

Preface

Teachers often find themselves using their personal incomes to purchase needed classroom materials for their students, or inundated with tasks that could be accomplished by school volunteers. Parents are often less than satisfied with school equipment and materials, or eager to find ways to support their children's non-academic interests. Principals struggle to find ways to fund school events, or improve school-based professional development; and far too many students suffer from a lack of extended learning opportunities. Most K-12 educators can add to these examples, and attest to the frustration and constraints in teaching and learning created by a lack of resources.

Resources, then, both human and material, are at the center of educational excellence. Community involvement is one way to generate resources that are essential for effective schooling. When such resources are appropriately channeled, they can support innovative educational programs that meet the learning needs of increasingly diverse student populations, and promote equity in the educational opportunities available to all students.

Here, community involvement is defined as connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged to directly or indirectly promote students' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development¹. Community within this definition of school-community partnerships

¹ I also use the terms school-community partnerships, and school-community collaboration to account for such connections. For the purposes of this book, I use these

is not constrained by the geographic boundaries of neighborhoods, but refers more to the "interactions that can occur within or transcend local boundaries" (Nettles, 1991, p. 380)². While parent involvement can be included within the broader definition of community involvement, it is important to note that parent involvement is not a central focus of this book.

As described in Chapter 1, however, community involvement activities can be developed to assist families in supporting their children's learning and school engagement. Furthermore, parental support can help schools to identify, attract, and maintain community connections. Schools are, thus, encouraged to think of community involvement and parent involvement as two sides of the same coin in their school improvement efforts, and to explore the resources that currently exist to help schools develop and improve their outreach to parents³.

This book is a result of five years of research and teaching in the area of school-community partnerships⁴. The research included surveys of hundreds of school leaders, and case studies of elementary, middle, and high schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas in the U.S. At the time the studies were conducted, participating schools were members of the National Network of

terms interchangeably, and not to denote differences in the intensity or complexity of the connections.

² For an extended discussion, see Nettles, S.M. (1991). Community involvement and disadvantaged students: A review. *Review of Educational Research*, 61(3), 379-406.

³ For example, see Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Salinas, K., Simon, B., VanVoorhis, F., & Jansorn, N. (2002). *School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, 2nd Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

⁴ The research on which this book is based was supported by grants from several funding sources including the Spencer Foundation, The Dewitt-Wallace Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and Institute of Education Sciences. The opinions expressed are the author's and do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the funding agencies.

Partnership Schools (NNPS)⁵. NNPS was begun in 1996 to provide research-based support, guidance, and tools to schools, districts, and states seeking to achieve or maintain high levels of family and community engagement. The educators that have been involved in NNPS activities have been essential in generating new knowledge on the processes and outcomes of school, family, and community partnerships. I am indebted to them and my colleagues at NNPS for their hard work and cooperation over the years. Although I do not include a separate methods section in the book, when relevant, I refer to the studies on which individual chapters are based.

The book is written to serve as a resource for educational leaders who seek to establish school-community partnerships to achieve goals for their schools, and the students, families, and communities they serve. It is organized in eight chapters that, when taken together, offer a broad and practical overview of theory research and practice in the field.

Chapter 1 provides background information on community partnerships. It describes why such partnerships are important; how they can be organized to focus on students, families, schools, and communities; and a variety of community partners with whom schools can collaborate. It also details several obstacles schools face in developing and maintaining effective community partnerships, and strategies to address these obstacles.

Chapter 2 provides in depth information on five prevalent kinds of school-community partnerships. The partnerships are defined by the primary community

⁵ For more information on NNPS, visit the organization's website at www.partnershipschools.org.

partners involved – (1) businesses, (2) universities, (3) organizations that provide internships for youth, (4) service agencies and professionals, and (5) faith-based organizations. I review the conceptual and empirical literature that has been generated on each type of partnership. The review highlights key factors that influence school-community collaboration with these and other partners.

Chapter 3 presents a model that outlines essential components for the successful implementation of school-community partnerships. These components are (1) a high-functioning school, (2) a student-centered environment, (3) an effective partnership team, (4) principal leadership, and (5) external support. When present, these components help schools to attract and maintain a variety of desirable community partners to achieve specified goals, and overcome the common obstacles to effective partnership program development discussed in Chapter 1. Drawing from the efforts of one teacher-leader, Chapter 4 discusses how educators, through incremental, focused steps, can build their schools' capacity for successful community partnerships.

Chapters 5 and 6 include case studies that exemplify how the components described in Chapter 3 work in practice. Community partnerships at an urban elementary and rural high school, respectively, are described. These cases show how K-12 schools with different needs, goals, and student populations can develop community linkages that support school improvement and enhance students' learning.

Chapter 7 offers several examples of school-community partnership activities being conducted in schools throughout the United States. These

examples are taken from activities published in NNPS' Annual Collection of Promising Partnership Practices. Selected activities further illustrate the wide variety of partnership activities that can help schools achieve important goals for students' success.

Finally, Chapter 8 provides materials that educators can use to conduct professional development workshops on school, family, and community partnerships. A sample agenda is provided, along with small group and whole group exercises, and materials that can be used as overheads, handouts, or adapted for power point presentations.

The concluding section describes additional resources that will be helpful to readers who would like to further explore key aspects of school, family, and community partnerships. It is followed by an Appendix, which includes exercises to help teams that are just beginning the partnership process, or interested in improving the quality of their current partnerships. The Appendix also includes sample letters that readers can use to communicate annually with community partners.

The current reform era of high stakes testing and accountability, alongside shrinking educational budgets, demand that schools seek bold and innovative ways to build strong learning environments for all students. Goal-oriented school-community partnerships are one way to do so. Educators can and should be in the forefront of creating opportunities for such partnerships. The resources generated can help to produce the kinds of schools that all children and youth deserve.