, and social.

Epstein, J.L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

This comprehensive volume provides educators with a theoretically and research based framework for conceptualizing, planning, and implementing programs for school and family partnerships. The volume includes a review of the research on the implementation and effects of

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partnerships, outlines six types of involvement for creating partnerships, and provides examples of specific practices to use in elementary, middle, and high schools. It addresses how teachers and administrators can prepare themselves to create positive relationships and productive partnerships with families, and is designed as a main or supplemental text for use in college courses.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research, 67*(1), 3–42.

Based on psychological theory and research, this insightful review highlights three constructs proposed as central for understanding why parents become involved in their children's education. Issues related to how parents perceive and construct their roles as parents, parental self-efficacy, and involvement messages from the school offer implications for both researchers and practitioners interested in enhancing family involvement.

Liontos, L. B. (1992). *At-risk families and schools: Becoming partners* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EA 023 283). Eugene, OR: ERIC.

This 150-page manual is an excellent, readable synthesis of theory, research, and specific programs about home-school collaboration for at-risk populations. Topics include communication, home as an educative environment, school readiness, home learning, and decision making. Particular emphasis is placed on early intervention, dropout prevention, and supporting and strengthening families. Elements of successful programs and information on reaching families are detailed.

National P. T. A. (2000). *Building successful partnerships: A guide for developing parent and family involvement programs.* Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

The six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (Communicating, Parenting, Student Learning, Volunteering, School Decision Making and Advocacy, and Collaborating with the Community) provide the framework for this informative, useful book, of interest to anyone designing and evaluating parent involvement programs. Other resources include strategies for overcoming barriers and developing action teams, and reproducible position statements, surveys, forms, and worksheets helpful for developing family involvement programs.

U.S. Government Documents and Other Helpful Resources

- For a free hardcopy of these publications, while supplies last, contact ED Pubs at 1-877-4ED-PUBS or at www.ed.gov/about/ordering.jsp. For more information on *No Child Left Behind* agenda, call 1 800-USA-LEARN:
  - *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read.* US Dept. of Ed pub: EXR0007B
  - *Put reading first: Helping your child learn to read.* US Dept. of Ed pub EXR0006H
- *America Goes Back to School: Parents Activity Guide* (Obtain from the Institute of the Family Involvement Partnership for Learning, (800) USA-LEARN.)
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Appendices

Appendix A: Inventory for Creating Parent-Teacher Connections

Appendix B: Literature Summary for Interventions Ideas

Appendix C: Handout: Creating Conditions for Student Success

Appendix D: Examples of Academic and Motivational Support for Learning

Appendix E: "Nuts and Bolts" of Communication

Appendix F: Inviting Parent Input and Maintaining an Optimistic Message

Appendix G: Techniques for Blocking Blame

Appendix H: Ways to Involve Uninvolved Families

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Appendix A

Inventory for Creating Parent-Teacher Connections

The goals of creating constructive parent-teacher relationships are to enhance learning experiences, engage students as readers and learners, and foster positive learning outcomes. Family and school—out-of and in-school influences—provide different but complementary opportunities for children to learn. Ideally, parents and teachers interact as partners to achieve these goals.

The "four A's" provide a way to conceptualize the key elements or conditions that enhance productive parent-teacher relationships: approach, attitude, atmosphere, and actions. Various indicators for each of the four A's are listed. Each indicator can be considered an objective that contributes to the overall goal of creating constructive parent-teacher connections for children's reading and learning. This inventory was designed to provide a structure for teachers as they dialogue about ways to promote positive connections for children's reading and learning in their classrooms and school context. Respondents are asked to judge the degree to which each objective stated below has been accomplished in their classroom.

The following 5-point scale is useful for engaging in self-reflection about parent-teacher connections:
> 1: Not at all/never
> 2: In some situations/infrequently
> 3: Variable/sometimes but not usually
> 4: In most situations/usually
> 5. Completely/always

APPROACH – The framework for interaction with parents

To what extent are the following conditions present in my classroom?

1. Mutually shared goals across home and school for children's reading and learning.
>   1   2   3   4   5

2. Belief that parental involvement in reading and language development activities is paramount.
>   1   2   3   4   5

3. Belief that working together as partners will benefit the child's reading and learning, with mutually supported roles and actions to achieve this goal.
>   1   2   3   4   5

4. Recognition of the value of both in- and out-of-school learning opportunities for children's reading, learning and school progress.
>   1   2   3   4   5

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5. Recognition that the nature and quality of the parent-teacher relationship influences (positively or negatively) children's reading and school performance.

1   2   3   4   5

6. Expectation that families will be involved in home support for reading, and recognition that such involvement can mean different things to different families.

1   2   3   4   5

7. Expectation that as the classroom teacher, I will seek ways to invite parents to share in the educational process for their children, recognizing that this may "look different" to different families.

1   2   3   4   5

8. Presence of a policy statement that promotes the importance and expectation of parent-teacher connections for children's reading and learning success.

1   2   3   4   5

ATTITUDES – The values and perceptions held about parent-teacher relationships

To what extent are the following conditions present in my classroom?

1. Attempts to understand the needs, ideas, opinions, and perspectives of parents.

1   2   3   4   5

2. A nonblaming, no-fault problem-solving stance in interactions with parents.

1   2   3   4   5

3. Willingness to share perspectives and observations across home and school.

1   2   3   4   5

4. Perception of parent involvement as essential (i.e., bringing a critical element to my work that is otherwise unavailable) rather than simply desirable.

1   2   3   4   5

5. A positive attitude that focuses on teacher, parent, and child strengths, rather than only on problems or deficits.

1   2   3   4   5

6. Willingness to co-construct the whole picture about the child by discussing, exploring, and understanding different perspectives.

1   2   3   4   5

7. Willingness to listen to and respond to concerns across home and school—viewing different perspectives as a way to better understand the student's needs, and viewing parents' and teacher's concerns as a way to offer mutual support.

1   2   3   4   5

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8. Mutual respect between parent and teacher.
                1   2   3   4   5

9. Understanding that barriers for positive parent-teacher relationships (i.e., constraints of each system) exist for both parties.
                1   2   3   4   5

ATMOSPHERE – The climate for parent-teacher interactions

To what extent are the following conditions present in my classroom?

1. Recognition of the value, and active solicitation, of family input regarding important decisions about their child.
                1   2   3   4   5

2. Use of parent and teacher input to promote positive outcomes for students.
                1   2   3   4   5

3. A welcoming, respectful, inclusive, positive, supportive climate and atmosphere in the classroom for *all* children and families.
                1   2   3   4   5

4. A variety of communication strategies to reach all parents in a manner that is sensitive or responsive to family background (e.g., language, skills, knowledge level), easy to understand, and "jargon-free."
                1   2   3   4   5

5. A variety of communication strategies to share information and/or monitor children's performance.
                1   2   3   4   5

6. Parental and teacher trust in each other (including motives, objectives, and communications).
                1   2   3   4   5

7. Mechanisms for listening to and responding to concerns across home and school.
                1   2   3   4   5

8. Meaningful ways and flexible options for parents and students to be involved.
                1   2   3   4   5

9. Opportunities for parents and teachers to learn from one another (e.g., cross-cultural communication opportunities).
                1   2   3   4   5

ACTIONS – Strategies for building shared responsibility

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To what extent are the following conditions present in my classroom?

1. Information is provided to families about classroom policies and practices, parents' and students' rights vis-à-vis education, and ways to foster students' engagement with reading.

              1   2   3   4   5

2. Opportunities or mechanisms are provided for the parent and teacher to plan jointly and collaborate to resolve a shared concern or to improve reading and learning experiences for the student.

              1   2   3   4   5

3. A process exists for creating mutually supportive roles for parents and teachers.

              1   2   3   4   5

4. Supports and resources exist for creating and maintaining parent-teacher partnerships.

              1   2   3   4   5

5. Policies and practices support a coordinated, collaborative approach (i.e., shared responsibility) for enhancing students' reading progress.

              1   2   3   4   5

6. Parents and teachers (i.e., partners) routinely review the availability, accessibility, and flexibility of parent-teacher roles and responsibilities for fostering children's reading and school engagement.

              1   2   3   4   5

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Appendix B

Literature Summary for Interventions Ideas

1. Hannon, P. & Jackson, A. (1987). Educational home visiting and the teaching of reading. Educational Research, 29 (3), 182-191.

The authors pointed out that educational home visiting has been carried out for pre-school children, but rarely for school-age children (except in special problem cases). They designed a home-visiting program (duration of three years) to increase the involvement of parents in their child's reading. Participants were working class families of five- to eight-year old students. All parents were encouraged to listen to their child read regularly at home.

The home visitor was either the child's teacher or the project coordinator. There were three types of home visits: preliminary, consultative, and special visits. In the preliminary visit, the home visitor offered general advice about reading with children and talked with parents about their roles. The consultative visits began with general advice but then moved into a discussion about the child's reading. The emphasis was on reducing reading problems and making reading enjoyable. Special visits had a variety of purposes such as giving children who were on holiday new books or tracking down missing books.

Both parents and teachers reported positive views about the program. Parents liked being able to talk with the home visitor in their home. Some parents said that it helped to talk in privacy without the child nearby. There was also some indication that parents were able to talk a bit more openly at their homes. Fifty percent of parents reported that visiting once a term was just about right (in term of visiting frequency). Teachers reported that children's attitudes were more positive after the home visits and that they felt closer to the children whose home that they had visited. They also reported that the home visits helped to develop better relationships with parents. Overall, the home visits were a positive experience for both parents and teachers.

2. Justice, L. M. & Ezell, H. K. (2000). Enhancing children's print and word awareness through home-based parent intervention. American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 9, 257-269.

This study investigated the effectiveness of a home-based intervention for enhancing parents' use of print-referencing behaviors and for encouraging children's literacy development in the area of print and word awareness. Participants included parents and their four-year-old children.

Parents in the experimental group viewed a seven-minute training videotape titled "Adults reading to young children: Directing focus on written language." The video discussed and demonstrated five print-referencing behaviors that parents could use to promote their child's interactions with print. The behaviors consisted of three verbal references to print (i.e.,

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comments, questions, and requests about print) and two nonverbal references to print (i.e., pointing to print and tracking print while reading).

Pre-test to post-test comparisons indicated that parents improved in their use of references to print and their use of these behaviors enhanced their children's literacy development in print and word awareness.

3. Koskinen, P. S., Blum, I. H., Bisson, S. A., Phillips, S. M., Creamer, T. S., Baker, & T. K. (2000). Book access, shared reading, and audio models: The effects of supporting the literacy learning of linguistically diverse students in school and home. Journal of Education Psychology, 92 (1), 23-36.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of book-rich environments and home rereading (with and without an audio model) on reading motivation, comprehension, and fluency for native English speakers and for ESL first-grade students.

The independent variables were literary conditions and English-language proficiency. There were four intervention conditions: book-rich classroom environment (use of 154 new books and small-group reading of new books 3-4 times a week), book-rich classroom environment and daily rereading of books at home, book-rich classroom environment and daily rereading of books at home with an audio model, and unmodified reading instruction at school. In the three experimental conditions, the children were provided with books at their instructional reading level.

Results showed that there were benefits of the book-rich environment, with or without the home component; children's reading comprehension scores in all three conditions were significantly higher than the scores of the control group. There were also gains in the home component conditions (with and without audiotapes). Parents noted that children were more motivated to read and enjoyed it more. In the home component with audiotape condition, student reported using the audiotape as a means of support when they encountered unknown words. The ESL students who were the least proficient speaking and reading English reported practicing significantly more than both the more proficient ESL students using audiotapes or the other students who used books only at home. The use of audiotapes was beneficial for this group.

Rereading assists beginning readers develop fluency and enhances motivation (students feel successful and confident because they have mastered something). Rereading also has been shown to improve reading rate, comprehension, and accuracy. Repeated rereading is also effective with an audio model.

4. Leslie, L. & Allen, L. (1999). Factors that predict success in an early literacy intervention project. Reading Research Quarterly, 34 (4), 404-424.

These researchers designed an intervention for at-risk students in grades 1-4 who were either nonreaders or were one or more years below grade level. Children received small-group literacy

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instruction from a teacher for 10 weeks after school each semester until they reached grade level reading. Parents were involved by attending special literacy events.

Parents were invited to four events each semester. The first event was a presentation by a well-known author or storyteller. The second event was a meeting where university faculty talked about selecting books for their children to read and modeled what to do when their children encountered unfamiliar words. The third event was a conference where tutors met with parents to explain the program, model strategies, and report progress of the student. The last event was a ceremony where an award and a book were given to each child for participation; in addition, awards were given to children who read the most and to parents who demonstrated maximum participation. Also, parents were expected to read with their children at home. A parent involvement form was sent home with the child along with a book. The parent was to record on the form who read the book: parent, child, or parent and child together.

Children who started reading at first-grade level showed more improvements than those who started reading at lower or higher levels. Four factors were predictive of reading growth: number of rhymes taught, story grammar instruction, number of words the child read at home, and parental involvement in reading at home. There was some evidence that some of the effectiveness of this intervention was developmentally related.

5. Morrow, L. M. & Young, J. (1997). A family literacy program connecting school and home: effects on attitude, motivation, and literacy achievement. Journal of Educational Psychology, 89 (4), 736-742.

This study was examined the effects of a family literacy program on enhancing children's achievement and motivation to read and write. The program was designed so that the control group received a school-based program while the children in the family literacy condition received both a home and a school-based program. Participants were first-, second-, and third-grade students from an urban school where students are considered "at-risk."

Parents, teachers, and children were interviewed about what they believe should be included in a family program and what goals they hope would be achieved. Parents said that they valued achievement for their children and wanted to learn ways to help their child. They also wanted to work with teachers to help their child become an independent learner. Children wanted their parents help so they could perform better in school. Teachers believed that parents should be partners in their children's literacy development.

The family literacy program included these elements (Morrow & Young, 1997, pp. 737-8):
1. Parents read daily to and with the child often, listened to the child read, read together side by side, and talked about what was read.

2. Parents told stories about family experiences and from books and made up original stories, using techniques such as puppets and props for storytelling.

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3. Parents and children wrote in journals together in the two spiral notebooks provided. Parents and children could write stories and things they did each day, making shopping lists, draw pictures, copy writing from books, or write about how it felt to work together.

4. Parents helped children record "Very Own Words" in the file box provided containing blank 3" X 5" cards. Children selected the words from print from the home and community, from schoolwork and from stories. Parents were instructed to point out print around them - in and outside of the home (mail, road signs, store signs, directions, and medicine). Children and parents were to read the "Very Own Words," copy them, and use them when writing stories or writing in their journals.

5. The Highlights for Children magazine was given to each child by his or her classroom teacher to take home. Another copy of the same magazine remained in school to work with there. A loose-leaf notebook that included lessons for using the magazine was provided to parents and teachers. This was one of the literacy materials in common in the home and school. Lessons for using the Highlights were given to the teachers to use in school first so that the children would recognize the activities when doing them at home with their parents. Children could show parents with limited literacy ability what to do with Highlights because they had worked with them at school.

6. Children participated in literature center time at school set aside for them to read and write independent of the teacher in social settings with others. To accomplish this goal, as parents work and have young children at home, literacy center time was scheduled at different times during the school day throughout the year.

In addition, parents were asked to: find a special place for the materials that they received for this program so their child could locate them, to attend a monthly group meeting, and a monthly one-on-one with a mentor (a university student in education). Parents also received parent handbooks. One section was called "Things to Look for and have in Your Home." It suggested to parents that they keep items such as scissors, tape, pens, pencils, paper, newspaper, magazines, and children's book in their home for children.. Another section titled "Things to Do With Your Child at Home" discussed activities for families to do together in the home while a different section provided suggestions for "Things to Do With Your Child Outside the Home."

Both groups showed pre-test to post-test gains; however, in the family literacy condition children reported reading more often in their free time and reading more often with adults than the control group. The program overall was considered to be successful.

6. Primavera, J. (2000). Enhancing family competence through literacy activities. Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community, 20 (1-2), 85-101.

The goal of this study was to increase children's school readiness and emergent literacy skills by training parents on effective book sharing methods. Participants were 100 parents of low-income preschoolers enrolled in an urban Head Start.

Parents attended a series of family literacy workshops to help them share books more effectively with their children. The workshops were modeled after the "Parents as Partners in Reading" program (Edwards, 1990) and the goal was to help parents become more effective "first teachers" regardless of their own literacy abilities.   Lessons used modeling and role-playing techniques to educate parents. One activity showed parents how to maintain their child's attention while reading together (i.e., through the use of different parent-child seating arrangements or by changing their tone of voice while reading to their child).

In rating the effectiveness of the program, 97% of parents gave it the highest rating. Parents reported that parent-child book sharing time increased and it was more enjoyable and interesting. Children's interest in reading increased and also showed gains in their language skills. Parents' self-esteem and self-confidence improved, they gained a sense of efficacy, and they were more knowledgeable about normative literacy development.

7. Pumfrey, P. D. (1986). Paired reading: Promise and pitfalls. Educational Research, 28 (2), 89-94.

Much research has indicated that reading attainment is highly correlated with reading aloud. Thus, researchers have developed the "paired reading" technique to make the time that parent and child spends reading together more effective.

Pumfrey reviewed many studies that showed positive effects of the paired reading technique. However, he maintained that while paired reading was a successful technique, it was difficult to measure reading attainment improvements (which leads to weaknesses in experimental design). He called for more and better-designed studies to evaluate this strategy. For the meantime, he concludeed that any teacher or parent interested in improving children's literacy should be informed about paired reading and should consider the technique seriously.

8. Saracho, O. N. (1999). Families' involvement in their children's literacy development. Early Child Development and Care, 154, 121-126.

The researcher interviewed families of 100 first grade children to learn about their involvement in their child's literacy development. Results suggested that many family literacy activities and materials do not necessarily include books or formal reading instruction, but consisted of informal literacy experiences.

9.   Winter, M. & Rouse, J. (1990). Fostering intergenerational literacy: The Missouri parents as teachers program. The Reading Teacher, 382-386.

The Parents as Teachers program grew out of the understanding that educators cannot make a difference in children's literacy without acknowledging the importance of parental involvement and the home environment. The PAT program originally ran as a pilot project in 1981(Missouri

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was the first state to mandate all schools to provide parent education and services at the beginning of a child's birth). The project population was 350 urban, suburban, and rural families who were expecting their first child. By age 3, the children in the pilot program were significantly more advanced than the comparison group in language, social development, problem solving, and other cognitive abilities (regardless of SES and traditional risk factors).

An essential element of the PAT program is that it believes that parents are a child's first and most influential teachers and that the school's role is to assist families in educating their children. The program does not tell parents what they are doing wrong; rather it offers suggestions for improvement.

Concluding Generalizations

The theory that many parents are not interested in their children's education is a misconception. Many families want to help their children learn to read, but are unaware of ways to go about doing so. Some conclusions that can be drawn from these studies are:

- Interventions that provide families with ideas on how to interact with their children while reading seem to be the most effective. Showing parents how to read with their children by modeling the process for them instills teacher trust in the parents' abilities of being effective teachers of their children. It also reaffirms their importance as an educator of their children.

- Rereading seems to be another powerful technique that allows children to master a reading selection and to feel confident about their skills.

- It is also important that parents are acknowledged as a critical figure in their children's education and parental views are taken into consideration.

- Lastly, reading must be an enjoyable and pleasurable activity for both family and child, for this helps to ensure that the activity will be carried out after the intervention ends.

Source: Picklo, D. (2001). University of Minnesota School Psychology Program.

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Appendix C

Example for Study Group # 3: Creating Conditions for Student Success

What helps students learn? What helps students develop positive habits for learning? What helps students do their best in school?

Doctors routinely report that individuals should eat 5 cups of fruits and vegetables daily to reduce their risk of colon cancer. They also remind us that we should eat less fat to reduce our risk of coronary heart disease. Similarly, we know what helps increase the likelihood that students will perform their best in school. From a review of over 200 studies, we know that students perform most optimally when they experience six factors in school- - -from teachers- - - and outside of school- - -from parents.

What are the six factors?

These factors focus on the importance of engaging students with learning. We know student achievement is correlated with students' active involvement with learning; however, we also know students are influenced by the extent to which their teachers and parents provide conditions that encourage and support their learning. There is a role, albeit different, for parents and teachers. Teachers are responsible for the formal education and instruction, whereas parents are responsible for the informal education and instruction, such as valuing education, fostering learning at home, supporting homework completion, etc. Both kinds of education are essential to creating optimal learning conditions for students.

Standards and Expectations refers to the level of expected performance held by key adults for youth. Student success in school is facilitated when parents and teachers clearly state expectations for student performance, set specific goals and standards for desired behavior and performance, discuss expectations with youth, emphasize children's effort when completing tasks, and ensure youth understand the consequences for not meeting expectations. Academic achievement is positively correlated with realistic, high parent and teacher expectations for children's performance.

At Home...
- parents communicate that effort and a positive attitude in school are expected.
- parents support their child and encourage him/her to strive for good grades (e.g., have your child teach you one thing he/she learned in school each day).

In School...
- expectations are based on the level of student performance and are measurable and attainable (e.g., write specific behavioral objectives).
- the student understands that assignments are to be neat and turned in on time.

Within the Community...
- members of the community share common values.

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- the community sets high standards for public behavior.

Structure refers to the overall routine and monitoring provided by key adults for youth. Students' success in school is facilitated when families and schools provide a consistent pattern of events and age appropriate monitoring and supervision. Students perform better in school when they understand their schedule of daily activities, directions for schoolwork, rules for behavior, etc.

At Home...
- routine daily events such as eating dinner together, completing homework, and bed times are reinforced.
- the child is held accountable for completing his/her household tasks/chores.

In School...
- the student knows what to do when he/she has completed the assigned task (e.g., independent reading, spend time in the computer lab etc.).
- teachers remind students of behavioral expectations and standards prior to unique or novel activities (e.g., fields trips, assemblies, guest speakers etc.).

Within the Community...
- youth in the community are involved in interesting, challenging programs that allow and promote productive use of time.
- the community has a feeling of cohesiveness and a collective sense of well being and physical security.

Opportunity to Learn refers to the variety of learning options available to youth in the home, at school and within the community. Student success in school is facilitated when youth are provided with various tools for learning such as: reading materials, access to clubs and organizations, varied teaching strategies and time to practice/master new skills. Also, it is enhanced when the key adults in the youth's life communicate with each other.

At Home...
- the child is involved in extra-curricular activities (e.g., youth groups, sports or music lessons).
- parents spend time with the child discussing current events.

In School...
- the student is provided with prompts and cues to help him/her answer a question.
- when a student is able to complete tasks independently during practice, his/her success is between 90-100%.

Within the Community...
- youth participate in community services and programs.
- youth have opportunities to have conversations and interactions with adults in the community other than their parents.

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Support refers to the guidance provided by, the communication between, and the interest shown by adults to facilitate student progress in school. This progress is facilitated when adults give frequent verbal support and praise; provide the youth with regular, explicit feedback; talk directly to youth about schoolwork and activities; and teach problem solving and negotiation skills. It is what adults do on an on-going basis to help youth learn and achieve.

At Home...
- parents are involved in the child's school by participating in school events and/or spending time working with the child on school-related topics (e.g., join the PTA, attend a basketball game).
- parents recognize the child's effort and progress (e.g., give a high five for a 10 point improvement on a math test).

In School...
- teachers contact parents at first sign of a problem.
- the student is provided specific, immediate, and frequent feedback about his/her behavior and progress (e.g., recognize improvements, not just perfection).

Within the Community...
- organizations within the community collaborate, rather than compete, for the benefit of youth.
- youth receive guidance and recognition from a variety of community organizations (e.g., churches, families, youth organizations).

Climate/Relationships refers to the amount of warmth and friendliness; praise and recognition; and the degree to which the adult-youth relationship is positive and respectful. These relationships are facilitated by cooperative, accepting environments; a non-blaming relationship between home and school; and encouragement, praise and involvement in the youth's life from key adults. The degree of continuity of these relationships and interactions, between adults at home and at school, will greatly influence the degree of academic achievement of the youth. Climate/Relationships is how adults in the home, in the school and in the community help youth to be learners.

At Home...
- the parent-child relationship is generally positive and not strained (e.g., hugs, smiles, "I am proud of you").
- parents talk to and listen to the child to better understand his/her opinions and needs (e.g., listen to the child's questions and concerns, ask for his/her opinion or ideas).

In School...
- the classroom is warm and friendly and the student obviously feels comfortable and accepted in the environment (e.g., use praise when the students enter or leave the classroom, smile, the teacher greets the students).
- the teachers listens to students opinions and ideas (e.g., demonstrate interest by nodding, eye contact, open arms etc.).

Within the Community...
- the community provides an environment that recognizes individual and group accomplishments.
- youth in the community have access to competent and caring adults to provide them with additional counsel and guidance during crisis.

Modeling refers to how adults demonstrate desired behaviors and commitment/value toward learning and working hard in their daily lives. Student success at school is enhanced when teachers establish an academically demanding classroom that has clearly defined objectives, explicit instructions and an orderly and efficient environment, and when parent(s) or other adults read, ask questions, discuss the importance/value of education, set long term goals, and are able to intervene and be involved with youth's school. Modeling appears to be influenced by both attitudes and behaviors of parents and teachers.

At Home...
- parents model the importance and value of education by using reading and math in the home (e.g.., balance a checkbook, read a book).
- parents admit when they are wrong and listen to suggestions from the child.

In School...
- the teacher performs the desired classroom behavior (e.g.., talking softly vs.. talking loudly).
- the teacher models classroom guidelines and rules (e.g.., listens to students, doesn't chew gum, drink pop etc.).

Within the Community...
- the community has adult mentoring programs to teach appropriate behaviors and decision making skills to youth involved in high risk behaviors.
- youth can turn to adults in the community, other than parents, for advice and support.

What are the Benefits for Parents and Teachers?

- Parents and teachers can communicate about ways to enhance student learning by discussing the six factors and sharing ideas with each other.
- The factors are important for all students, regardless of income level, ethnicity, or learning skill level.
- The factors emphasize the importance of a consistent message across home and school environments about the value of school and the importance of learning.
- Students who were identified as consistent learners reported in focus groups many more examples of these six factors vis-à-vis their learning experiences on a more consistent basis and overtime (i.e., across grade levels) than did students who were identified as inconsistent learners.

Handout abstracted from: Christenson & Peterson (1998).

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Appendix D

Examples of Parental Academic and Motivational Support for Learning

Examples of Academic Support for Learning

- I set realistic expectations for my child's school performance.
- There are opportunities (by phone, by note, in person) for my child's teachers and me to communicate about my child.
- I think of myself as a "teacher" of my child.
- I read with my child.
- I encourage my child to read (e.g., words on signs, books) throughout the day.
- My child knows I'll call school when I have a problem or concern.
- My child knows that attendance and participation in school is important.
- My child understands my expectations for his or her schoolwork.
- My child has a regular time for and place to do homework.
- My child receives assistance in getting organized (e.g., sequencing/ prioritizing tasks to be completed).
- I discuss the grade/teacher feedback on assignments with my child.
- I review assignments before they are turned in. I help my child prepare for tests and quizzes.
- I review what my child is reading and/or proofread what my child is writing.
- My child's homework is checked for accuracy and completion.
- I communicate with school personnel (by phone, by note, in person).
- I contact the school when there is a concern.
- I contact my child's school for positive reasons.
- I participate in school activities and attend school functions.
- I talk about my goals for my child's performance in school with my child.
- My child and I talk about schoolwork and school activities.
- I speak positively about my child's school, teacher, and assignments.
- Someone is available to help my child with schoolwork and to learn at home.
- Learning tools are available in my home for my child's use (i.e., books from home or the library, paper, pencils, crayons, computer).
- Someone at home helps organize my child's assignments.
- My child's schoolwork is viewed on a weekly basis.
- My child and I talk about schoolwork in our home.
- My child's language errors are corrected.
- When my child is having trouble with an assignment, assistance is available.
- I stay informed about my child's school progress.

Examples of Motivational Support for Learning

- My child understands why school is important.

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- My child knows I will listen to his/her thoughts or problems.
- There are regular, set times for mealtimes, bedtimes, etc. in our house.
- The amount and kind of TV my child watches is mentored in our home.
- My child is praised for effort in learning, not just the final product.
- My child and I spend some relaxing time together on a regular basis.
- I use reading and math skills at home.
- I involve my child in learning activities at home (e.g., cooking, drawing, gardening, fixing things).
- My child and I have conversations about daily events at school, in our neighborhood, or the world.
- My child sees family members set personal goals and work toward achieving them.
- I admit when I am wrong and listen to suggestions from my child.
- My child is encouraged to try new things.
- Opportunities are created for my child to become involved in other interests (e.g., sports, music, dance, art)
- I talk about my child's strengths with my child.
- My child's out of school activities are mentored and supervised.
- My child and I make joint decisions about my child's use of time.
- I discuss books, stories, and TV programs with my child.
- I listen to my child and try to understand his/her point of view.
- My relationship with my child is generally positive and not strained.
- When my child makes a mistake, we discuss how to avoid it in the future–what should be done next time.
- My child sees adults and siblings learning new things.
- I discuss my values with my child and talk about the values I would like my child to have.
- I share lessons I have learned in life with my child and how education has helped me.
- My child is encouraged to have an "I can do it" attitude.
- My child is encouraged to work hard in school, to put forth a lot of effort, and to try again.
- My child's progress and improvement are recognized. If my child's school performance (e.g., grades) are poor, I'm inclined to express negative emotion, ignore the situation, or punish the child.
- When my child has a problem or concern with school, we discuss it.

(Note: It is unclear whether these are mutually exclusive types of support).

Appendix E

"Nuts and Bolts" of Communication with Parents/Families

Attitudes:

- **Express confidence**: Consistent with solution-oriented approaches to consultation and conferencing. Provide an optimistic message to parents so they can be encouraging of children's learning. Provide an atmosphere of respect for children and parents.

- **Request for parental assistance**: Consistent with two-way communication. Understand that children develop in multiple contexts (ecological orientation). Create an opportunity for dialogue and empowering parents. Reflects that schools can't solve many concerns alone.

- **Encourage a role for parents**: Underscores the importance of working together as well as input from both systems. Emphasis is on giving a coordinated message to student and the student's awareness that parent and teacher are communicating (i.e., sharing information and resources to solve the concern).

- **Engage in perspective taking**: Listen for parents' needs. Use this golden rule as a guideline: *Treat parents as you would like to be treated.* For example:
    - If I had a child in school, what specific information would I want to hear from the teacher at the beginning of the year?
    - How and when would I want to be approached about a problem?
    - How would I want to be spoken to? Listened to?
    - Would I like to hear from the teacher when my child is doing well or only when there is a problem?

Behaviors:

- **Be clear about teacher expectations**. Reflected in first day objectives, such as discipline and homework policies.

- **Be clear about and be sure school expectations reach all parents**. Back to school night information must reach nonattendees.

- **Listen for parent roadblocks and react with sensitivity and understanding**.

- **Use statements that express concern for the student and state the problem**. These are more positive and inviting than the ones that do not. Which of these would you rather hear if you were a parent? Mrs. Smith I'm calling because:

- I'm not at all pleased with Ted's progress.
- Linda's behavior in class is getting worse and worse.
OR
- I'm concerned about how little work Jess is doing.
- I'm concerned about how Brian gets along with the other students.

- **Develop positive communication with parents.**
  - Positive phone calls: Describe student's positive behavior. Describe how you feel about the behavior. Ask the parent to share the content of the conversation with the student.
  - Send a before school greeting or introductory letter.
  - Open verbal communication with parents of potential problem students.
  - Communicate at the first sign of a problem (phone call) and set up a parent problem-solving conference.
  - Schedule time for positive communication: 360 phone calls in 36 weeks (teacher makes 10 per week; if 30 elementary school students, each family receives12 per school year -use good news postcards if no phones).
  - Other strategies: Notes, students keep a "school-to-home" journal; send student work home in a "Special Delivery to Parents" envelope; weekly classroom newsletters.
  - End the year on a positive note. Send end of year note to students; make open house a parent thank you event (Could students plan and feature what they have learned and their goals for next year?). Call parents with whom you have worked to solve problems.

Always…

- Develop a regular and reliable communication process. Communication needs to begin where families are. It should center on their interests, needs, and capabilities, not where you want them to be. It should be:
  - Timely.
  - Provide both a personal and general message.
  - Emphasize the positive but address concerns clearly and directly.
  - Give families information they need.
  - Be clear, concise, and free of jargon.
  - Documented on a regular basis.

- Promote two-way exchanges of information. Consider whether you are communicating at mutually convenient times. To increase the potential for two-way communication:
  - Provide your telephone number on all communications.
  - Tell families how they can get in touch with you.
  - Practice active listening – during face-to-face and phone communications reiterate what you think the person is saying. Show that you are listening and understanding. Seek parent input and

encourage them to share in the problem-solving process. Address parents' concerns.

- When setting up an intervention, ask the parent to join a partnership agreement with you. Each of you signs and commits to carrying our specific responsibilities for supporting the student's learning.

- Employ a variety of communication strategies.
  - Ask families about the form of communication they prefer: written notes, phone calls, visits.
  - Plan communication and interventions to match family needs.
  - Use calendars, letters, and phone calls to help parents be aware of activities going on at school and activities that reinforce reading at home.

- Employ a variety of strategies to enhance individual and personal communications.
  - The most powerful and meaningful communication strategies take place face-to-face or over the phone. Don't rely solely on written communication.
  - Emphasize what the parent can do to achieve his/her goal for the child. Affirm the importance of the parent to the child's engagement with reading and learning.
  - Provide parents with options. Invite the parent's participation; explain the importance of the parent's participation; don't mandate how the parent will be involved. Let the parent select.
  - Remember to thank parents for their involvement.

- **Remember the Value of Personal Communication.** Personal contact (home visits, phone calls, personal notes) has been found to be most effective in reaching uninvolved families. Additionally, it is important to emphasize interest in the student and provide an optimistic message to parents.

  Reasons why personal communication may be more effective include:
  - Parents may not be able to read.
  - Parents are swamped with written communication.
  - Materials sent home from school with students doesn't always make it home.
  - Personal communication is friendlier, more effective, and less formal.

Source: Canter & Canter (1991); Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr (2001).

Appendix F

Inviting Parent Input and Maintaining an Optimistic Message

Initial Phone Call about a Concern:

It is important to call parents when concerned – at the first sign of a concern. Remember: for parents to be involved they must be informed and included. Canter and Canter(19910 have developed a structure that illustrates this point.

Begin with a statement of concern:	"I am concerned about how little reading Sophia is doing."
Describe the specific behavior that necessitated the call.	"The reason I am concerned is that Sophia has refused to complete any reading work in class for two days."
Describe the steps you have taken to solve the concern.	"I have met with Sophia, checked to be sure she can do the work, and paired her with a reading buddy." I still have very little work completed.
Get parental input.	"Is there anything you can tell me that might help us solve this concern?
Present your plan to the parent.	"Based on what I know, I will plan to read with her everyday, continue some paired reading, and begin a mystery motivator program with her."
Express confidence in our ability to solve the concern.	"I know if we work together we will be able to get Sophia back on track. I have seen this happen to other students. It will help if you ask her about what she read in school today, about what happened to Pip, or what I said about her reading."
Inform parents about follow-up contact from you.	"I will call you in three days or the end of the week to let you know how things are going."

Calling Parents of Potential Problem Students

The purpose of making this call is to open up verbal communication with parents. Therefore, three points are important when making this type of call. Be sure you begin with a statement of concern, get parental input on last year, and get parental input for what will be needed to make this year more successful.

Begin with a statement of concern.	"Mrs. Jones, this is Mrs. Williams. I'm going to be Jill's second grade teacher. I wanted to speak with you before the school year began because I want this to be a very successful school year for Jill.
Get parental input concerning the difficulties last year.	"I would like to know your view of how school went for Jill in first grade."
Get parental input for what will be needed to make this year more successful.	"I'd like to know what you think we need to do to insure Jill has a good productive year in second grade. What would help to make this a great year?"
Explain that parent support is critical.	"I believe that you can help me make this a really good year for Jill. I will be in touch with you throughout the year because, if we work together, Jill will make greater progress and enjoy school more. I am happy that Jill is in my class and I look forward to talking to you again."
Express your confidence.	"I know if we work on this together, Jill make great in reading or_____(from parent concern)."

Source: Canter & Canter (1991), pp. 38-40; 128-133.

Appendix G

Techniques for Blocking Blame

Direct Blocking: Signaling that the purpose of the interaction is not to blame but to solve a problem. Example:
- Student: *Johnny always starts the fights–it's not my fault.*
- Teacher: *We're not here to find out who's to blame but to figure out how you and Johnny can get your work done instead of fighting.*

Reframing: Providing an alternate point of view about a set of facts which gives the facts a more positive, productive meaning. Example:
- Teacher: *These parents drive me nuts–all they're concerned about is whether their child is going to get into the top class. It starts in pre-kindergarten.*
- Teacher: *It sounds as if they're trying to be an advocate for their child's education and get them started off on the right track.*

Probing: Eliciting additional information to clarify the context leading to the blaming. Example:
- Student: *The teacher always picks on me.*
- Teacher: *I certainly don't intend to pick on you, David. What do you see me doing that makes you think I'm picking on you? Give me some examples.*

Refocusing: A statement that redirects the discussion from a non-productive or nonessential area to an area relevant to helping the student. Example:
- Parent: *Jose did great last year with Ms. Johnson. We think that Ms. Williams is just not as good a teacher.*
- Guidance Counselor: *I can see that you're very concerned that Jose has a good year this year, too.*

Illustrating: Giving concrete examples of areas of concern. *Example:*
- Parent: *He doesn't act that way at home. You just don't know how to deal with him.*
- Teacher: *What I've observed is that Johnny acts that way when he is with his friends. They enjoy talking with each other so much that they don't seem to be able to stop when it's time to get down to work.*

Validating: Recognizing the validity of another's perception or efforts. Example:
- Parent: *I know Jane needs me to spend more time with her–maybe I should quit going to school.*
- Principal: *I can understand your concern about spending time with Jane, but your going to school is also a positive role model for her. Let's see if there are other ways you could be helpful to her.*

Agreeing: Confirming someone's perception of a situation. *Example:*
- Teacher: *It really drives me nuts when people come in and think they can just take over the classroom.*
- Parent: *It would drive me nuts, too, if I thought someone was trying to*

take over something that I was responsible for.

Appendix H

Ways to Involve Uninvolved Families

Drawn from many resources, the following have been suggested to and/or used by school personnel to involve families:

Do you see parents/families as a resource? According to Edwards (1992), power means resources parents have and need to recognize, and our goal is to help parents maintain a sense of power, dignity, and authority in rearing their children. Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community; it involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over resources. Critical elements include inclusion and a sense of power in decision making.

Are roles and responsibilities negotiated?
- Explain the importance of family influences for children's learning
- Expect parents to be involved
- Clarify how parents can help (e.g., options)
- Encourage parents to be assertive; do not mandate how parents should help; let parents select

Have you reduced home-school barriers? According to Chavkin (1993), some ways to reduce barriers include: (a) have contact with parents before children /adolescents begin school; (b) have contact with parents early in the school year; (c) establish ongoing communication systems that include good news as well as sharing of concerns with a way to dialogue and share resources to address concerns; (d) use two-way communication formats: telephone, home visits, assignment/communication notebook, community liaisons; and (e) focus on the knowledge and interests of individual families (e.g., explain the importance of their involvement and ask them how they want to contribute to the school/classroom and their child's learning).

Have you created a spirit of cooperation with the purpose of meeting children's needs? Cited by Edwards (1992, p. 224; from Hobson, 1979, pp. 44-45), five essentials of parent involvement for school personnel that should be attended to for all families, but particularly ethnically and culturally diverse families are: (a) explore with families what they want schools to accomplish, (b) devise opportunities for involvement that parents see as practical and meaningful, (c) reach out to parents with warmth and sensitivity (over and over), (d) develop an ongoing training program in which parents and staff are both teachers and learners, and (e) acknowledge that sharing power with parents is not abdication of one's professional leadership role. Rather it provides an opportunity to understand the interests and goals of parents, and to learn ways to achieve them.

Have you considered these strategies?

- Multiple efforts, eliminating stereotypes, and changing school practices
- Use of welcoming strategies (e.g., personal invitations in native language, translators)
- Planned for logistical barriers (e.g., daycare, transportation)
- Invite parent assistance/input for addressing school-based concern; keep focus of interaction solution-oriented (i.e., what can we do to foster child's progress?)
- Make events fun (e.g., raffles, contests) and meet a family need (e.g., meals)
- Use community outreach (e.g., meet in neutral sites, home visits)
- Identify a powerful parent who will spread good messages about the school
- Identify why parents are not involved
- Examine procedures for recruiting
- Develop meaningful roles for families (e.g., build on home experiences in classrooms, parent expertise, such as co-leader for a workshop)
- Explaining to parents that if they choose not to be involved, the teachers will continue to work hard to teach their children. However, the children may make less progress because they are not practicing outside of school. They have less opportunity to learn.

Have school communication practices been examined?

- Is communication presented as a two-way, reciprocal, shared responsibility?
- Are avenues clearly open for families to initiate contact if they have an idea, question, or concern (without being perceived as a problem parent)?
- Under what circumstances do individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas?
- Do our interactions with parents currently elicit and openly value their input (i.e., use their input)?
- How often, and under what circumstances, do interactions occur between educators and families that foster the development of a positive, working relationship? When are we unsuccessful? What factors characterize our positive and negative contacts?

Parent-Teacher Partnerships: Creating Essential Connections for Children's Reading and Learning By Sandy Christenson, University of Minnesota Purpose The content of this module focuses on parent-teacher relationships and home-school strategies to enhance students' reading success. The module is designed to provide teachers with knowledge about characteristics of effective partnerships and efficient, effective strategies to enhance home support for reading. Teachers are in daily contact with students, the first line of communication with parents, and considered by parents as the most important