



the

# evaluation exchange

A PERIODICAL ON EMERGING STRATEGIES IN EVALUATION

HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT ■ HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ■ VOLUME XIV NUMBERS 1&2 ■ SPRING 2008

## from the director's desk



Heather Weiss

Our understanding of learning—what it is, where it takes place, and who enables it—is changing and so too are our strategies for promoting it. In 2005, Harvard Family Research Project introduced the concept of complementary learning—the idea that integrating school and nonschool supports in an aligned and systemic way can better ensure learning and positive development for all children and youth.

In this issue, we spotlight one of the central components of complementary learning: family involvement. Our Winter 2005 issue demonstrated how evaluations of new family involvement programs and interventions were building a knowledge base for the field. Today, we and other field leaders see the need and opportunity to move beyond individual programs to continuous and systemic family involvement efforts.

Building these investments in policy and practice requires reframing family involvement within a complementary learning framework. As our Theory & Practice article outlines—and articles throughout the issue illustrate—investments in family involvement are important across ages and settings and through the coconstructed efforts and shared responsibilities of many stakeholders.

In our Questions & Answers article and in his recent book (reviewed on page 19), Rudy Crew, Superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, highlights the importance of this shared responsibility. He talks about the role of administrators and teachers in helping parents become “Demand Parents” who understand both their rights and responsibilities when it comes to engaging with and expecting support from schools.

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With reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act on the horizon and a presidential election underway, now is the time to ensure that family involvement has a voice in policy and in the national conversation about education reform. This issue is designed to spark discussion about how to elevate our collective and research-supported voice at all levels.

In our Ask the Expert features, leaders in policy, practice, and research reflect on the past, present, and future of family involvement and explore opportunities for progress. Other articles highlight initiatives, evaluations, and strategies with the potential to build knowledge and be implemented at scale. Promising Practices features innovative initiatives from local and district to state and national levels, while Evaluations to Watch includes a special feature on the evaluation strategy of the national Parental Information and Resource Centers.

This issue reinforces our longstanding emphasis on evaluation for learning and continuous improvement. To move forward in policy and practice, there is a clear need for greater investments in evaluation to understand what works best, for whom, and why. We as a field must address a set of key questions: Where and how should we increase our evaluation investments? How do we evaluate systemic family involvement efforts? How will we share this emerging knowledge? We invite you to join us in addressing these questions and furthering the national conversation about the critical role of families in ensuring success for all children and youth.

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.  
Founder & Director  
Harvard Family Research Project

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## Founder & Director

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.

## Managing Editor

Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.

## Contributing Editor

Abby Weiss

## HFRP Contributors

Margaret Caspe, Ph.D.  
Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.  
Helen Westmoreland  
Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.

## Publications and Communications Manager

Marcella Franck

## Publications Editor

Carrie-Anne DeDeo

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Fellows of Harvard College

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# > theory & practice

## Thinking Big: A New Framework for Family Involvement Policy, Practice, and Research

*Suzanne Bouffard and Heather Weiss reframe family involvement as part of a broader complementary learning approach to promoting children's success in education and in life.*

Now is a moment of opportunity for family involvement. Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act is on the horizon, and family involvement is part of at least three recently proposed pieces of federal legislation (see page 17). Public figures like Bill Cosby are talking—and sometimes sparking controversy—about the importance of parents in learning.<sup>1</sup> National media stories demonstrate that public attention to the issue is growing. In response to a recent *New York Times* story about required homework for parents, 348 readers posted comments online.<sup>2</sup> The upcoming year represents what researcher John Kingdon calls “a policy window”—a moment in time when three factors converge: “A problem is recognized, a solution is available, and the political climate is right for change.”<sup>3</sup>

Utilizing this policy window will require moving beyond business as usual. Historically, policymakers' and schools' investments in family involvement have been limited and inconsistent, due to shifting political ideologies, issues of control and accountability, and the challenging nature of building and sustaining meaningful family-school relationships.<sup>4</sup> As several field leaders discuss in this issue, traditional definitions of family involvement (e.g., volunteering, chaperoning, parent-teacher conferences) persist, despite advances in research and practice that demonstrate that family involvement is broader and is most authentic and effective when it is intentionally “linked to learning.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, traditional challenges to implementing meaningful policies and practices persist, despite the concerted efforts of many individuals and organizations.

We at HFRP see that it is time to reframe the concept of family involvement. To build the field and capitalize on the current policy window, we need to think big—that is, we need to consider the “big picture” of family involvement and its potentially bright future. Doing so requires a deeper understanding of what effective family involvement is, how to foster it, and how to assess it. It also requires a commitment to including those individuals and institutions who have worked in other silos or who have historically been excluded from the conversation about family involvement.

### Broadening the Concept of Family Involvement

Thanks to decades of high-quality research, there remains little doubt that families play a crucial role in their children's school success. From the moment of their children's birth—and even before—parents' behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes affect children's cognitive development and behavior and even the establishment of achievement gaps.<sup>6</sup> In fact, research shows that, when it comes to children's outcomes, parents' behaviors are more important than other widely publicized factors, such as daycare arrangements.<sup>7</sup>

1. Suarez, R. [Correspondent]. (2004, July 15). *The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer*. [Television broadcast.] New York and Washington, DC: Public Broadcasting Service. Transcript available at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec04/cosby\\_7-15.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec04/cosby_7-15.html)

2. Spreading homework out so even parents have some. (2008, October 4). *New York Times*, p. B1. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/04/education/04homework.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/04/education/04homework.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)

3. Kingdon, J. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 93.

4. To read in greater detail about these factors, see the Ask the Expert articles on pages 6 and 18 of this issue.

5. Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York: The New Press.

6. For a review of the literature on family involvement, see Harvard Family Research Project's *Family Involvement Makes a Difference* series, featured in the sidebar on page 3.

7. Belsky, J., Vandell, D. L., Burchinal, M., Clarke-Stewart, K. A., McCartney, K., & Owen, M. T., the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2007). Are there long-term effects of early child care? *Child Development*, 78(2), 681-701.

This research, along with field experience, has illuminated the benefits of family involvement and also how and why family involvement matters. Our own review of the evidence reveals three essential components for a framework of effective family involvement policies and practices:

- Family involvement occurs in all the contexts where children and youth live and learn and should be part of a broader complementary learning approach.
- Family involvement matters from birth through adolescence but changes as children mature.
- Family involvement must be coconstructed and characterized by mutual responsibility among families, schools, and other institutions and stakeholders.

### Family Involvement Across Contexts

Research is beginning to document what years of field experience show: Families are involved not just in schools and homes, but in a variety of settings. From the everyday “teachable moment” to formal educational institutions, families can encourage learning everywhere—in museums, on playgrounds, and in grocery stores, to name just a few settings. Broadening the concept of family involvement to include all of these settings provides more opportunities for families to support learning, reduces or compensates for barriers to traditional forms of involvement, and promotes continuity of involvement.

Families can and should be a centerpiece of what we call *complementary learning*—a systemic approach that intentionally integrates school and nonschool supports to promote educational and life success. Complementary learning builds on a long history of theory and research about the many contextual influences on children’s development and on the understanding that neither schools, nor families, nor communities alone can ensure educational achievement.

To understand the role of families in complementary learning, it is instructive to look at the example of out-of-school time (OST). Families play many important roles in their children’s participation in OST experiences, including after school and summer programs.<sup>8</sup> Children are more likely to participate in OST

8. For more details and individual citations on the role of families in OST, see both the *Focus on Families!* guide featured in this article and Bouffard, S., Little, P. M. D.,

### Family Involvement Makes a Difference

Harvard Family Research Project’s series, *Family Involvement Makes a Difference*, provides a thorough review of family involvement research and evaluation. This series of research briefs on family involvement and student outcomes makes the case that family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age. The briefs in the series focus on family involvement in early childhood, the elementary school years, and adolescence. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/publist.html#fimd](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/publist.html#fimd)

### Focus on Families!

*Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School* is a critical resource for after school providers looking to create or expand family engagement in out-of-school time programs—a key complementary learning setting. The comprehensive, easy-to-read guide, produced by Harvard Family Research Project and Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet,) looks at the research base for why family engagement matters, concrete program strategies for engaging families, case studies of promising family engagement efforts, and an evaluation tool for improving family engagement practices. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/families/](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/families/)

programs when parents are emotionally supportive and involved in learning. OST programs provide opportunities for parents to be involved with their children’s learning and can build bridges between families and schools—minimizing some of the common barriers to involvement at school, such as schedule conflicts, feelings of intimidation around school personnel, and language and cultural differences from teachers. In fact, family involvement in OST programs appears to promote involvement in school and at home. In addition, family involvement in OST can build social networks and help families share information about school policies and practices and other topics.

### Family Involvement Across Ages

Although much attention has been paid to family involvement in early childhood, recent research demonstrates that families play a significant role in learning for children and youth of all ages, including adolescence.<sup>9</sup> Effective family involvement changes over time as children mature, but it remains important.

In order to be effective, the practices and relationships in which families engage to support learning must be matched to the child’s stage of development. Young children need parents and other family members to provide structure and establish the foundations for learning. As they get older, children need to develop independence and take responsibility for their own learning. As a result, family involvement practices that provide direct instruction and support—such as shared reading, helping with homework, and volunteering at school—are more prevalent in elementary school and decline as children get older, with a marked drop-off in adolescence. However, less instrumental forms of involvement, such as discussing college plans, monitoring school performance and progress, and maintaining high expectations become more common in adolescence. These forms of involvement can help balance adolescents’ two equally important but sometimes

& Weiss, H. (2006). Building and evaluating out-of-school time connections, *The Evaluation Exchange*, 12(1&2), 2–6. Available at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue33/theory.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue33/theory.html)

9. Kreider, H., Caspe, M., Kennedy, S., & Weiss, H. (2007). *Family involvement in middle and high school students’ education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

competing needs—to develop independence and to remain connected and close to parents—and are associated with academic benefits.<sup>10</sup> These changing family involvement patterns also reflect changes in children’s and adolescents’ educational environments. As children enter middle and high school, their work becomes more advanced, and many parents feel less able to provide direct instruction and support. At the same time, schools become larger, more bureaucratic, and less welcoming to families, which may discourage parents’ sense of school community and belonging—and, therefore, their involvement.<sup>11</sup>

Family involvement is an ongoing process, rather than a single moment in time. In this process, developmental and educational transitions play an important role. These transitions are periods of heightened risk for children and youth and often of decreased family involvement, but they also can be moments of opportunity. Recent research demonstrates benefits of family involvement during transitions and of educators’ outreach to families during these times.<sup>12</sup> These findings suggest that involvement during transitions may be key to ensuring a continuous and sustained process of family involvement from birth to adulthood.

### Family Involvement as a Shared Responsibility

Conversations about family involvement are often plagued by finger pointing. Stakeholders of all roles engage in the blame game, as evident in public forums ranging from the national media to local parent–teacher organization meetings. However, to gain traction in practice and policy, family involvement must be a shared and meaningful responsibility among families, schools, communities, and the wider society.

Parents and other family members clearly have roles in and responsibilities for supporting their children’s learning. But families are one part of a larger, dynamic system that supports or constrains their educational involvement. For instance, social policies

and structures affect the basic conditions of economic well-being (such as shelter, nourishment, and health care), which need to be in place for families to be supportive and for children to learn.<sup>13</sup> Schools, meanwhile, influence family involvement via outreach, opportunities, and expectations,<sup>14</sup> while community-based institutions, such as early childhood and after school programs, provide additional entry points and opportunities. Businesses, too, impact family involvement. They determine parents’ schedule flexibility and time off and also can help families find creative strategies for involvement even in the face of difficult work schedules.

Educational and social structures are responsible for making the political, financial, and social investments that promote families’ capacities and opportunities for involvement. Families, in turn, are responsible for providing the time, energy, and other resources that are within their means. According to this framework of mutual responsibility, family involvement practices and policies must be coconstructed—that is, all stakeholders must be actively involved in and accountable for building meaningful partnerships. Coconstructed relationships are characterized by trust, shared values, ongoing bidirectional communication, mutual respect, and attention to all parties’ needs and expertise, and are associated with higher levels of involvement and greater benefits for children.<sup>15</sup>

Approaches to fostering involvement that are coconstructed and characterized by mutual responsibility are essential for progress, particularly in building involvement among populations who historically have had fewer opportunities for involvement or who have been less visibly involved. They acknowledge that many disadvantaged and some ethnic minority families experience barriers to involvement—such as financial and logistical constraints and, in many cases, negative histories with and mistrust of schools.<sup>16</sup> They also recognize the impact of cultural factors—such as social and cultural capital that are not matched with those valued by educational and social institutions.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, the mutual responsibility framework provides a starting place for acknowledging and addressing these barriers and for setting high expectations for all parties—including but not limited to families.

*To gain traction in practice and policy, family involvement must be a shared and meaningful responsibility among families, schools, communities, and the wider society.*

10. Adams, K. C., & Christenson, S. L. (2000). Trust and the family–school relationship. Examination of parent–teacher differences in elementary and secondary grades. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*, 477–497; Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1993). Parent school involvement during the early adolescent years. *Teachers College Record, 94* (3), 568–587; Grolnick, W. S., Kurovski, C. O., Dunlap, K. G., & Hevey, C. (2000). Parental resources and the transition to junior high. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 10*, 465–488; Hill, N. E., Castellino, D. R., & Lansford, J. E. (2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behavior, achievement, and aspirations: Demographic variations across adolescence. *Child Development, 75*(5), 1491–1509; Lord, S. E., Eccles, J. S., & McCarthy, K. A. (1994). Surviving the junior high school transition: Family processes and self-perceptions as protective and risk factors. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 14*, 162–199.

11. Eccles & Harold, 1993.

12. Kraft-Sayre, M. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2000). *Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: Linking children, families, and schools*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, National Center for Early Development & Learning; Kreider, H. (2002). *Getting parents “ready” for kindergarten: The role of early childhood education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project; Schulting, A. B., Malone, P. S., & Dodge, K. A. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology, 41*(6), 860–871; see also Amy Schulting’s article on page 8 of this issue.

13. Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the Black–White achievement gap*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

14. Simon, B. S. (2004). High school outreach and family involvement. *Social Psychology of Education, 7*, 185–209.

15. Lopez, M. E., Kreider, H., & Caspe, M. (2004/2005). Co-constructing family involvement. *The Evaluation Exchange, 10*(4), 2–3. Available at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue28/index.html>

16. Garcia Coll, C., & Chatman, C. (2005). Supporting ethnic and racial minority families. In H. B. Weiss, H. Kreider, M. E. Lopez, & C. Chatman, *Preparing educators for family involvement: From theory to practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

17. For a fuller discussion of the role of social and cultural capital in family involvement, readers are referred to our upcoming paper from the Campaign for Educational Equity, featured in the sidebar on page 5.

### Implications for This Issue and for the Field

The articles in this issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* illustrate the three components of our family involvement framework as they play out in policy, practice, and research across federal, national, state, and local levels. They showcase the latest research findings, promising areas for investment, and provocative ideas to spark discussion about where and how the field should move forward.

As these articles demonstrate, our framework of family involvement is only as useful as the commitment we make to applying it. Our research, experience, and conversations with other field experts suggest that the following actions are necessary to build family involvement in a meaningful and effective way:

- Family involvement initiatives must be part of a larger complementary learning strategy. Because no one individual or institution alone can ensure families' involvement or students' success, family involvement should be embedded in systemic efforts to promote learning across all of the settings where children live and learn. At all levels—federal, state, and local—our financial and human investments must move beyond isolated programs to systemic efforts.
- Family involvement must be seen as a continuous and evolving process throughout childhood and adolescence. Moving forward, the field should invest in initiatives that work across ages and that facilitate family involvement during transition periods. Initiatives targeting a specific age group should consider how their work relates to the larger trajectory of family involvement.
- New and existing initiatives should consider the roles of *all* of the individuals and institutions who influence families' capacity for involvement—and set high expectations for each of them. Together, all of these stakeholders can think more broadly and creatively and make a more systemic and sustained commitment to family involvement and complementary learning.
- All investments in family involvement and complementary learning should include a commitment to and resources for evaluation, in order to facilitate continuous learning about what works, for whom, and why.
- Stakeholders from all backgrounds need to share emerging knowledge from these efforts. Investments in family involvement must include opportunities for open and ongoing communication, sharing, and learning, including both formal networking opportunities and informal communities of practice.

One of the primary goals of this *Evaluation Exchange* issue is to begin a conversation about these and other next steps for the field. We believe that it will take collective and creative thinking from many perspectives and backgrounds to make progress. In representing many diverse voices, including both longtime and emerging leaders, our hope is to embody one of the most important priorities for the field in this current policy window: to build a collective vision that spurs collective action on behalf of all families and their children.

**Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.**

*Project Manager, HFRP. Email: bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu*

**Heather Weiss, Ed.D.**

*Founder and Director, HFRP. Email: hfrp@gse.harvard.edu*

### Coming Soon: Family Involvement and Educational Equity

The themes discussed in this article are explored in greater detail in an upcoming paper reframing family involvement and reviewing research for the Campaign for Educational Equity's *Equity Matters* series. A collaboration between Harvard Family Research Project's Heather Weiss and Suzanne Bouffard and Columbia University's Edmund Gordon and Beatrice Bridglall, the paper will be published and presented, along with other reviews in the series, at the Campaign's November 2008 symposium on Comprehensive Educational Equity.

Based at Teachers College, Columbia University, the Campaign for Educational Equity works to promote equity and excellence in education and to overcome the achievement gap through research-based analyses of key education policy issues. The Campaign's Research Initiative cultivates empirical research projects, such as the *Equity Matters* series, to address unanswered questions in the field of education related to equity.

To read more about the Campaign for Educational Equity or to learn about the upcoming symposium, visit [www.tc.edu.org](http://www.tc.edu.org).

### New Resources From HFRP

*After School Programs in the 21st Century: Their Potential and What It Takes to Achieve It.* This research brief draws on a decade of seminal research and evaluation studies to address two questions: Does participation in after school programs make a difference, and what conditions are necessary to achieve positive results? [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief10/](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief10/)

*Changing the Conversation About Home Visiting: Scaling Up With Quality.* This paper looks at what the evidence and conventional wisdom say about scaling up home visiting as one of the best ways to support parents and promote early childhood development. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/home-visit/conversation.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/home-visit/conversation.html)

*Tomasito's Mother Comes to School/La mamá de Tomasito visita la escuela.* This online bilingual storybook about family involvement includes a children's story, along with a guide for teachers and adult family members. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/tomasito.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/tomasito.html)

*Out-of-School Time Research Updates.* This new series culls key insights from each update to the HFRP's out-of-school time (OST) database, thus enabling you to quickly get up to speed on the latest in the growing field of OST research and evaluation. [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html#updates](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/index.html#updates)

## Building the Field

*HFRP talks with five leaders in the family involvement arena about the current state of the field and promising areas for its future.*

What does it take to build the family involvement field? There has been steady accumulation of evidence about the importance of family involvement in children's learning and development since 1965. At that time, the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act set the stage for future legislation that would mandate a role for families and communities in schools. Yet, in current national and school district-level conversations about school reform and closing the achievement gap, family involvement is often not given high priority.

For this issue of *The Evaluation Exchange*, HFRP spoke with five family involvement experts about the current state of the field and about its future: Kathy Hoover-Dempsey of Vanderbilt University, M. Elena Lopez of the Picower Foundation, Karen Mapp of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Eva Patrikakou of DePaul University, and Sam Redding of the Academic Development Institute.<sup>1</sup>

These conversations highlighted the complexity of family involvement and illuminated ways to systematically broaden the field's impact on policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. This article summarizes the main themes that emerged from these conversations, including recommendations for how researchers and evaluators can strengthen the field moving forward.

### A Complex Field in a Complex Environment

"One of the exciting things about the family involvement field is that it is multidisciplinary and multifaceted," said Eva Patrikakou, Assistant Professor of Special Education at DePaul University. She attributed this excitement to the field's blend of "scholars and practitioners from education, human development, psychology, sociology, and economics, and, of course, family and community members." But, at the same time, she added, this multifaceted membership "can inhibit growth, coordination, and a common focus." Many of the experts spoke of this same tension: that family involvement, despite being supported by research, practice, and some federal and state policy, has not received more attention because it is not one coordinated strategy; rather it encompasses many different strategies and has been part of many different social and political movements.

The experts agreed that there needs to be a way to elevate family involvement from a whole-system perspective. However, they also noted that the intricate educational, societal, and cultural contexts in which family involvement is situated makes this challenging. Respondents used words like "peripheral" to describe

1. Interviews were conducted by Abby Weiss in October and November 2007. Our experts were asked the following questions: 1) What is your analysis of why there is not a higher priority on family involvement at the national and school-district levels? 2) What would effective field leadership look like and accomplish? Who constitutes the field of family involvement? Who should it include? 3) What does the field need most today? 4) What are the most important and most promising areas for investment—financial, political, and intellectual? Where do you think there is the most potential for return on investment?

the location of family involvement in relation to schools' main purpose. They also spoke of the stresses placed upon schools since the passage of No Child Left Behind, which focuses primarily on standards and accountability. Karen Mapp, lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, explained, "Family and community engagement is often seen as an add-on. There hasn't been a whole-hearted acceptance of the fact that family involvement is a strategy that must be seen as part of the instructional core and not something that's separate."

Moreover, changes in family structure and work routines over the past 30 years, as well as research on cultural variations in family engagement patterns, have called into question how family involvement should be defined and what family engagement should look like. Many of our respondents lamented that the school-centric notion of family involvement, in which parents must come to the school building, still looms large—despite growing research showing that family involvement does and should more often take place in a variety of settings, including the home, the workplace, and in the community, and that it might look different based on families' cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

### Critical Elements to Systematically Elevate the Field

Five common themes emerged from our conversations about critical elements for moving beyond these complex challenges and systematically elevating the family involvement field in order to increase awareness among policymakers, researchers, and evaluators.

**1. Developing a community of practice.** All respondents agreed that the field needs a coordinated and collaborative community of practice—that is, a central setting for constituents to come together for nationally focused conversations about professional research and practice. Kathy Hoover-Dempsey, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, noted, "As academics, our field gets divided, and we tend to work with people largely within our main discipline." She and others made clear that the field needs to adopt a fresh and more collaborative working style.

To that end, Hoover-Dempsey proposed a possible model: "The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development should be our example. What this project did was support the convening of key interdisciplinary researchers and, in some circumstances, policymakers and thinkers from a variety of perspectives. The study brought them around a conference table that was national in its orientation and said, 'We're working on this together.' Consequently—with significant and longitudinal funding—we now have collective, substantial, and reliable knowledge of the impact of childcare on children's development. This is what the family involvement field needs."

Indeed, all of our experts mentioned the need for a community of practice that would not only bring together the field's varied constituents, but also become an active location for advocacy and policy efforts.

**2. Fomenting a movement.** Many of the experts we interviewed expressed the belief that the family involvement field cannot be

built from the top down but rather requires a coconstructed grassroots component involving families, communities, and schools. Unlike many other education movements, such as the effort to abolish segregated schools and classrooms, the family involvement field has not yet become a movement with self-sustained demand and force. Many of the field leaders spoke of the importance of grassroots-level stakeholders coming together to demand and foment change. Key to building this movement, Hoover-Dempsey suggested, is “harnessing the energy and the resources that all families have.”

M. Elena Lopez, former senior consultant to HFRP and currently Senior Project Manager at the Picower Foundation, similarly envisioned leadership for this movement as coming from parents. She explained, “When you talk about leadership, it needs to be about parent leadership. The gatekeeper to parent involvement is too often the principal. We need to reverse the situation so that parent involvement comes from parents saying, ‘This is important.’ That type of parent leadership would potentially make the schools more open to parent involvement and create a better partnership between the parents and the school, allowing parents’ issues and concerns to be addressed.”

Sam Redding, executive director of the Academic Development Institute, built on the notion of grassroots change by focusing on the bidirectionality of leadership. “We need leadership that comes from both directions on a two-way street. Schools need to take the lead in reattaching themselves to the community. But if schools rally the troops, we need to make sure we are clear about what we want and expect parents to do. For the most part, schools don’t have the problem of parents lining up at the door, demanding more involvement. We need to see more engaged parent interest and demand for involvement, in a constructive way.”

Regardless of the origin of the leadership, our experts agreed that families constitute a strong component of the developing family involvement movement and that demand from their side would strengthen and elevate the field substantially. Thus, building the family involvement field requires supporting and giving voice to all its constituents, especially those who have historically had less opportunity to be heard.

**3. Funding and investing in infrastructure.** A third theme was the need for stronger funding and infrastructure for family involvement at the school and district levels—the locations where family involvement takes place. “We see some funding here and there, but it’s at the state’s discretion or at the district’s discretion, and many times the funding doesn’t necessarily trickle down to the schools the way the law intended it to,” said Eva Patrikakou. Experts commented on the need to build capacity at the school and district levels through substantial line items in both school and district budgets for efforts that go beyond a few open house events or the hiring of part-time professionals. This can include creating positions for family liaisons and coordinators who can act as mediators between schools and families, and it can also include investments in professional development and partnerships with universities to provide stronger training for teachers, principals, and superintendents.

**4. Conducting research and evaluation and disseminating knowledge.** All of our respondents spoke about the need for more

research exploring *why* family involvement is important and *how* to make better use of family involvement in supporting children’s learning. Yet, Karen Mapp warned, “We need to get realistic in terms of the research and have better language around what the possible outcomes are that family involvement will be able to produce.” Many of our experts echoed this warning and offered their own perspectives on how to do it.

Kathy Hoover-Dempsey noted that, to elevate the field, the next generation of research must be theoretically grounded, giving attention to motivators, mechanisms, and short-term outcomes that support learning, such as the skills, attitudes, and work habits that promote long-term school success. These studies must then push forward to show how these aspects of learning are amenable to direct parental influence during involvement activities. In short, researchers must develop and test theories while at the same time embracing longitudinal quasi-experimental and experimental designs, short-term evaluations of effective practices for programs that can go to scale, and cost-benefit analyses. As many of our experts suggested, researchers must strive to broaden the indicators of family involvement’s impact beyond achievement test scores and grades. These indicators can include, but are not limited to, social and emotional aspects of children’s development, longer term effects of schooling such as retention rates, high school completion, engagement with juvenile justice, employment rates, and postsecondary education.

Our experts agreed that developing a platform to communicate and disseminate research is just as critical as generating the research itself. In particular, it is imperative for researchers to strategically communicate about how and under what conditions family involvement makes a difference and to present this information to multiple audiences including policymakers, practitioners, and parents. Karen Mapp explained, “If we don’t have a mechanism to really expose these folks to the research that’s out there and its importance for student learning, then I’m not sure what we can expect in terms of going to scale.”

Sam Redding spoke of the need to be more intentional and more specific about the language used to communicate this research-based knowledge to educators. “We need a new vocabulary. We’re always telling schools to involve parents, but we’re never specific about what it is schools are to do. This can lead to frustration, because educators may work hard to involve parents but may not focus their energy on the specific things that research says can be most effective. It would also help if we had some political leaders who could use this new, more specific vocabulary and get beyond the vague platitudes of ‘Yes, family involvement matters, and I’m going to make that part of my campaign.’ We all—researchers, policymakers, and educators—need to get beyond platitudes to more concrete language about specific family involvement practices and behaviors.”

**5. Creating new visions.** Lastly, some experts called for a creative rethinking of family involvement, in concert with a new vision for schools. Only through new and broader thinking, these experts believe, can real change occur. Sam Redding for example, conceived of a “radical reconsideration” of schooling. He explained that this new model can go beyond the personalization offered

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This issue's Promising Practices section highlights how a range of school-, district-, and state-level efforts incorporate the three components of HFRP's family involvement framework: Family involvement a) matters across ages but changes over time, b) occurs in many different settings, and c) should be coconstructed by families and professionals.

### Promoting Parent–School Relationships During the Transition to Kindergarten

*Amy Schulting from Duke University explores the role of teacher outreach to families during the transition to kindergarten.*

The transition to kindergarten is a critical time in a child's academic career—and a time at which low-income children are especially at risk. Given the link between early school achievement and later outcomes, difficulties during this transition can presage long-term academic failure. Many education scholars frame this challenge in terms of “kindergarten readiness,” implying that the critical factors lie wholly within the child. However, children's cognitive and behavioral skills, while important, are not enough to ensure school success. Of equal or greater importance are the support and involvement of the child's family and a positive relationship between home and school.

The majority of American elementary schools implement transition practices to facilitate children's adjustment to school. These practices range from sending letters home or inviting families to an open house to having teachers conduct home visits. Most transition practices involve families and are implicitly designed to increase parent involvement, improve home–school relations, and facilitate communication. How helpful are these practices? Do they increase student achievement and parent involvement? Do they help the low-income children most at-risk for early school failure? Along with my colleagues, Kenneth A. Dodge and Patrick S. Malone, I set out to answer these questions.

Despite the near-universal implementation of kindergarten transition practices, ours was the first rigorous study to examine the impact of transition practices on parent involvement and child outcomes. The study examined data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Class of 1998–1999 (ECLS-K), which has the largest and most nationally representative dataset available with which to study schools' implementation of seven different kindergarten transition practices. Data on 17,212 kindergarten students from 992 schools were included. Our analyses utilized hierarchical linear modeling to find the following answers to our questions:

*Are transition practices associated with improved academic achievement in kindergarten?* Yes. We examined the effect of transition practices on kindergarten achievement, controlling for child demographic factors, and found that schools implementing the average number of transition practices had student achievement scores that were higher than the achievement scores of students offered no transition practices. This difference is statistically significant.

*Are transition practices especially helpful for low-income children?* Yes. Low- and middle-income students demonstrate the

largest increase in achievement for each additional transition practice offered at their school. The impact of transition practices on upper-income children was much less. These findings suggest that kindergarten transition policies might be a very important tool in reducing the achievement gap across income groups.

*Do transition practices increase parent-initiated involvement?* Yes. Transition practices have the greatest positive impact on the involvement of low- and middle-income families. In fact, parent-initiated involvement scores for low- and middle-income parents offered seven transition practices was substantially higher than the involvement of parents offered zero. Increased parent-initiated involvement was also found to partially explain the link between transition activities and increased student achievement. One of the primary ways that kindergarten transition practices exert their effect on student achievement is by first increasing parent-initiated involvement, which, in turn, yields stronger student performance.

*Who receives transition practices?* Here is where the ironic and unfortunate reality of American education rears its head. Affluent children, whose already high levels of achievement and parent involvement are not further increased by kindergarten transition practices, are offered the greatest number of transition practices. In contrast, low-income children, who are at greatest risk of early school failure and who would benefit the most from kindergarten transition practices, are least likely to receive them.

The positive impact of transition practices on low-income children and families is striking, given that these practices are not tailored to this high-risk population. One can only imagine the impact of transition practices designed to address the multiple barriers to involvement and achievement faced by low-income children and families.

Home visiting is one transition practice that enables teachers to reach out to even the most at-risk families. My colleagues and I are currently conducting a randomized controlled trial of home visiting as a kindergarten transition practice with 44 kindergarten teachers and approximately 1,000 families. With a strong, positive relationship at the beginning of school, parents and teachers can work together to ensure that all children experience a smooth transition to kindergarten and successful academic careers.

**Amy B. Schulting, M.Ed., M.A.**

*Duke University, Center for Child and Family Policy, Box 90545,  
Durham, NC 27708-0545. Tel: 919-613-9331.  
Email: amy.schulting@duke.edu*



## Local School Councils and Parent Involvement in Chicago

*Melissa Marschall's study on Latino parents' participation in school governance underscores this issue's theme of the importance of coconstructing family involvement.*

After four decades of large-scale U.S. immigration, Latino children currently account for one in six school-aged children. In 2000, they comprised 41% of students in the ten largest public school districts. Due to language barriers, visa and other immigration problems, and high rates of poverty, parents of these children tend to face greater challenges when it comes to their children's schooling and education.<sup>1</sup> These challenges are often compounded by the fact that schools are not equipped to serve them,<sup>2</sup> as indicated by the educational outcomes of Latino students. Although their schooling outcomes have improved over the last 30 years, Latinos continue to score lower on standardized tests and drop out more frequently than their Anglo and African American peers.<sup>3</sup> The lack of cooperation among schools, parents, and communities is partly responsible for this low academic achievement.<sup>4</sup>

What can be done to foster stronger ties between schools and Latino parents in order to improve schooling outcomes for Latino students? I investigated this question in a study<sup>5</sup> focusing specifically on the Chicago Public School (CPS) system and schools serving predominantly Latino students.

### Decentralized Governance and Latino Political Incorporation

The Mayor of Chicago has held formal control of CPS since 1995. However, decentralized governing structures—established through earlier school reform efforts—still exist. These structures continue to facilitate parent involvement and the political incorporation of noncitizens and immigrants. Specifically, a 1988 school reform bill established local democratic control and school-based management in all elementary and secondary schools in the form of Local School Councils (LSC), comprised of parents and community members. LSCs have the authority to enact school improvement plans, adopt school budgets, and evaluate principals. Importantly, U.S. citizenship is not required to run or vote in LSC elections.

No study had looked explicitly at the link between LSCs and parent involvement. But anecdotal evidence suggested that Chicago's decentralization has led to the institutionalization of resources for immigrant parents. One example is the Bilingual Parent Resource Center, which offers workshops on self-develop-

1. Gibson, M. A. (2002). The new Latino diaspora and educational policy. In S. Wortham, E.G. Murillo, & E.T. Hamann (Eds.), *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing.

2. Fuller, B., Eggers-Pierola, C., Holloway, S. D., Liang, X., & Rambaud, M. F. (1996). Rich culture, poor markets: Why do Latino parents forgo preschooling? *Teachers College Record*, 97, 400–418.

3. National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). *Status and trends in the education of Hispanics*. Washington DC: Author.

4. Scribner, J. D., Young, M. D., & Pedroza, A. (1999). Building collaborative relationships with parents. In P. Reyes, J. D. Scribner, & A. Paredes (Eds.), *Lessons from High Performing Hispanic Schools: Creating Learning Communities* (pp. 36–60). New York: Teachers College Press.

5. Marschall, M. J. (2006). Parent involvement and educational outcomes for Latino students. *Review of Policy Research*, 23(5), 1053–1076.

ment, at-home learning, and family literacy. Another is the Parent Training Unit, which provides training and technical support to Local Bilingual Advisory Committees, which, in turn, advise school principals and LSCs about bilingual program services.<sup>6</sup> Given these and other structures, Chicago schools ought to be well positioned to engage in effective outreach to Latino parents. My study investigated whether this was indeed the case.

### Fostering Outreach and Involvement

I utilized survey data collected by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, data on Latino LSC membership, and school-level demographic information to investigate how organizational aspects of schools, governance and representation, and school demographics influence schools' parental engagement policies and practices. The statistical analysis examined survey items that tapped into teachers' cultural and community awareness and school-initiated efforts to involve parents.

Based on a sample of 160 schools enrolling above-average percentages of Latinos in 2003 (greater than 30.4% of the total student population), I found that higher levels of Latino representation on LSCs were associated with greater teacher awareness of students' cultural and community issues and with greater school efforts to forge strong parent-school relations. It was not simply the degree of Latino representation on LSCs that contributed to greater teacher awareness and outreach. Rather, the direct efforts and activities of LSC members to engage other parents were what made the difference. In schools where LSCs actively contributed to improving parent involvement and community relations, parents were significantly more involved in their children's schooling, and teachers thus became more aware of and more likely to reach out to them.

Findings from my study demonstrate that governing arrangements and Latino political incorporation play a critical role in building school outreach to parents, stronger school-parent relations, and higher levels of parental involvement. It appears that LSCs with Latino representation and/or LSCs that actively contributed to parent involvement were better able to help school personnel break down cultural barriers, increase awareness of cultural and community issues, and facilitate school initiated outreach. By encouraging schools to reach out to Latino families, such cooperation may better equip schools to serve Latino students and reduce achievement gaps. While there is still much work to be done, this research provides initial insights about how to promote relationships between schools and Latino parents and to improve the educational prospects of Latino students.

### Melissa Marschall, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Rice University, Department of Political Science-MS 24, P.O. Box 1892, Houston, TX 77251-1892. Tel: 713-348-2694. Email: marschal@rice.edu

6. Spaulding, S., Carolino, B., & Amen, K. A. (2004). *Immigrant students and secondary school reform: Compendium of best practices*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers; Chicago Public Schools Policy Manual. (2002). *Bilingual education policy, Board Report 02-1023-PO01*. Available at <http://policy.cps.k12.il.us/documents/603.1.pdf>

## Implementing Family and Community Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges in Boston Public Schools

*Abby Weiss and Helen Westmoreland look at the lessons learned from the evolution of Boston Public Schools' family and community engagement strategy.*

In 2006, Boston Public Schools (BPS) received the Broad Prize for Urban Education for its accomplishments during then-recently departed superintendent Thomas Payzant's decade-long tenure. In the months leading up to Payzant's departure, a group of scholars explored the district's progress in a number of education reform areas, including family and community engagement.<sup>1</sup> This article sheds light on some of the key opportunities and challenges that confronted Boston's family and community engagement strategy between 1995 and 2006.

### Identifying Parent Leadership

As a result of Boston's turbulent and drawn-out desegregation process, as well as other lawsuits against the school system, by the 1990s the district was home to a complex dynamic of parent representation, in which several parent advocacy groups received BPS funding but acted as autonomous oversight bodies and vehicles for family involvement. When he first arrived as superintendent in 1995, one of Payzant's early goals was to bring together these disparate voices and services. Rather than negotiating separately with the district's parent advocacy groups, he turned to the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON), a grassroots organizing group that emerged in the late 1990s, as an entity that represented the concerns of *all* parents, not just those with specific advocacy agendas. BPON, in collaboration with other community groups, helped shape the district's new family and community engagement strategy.

### Using Evaluation to Regroup and Reframe

A growing sense of community dissatisfaction about family and community engagement in the district led the Boston school committee, in the year 2000, to convene a task force to investigate the state of family and community engagement in the district. The nine-member committee, consisting of researchers, central office staff, parents, and representatives from community advocacy and organizing groups, went through an extensive information-gathering phase. They mailed surveys to over 1,000 individuals, held community forums, conducted interviews, and reviewed relevant documents as part of their data collection efforts.

After the task force analyzed this data, Payzant met with them and reviewed their findings and subsequent recommendations, which included:

- Expanding the definition of “parent involvement”
- Making family engagement a priority and holding schools accountable for it

1. This article is adapted from Weiss, A. R., & Westmoreland, H. (2006). Family and community engagement in Boston Public Schools: 1995–2006. In S. P. Reville & C. Coggins (Eds.), *A decade of urban school reform: Persistence and progress in the Boston Public Schools* (pp. 219–242). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

- Developing school-based family engagement plans that would be evaluated
- Identifying individuals at the school level to focus family engagement efforts
- Focusing family engagement on student learning
- Training principals and teachers in how to communicate with and engage families
- Examining the structure of the parent support services team at the district level

### Creating Infrastructure to Serve Families

In 2002, Payzant proposed implementation objectives based on these recommendations. His new plan for family and community engagement included an increase in staffing and service delivery, which required the district to reallocate funds. The district withdrew funding from its parent advocacy groups to free up monies for a new central organizational structure and revamped parent information centers. Although this decision drew criticism from some community members, it ultimately gave the district more transparency and public accountability for its family and community engagement strategy.

Deciding on the structure and leadership of the new team responsible for family and community engagement entailed considerable debate. Early proposals called for teams embedded in student services in individual schools or organized in regional clusters, with team leaders reporting to deputy superintendents. Payzant set aside this model in favor of a plan, put forth by community activists, that elevated family and community engagement to a new level of importance within the district by creating a separate Office of Family and Community Engagement, led by a deputy superintendent who reported directly to him.

In addition, Payzant's plan called for new family resource centers that would conduct trainings, promote positive practices to involve parents, provide information, and be “one-stop shops” for families. Upon implementation, this plan struggled because student registration continued to take up the majority of family resource center staff time. Recognizing this, in 2005 Payzant again restructured the family resource centers by removing them from the purview of the Office of Family and Community Engagement and instead hiring family outreach specialists and creating a district-wide training center.

### Reaching Into Schools and Classrooms

That same year, Boston Public Schools, with input from families and community members, began the Family and Community Outreach Coordinators (FCOC) Pilot Initiative to build consistency in the ways schools partner with families. Before this time, many schools had allocated funds for parent liaisons, but, without clear district expectations and support, varied in how they used these parent liaisons.

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## Supporting Family Engagement Through District-Level Partnerships

*Mavis Sanders from Johns Hopkins University looks at how school districts can promote family-school partnerships by collaborating with community based organizations.*

Effective school, family, and community partnership programs largely depend on teachers' and administrators' knowledge about such partnerships and their capacity to work collaboratively with adults in students' families and communities. They also depend on district educational leaders' capacity to support the efforts of school faculty and staff.<sup>1</sup> District leaders who can garner support not just from within the district but also from external sources—such as businesses, foundations, community organizations, and universities—may be the most successful in implementing and scaling up partnerships.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of such external support is highlighted in a case study of an urban school district in the northeastern United States. In this district, the relationship between district-level leaders responsible for family and community involvement and a community-based organization, the Community Parent Involvement Organization (CPIO), positively influenced the implementation of school, family, and community partnerships.

The study is part of an ongoing longitudinal qualitative study of district leadership for family and community engagement.<sup>3</sup> Districts participating in the study are members of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS).<sup>4</sup> The study employs a multiple case study design, which includes interviews with district, school, and parent leaders; observations of workshops, meetings, presentations, and other work-related activities of key district-level respondents; document collection and review; and site visits to participating schools within each of the four districts included in the study.

Findings reported in this article are drawn from data gathered in District 3 between 2005 and 2007. District 3 has approximately 60 schools that serve approximately 38,000 students representing a variety of racial and ethnic groups. As a member of NNPS, it has been implementing a comprehensive district-wide partnership program for nearly a decade. Data collected during the study sug-

gest that the collaborative relationship between district leaders for family involvement and the CPIO has supported partnership reform in the following, often overlapping ways:

*Parent leadership training for school-based partnership teams.* District and CPIO leaders (who together attend NNPS annual leadership development conferences) have jointly worked to provide parent leaders with in-depth knowledge of family and community involvement in schools, including the core principles of the NNPS framework: (a) a team approach to partnership program development and design; (b) a broad definition of parent and community involvement based on Epstein's six types of involvement; and (c) a goal-oriented, research-driven approach to partnerships. CPIO parent leadership activities, such as monthly meetings and parent academies, complement school partnership team trainings provided by the district's family involvement coordinator(s).

*Planning and implementation of district-wide partnership activities.* District leaders for family involvement and CPIO members have worked collaboratively to plan and implement several district-wide partnership activities, including a parent involvement conference. They also worked together to develop a "road map" for partnerships requested by the superintendent, which included recommendations for improvements in the district's current practices.

*Advocacy for district partnership personnel and resources.* The CPIO has supported partnerships in the case district by acting as an advocate for continued implementation of the NNPS framework. For example, when two of the district's three coordinators for family involvement retired, the CPIO "harassed" the district to fill these positions, buttressing the requests of the remaining coordinator and her supervisors. Furthermore the CPIO has met monthly with the superintendent to lobby for improvements in the district's partnership efforts, including holding principals accountable for family and community outreach at their schools.

Findings from this study suggest that district leaders can work with external partners such as the CPIO to keep family and community engagement a central focus in their districts' improvement efforts. This is especially critical, given recent reductions

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### Continuing Research

The research described in this paper is part of a larger study that focuses on bringing school, family, and community partnerships to scale. Cynthia Coburn offers a conceptualization of scale that has four interrelated dimensions. These are: (a) depth, (b) sustainability, (c) spread, and (d) ownership. Findings related to how successful district leaders for partnerships achieve these dimensions of scale are expected in 2008.

1. See Epstein, J. L., Galindo, C., Sheldon, S., & Williams, K. (2007). *Levels of leadership: Understanding district influence on schools' programs of family and community involvement*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL; Sanders, M., Epstein, J., & Sheldon, S. (2005). Improving schools' partnership programs in the National Network of Partnership Schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5(1): 24-47.  
2. Fullan, M., Bertani, A., & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons for district-wide reform. *Educational Leadership*, 61, 7: 42-46.  
3. This research is supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. The opinions expressed are the author's and do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the funding agency. The author would like to sincerely thank participants for their willing cooperation at each stage of the study. Actual names of districts and individuals involved in the study are not used to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality.  
4. NNPS was established in 1996 to provide schools, districts, and states with research-based guidelines and tools to develop goal focused programs of school, family, and community partnerships. To read more research related to NNPS, visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) and click on Research and Publications.

## Whole Children, Whole Families, Whole Communities

*Jonathan Zaff and Danielle Butler from America's Promise Alliance look at how winners of the 100 Best Communities for Young People employ family involvement strategies.*

In 2005, America's Promise Alliance launched the 100 Best Communities for Young People competition, with the goal of highlighting communities that have implemented innovative context-crossing strategies to address the holistic needs of children. We call these holistic needs the Five Promises: Caring Adults, Safe Places and Constructive Use of Time, Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Make a Difference. So far, three rounds of the competition have resulted in 190 unique winners, 25 of which emphasized family involvement.

From among the existing winners, we identified programs employing family involvement programs and strategies. We conducted in-depth interviews with representatives from a range of towns, cities, and counties.<sup>1</sup> Six family involvement implications emerged:

*Family involvement strategies often arise organically but depend on a knowledgeable leader for implementation.* The communities interviewed did not find inspiration for their family involvement programs in manuals; rather, their decision to include family involvement components in their programs came about intuitively and organically. Leaders from Tempe, Arizona, Madison County, Idaho, and Chesterfield County, Virginia, all told us that they recognized intuitively that their community initiatives would be ineffective if they did not empower parents to support their children. Leaders built on their experience-derived intuition by consciously planning ways to include parents in programs.

*Looking to parents and children provides insights on how to best serve them.* The leaders we interviewed realized the value of tapping their communities to attain the knowledge needed to implement effective programs. Chesterfield County held community forums, facilitated by a Youth Services Citizens Board comprised of parents and youth, to solicit feedback on the needs of the community and possible solutions. Similarly, in Redwood, Washington, feedback from parents and children resulted in the creation of the Neighborhood School House, a program that offers necessary community resources to children and families within the school.

*Integrating programs enables communities to address the multiple needs of families.* The community leaders we interviewed recognized the holistic, multilayered needs of children and their families. Some of these communities looked at the family as part of a larger system and therefore provided supports to meet families' multiple needs. For example, communities that focused on families' economic stresses facilitated enrollment into Food Stamps and TANF in order to increase financial stability in the home and enable parents to provide basic resources for children.

1. We thank the following people for taking the time out of their busy schedules to speak with us about their communities: Jan Radley (Redwood, WA); Nancy Gentes (Norwich, CT); Janet Goodliffe (Madison County/Rexburg, ID); Jan Cox, (Greenville, SC); JoAnn Miller (Benton, OR); Rick Peterson, Jane Schaaf and Tanya Mallard (Crawford County, WI); Lynette Stonefeld (Tempe, AZ); and Don Kappel and Jana Carter (Chesterfield County, VA).

Other programs focused on the ways that parents' education and mental and physical health affect the well-being of children, offering GED classes, workforce development programs, and substance abuse programs, which empowered parents to become productive employees, role models, and providers. Based on research that shows educating parents on effective parenting practices and strengthening parent-child relationships affects children's academic success and socio-emotional health, communities offered parent training and conducted community events and after school programs, bringing parents and children together.

*Data provide an effective tool for guiding program development and revision.* Though difficult to obtain on the community level, data about children and families prove valuable in informing program development and revision. The communities we interviewed drew on a variety of strategies for collecting and using data. Chesterfield County's Quality Office, for instance, aggregates data across agencies to derive community-level indicators, such as citizen participation. Community leaders, in turn, disaggregated this data to more fully understand the story behind the numbers.

*Community leaders should encourage, not resist, systematic performance measurement.* The funding tail often wags the data dog, with funding agencies mandating systematic evaluations. Communities can make the most of these mandated evaluations by using the data gained from them to facilitate program development and revision. By partnering with the United Way of Southeast Connecticut, for example, the city of Norwich's Madonna Place program has become more outcome focused—the result of the United Way's emphasis on measuring impacts.

*Community infrastructure is key to developing needed programs.* Meeting families' needs depends on infrastructural and financial support and leadership from organizations in the community. In Crawford County, Wisconsin, Prairie du Chien Memorial Hospital provides the necessary infrastructure, serving as a key financial and human resource partner in parent-level programs intended to prevent child abuse and improve the services and developmental resources that children receive.

Our interviews demonstrate that communities possess the will to implement family involvement programs and use a variety of strategies to acquire the resources and infrastructure to implement them and make them succeed. Going forward, we at America's Promise hope to further study past and future winners of the 100 Best Communities Initiative to uncover tactics that other communities can use to create the necessary momentum to integrate family involvement programs into their communities.

**Jonathan F. Zaff, Ph.D.**

*Vice President, Research & Policy Development.*

*Email: jonz@americaspromise.org*

**Danielle Butler**

*Senior Director, Alliance Partnerships.*

*Email: danielleb@americaspromise.org*

*America's Promise Alliance, 909 N. Washington St., Suite 400, Alexandria VA 22314. Tel: 703-684-4500.*

*Website: www.americaspromise.org*

## After School Programs as an Oasis of Hope for Black Parents

*Gerard Robinson discusses how and why low-income and working-class Black parents are involved in enrolling their children in after school programs.*

Many low-income and working-class Black families in urban areas consider after school programs (ASPs) an extension of home—a place where caring adults can nurture a child’s talents or provide a positive influence. ASPs broaden the positive influences on a child to include not just family members but members of the larger community. Indeed, ASPs are one of many community-building strategies that parents in poor neighborhoods use to educate successful children.<sup>1</sup>

ASPs represent an important avenue for family involvement in the lives of children, especially low-income and minority children. The simple fact of enrolling a child in an ASP requires family involvement. When a family enrolls a child in an ASP, the family identifies the programs and opportunities that can supplement the child’s education and thereby enhance her or his academic, social, and emotional development. ASPs also offer opportunities for parents to communicate with educators, interact with their children, volunteer, and get involved in other ways.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that ASPs have a positive impact on the academic and social well-being of low-income and minority children, families, and communities.<sup>2</sup> However, access to after school care poses significant challenges for many Black families.<sup>3</sup> Minority and poor parents often express dissatisfaction with the quality and availability of ASPs.<sup>4</sup>

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization whose mission is to actively support parental choice in order to empower families and increase quality educational options for Black children. For BAEO, creating educational options, such as ASPs, that foster family involvement is essential. Central to creating such opportunities is learning about how Black families choose and assess ASPs.

With financial support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, BAEO conducted a study of low-income and working-class Black families in Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, to understand the factors that influence parents’ ASP choices, the ways parents assess ASPs’ quality and availability, and how parents define a positive ASP experience. Results of this study are based on data obtained from 407 Black mothers, fathers, grandparents, and other adult caregivers, to whom the

study refers broadly as parents. Nearly 50% of parents work full- or part-time, and most earn \$20,000 or less annually. Approximately 60% reported that they rent their residence, and nearly half are single. Each parent completed a two-page questionnaire and participated in one of 46 focus group meetings conducted between November 2006 and March 2007. Parents provided the following answers, presented in the order of frequency they occurred in response to each research question:

*What is the purpose of an ASP? What outcomes are parents looking for?* Parents say the purpose of an ASP is to provide homework assistance and individualized tutoring, a safe environment away from negative influences, and opportunities to learn leadership and decision-making skills. Parents want children to earn better grades in school, show greater maturity, and obtain broader exposure to diverse peers and experiences, as well as to positive male role models. As one Philadelphia mother explained, “A lot of us don’t have men at home for some children, and the mentoring [provided by ASPs] is really important.”

*What makes an ASP a strong, quality program?* A weak ASP, according to parents surveyed, includes employees who show little interest in their job or students, inconsistency with applying rewards and discipline, and no parental involvement. A strong ASP includes well-trained and energetic staff, strong administrative leadership, and an appropriate balance between academics and fun. A quality program has a welcoming atmosphere that encourages parent and child participation, a defined schedule, structured activities, and happy and engaged children.

*What do Black parents consider barriers to ASP enrollment?* Parents reported that lack of transportation, affordability, and proximity of the ASP to the home, school, or both are barriers. Parental illiteracy is also a barrier.

*What do Black parents recommend ASP leaders do to inform the community about ASPs?* Parents primarily learned about ASPs by word of mouth from other adults, their children and their children’s friends, school personnel, and flyers. Parents surveyed recommended that ASPs advertise on at least one popular local radio station to ensure broader awareness of available programs.

Parents believe that strong, quality ASPs can, in the words of one parent, “help us bring our kids out of poverty.” To promote the creation of such programs—and with them, much-needed parent-ASP partnerships—BAEO will continue to support family involvement in ASPs through this study and other initiatives. At the same time, to ensure that low-income and minority families have access to the ASPs they need, BAEO will encourage our partners and stakeholders to continue investing in the human and financial capital necessary to support family-friendly ASPs in urban America.

### Gerard Robinson

*Senior Fellow, Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University. President, Black Alliance for Educational Options, 1710 Rhode Island Ave. NW, Floor 12, Washington, DC 20036. Tel: 202-429-2236. Email: Gtr924@aol.com*

1. Jarrett, R. L. (1999, Fall). Successful parenting in high-risk neighborhoods. *The Future of Children: When School Is Out*, 9, 45–50.

2. For example, see Posner, J. K., & Vandell, D. L. (1999, May). After-school activities and the development of low-income urban children: A longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 868–879; Kakli, Z., Kreider, H., Little, P., Buck, T., & Coffey, M. (2006). *Focus on families! How to build and support family-centered practices in after school*. Cambridge and Boston, MA: Harvard Family Research Project and Build the Out-of-School Time Network.

3. Roehlkepartain, E., Mannes, M., Scales, P., Lewis, S., & Bostrom, B. (2004). *Building strong families 2004: A study of African American and Latino/Latina parents in the United States*. Chicago, IL: YMCA of the USA and Search Institute.

4. Duffett, A., & Johnson, J. (2004). *All work and no play? Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time*. New York: Public Agenda.

## A City-Wide Effort to Support and Involve Families

*Brenda Miller and Ginger Peacock Preston from the Jacksonville Children's Commission describe how the city of Jacksonville, Florida, is integrating family involvement into a system of care for children and families.*

On a Saturday in the fall of 2007, Mayor John Peyton kicked off *RALLY Jacksonville!*, a comprehensive program directed at increasing the literacy outcomes of young children. Over 7,000 children and their families gathered at the Main Library in downtown Jacksonville to take advantage of health screenings, book giveaways, hay rides, storytelling, and art activities. Young children clamored to meet Pete the Dog, the main character from a 12-book series about Jacksonville written for the Mayor's Book Club, an early literacy initiative targeted at the city's 4-year-olds.

The popularity of this event reflects Jacksonville's community-wide commitment to education and families—and to the critical relationship between them. One out of four people living in Jacksonville is under the age of 18,<sup>1</sup> and it's Jacksonville's focus on children and families that led the city to be named one of America's Promise's 100 Best Communities for Young People in 2005.

Currently, Jacksonville is working to build a system of care for children and families that connects services, supports, and stakeholders. Several key players have helped these efforts. One is Mayor Peyton. Another is the Jacksonville Children's Commission (JCC), an agency of the city government that provides and coordinates prevention and early intervention services for children from birth to age 18. In the past few years, we at JCC have moved away from funding siloed services to investing in a connected system of care across ages and across the city—an effort that embodies the concept of complementary learning. Promoting family involvement is a critical part of this work.

At JCC, our family involvement educators have begun to step away from the classroom and move into the community, where

1. Jacksonville Children's Commission. (2007). *Jacksonville child trends & statistics 1990–2005*. Jacksonville, FL: Author.

### Evaluating the Impact of the Mayor's Book Club

Each year, an evaluation of *RALLY Jacksonville!* surveys parents about the value of the Mayor's Book Club and its components, and each year, we make changes to the program based on those results. Of the 515 families who responded to the survey in 2006:

- 83% found the Mayor's Book Club helpful in teaching their children literacy concepts.
- 61% reported having more than 75 children's books in the home.
- 65% increased the amount of time they spend reading with their children.

they model nurturing behavior and help build families and neighborhoods that provide children with the resources and skills they need to thrive. We organize events such as regional family festivals, offer the services of a family coach in our Family Reception and Resource Areas, and produce the *JCC Family Resource Guide* and other instructive materials for families.

Many of our efforts are built on a commitment to collaboration with community partners. For example, our new initiative is a community collaboration among families, universities, inclusive social services, out-of-school time programs, and neighborhood organizations. Another new initiative, the Jacksonville Outdoor Initiative—a collaboration among the Mayor's office, Jacksonville Children's Commission, Jacksonville Public Library, Jacksonville Parks, and the National Wildlife Federation—is designed to create a bridge between the Mayor's Book Club and kindergarten.

Thanks to a grant through The Community Foundation to study reflective practice in 2004, we developed a strategic plan that outlined our newly customer-centric focus on community engagement and collaboration. It was then that our philosophy became one of relationship building and partnership with the families and community agencies of Jacksonville.

A core principle of our work is a commitment to using evaluation and data. One way we use data is to solicit community input and assess our population's needs. Last year, surveys of families about their desires and needs informed content and practice for 100 workshops, which 97% of participants rated as exceeding expectations. In addition, for the past 3 years, JCC's annual *Jacksonville Child Trends & Statistics Report* has provided an overall assessment of the status of Jacksonville's children. As Mayor Peyton says, "This useful information will help us to continue to effectively direct resources to further support the children and families in our community."

We also use data to track how many families are using our services and how much they are benefiting (see sidebar), as well as to track outcomes for the nonprofits with whom we contract. By measuring program effectiveness, these data help us make strategic decisions about which services to continue to support and which to eliminate. We also use outcome data to help parents make good choices; for example, we have collaborated with the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County to create a quality rating system for early childhood programs.

The success of our efforts is evident from Jacksonville voters' beliefs about education. According to a recent opinion survey, "promoting early childhood literacy" ranked fourth in overall importance and first in excellence among children's issues.

#### Brenda Miller

*Family Involvement Coordinator. Tel: 904-630-7004.  
Email: brendam@coj.net*

#### Ginger Peacock Preston

*Associate Director for School Readiness. Tel: 904-630-7279.  
Email: gingerp@coj.net*

*Jacksonville Children's Commission, 1095 A. Philip Randolph Blvd.,  
Jacksonville, FL 32206.*

## Empowering Parents to Improve Education: Evidence from Rural Mexico

*Paul Gertler, Harry Patrinos, and Marta Rubio-Codina summarize a study on the outcomes associated with a school-based management intervention in Mexico.<sup>1</sup>*

Mexico's compensatory education program provides extra resources to primary schools that enroll students in highly disadvantaged rural communities. This intervention started in 1992 in the poorest states of Mexico and expanded to poorly performing schools in less disadvantaged areas. One important component of the program is the school-based management intervention known as AGEs (*Apoyo a la Gestión Escolar*, or School Management Support), which began in 1996. School-based management is the decentralization of power from central or state-level education authorities to local schools. Under this system, local stakeholders (principals, teachers, school committees, and parents) have an increased voice in running the schools—creating pressure to influence and alter school management and change decision making to favor students.

AGEs finance and support parent associations through annual grants transferred quarterly to the parent associations' accounts—money that parent associations can use to invest in infrastructure or in materials they deem important for their schools. Parents receive training in the management of these funds, skills training to increase their involvement in school activities, and information about how to help their children learn. In return, parents must commit to greater involvement in school affairs, participate in the infrastructure work, and attend trainings.

Our objective in evaluating the AGEs was to examine whether the increased parental participation that they brought about helped to create a more conducive learning environment and improve students' learning outcomes. This would provide robust evidence regarding claims of the beneficial impacts of school-based management. We employed a combination of quantitative techniques to estimate the size of the impacts and qualitative techniques to understand how and why these effects occurred.

For the quantitative analysis, we assessed the impact of the AGEs on intermediate school quality indicators—school-averaged grade failure, grade repetition, and dropout rates—acquired from school census data and official data collected by education ministry officials on the expansion of the compensatory education program. Because the intervention targeted multiple communities and expanded over time, we were able to obtain difference-in-difference estimates of impact. That is, we were able to compare how the evolution (the over-time trends) of the outcome variables differed between schools that had adopted AGEs (treatment schools) and those that had not yet received the intervention (comparison schools). The mean difference between the “after” and “before” values of the outcome indicators for schools in the treatment

and comparison groups is calculated, followed by the difference between these two mean differences. The second difference (that is, the difference in difference) is the estimate of the impact of the program. The analysis controlled for characteristics of schools and municipalities that vary over time and that might have been correlated with the outcomes.

We focused our analysis on the impact of AGEs in rural non-indigenous primary schools between 1998 and 2001. We defined treatment schools as those that first received AGEs between school year 1998–1999 and school year 2001–2002 and that received it continuously since. We defined comparison schools as those that started receiving AGEs from 2002–2003 onward. Our final sample consisted of 6,038 schools, 43% of which are AGEs beneficiaries.

Our results show that AGEs are an effective measure for improving both parent involvement and student outcomes. We found a significant reduction in school-averaged grade failure and grade repetition in AGEs beneficiary schools. Specifically, there was a 4% decrease in the proportion of students failing a grade and a 4.2% decrease in the proportion of students repeating a grade. These effects remain strong and significant even after controlling for the presence of other educational interventions in the school, such as the proportion of *Oportunidades* (Mexico's conditional cash transfer program) scholarship holders and the proportion of teachers under *Carrera Magisterial*, a performance incentive scheme.

Our results also suggest that AGEs are a cost-effective intervention. Parent associations at each participating school receive between \$500 and \$700 a year depending on school size. With over 45,000 schools and over 4.5 million students participating in the AGEs, the total cost of the AGE school grants is about \$26 million a year, or just \$5.86 per student annually.

Complementary qualitative evidence corroborates our broad empirical findings. Through interviews with parents and principals, we learned that the AGEs have increased parents' involvement in school-related activities and in student life. Parents also report improved communication among parents, teachers, and directors. Principals in beneficiary schools reported that parents became more aware about their children's academic performance and more likely to insist that their children fulfill school duties such as homework after the introduction of AGEs.

### Paul J. Gertler

*Li Ka Shing Distinguished Professor of Economics,  
Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, CA 9407.  
Tel: 510-642-1418. Email: gertler@haas.berkeley.edu*

### Harry Anthony Patrinos

*Lead Education Economist. World Bank, 1818 H Street, NW,  
Washington, DC 20433. Tel: 202-473-5510.  
Email: hpatrinos@worldbank.org*

### Marta Rubio-Codina

*ESRC Research Fellow, Edipo. University College London and Institute  
for Fiscal Studies, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE, UK.  
Tel: 00 44 20 7291 4800. Email: m.rubio-codina@ucl.ac.uk*

1. This article is summarized from Gertler, P. J., Rubio-Codina, M., & Patrinos, H. A. (2006). *Empowering parents to improve education: Evidence from rural Mexico*. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 3935. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=923242>

## Family Involvement Policy: Past, Present, and Future

*Over the past year, HFRP has spoken with several family involvement experts about federal, state, and local policies—where these policies have been, where they are headed, and what strategies are necessary to seize the current policy window. This article draws from a panel discussion at the 2007 National Parental Information and Resource Centers Conference and from interviews with field experts.*

**Although there has been some progress in the last half century, many in the field are unsatisfied with the current state of family involvement policy. What have been the barriers to date in creating sustained, systemic family involvement policies?**

**Arnold Fege, Director of Public Engagement and Advocacy at Public Education Network:** First, our definition of family involvement has become increasingly limited over time. As the law began to evolve during the '80s and '90s, we turned parents from a political entity that demanded quality public education to task agents—people who did things for you, like fundraise for the school. This resulted in individualizing family involvement rather than building a collective effort around the community. This has been exacerbated by fragmentation among parent groups, as a result of the federal government requiring many specialized programs (such as Head Start, special education, and Title I) to have separate parent advisory committees, which do not often collaborate. Further limiting the definition of family involvement, market forces have recently been pushing school choice and transfer and calling that family involvement.

Second, politics have played a role, especially at the federal level. Many lawmakers do not want to spend political capital on family involvement, for several reasons. Some are nervous about taking a position on NCLB, others are afraid to endorse a federal role in education, and still others do not want to be caught in issues of power and control between schools and families. These control issues are entrenched. Decades ago, school board members and superintendents began to resist any kind of federal mandate for family involvement because the federal law began what was an “alternative” political system to the power of the superintendent.

### National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

An advocate for family involvement for over 25 years, the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) builds visibility for family involvement, monitors legislation, and shares information about research, programs, and policies. Says NCPIE Chair Sue Ferguson, “While there is still a long way to go, there has been real progress. Schools and districts are beginning to use the research, there is more parent leadership training, and federal programs are coordinating to support policies and practices.” [www.ncpie.org](http://www.ncpie.org)

**Oliver Moles, Researcher/Evaluator at the Social Science Research Group, LLC, and former research analyst in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement at the U.S. Department of Education:** One of the reasons for this, from the school perspective, is that it's often challenging to work with people who are not under your direct control. What goes on in the classroom is something you can gauge and influence, but what parents do is something out of and beyond a school's control. As a result, many schools and districts have been loath to commit to family involvement policies and practices.

**Craig Stevens, Director of Education Policy and Research at the Nevada State Education Association and former Public Policy Specialist at the National PTA:** The accountability issue is an important one. Parental involvement is tough to measure and monitor, and this makes it more difficult for policymakers to justify investments in parental involvement policies and programs. Congress and the legislature try to get their hands around the concept as best they can, but it is a challenge. Currently, lawmakers are asking for more information about how to measure parental involvement, including the opportunities given to parents to enter the classroom.

**Edwin Darden, Director of Education Policy, Appleseed:** From the federal government to parents themselves, there's certainly enough responsibility to spread around. Federal officials haven't made family involvement much of a priority item—in terms of focusing on it in high-level speeches, but also in terms of monitoring practices and procedures at the state and district levels. And school districts seem not to recognize parents' potential. Based on my recent review of about two dozen school district policies, districts are focusing on compliance as opposed to a statement of belief that parent involvement is integral. In addition, parents themselves have still not had that “dawning,” or recognition, that they have a tremendous amount of collective power. This means that they aren't exercising their rights or the opportunities that are there.

**Despite these challenges, some progress has been made. What achievements can we hope to build on as we move forward?**

**Craig Stevens:** There is a lot more research on the benefits of parental involvement now, and we know more about the kinds of practices that can be effective and can bring parent involvement to the forefront. This research is extremely valuable, not only for improving practice, but for building a case for sustained investments in family involvement.

**Oliver Moles:** In addition to high-quality research, we now have effective models from programs and community efforts. Over the last 10 to 20 years, there have been certain cities and states that have taken the lead in developing some really strong activities.

**Arnold Fege:** In particular, we are seeing progress in parent organizing models and collective action, including the efforts of ACORN, the National Council of La Raza, the National PTA, local education funds, and many others. In addition, and maybe because of the increase in research and models, I think we're



### Strengthening Parent Involvement Policy

Why is it so challenging to strengthen parent involvement in federal child policy? The answer to this question reveals a fundamental flaw within our laws for children. Our policies address problems, rather than children themselves. Because education policy focuses on instruction, rather than the whole child, we lack critical pieces of the education puzzle, such as parent involvement, that would strengthen student achievement.

This year, the federal government will spend roughly \$25 billion through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act to improve student academic success. This law, which focuses on important issues such as accountability and teacher quality, includes a very modest emphasis on parent involvement. However, several bills have been introduced to amend NCLB to meet more fully the holistic needs of students. Among these bills, which would strengthen ties among students, parents, schools, and communities, are the WE CARE Act (Working to Encourage Community Action and Responsibility in Education), Keeping PACE Act (Keeping Parents and Communities Engaged), and the Full Service Community Schools Act.

These legislative efforts acknowledge that children are not problems to be “fixed” in silos and that their multifaceted problems do not fit neatly within the jurisdictions of Congressional committees. Moving forward, it will take our nation as a whole to build on these efforts and change how policymakers think about our young people.

*Phillip Lovell is the Vice President for Education Policy at First Focus. You can read summaries of the legislation highlighted above at [www.firstfocus.net](http://www.firstfocus.net).*

coming into a new understanding among school administrators. They’re beginning to understand that they need parents in order to accomplish high achievement, even if they don’t yet know exactly how to do it.

**Edwin Darden:** Although some folks would disagree, I think that NCLB has been an important milestone. It has started a revolution by institutionalizing the rights of parents from a legal standpoint. It opens the door for parents by requiring that they receive clear, timely information and giving them the right to act on it. It now becomes about parents sitting at the table with schools and saying, “Okay, you are the experts, but we are also experts in our own right, and we can help you get better.”

### What needs to happen in the next 3 to 5 years in order to make more progress in family involvement policy?

**Edwin Darden:** We need to focus our efforts at multiple levels. At the federal government level, monitoring and compliance need to include family involvement as a true priority, not one that simply exists on paper. It needs to be encouraged, monitored, and supported by additional funds. At the state level and district level, policies are needed that signal to school districts that family involvement is extremely important. This culture change needs to happen everywhere, but it could be particularly effective in struggling schools. And there needs to be more focus on providing

parent training. You can open the doors, but if folks don’t know how to walk through them, you’re not going to be as effective as you want to be.

**Arnold Fege:** I agree that accountability is critical, especially at the principal and school-site level. Building on the parent training idea, we need to build capacity at multiple levels. One of the most important, and most challenging, tasks is getting schools of education to transform their way of training teachers and administrators in a way that includes family involvement. Another important capacity-building effort is the Parental Information and Resource Centers, which serve as collaborators and brokers who bring together family involvement resources and opportunities across states. Research serves a capacity-building function as well. We are now building a collective research effort across a number of different fields, including not just education but also political science, child development, and the Department of Education’s research institutes.

**Craig Stevens:** A critical step now is getting that research out to Congress and other policymakers in a way that they can understand and use. Family involvement efforts need to be visible. Since members of Congress hold the purse strings, family involvement stakeholders need to be in their offices and in constant contact with them, sharing research and stories and letting them know about the benefits, the challenges, and how to tweak the law so that it benefits the families and children who need to be reached.

**Edwin Darden, Arnold Fege, Oliver Moles, & Craig Stevens:** For all of us in the field, having a common vision and a common agenda is critical. We’re all in this together, and we need the schools as much as they need us. The role that we serve as brokers in facilitating this collective discussion is essential. This includes bringing together a diverse range of groups who are doing tremendous work on these issues, including the National Coalition on Parent Involvement in Education, the American Educational Research Association’s Family School Community Partnerships special interest group, the PTA, local education funds, Public Education At Work, and many other local and national organizations.

Across all of these stakeholders, there needs to be even more of a concerted effort to unify the voice. You can make light the work by having many hands at it and having those hands and mouths in communication with each other. Together, we need to build a national constituency so that the general public understands the link between families and communities, high-quality public education, and economic and civic success. If the schools and families succeed, we all succeed; if they fail, we are all at risk.

This is a very special moment in history for family–school relationships and it’s one that won’t last if we don’t take full advantage of it. We need to work together so that we don’t lose the opportunity that has been presented.

**Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.**

*Project Manager, HFRP. Email: [bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu)*

**Abby R. Weiss**

*Executive Director, Full-Service Schools Roundtable,  
443 Warren Street Dorchester, MA 02121. Tel: 617-635-6537.  
Email: [aweiss@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:aweiss@boston.k12.ma.us).  
Website: [www.fullserviceschoolsroundtable.org](http://www.fullserviceschoolsroundtable.org)*

## Getting Serious About Excellence With Equity

*Ronald Ferguson, Director of the Achievement Gap Initiative and Lecturer at Harvard University, proposes that parents must be part of a broader movement for excellence with equity.*

Agreement is spreading in the U.S. that our future vitality as a nation hinges on our success over the next few decades at raising achievement levels for all groups while narrowing achievement gaps between groups—in other words, achieving *excellence with equity*. In order to achieve our intellectual potential as a nation, we need both formal and informal reforms that target teaching, youth peer cultures, out-of-school time supports, and other influences that shape what children know, can do, and come to value. We need a social movement for excellence with equity, in which *parenting for high achievement* is an important component.

From infancy on, parent-child interaction practices affect cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Parents also cultivate supports outside the home and try to protect their children from associated dangers. Because children do not arrive with instruction manuals, parents draw largely on personal experience—including the ways in which they themselves were parented—to guide their decisions. In this manner, parenting practices may pass from generation to generation, reflecting the threats and opportunities to which past generations adapted in their efforts to survive and prosper. Racial and social class identities and opportunity structures have, over generations, presented families with different options, which, in turn, have lead systematically to racial and social class differences in parenting, as parents have endeavored to prepare their offspring for expected threats and opportunities.

As threats and opportunity structures have changed across the generations, so also have the most effective modes of parenting. However, in the face of these changes, there are impediments to effective adaptation. Some parents lack well-informed sources of ideas about what to do differently. Some also lack support from employers, extended family members, school officials, purveyors of popular culture, and people in a host of other roles that affect what is really feasible for parents to do for their children.

Several months ago, I met with about a dozen business and school system leaders who are concerned about the impact of achievement levels and gaps on their region's quality of life, race

relations, and the future availability of skilled labor. I began the discussion by posing the following question: “What would we do if we were really serious about raising achievement and closing gaps?” A business leader in the group responded, “We *are* serious, so what should we do?” My response was something like the following:

If we were serious, we would mobilize a social movement for excellence with equity. It would engage all segments of the community. Inside that movement, there would be strategies, policies, programs, and projects that pushed us to reorder our individual and collective priorities in the interests of young people from birth through early adulthood. Parents, teachers, youth workers, and other community members would embrace one another as allies. There would be efforts to supply clear, coherent guidance to people in every role—including parents—to help them perform as effectively as possible, informed by the best available ideas and evidence. People who struggled in their roles would be given extra supports; people who shirked their responsibilities would be pressured to improve. Progress in the design, implementation, and evaluation of community-level initiatives would be monitored and reported in ways geared to foster both supports and pressures for

the work to get done expeditiously. Celebration would be common as a way of recognizing and rewarding progress, but it would be balanced by efforts to identify and implement ways of continuing to improve and holding one another accountable.

In my recent book, *Toward Excellence With Equity: An Emerging Vision for Closing the Achievement Gap*, I advocate just such a vision. I argue that this vision will become more plausible as regions develop sophisticated “excellence with equity engines.” Engines will be well-funded private sector organizations whose purpose is to “push and pull” their regions to stay focused over the next several decades on achieving excellence with equity. With regard to parenting in particular, they will provide employers, schools, and other organizations with tools and incentives to support parents more effectively. In addition, they will instigate the formation of new social and institutional structures through which parents can meet and learn from both experts and other parents.

Those of us who embrace the vision have a responsibility to develop more detailed and persuasive arguments to help build these engines. Without engines in a movement for excellence with equity, I fail to understand how we can succeed at a level that is worthy of our nation and our children.

**Ronald F. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

*Lecturer in Public Policy & Senior Research Associate, Wiener Center for Social Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government. Faculty Co-Chair & Director of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University. 79 JFK Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. Tel: 617-495-1104. Email: ronald\_ferguson@harvard.edu*

*“We need a social movement for excellence with equity, in which parenting for high achievement is an important component.”*

### Related Resource

Ferguson, R. F. (2007). *Toward excellence with equity: An emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. Available for purchase at [www.hepg.org/hepg/Book/77](http://www.hepg.org/hepg/Book/77).

## Only Connect: The Way to Save Our Schools

Helen Westmoreland of HFRP reviews *Only Connect: The Way to Save Our Schools* by Rudy Crew. An interview with Dr. Crew can be found on pages 20–21 of this issue.

“One teacher up at the front of the room with a pointer can’t make all the connections that a twenty-first century education requires. But we all carry the light of our particular knowledge, and Connected Schools ask each of us to focus that light on the place called school so our children can see the world around them with the clarity and courage they’ll need.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Only Connect: The Way to Save Our Schools*, Dr. Rudy Crew, superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, articulates a powerful vision for public education built on the premise that schools must look past their real and imagined walls and connect with the world around them. Young people, he argues, need to be able to connect their learning to the real world to be productive citizens; educators need to connect to their students to teach and inspire them; and schools need to connect to families and communities to both leverage other resources and to build accountability. *Only Connect* describes a need for a shared responsibility for education and makes a plea for all stakeholders to demonstrate a commitment to educating our nation’s young people.

At the core of Crew’s vision are “Connected Schools”—schools that are “connected in the intimate, functional way the heart works within our bodies” to families, businesses, community institutions, and others outside the school.<sup>2</sup> Though the book also addresses such topics as standards, assessment, and the role of the federal government in ensuring students receive a quality education, this review hones in on how *Only Connect* proposes that schools redefine their relationship with families and the community through Connected Schools.

### Forging Connections With Families

At the heart of Connected Schools is the twofold belief that (a) families are critical to the work of educating young people and (b) schools must take the first step toward helping families realize their potential. “I don’t care where it’s located, how poor its families are,” Crew writes. “If you can get a critical mass of engaged, thoughtful, and knowledgeable parents to participate on a consistent basis, that school will be successful.” He argues that schools should not only welcome but also foster the development of what he coins “Demand Parents.” As opposed to “Supply Parents”—

passive recipients of education—Demand Parents “demand things from their schools because they understand that they are indeed owed something and it is their responsibility to get it for their children.”<sup>3</sup>

Not only do Demand Parents hold their schools accountable, but they also share in the responsibility of helping their children learn. Not all parents know that there is a role for them in education, and, Crew argues, it is the responsibility of the school system to help them realize this role. Connected Schools are founded on the belief that all children can learn and all parents can teach.

In Miami-Dade County, Crew is working to build a cadre of Demand Parents through an initiative called the Parent Academy. Intended to help parents “cross the bridge” from home to

school, this initiative offers classes on early childhood, health and wellness, helping children learn, financial skills, languages, parenting skills, personal growth, and technology at locations throughout the community. Designed by asking parents what they wanted and needed, both for themselves and for their children, The Parent Academy served over 28,000 parents in its first 2 years.

### The Heart of Their Community

*Only Connect* also emphasizes the role of the community, including businesses and higher education. Crew argues for “mutuality of service delivery” to guide these relationships—that is, that the resources school districts receive from these partners (and from the government) should be seen as an exchange of services. He explains: “I wanted to redefine the role schools play in the community. I wanted the whole city plugged into the culture of its schools, and the schools plugged into the city.”<sup>4</sup> To this end, when he

first arrived in Miami-Dade County, Crew sought out business leaders and local public officials and asked how their efforts could converge with those of the school system. Through roundtable discussions of common interests and a series of written partnership agreements with business leaders, Crew embraced accountability to make the most of community partnerships.

*Only Connect* details these strategies and other concrete recommendations for families, communities, schools, and other stakeholders. The book makes a compelling case for why our nation must re-envision, not reform, its public education system, and for how Crew’s vision can play out in districts across the country.

Helen Westmoreland

Research Analyst, HFRP. Email: [westmobe@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:westmobe@gse.harvard.edu)



1. Crew, R., with Dyja, T. (2007). *Only connect: The way to save our schools*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 198.

2. Crew, 2007, p. 88.

3. Crew, 2007, p. 155.

4. Crew, 2007, p. 91.

*A conversation with*

**Rudy Crew**

Recently named the 2008 National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators, Dr. Rudy Crew is Superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the nation's fourth-largest school district. During his 25 years as an educator, he has served as a teacher, principal, and superintendent, including 5 years as chancellor of the New York City Public Schools. He has also taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, California State University, and Lesley University, and has served as director of district reform initiatives at the Stupski Foundation and as executive director of the Institute for K-12 Leadership. Dr. Crew has received many awards, including the NAACP Educational Leadership Award, the Arthur Ashe Leadership Award, the Spirit of Excellence Award from Minority Development & Empowerment, Inc., and the Florida Association of Partners in Education Superintendent's Award. He recently authored the book *Only Connect*, reviewed on page 19 of this issue. His work to close the student achievement gap in Miami-Dade County—recognized as a Broad Prize for Urban Education finalist in 2006 and 2007—includes the design and implementation of M-DCPS's Parent Academy, School Improvement Zone, and Secondary School Initiative; after school, Saturday, and summer programs; literacy campaigns; and an extended school day and school year.

**Q** In your book, *Only Connect*, you talk about your vision of enabling all parents to become Demand Parents—that is, parents who “demand things from their schools because they understand that they are indeed owed something and it is their responsibility to get it for their children.” What is the role of the school district in helping parents become Demand Parents and in facilitating family involvement?

**A** We can't meet the interests of the school district without meeting the interests of the parents. In any other market, success depends upon people having a relationship with your product. We need more opportunities for parents and community members to encounter our institutional “product” in positive and reinforcing ways. To do this, we need to create a wider pathway and a more expansive menu of opportunities for parents. Currently, there is a very narrow pathway for the parent-school relationship, which does not invite all the different kinds of conversations that are needed and does not ask parents to operate in any actionable way with schools. We need a different architecture for this relationship, which must evolve as children and families evolve and change.

If we want parents to take action, we need to help build their knowledge about education and the importance of family involvement. Parents will get their kids to SAT tests if they know they're important and fit into the picture of kids going to college. But

many parents, particularly in urban communities and very rural communities, don't have this knowledge. In Miami, one of the ways we are building knowledge is through the Parent Academy, which provides workshops, classes, events, and other opportunities to help parents learn about how to support their children's education.

*If we want parents to take action, we need to help build their knowledge about education and the importance of family involvement.*

**Q** Who should be responsible and accountable for ensuring that families are involved?

**A** Family involvement requires a cadence, in which parents and schools and kids all get into the rhythm of what it means to be an engaged learner, an engaged parent, and a school that rolls out a road for them to march on. I see the responsibility for this in thirds. Parents and the community have to do

their third, the principal and teachers have to do their third, and kids need to do their third. If district and school site staff do not understand the value of parent engagement and its connection to student achievement, they will not do the work.

I expect principals to be entrepreneurs in creating a menu of options for the ways in which we communicate with parents. Schools will have different portfolios of options for parent involvement, depending upon the parents, their needs, the school's history and traditions, and so forth. At each school, there need to be multiple ways, in addition to joining the PTA, in which parents

can engage in the education process.

I also expect principals to be accountable for the results of the children at the school in a way that causes parents to meet them a third of the way, because principals and teachers can't walk the full mile on their own. For their part, parents should monitor their children's efforts and provide their children with opportunities to gain access to the knowledge and skills that they need to feel confident as learners.

**Q** How will you know if the district's efforts to engage families are successful? What role should evaluation and assessment play?

**A** I see this largely as an issue of customer satisfaction. The question of the relationship between parents and schools is important: Do parents experience a high value in and come back for what you are offering them? In M-DCPS, we collect parent feedback from questionnaires, and we then create a school-by-school summary report. My administrative team and I also regularly assess each school on a number of indicators. In addition to traditional indicators—such as the number of children who miss between 6 and 16 days of school in a given grading period and the number of children who have left the school and not returned—we're going to start looking at a set of other indicators about the mental health of and support for students. These indicators include the number of contacts that have been made with students' homes and parents.

Evaluation plays another important role: It helps parents to understand and support their children's educational development. We already use data to provide parents with meaningful feedback about their children's academic achievement via report cards. This data helps inform them about their children's progress and needs. Now, we're beginning to shape additional indicators to give parents a sense of their children's broader development and what more may be needed at home to support that development. We want to create a conversation with parents about their children's social and behavioral development and occupational knowledge and skills, because school isn't just about whether you have passed the right test, but also about whether you have a blend of the values that will make you an appealing member of a democracy and a work environment.

**Q** What other kinds of evaluation data would you like to have to inform and build your family involvement efforts?

**A** First, it would be helpful to know more about parents' "consumer habits" and their use of schools. I'd like to ask them: What's the proximity from your home to your school? Do you know the principal of your child's school? How

many hours do you, over the year, have a conversation with somebody in the school?

Secondly, through a comprehensive 2-year study of the Parent Academy, we've been able to determine whether or not parents view our menu of outreach and opportunities favorably. As educators, we need to market-test our "product" very often with our customers. We have data that suggests whether and how parents get involved in their children's education, and we ask: "What do you *feel* about what you're doing with us?" We talk to parents to figure out whether our efforts make sense to them and whether they are helpful. For example, does the "Back to School Night"

hold any meaning for them? We have an outcomes-driven conversation, and to do this, we gather good research and good feedback from our parents.

**Q** What do you think it will take to build a more sustained and systemic commitment to family engagement in school districts across the country?

**A** It's going to take some incentives, largely from the government. For one thing, there should be incentives for greater collaboration among school systems, universities, businesses, social service agencies, and others. To date, we have not built those networks, and we need incentives to be more intentional about doing so.

One way of creating these incentives is financial support. Currently, school districts are funded based on demographics, such as enrollment and the number of students

whose first language is not English. I would like to see a new formula that gives some weight to those things but also recognizes the dollar value of what school districts are doing and how they are doing it. In this equation, greater federal support would go to districts that are offering a broader menu of opportunities for family engagement and that are more efficiently serving parent populations throughout their communities.

Greater support would also go to districts that are collaborating with more partners. For example, does your network have a college or university that is providing you with quantitative and qualitative data to help you assess new and innovative strategies? Is your municipal government involved?

There should also be incentives to test and elevate new models that create and accelerate innovative pathways for parent engagement. What we're doing in Miami right now is birthing a new on-the-ground model for education and family involvement. We need more live births like this one in order to examine which models have the greatest promise for providing deeper, wider, and more robust pathways to involvement for parents.

**Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.**

*Project Manager, HFRP. Email: bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu*



Rudy Crew

The first four articles in this issue's Evaluations to Watch section spotlight the national Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) program and the ways in which a new evaluation approach is helping it build the family involvement field. We begin with an overview of the evaluation strategy and continue with articles describing three PIRCs' evaluation plans and lessons learned.

### A Strategic Evaluation Approach for the Parental Information and Resource Centers

*Helen Westmoreland and Suzanne Bouffard describe the evolving evaluation strategy for the national Parental Information and Resource Centers program, the program's potential to build the family involvement field, and the role of the National PIRC Coordination Center.*

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act gives parents the right to be involved in their children's education in numerous ways—from taking part in school improvement to exercising options for school choice and supplemental services. But many schools need help in reaching out to parents and informing them of these rights, and parents often need additional information about how they can advocate for and help their children.

To address these needs, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) established the National Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). Through a competitive process, this program funds and oversees one or two PIRCs—statewide centers charged with promoting family-school relationships, including an emphasis on helping parents and schools understand the parent involvement provisions of NCLB—in every state or U.S. territory. Building on their history as technical assistance providers, the PIRCs funded for 2006–2011 have a new mission to build statewide knowledge of and capacity for parent involvement, as well as a new opportunity to reposition themselves as leaders in their states and in the field. There are currently a total of 62 PIRCs in all 50 states and a number of U.S. territories and outlying areas.

As part of its ongoing work to build family involvement practice and policy, Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) is collaborating with SEDL (formerly the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) to serve as the National PIRC Coordination Center. The Coordination Center provides technical assistance and guidance to build the PIRCs' capacity for program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

With support from the Coordination Center and ED, PIRCs are positioned to help build the field of family involvement both

within their states and nationally. To help the PIRCs fulfill this role, the Coordination Center uses a multifaceted approach, which includes an emerging strategic framework for quality implementation and a new and field-building evaluation strategy that helps PIRCs use evaluation to inform and improve their family involvement practices.

#### The PIRC Evaluation Strategy

The evaluation strategy is designed to achieve three primary goals: a) to assess evidence of impact for PIRC accountability and sustainability, b) to facilitate a process of learning and continuous improvement in each PIRC and the program as a whole, and c)

to inform the field at large. The Coordination Center's approach to evaluation honors the great diversity among the PIRCs, from their geography to their local needs, while addressing the commonalities across the PIRCs and emphasizing that each PIRC is part of a collective story of impact. It groups PIRCs' activities and desired outcomes into similar categories, in order to analyze the value-added of PIRCs for multiple outcomes and through multiple activities. This strategy also helps the Coordination Center target technical assistance accordingly.

The three primary components of this evaluation strategy are:

**1. Integrating program practice and evaluation.** With this new evaluation approach, the PIRCs are bridging the divide between *doing* and *assessing* parent involvement work. For the first time, ED is requiring each PIRC to work with an external evaluator. Maximizing this opportunity entails improved collaboration between PIRC directors and external evaluators. As a result of Coordination Center-facilitated institutes and ongoing

meetings, directors now report more investment in the evaluation process and evaluators feel more grounded in the day-to-day work of the PIRCs.

An important part of this collaboration is feeding evaluation data back into the program for learning and continuous improvement. PIRCs are collecting and analyzing data not just for com-

*The PIRC program is becoming a national think tank for parental involvement. PIRCs are increasing the visibility of parental involvement issues and services, leading efforts to coordinate parental involvement efforts across their states, and working together to build knowledge. The new evaluation strategy is critical to these efforts, because it helps us—and the field—understand how we can make the most difference.*

—Patricia Kilby-Robb, National PIRC Expert and Contracting Officer's Representative at the U.S. Department of Education

pliance with federal mandates, but to learn about what does and does not work well in their centers and to make changes accordingly. To facilitate this process, PIRCs are investing in management information systems, staff development, and regular meetings to discuss progress. PIRCs are also sharing this information with each other and with the public to promote best practices.

**2. Activity and outcomes alignment.** From October 2006 to October 2007, the first year of a 5-year funding cycle, PIRCs engaged in the first phase of the evaluation strategy: planning their evaluation activities for the entire cycle. One of the Coordination Center's primary goals during this year was to help PIRCs create a strategic evaluation plan that links their activities, the outcomes mandated by the federal legislation, and their evaluation design and measures. To help PIRCs create and improve these plans, the Coordination Center conducted regional training workshops and provided evaluation resources. The first step was to ensure alignment between PIRC activities and the legislated outcomes (e.g., increased home-school communication, improved school readiness) that PIRCs chose to measure. PIRCs are now able to focus on getting high-quality data that has a clear link to their individual efforts. In addition, the Coordination Center is able to look across all of the PIRCs to understand the kinds of outcome data that will be available at the end of the 5-year grant cycle.

**3. Increasing evaluation rigor.** In addition to better aligning their activities and outcomes, the PIRCs are also engaged in a number of other strategies to strengthen their evaluations. For example, some PIRCs have begun using more rigorously tested data collection measures to assess their progress toward outcomes. Almost half of the PIRCs have elected to conduct quasi-experimental research studies that use rigorous methods to examine the effectiveness of specific parental involvement approaches. These studies, which employ comparison groups to show the impact of specific programs or services, will contribute to a growing evidence base in the parent involvement field.

### Moving Forward

Through intensive work with all the PIRCs, the Coordination Center has witnessed a shift in perspective toward a program-wide

#### National PIRC Website

The National PIRC Coordination Center, a collaborative effort between SEDL, the Miko Group, and HFRP, has launched a new website to help support the Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). The new website details the Coordination Center's plan for technical assistance, provides useful links about PIRCs, and has a directory to help you locate your state PIRC. [www.nationalpirc.org](http://www.nationalpirc.org)

#### New and Upcoming SEDL Resources

For four decades, SEDL has worked to improve teaching and learning. In recent years, they have helped school, districts, and states meet the challenges of No Child Left Behind with resources, professional development, and other strategies. In addition to their work on the National PIRC Coordination Center, SEDL offers a vast number of practice and research-based family involvement resources, including research syntheses, strategy briefs, and a searchable database of school-family-community publications. You can access these resources at [www.sedl.org/connections](http://www.sedl.org/connections).

In October, 2006, the National Institute for Literacy awarded SEDL a contract to create and carry out a plan to get five new publications into the hands of parents nationwide. The free booklets give parents tips that support the development of their children's five crucial early reading skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. One of the booklets, *Dad's Playbook: Coaching Kids to Read*, is designed for fathers; another titled *Big Dreams* contains little text and is designed for parents with low-literacy skills. To find out when these resources become available, visit [www.sedl.org](http://www.sedl.org).

understanding of the critical role of evaluation for program quality and sustainability. Many PIRCs have increased the quality of their evaluation methods and measures and have created systems to build and sustain evaluation capacity. The PIRCs are becoming incubators of innovation, whose evaluation and research studies will not only inform PIRC services, but make an important contribution to the field and to parents and educators across the country.

In the words of Patricia Kilby-Robb, National PIRC Expert and Contracting Officer's Representative at ED, PIRCs are becoming "a national think tank" for parental involvement, which will inform the field at large. With support and leadership from the Coordination Center, the new focus on using evaluation data to identify and promote effective practices is a large component of this innovative and field-building work. The following three articles illustrate the range of PIRC approaches and strategies, demonstrate how PIRCs are using evaluation, and highlight efforts to promote parent involvement in systemic and collaborative ways.

#### Helen Westmoreland

Research Analyst, HFRP. Email: [westmohe@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:westmohe@gse.harvard.edu)

#### Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.

Project Manager, HFRP. Email: [bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu)

## The Indiana State PIRC's Collaborative Evaluation Process

*Jerrell Cassady and Jackie Garvey illustrate how an ongoing, collaborative process between director and evaluator has informed and improved the Indiana State PIRC's programs to support family involvement.*

For the past 5 years, we have served as the project evaluator and director for the Indiana State Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC). In that time, we have found evaluation to be integral to establishing a progressive growth model for the organization. In addition to meeting federal and program mandates, effective external evaluation can provide PIRC staff with the knowledge necessary to be adaptive and flexible in meeting the needs of constituents. Our strong, collaborative relationship as director and evaluator has played a major role in helping the evaluation and, consequently, the PIRC to thrive.

### Clarity and Consistency

Building this relationship has taken time and effort. During the first year of the PIRC evaluation, Jerrell—an experienced evaluator—had difficulty identifying the PIRC's core project goals and functions. From his perspective, the PIRC was “doing too many things.” From the perspective of Jackie—the PIRC director—Jerrell “just didn't get it.” We find this difference in perspective common in evaluations of PIRC programs.

After several meetings, we came to agree that there was, at least from an outside point of view, a lack of consensus about what the PIRC “did” and that, as a result, evaluation activities did not sufficiently connect the diverse components of the PIRC. Jackie responded to this issue by articulating the organization's framework—outlining the interconnections between the people and programs affiliated with the PIRC. The value of this process of clarification was two-fold: Jerrell gained insight into the “big idea” of the PIRC, and the staff saw how their individual roles fit into a bigger picture, which, in turn, fostered greater synergy in their work processes.

Consistency was key at this stage of the game and is a key strategy for success. Evaluator turnover would require repeating this year-long learning process and thus negatively impact evaluation quality.

### Bridging the Paradigm Gap

Evaluators operate from a paradigm of evaluation design that places great importance on methodological processes and sampling concerns. Program staff often see these concerns as unimportant details, instead placing greater emphasis on program content and delivery. In our experience, successfully bridging the gap between the two paradigms occurs through a process of mutual respect, whereby both parties recognize the parameters underlying their joint activities and acknowledge that the other party is qualified to negotiate the barriers that arise between their different paradigms.

### Trust

For the project director, trusting the evaluator is essential because the evaluator requests information that may not shine a wholly

favorable light on the organization. Distrustful project directors have been known to withhold information that they believe will lead to a negative evaluative report. Directors must realize that only when all the information is laid out for evaluator to examine can true improvement and change can be attained—especially in evaluations with a strong formative component.

In our experience, focusing on short-term goals and submitting brief reports on specific evaluation questions promotes the ability of the PIRC to respond to observed limitations in program efficacy and make gains within a program year. This trust does not mean that the evaluator is “sugarcoating” the PIRC's weaknesses and over-reporting strengths. The evaluator needs to maintain a critical eye and provide information to the PIRC in a timely fashion so that it can improve upon identified weaknesses.

### Building Evaluation Plans Together

To ensure that a quality collaborative relationship produces a quality evaluation design, we have developed a three-step process for evaluation design:

1. **Goal identification.** The program director identifies a set of goals, research questions, or benchmarks that serve as the key focus for a given time period.
2. **Clarify evaluation needs.** Once the goal or evaluation question has been articulated, the evaluator identifies the data sources and controls necessary to provide a confident and reliable conclusion.
3. **Negotiation and problem solving.** The evaluator and PIRC staff bring their own expertise to solve the problem. The evaluator communicates the requirements for a valid finding, while the staff highlight the realities of interacting with the parents, teachers, and school administrators. At the intersection of these two bodies of knowledge rests the optimal evaluation design for each PIRC goal.

This process helped the Indiana State PIRC more effectively design and deliver the Indiana Academy for Parent Leadership, which has been the central focus of the evaluation process for 3 of the evaluation's 5 years. In part as a result of our collaboration as PIRC director and evaluator, the Academy has grown in enrollment and refined services to reach more stakeholders. Now, sufficiently validated by evaluation, it serves as a central feature in a new parent engagement and leadership training program that provides the participants with university credit.

### Jerrell C. Cassady, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Psychology, Department of Educational Psychology, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.  
Tel: 765-285-8522. Email: jccassady@bsu.edu*

### Jackie Garvey

*Executive Director, The Indiana Partnerships Center, Parental Information and Resource Center, 921 E. 86th Street, Suite 108, Indianapolis, Indiana 46240. Tel: 866-391-1039.  
Email: jgarvey@fscp.org*



## Building Family Involvement Through a Targeted District Approach

*Marianne Kirner and Matt Storeygard explain how the Connecticut State PIRC is implementing and evaluating an effort to promote family involvement at the school district level.*

**H**ow can a PIRC best target its resources to strengthen family involvement in the schools and communities with the greatest needs? The Connecticut (CT) State Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) is working directly with school districts to institute school–family–community partnerships (SFCPs) in a large number of high-need urban and rural schools across the state. This Targeted District Project has the potential to “scale up” SFCPs by reaching all schools in a district and sustain family involvement efforts by building the capacity of district-level staff to directly train and support schools.

This comprehensive approach builds on Joyce Epstein’s SFCP model, which involves establishing school Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) that focus on critical school goals—such as supporting and promoting student achievement. Starting in 1995, the Connecticut State Department of Education and the State Education Resource Center (SERC) began promoting SFCPs by training action teams in individual schools. However, within the 8 years that followed, at least one third of the over 100 schools trained did not sustain their action teams. Evaluations demonstrated that many ATPs disappeared with changes in school leadership.

These findings led to a major change in approach in 2003–2004. In order to sustain action teams in the face of future turnover, it became clear that it was important to institutionalize SFCPs beyond specific principals and staff members. As a result, the Connecticut State Department of Education, SERC, and the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) partnered to pilot a district-level approach to promoting SFCPs within three Connecticut school districts. An evaluation of this district pilot project found strong evidence that a district-level approach is effective in promoting SFCPs. Specifically, the three districts developed their capacity to support schools and provide leadership on partnerships. Support provided by the CT State PIRC, for which SERC is currently the lead agency, helped the action teams in the participating districts meet turnover and other challenges.

The Targeted District Project builds upon this work by adding five additional high-need districts—selected by geographic distribution, urban/rural balance, economic/resource levels, and NCLB/AYP accountability status—to the project. Each district will receive targeted technical support for three years in a “trainer of facilitators” model. The PIRC will offer workshops and one-on-one coaching to build district-level leadership to support activities

at the district level and provide technical assistance at the school level to establish SFCPs. Schools in the targeted districts will be required to form action teams and develop concrete action plans that are a) goal-oriented, b) create an infrastructure to increase partnership activities, and c) utilize specific National Network of Partnership Schools evaluation tools and surveys.

Holt, Wexler & Farnam (HWF) is evaluating the activities of the CT State PIRC, including the Targeted District Project. To evaluate the outcomes of the Targeted District Project, HWF will use multiple methods, including a quasi-experimental study and qualitative data. The quasi-experimental study will assess the impact on students’ attendance, behavior, and achievement. Our hypothesis is that students in target schools will improve in all of these areas at higher rates than students in comparison schools. HWF will also track trends in parent involvement at participating schools through annual parent surveys about their participation

in the school, home and community (e.g., attending school activities, reading to or with their child) and by interviewing a cohort of 30 parents twice each year about the project’s impact on their participation. In addition, HWF will evaluate improvements in school/professional capacity by utilizing the annual NNPS Action Team reports, as well as qualitative data from annual interviews and focus groups with school professionals and parents.

The CT State PIRC then will use evaluation data to make midcourse adjustments to better serve our constituents and communities. For example, one finding from the SFCP district pilot project evaluation is that each district implemented strikingly different

approaches (e.g., creating a welcoming atmosphere versus implementing a targeted family literacy project). Evidence shows that these different approaches were appropriate for their differing local contexts. As we develop and adapt our strategy, HWF will continue to conduct formative evaluations with an emphasis on how to effectively promote SFCPs in larger, higher need urban and rural districts.

We are excited about the prospect of instituting comprehensive SFCPs in all schools in our five new districts—which include the cities of Hartford and Bridgeport—and we look forward to sharing the findings and lessons learned from this project.

**Marianne Kirner, Ph.D.**

*Director, CT State PIRC, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457-1520. Tel: 860-632-1485. Email: kirner@ctserc.org*

**Matt Storeygard**

*Holt, Wexler & Farnam, LLP, 900 Chapel Street, Suite 620, New Haven, CT 06510. Tel: 203-772-2050. Email: storeygard@hwfco.com*

*In order to sustain action teams in the face of future turnover, it became clear that it was important to institutionalize school–family–community partnerships beyond specific principals and staff members.*

## Reaching More Parents Through a Complementary Learning Approach

*Lisa St. Clair and Barbara Jackson describe how the Nebraska State PIRC connects with 21st Century Community Learning Centers to foster family involvement.*

What does it take to implement a statewide network of family and school partnership centers designed to strengthen family engagement and support student learning? The Nebraska State Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) takes a complementary learning approach to answering this question, by connecting schools, parents, out-of-school time (OST) programs, community agencies, and higher education partners.

The Nebraska State PIRC was created, in part, as an outgrowth of the evaluation of Nebraska's 21st Century Community Learning Centers—a network of 77 OST programs operating in school buildings through the state's use of federal Title IV-B education funds. As program managers and evaluators examined these programs' family involvement practices, they realized that new opportunities were needed to strengthen family and school partnerships. In 2006, the Nebraska Family and Schools Partnerships project was conceived, and we partnered with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nebraska Department of Education, and Munroe-Meyer Institute to apply for funding from the U.S. Department of Education to create the Nebraska State PIRC. Key partners in this effort are the Nebraska Department of Education and Governor Dave Heineman, who has identified parental involvement as one of his top priorities. Nebraska State PIRC also aligned its efforts with a state initiative called Together for Kids and Families (see sidebar).

The goals of the Nebraska State PIRC are simple: to provide technical assistance and funding to Title I schools with 21st Century Community Learning Centers who commit to strengthening their family and school partnership practices. We accomplish this work by two means: (a) School-Based PIRCs, or parent-school partnership teams, in elementary and secondary schools; and (b) early childhood parent education programs.

Over the next 5 years, the Nebraska State PIRC will partner with a total of 72 schools to create School-Based PIRCs. To support these host schools in their implementation efforts, we provide them with the Academic Development Institute's comprehensive Solid Foundation model and \$10,000 to defray the costs of sys-

tem changes in parent involvement practices. At inception, each school site will form a school community council—comprised of the building principal, several parents, a 21st Century Community Learning Center staff member, a prekindergarten parent or teacher, and one or two teachers—that will meet twice a month. The council will implement a 2-year plan to review and improve the school's parent-school compact and parent involvement policies, plan family activities, and establish home visitation.

We will also implement model school-based or school-linked early childhood parent education (ECPE) programs in six communities. The purpose of the Nebraska State PIRC Early Childhood Partnership in Learning Approach is to collaborate with families to support their children's school readiness, positive interactions with their young children, and capacity to access necessary community resources. These ECPEs will be linked to School-Based PIRCs to establish a continuum for family involvement.

The success of the School-Based PIRCs will be measured using a combined quantitative and qualitative evaluation approach, including interviews and documentation of change. Outcomes will be measured at multiple levels, including outcomes for the system, parents, and children. One of our goals is to evaluate the impact of the Nebraska State PIRC's services on parent involvement. For this purpose, we are employing multiple sources of data, including observations by evaluators, as well as teacher and parent ratings.

Another goal is to determine whether students have higher academic adjustment and achievement when their parents participate in PIRCs and early childhood parent education programs. To maximize the integration of state data, we considered measures that were already in use by schools in Nebraska. To measure student achievement, evaluation staff will draw from data collected from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, including a variety of student performance data as well as objective ratings by a team of evaluators of supports for learning, family involvement practices of schools, linkages between school day and OST programs, and general strategies used to enhance student learning. Baseline student data gathered the year prior to the adoption of the School-Based PIRC will allow for comparative analyses.

This multifaceted evaluation plan is designed to provide important information to inform the field about the extent to which implementing a complementary learning approach across a continuum of supports enhances outcomes for both students and their families. The Nebraska State PIRC has positioned itself to bring together key education and family support leaders to enact a systemic change in how schools partner with parents to support the learning and development of children and youth.

**Lisa St. Clair, Ed.D.**

*PIRC Director, Nebraska State PIRC, 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68508. Tel: 877-843-6651. Email: Lstclair@unmc.edu*

**Barbara Jackson, Ph.D.**

*Director, Evaluation, Munroe-Meyer Institute/UNMC, 985450 Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE 68198-5450. Tel: 402-559-5765. Email: bjackso@unmc.edu*

### Together for Kids and Families

This project by the Nebraska Health and Human Services System seeks to bring about positive outcomes for young children and their families by creating a comprehensive system of early childhood supports. The strategic plan outlines a vision for bringing together families, schools, service providers, and policymakers in a system where children are a top priority. [www.hhs.state.ne.us/hew/fah/Together-Kids-Families.pdf](http://www.hhs.state.ne.us/hew/fah/Together-Kids-Families.pdf)

## Strengthening Family Ties

*Sharon Hemphill and Holly Kreider describe how the Boys & Girls Clubs of America is implementing and evaluating an initiative that goes “beyond the walls” to support families in order to promote children’s success.*

Children from strong families have the best opportunities for success. Families play a key role in seamlessly connecting communities and have the greatest influence on young people’s development. That’s why Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA)—in its efforts to enable children to fulfill their potential—has a strong commitment to strengthening families. Generous support from the Kimberly-Clark Corporation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation allows Clubs to implement family strengthening programs critical to young people’s success.

Thanks to such generous support, for many years BGCA has overseen recognition and financial awards programs that reward Clubs for providing outstanding services to families. Building on the success of these programs, BGCA began implementing the Family PLUS (Parents Leading, Uniting, Serving) initiative in 2005. Family PLUS is designed to form collaborations with parents and caregivers to assist in the positive development of youth. With a commitment of \$7 million to the initiative, the Kimberly-Clark Corporation has provided 79 grants and 48 awards to Clubs for the implementation of Family PLUS so far, with plans for grants and awards to additional Clubs in 2009.

The central strategies for the Family PLUS initiative include kinship care, father involvement, economic opportunity, outreach strategies and the Family Advocacy Network (FAN) Club (an empirically supported family support program). Clubs have been using these strategies to create networks of support and to help families spend more time together. To facilitate implementation of Family PLUS, BGCA recruited an advisory committee of youth development experts who rolled up their sleeves to plan, critique and perfect the program’s framework. In its endeavor to expand the influence of the Boys & Girls Clubs Movement beyond the walls of the Clubs, BGCA has also placed the importance of

enhanced family support within IMPACT 2012, its 5-year strategic plan (see sidebar).

Through Family PLUS, Clubs around the country have created and implemented promising new strategies. For example, the Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach, California, initiated a counseling program, in which the Club contracted with a family therapist to conduct monthly sessions with teens and their parents, allowing youth and parents to talk through their differences. Other sites have offered a host of courses for parents, such as English as a second language, cooking, parenting, fitness, technology and financial literacy. Clubs also have a network of outside community resources to meet more intermediate and advanced family needs.

A process evaluation focused on the implementation of Family PLUS has been completed with the help of Sociometrics Corporation in Los Altos, California. Evaluators codeveloped a logic model with BGCA staff, evaluated our first Family Support Symposium, and collected data from lead staff and families at Family PLUS Club sites to assess a) capacity-building efforts by BGCA through training and technical assistance; b) implementation, usage and satisfaction with Family PLUS key strategies; and c) families’ reported time spent together as a result of programming.

This data was collected through a symposium exit and follow-up survey; surveys and phone interviews with chief professional officers and lead staff at Clubs; surveys and focus groups with parents/caregivers; youth focus groups; and document review. Findings revealed effectively implemented family support programming across Clubs, with high usage levels and few barriers experienced by parents, and with innovative strategies abounding. Club leaders appreciated BGCA’s national family support symposium and craved other opportunities to learn best practices and exchange ideas with colleagues. All stakeholders reported positive effects on family togetherness, through time spent together at Clubs, improved parenting skills, and parents’ fuller understanding of their children’s talents, interests, and peers. A continuation of the evaluation in 2008–2009 will further explore these findings.

This evaluation is helping BGCA track the progress of its efforts to support families. Along with activities such as the annual Boys & Girls Clubs Day for Kids celebration and a partnership with the Alliance for Children & Families during National Family Week, Family PLUS is a central part of BGCA’s recognition of the important role families play in society. Strengthening the familial bond will continue to be an important emphasis of the Boys & Girls Club Movement. For the Boys & Girls Clubs, giving kids the tools they need to succeed is all in the family.

### Sharon Hemphill

*Senior Director, Health and Life Skills. Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Program & Youth Development Services, 1275 Peachtree Street, Atlanta, GA 30309. Tel: 404-487-5826. Email: shemphill@bgca.org. Website: www.bgca.org*

### Holly Kreider, Ed.D.

*Vice President. Sociometrics Corporation, 170 State Street, Suite 260, Los Altos, CA 94022. Tel: 650-949-3282. Email: hkreider@socio.com. Website: www.socio.com*

### BCGA Strategic Objectives

Family PLUS fits within BGCA’s four strategic objectives for priority focus over the period 2008 to 2012:

1. Implement an impact with growth agenda
2. Expand the influence of the movement beyond our Club walls
3. Build stronger organizations
4. Assure greater public trust

The third objective spans community partnerships, civic engagement, brand awareness, and a leadership role for BGCA in youth development. One critical strategy identified for achieving this objective is to promote programs and partnerships that go beyond traditional out-of-school time activities to strengthen families and communities.

## Parents as Educational Leaders

*Bruce Wilson and Dick Corbett describe an evaluation of Kentucky's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership.*

Through its Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL),<sup>1</sup> Kentucky's Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence has designed a training program to help participating parents (known as Fellows) broaden their involvement in schools and school reform. Parents move from being school volunteers and/or advocates for their own children to become sophisticated critics of school reform and resourceful change agents whose actions benefit all educational stakeholders.

The program begins with a 3-month-long sequence of workshops that introduce Fellows to their rights to know about and gain access to school operations; key elements of Kentucky's reform legislation and policy; where to go and whom to contact for information about educational and community resources; and specific ways to act as advocates for school reform. Upon completion of the training, each Fellow undertakes a project designed to have an eventual effect on student achievement, involve other parents, and be sustainable in subsequent years.

From an initial 3-year evaluation of CIPL, we learned that Fellows significantly increased their knowledge about schools and school reform, built their confidence to work in those settings, and expanded their willingness to act for the betterment of all students in their community.<sup>2</sup> Recently, we investigated the experiences of all Fellows subsequent to their "graduation" from CIPL to see if their training continued to have ramifications in their children's schools, their local districts and communities, and the state.<sup>3</sup>

In summer 2007, we conducted interviews with nearly 60 parents chosen from a list of 100 parents provided by CIPL. The obvious bias toward "activist" parents was intentional, to allow us to bring to the surface a rich and deep collection of experiences. We asked parents about their project's sustainability, their continued engagement in educational activities, and the facilitators and barriers to their engagement. Out of these interview responses, we developed a survey, which we mailed to all 1,200 CIPL graduates across the 10 years of the program. Survey items measured continued networking with CIPL and other Fellows, ongoing project activity, further knowledge acquired about educational issues, the impact of CIPL experiences on Fellows' current engagement in schools, ability to promote CIPL goals, and the effect of CIPL on personal and professional lives.

From interview and survey results, we found four main themes: a) Fellows became more concerned with promoting the best interests of *all* children, not just their own; b) fellows sustained their involvement post-training and broadened its scope beyond schools; c) fellows felt empowered to act because they felt more

knowledgeable, confident, and competent; and d) fellows become more influential in their schools and communities.

The interview data richly illustrated these themes, as nearly every interviewee offered examples of how CIPL training influenced his or her life. The most obvious impact was parents' realization that they could make a difference. One parent described voicing her opinion at a local school board meeting. Before CIPL, she said, "I absolutely would not have been there to speak up." Fellows also acquired the ability to understand educational jargon, which led to greater comfort and a sense of empowerment in advocating for school reform. One parent said, "I can now talk with teachers comfortably, understand their vernacular, and am better able to evaluate what they are telling me."

New knowledge and skills spurred parents' willingness to tackle broader issues. Many said they joined a school committee or attended school board meetings after discovering that they knew state regulations governing the operation of school-based decision-making councils as well as or better than some school administrators. Some used their knowledge to force school officials to comply with formal guidelines and procedures and to inform other parents about their rights.

The Fellows continue to play a variety of active and visible roles in their communities and the state. Some are members of local, site-based decision-making councils, while others have won seats on local school boards. In these capacities, Fellows have had a direct hand in shaping curricula, consolidating schools, and hiring superintendents. Beyond the local school systems, Fellows lobby the state legislature about increasing educational funding and tailoring policies to better meet students' needs, serve on various state commissions or advisory councils, and speak to teacher education students around the state about parents' perspectives.

The study's data point to the conclusion that a program such as CIPL can be effective in prompting some parents—perhaps those

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### Related Resource

Commissioner's Parents Advisory Council. (2007). *The missing piece of the proficiency puzzle: Recommendations for involving families and communities in improving student achievement. Final report to the Kentucky Department of Education*. Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Department of Education. In this report, the Kentucky Commissioner's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC), the majority of whose members have completed the Prichard Committee's CIPL training, recommends that Kentucky become the first state in the nation to set standards for family involvement focused on improving student achievement. The report includes six objectives for increasing family and community involvement in education and a rubric for rating family and community involvement in the schools. [www.education.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/45597738-F31B-4333-9BB9-34255F02BC6D/0/PACtheMissingPiecev2.pdf](http://www.education.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/45597738-F31B-4333-9BB9-34255F02BC6D/0/PACtheMissingPiecev2.pdf)

1. To read more about CIPL, visit [www.cipl.org](http://www.cipl.org).

2. Our report, *I Didn't Know I Could Do That: Parents Learning to be Leaders Through the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership*, was prepared in 2000 with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Access the full report at [www.cipl.org/Articles/Publications/cipl\\_didnt\\_know.pdf](http://www.cipl.org/Articles/Publications/cipl_didnt_know.pdf).

3. The 2008 report, *Knowledge is Empowering*, which was supported by the Spencer Foundation, is available at [www.cipl.org/Articles/Publications/Knowledge\\_is\\_Empowering\\_Full\\_Report\\_with\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.cipl.org/Articles/Publications/Knowledge_is_Empowering_Full_Report_with_Survey.pdf)

## Upcoming Evaluations

*HFRRP takes a look at upcoming family involvement and complementary learning evaluations.*

### San Mateo County Community Schools Initiative

The Silicon Valley Community Foundation is overseeing the San Mateo County (California) Community Schools Initiative, which channels resources and provides technical assistance to emerging community schools that serve high-needs populations. With funding from The Stuart Foundation, LFA Group is conducting an evaluation of three communities in San Mateo County to understand how the community schools model supports comprehensive grassroots reform. The evaluators are observing and assessing the progress of program implementation and desired outcomes, including (but not limited to) family involvement, defined as supporting a child's learning, assisting with a child's development, and providing parent leadership and advocacy within the school community. The evaluation, to be completed in 2010 with interim results in 2008, will be used to develop a regional community schools policy.

**Steven LaFrance**

*Email: steven@lfaingroup.com*

**Gaylon Parsons**

*Email: gaylon@lfaingroup.com*

### Parent Services Project's Parent Leadership Institutes

Parent Services Project (PSP) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to integrating family support into early childhood programs and schools through training, technical assistance, and education. With support from the Marguerite Casey Foundation, PSP is poised to expand its annual Parent Leadership Institutes to several new locations over the next 2 years and strengthen the outcome evaluation already in place. PSP will keep and refine its pre-post test participant survey design, while adding institute focus groups and follow-up interviews with alumni and partner agencies. Evaluation training for a core group of parent alumni, as well as guidance from our outside evaluator, Sociometrics, will ensure the rigor and success of this participatory approach.

**Jenny Ocón, M.S.W.**

*Email: jocon@parentservices.org*

### Raising a Reader

Raising a Reader (RAR) works with early childhood programs in 33 states to increase parent-child book reading and use of public library services. RAR encourages parents, including those who cannot read or speak English, to "book cuddle" with their children and "read" the pictures. In a recent study, in which home visitors rotated bags filled with high-quality books into families' homes, parents in the RAR group reported a greater increase in time spent book sharing with their children than parents in a control group. In addition, children in the RAR group showed greater gains in overall development, particularly social, physical, and number skills, and RAR toddlers showed greater increases in time spent asking questions during book sharing. These results will

inform an ongoing 5-year study of the program as well as future research initiatives.

**Carol Welsh Gray**

*Email: cgray@raisingareader.org*

### Parents as Teachers National Evaluation

With a history of research, evaluation, and program quality standards, Parents as Teachers (PAT) is committed to continuous program improvement and to demonstrating the impacts of the Born to Learn home visiting model. Last year, Mark Appelbaum and Monica Sweet of UC San Diego conducted a review of PAT's research to date and made recommendations for future priority research activities. Based on their recommendations and input from the PAT Scientific Advisory Committee and the Research and Evaluation Committee of the PAT National Center, the organization is seeking funding for a rigorous, two-phase study. Phase 1 will focus on the quality of implementation, and phase 2 will focus on accountability and impacts of PAT.

**Karen A. Guskin, Ph.D.**

*Email: karen.guskin@parentsasteachers.org*

### Community Organizing and School Reform Project

With the Community Organizing and School Reform Project, researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education are undertaking one of the largest ever studies of education organizing. Led by Mark Warren and Karen Mapp, the team is studying six community organizing groups throughout the U.S. At their core, education organizing efforts focus on the active engagement of education stakeholders, especially families, in creating school and community change, on processes of leadership development, and on building power to address inequalities and failure in public schools. The project aims to answer questions related to the processes and mechanisms through which education organizing accomplishes its aims and the role of contextual factors in shaping these outcomes.

**Mark Warren, Ph.D.**

*Email: mark\_warren@gse.harvard.edu*

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### Parents as Educational Leaders

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already inclined toward activism—to become keenly involved in schools and school reform. The cumulative weight of what we have learned so far is best summed up by one parent's exclamation: "I didn't know I could do that!"

**Bruce Wilson**

*Independent Researcher. 11 Linden Avenue, Merchantville, NJ 08109.  
Tel: 856-488-1398. Email: bruce.wilson8@verizon.net*

**Dick Corbett**

*Independent Researcher. 512 Conestoga Road, Malvern, PA 19355.  
Tel: 610-408-9206. Email: corbetthd@comcast.net*

## Developing a Parent-Derived Measure of Latino Family Involvement

*Christine McWayne and Gigliana Melzi from New York University's Department of Applied Psychology discuss their investigation of Latino family involvement in early childhood education.*

The evaluation and development of family involvement programs for young children, particularly young Latino children, depend on quality family involvement measurement for the Latino community. Right now, few culturally responsive and valid instruments exist to capture adequately the family involvement attitudes, behaviors, and practices among diverse Latino families. This is problematic, given the growing numbers of Latino children enrolled in early childhood programs and programs' consequent need to conceptualize new ways of encouraging and gauging parental support of young children's educational success.

Supported by generous funding from both the Administration for Children and Families Head Start University Partnership Research Grants and the National Institute of Child Health and Development, our mixed-methods study, presently underway, investigates the specific and unique ways that Latino families support children's school readiness through their involvement behaviors. Our research recognizes the impact of both the home and school environments on children's development and attempts to improve the connections and links between them.

Specifically, the overall objectives of our work—within a diverse Latino community of families and children participating in Head Start—are to (a) understand parents' conceptualizations of family involvement in their children's early educational experiences; (b) develop and validate a culturally relevant, multidimensional measure of family involvement; and (c) examine the culturally relevant, multidimensional construct of family involvement in relation to school readiness. This work is necessary to report sufficiently on educational policies and practices for this community.

The study integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods within an emic approach to social science research.<sup>1</sup> An emic perspective allows us to analyze family processes from within the cultural system privileging what members of the cultural group themselves value as meaningful and important. Thus, the project begins with collection and analyses of qualitative, focus group data to identify core concepts and beliefs among Latino families regarding child development and the specific practices that families engage to support children's early educational experiences.<sup>2</sup>

After relevant categories are derived from the qualitative analyses, we will then focus on instrument development. First, representative behaviors will be sampled from each of the identified domains to create a pool of items for a multidimensional scale. Using quantitative methods, participants' responses to these items

will be subjected to common factor analytic and Rasch procedures to ensure that reliable dimensions are identified across and within Latino subgroups. Constructs will be confirmed with an independent sample using confirmatory factor analysis.

Findings from this study will contribute to our understanding of culturally situated practices and fill a void within the scientific knowledge base. This work will also help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various ways that Latino parents support their young children's early education and help to promote reciprocal dialogue among evaluators, early childhood educators, and families regarding effective ways to promote and measure involvement. Our results will have a direct impact on the Head Start programs in New York City, as well as suggest implications for early childhood programs serving Latino families and children across the nation.

**Christine McWayne, Ph.D.**

*Assistant Professor. Email: cm106@nyu.edu*

**Gigliana Melzi, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor of Applied Psychology.  
Email: gigliana.melzi@nyu.edu*

*New York University, Department of Applied Psychology,  
239 Greene Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10003.*

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### Building the Field

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by charter schools, which distinguish themselves thematically, to potentially “include smaller units of organization that are more community sensitive and responsive, in which parents, from the beginning, not only have a clear understanding of the expectations placed on them, but a clear understanding of the choices they have and the individual opportunities that are available to them and their children.”

M. Elena Lopez called for “re-imagining” parent involvement. She explained, “Thinking about the next generation of parent involvement means getting a new generation of emerging researchers and practitioners to come together and think about their generation. What do they think parent involvement should look like? The new generation is the first cohort in 40 years that has been able to build on two previous generations of thinking and action in this area. New directions should be defined and determined by the needs and opportunities this new group finds critical. It can be spearheaded by the older generation, but we need to leave it for the next generation to define as its own.” Although the specifics of these new visions have yet to be determined, the need to think creatively and imaginatively is evident.

**Margaret Caspe, Ph.D.**

*Consultant, HFRP, and Survey Researcher, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. PO Box 2393, Princeton, NJ 08540.  
Email: mcaspe@mathematica-mpr.com*

1. Hitchcock, J. H., Nastasi, B. K., Dai, D. Y., Newman, J., Jayasena, A., Bernstein-Moore, R., et al. (2005). Illustrating a mixed-method approach for validating culturally specific constructs. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*, 259–278.

2. Gaskins, S. (1994). Integrating interpretive and quantitative methods in socialization research. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 40*, 313–333.

## Measuring the Implementation and Impact of the Kentucky Family Resource Centers

*John Kalafat from Rutgers University describes how he and his colleagues used Innovative Configuration Analysis to evaluate a statewide family resource initiative's implementation and impact.<sup>1</sup>*

The Kentucky Family Resource Center (FRC) program is a statewide initiative consisting of school-based centers whose mission is to ensure that children come to school healthy, safe, and prepared to learn. As required by the legislation enabling their creation, FRCs provide a set of core family services adapted to the needs and contexts of the local community. FRCs address the physical, psychological, and social needs of children and their families; increase family participation in the educational process and access to community services; and forge cooperation among families, schools, and communities.

Because the state's mandate is flexible and ambitious, interventions vary from one FRC to another. Seeking to understand what FRCs were *doing* to meet the state's mandate, we conducted a process evaluation involving extended visits to several FRCs. During these visits, we observed and interviewed FRC staff, school and community personnel, and family members. We also reviewed program materials. These visits yielded qualitative descriptions of *what* programs and services FRCs were providing and *how* they were providing these services to their schools, families, and communities.

From these descriptions, we were able to identify the “active ingredients” of FRCs—that is, the common cross-site services and approaches that seemed most likely to remove barriers to learning.<sup>2</sup> For example, we found that, across multiple FRCs, coordinators had to win school principals and faculty over to the *idea* of increased family involvement in schools as a precondition to facilitating family involvement. Similarly, FRC coordinators frequently found it necessary to convince principals of the importance of the FRC working in the broader community with families, rather than working solely in the school with students.

As we examined the presence of these active ingredients in the FRCs, we quickly recognized that simply dichotomizing them as present or absent in an individual FRC would result in a substantial loss of information. These “ingredients” were in fact ongoing processes, and we realized that we needed to describe not presence or absence but rather the different *levels* of implementation

of these components. For example, one FRC coordinator may be working closely with the school principal, while another may be just beginning to educate her principal about the role of FRCs in children's school readiness.

In order to measure these ongoing processes and their varying levels across FRCs, we utilized Innovation Configuration Analysis.<sup>3</sup> Innovation Configuration Analysis draws on detailed descriptions of program activities—such as relationships between schools and parents—and creates a scale on which each activity can be rated. To begin using this method in the FRC evaluation, a committee of evaluators who were familiar with FRCs, FRC coordinators, and state administrators held several meetings to generate descriptions and rating scales for program domains, or approaches to serving families. Ultimately, they generated the following domains: Needs

Assessment, Relationship With School, Relationship With Community, Relationship With Families, Advisory Council (involvement of), and Mission Focus (degree to which activities addressed barriers to learning). The committee also generated descriptions of levels of implementation for each domain. Successive versions of these descriptions were submitted to other center coordinators for review and modification. This iterative process resulted in the Innovative Configuration Analysis measure.

As the next step in our evaluation, we assessed how the implementation of these

domains related to students' social and academic performance—which is, of course, the ultimate goal of the FRCs. For each domain, we assigned points to each implementation level and created total scores for each domain, representing the degree of implementation. We then created a percentage score by dividing the total score by the total possible score. Hall and Hord called this measure an Innovation Components Configuration (ICC) map.<sup>4</sup> Finally, by averaging each of their domain scores, we developed an overall implementation score for each center in our study.

When examined together, the ICC maps create a picture of how intensively the FRCs implemented each of the activities, both as individual centers and across groups of centers. These overall implementation scores strongly relate to educational outcomes for the students who participate in the FRC programs. This procedure for carefully describing specific program activities yields practical information that can help FRC efforts to attenuate barriers to learning.

**John Kalafat, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor, Rutgers Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, 152 Frelinghuysen Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Tel: 732-445-2000 ext. 121. Email: kalafat@rci.rutgers.edu*

3. Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (1987). *Change in schools: Facilitating the process*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

4. Hall & Hord, 1987.

*We recognized that dichotomizing the active ingredients of Family Resource Centers as present or absent would result in a substantial loss of information. These “ingredients” were in fact ongoing processes.*

1. For more information about the topic discussed in this article, see Kalafat, J., Illback, R. J., & Sanders, D. (2007). The relationship between implementation fidelity and educational outcomes in a school-based family support program: Development of a model for evaluating multidimensional full-service programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 30, 136–148.

2. Kalafat, J., & Illback, R. J. (1998). A qualitative evaluation of school-based family resource and youth service centers. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26, 573–604.

## Overcoming Practical Obstacles to Meaningful Program Evaluation: The Booklet Approach

*Steven Harvey and Gregory Wood describe how they created a methodology to capture data across a series of parenting workshops.*

Traditionally, evaluations of impact on program participants rely on pretest–posttest survey methodology, whereby a sample group of participants completes surveys prior to and after their participation in a given program. EPIC (Every Person Influences Children) offers programs to help parents and other adults to raise academically successful and responsible children. For years, EPIC used “pre–post” surveys to measure our impact on the parents who attend our multisession parenting workshops.<sup>1</sup> However, while the small sizes of our individual workshops—10 to 15 parents—help us to connect with parents, they also result in small sample sizes, which made it difficult to measure the extent of our impact.

Participant absenteeism further complicates the sample size issue. Sample size eroded quickly when a handful of participants missed the first workshop session, at which the pretest survey was administered, and another handful missed the final session and thus the posttest survey. In this way, a program in which 20 parents participated could easily result in a report based on the surveys of just 7 or 8.

Facilitator error compounded the problem. Most parent workshops are facilitated by volunteers trained by EPIC. While these volunteers were highly motivated to deliver the program curriculum, many failed to appreciate the importance of administering evaluation surveys, sometimes forgetting to administer the posttest survey. Even when we implemented better facilitator training, sent reminders to facilitators, and sent surveys to participants via the mail, we were not able to correct the problem.

Small sample sizes created additional headaches for program evaluators. First, small sample sizes led to low statistical power when testing for pre–post differences in key variables. As a result, in many cases EPIC was not able to demonstrate statistically sig-

1. A typical workshop series consists of anywhere from 6 to 16 individual workshop sessions.

### Five Factors That Impact Parental Effectiveness

1. Knowledge about parenting skills
2. Attitudes toward implementing parenting skills
3. Perceived effectiveness of the parenting workshops
4. Feelings of parental isolation
5. Perceived confidence with regard to implementing parenting skills

nificant changes in our clients, even though we were confident of program effectiveness based on data from studies with larger sample sizes. Second, small survey sample sizes created the impression that EPIC failed to adequately recruit participants. Clearly, EPIC needed to adjust its survey approach in order to better represent our work to organizations that had invested in our mission and programming.

To address these issues, we developed a new approach to program evaluation. We began by defining a logic model describing the conceptual basis for the parenting workshops. The model specified that EPIC programs impacted five specific factors that years of research show, in turn, impact parental effectiveness (see sidebar).

Next, we developed evaluation booklets, which allow us to collect data from participants in an ongoing way. Each “chapter” of the booklet consists of a program evaluation survey to be administered at the end of the session. If a participant attends all sessions, she completes all the surveys; if she attends three out of five sessions, she completes only those three surveys. With this approach, EPIC is able to establish a posttest for almost all participants. It also allows us to assess the impact of the program across time, not just from the first to the last session. Finally, this new methodology allows EPIC to report on participant attendance over the series of workshops, thereby giving funding agencies a more realistic picture of program activity.

An independent research firm analyzes the data and reports the findings with respect to outcome accountability and continuous program improvement. The report contains data on average group performance on the five key variables, the sample size associated with each session, and evidence of change over the course of the workshop series.

While the new approach does not evaluate changes for individual participants, it does provide meaningful descriptive evidence of client performance on key outcome variables across workshop sessions. In addition, volunteer facilitators are more likely to administer the surveys because it is now part of the standard practice of each session and not a special activity at the beginning and end of a series. Finally, we are able to provide funding agencies with meaningful information that corresponds to the logic model upon which the program curriculum is based. This new approach has improved the meaningfulness of evaluation reports for EPIC’s multiworkshop programs, and funding agencies have responded favorably to the new report formats.

#### Steven J. Harvey, Ph.D.

*Director of Research and National Program Coordination. EPIC – Every Person Influences Children, 1000 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14202. Tel: 716-332-4126. Email: harveysj@epicforchildren.org*

#### Gregory R. Wood, Ph.D.

*Chair, Management/Marketing Department. Richard J. Wehle School of Business, Canisius College, 2001 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14208. Tel: 716-888-2645. Email: gwood@canisius.edu*



## Cost-Effectiveness and Cost-Benefit Analyses of Family Involvement Initiatives

*Brian Yates from American University explains the value of both cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses in promoting investments in family involvement.*

Have you ever wondered how you could involve more families in more ways for less (money, time, or other resources)? Then you've been asking questions that *cost-effectiveness analysis* can answer. Have you ever hoped to show a potential funder that a family involvement program is "worth it"? Now you're talking about a *cost-benefit analysis*.

Both cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses are simple approaches to answering the complex questions that arise in a world of escalating demands and decreasing budgets. Because programming can be costly, funders, policymakers, and school leaders want assurances that their investments pay off. Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses can give the family involvement field the data it needs to make the case for continued and increased funding.

### Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

To do a simple cost-effectiveness analysis of a family involvement program, start by listing the *effects* that your program should have on family members and the community. These might be improved academic performance, increased interactions with children, or reductions in problem behaviors in the home, school, and community. Focus on the effects that you can measure, that don't cost too much to measure, and that have been shown to improve with more or better family involvement. Measure these effects accurately, ideally using a quasi-experimental or experimental design.

Next, list the *ingredients* of your family involvement program: time and expertise, space, written materials, toys, and whatever else you use to involve families. Concentrate on the resources that are, in your opinion, most crucial to making the program work, and that, if omitted, would be most damaging to the program's success. The best way to do this usually is to list each *component* of your program (such as a parents-read-to-kids initiative or a principal-visits-your-home effort). Next, ask yourself what specific ingredients are essential for that component to be implemented well. Don't forget the time that parents and kids need to spend in the program and in activities directly related to the program. Measure the value of these resources by either finding out what was paid for them, or what you would have paid for them if they had not been donated. These are the ingredients' *costs*.

Now assemble measures for both effects and costs. If the data are detailed enough, you may be able to at least estimate the contribution that each component of your program contributes to the overall effectiveness of the program in terms of helping families function better. By contrasting the effectiveness of each component to the value (costs) of the resources each component requires, you may be able to decide how much each component

should be used to deliver the most effective program given the resources available. You also can use the same data to argue for more resources (a bigger budget), possibly showing how modest increases in certain resources could allow substantial increases in the effectiveness of your family involvement program.

### Cost-Benefit Analysis

To begin a simple cost-benefit analysis of a family involvement effort, return to the list of program effects and concentrate on those that are monetary or that can be translated into monetary terms. For example, successful programs may allow some family members to return to part- or full-time employment or to be more productive on the job. If so, those are monetary outcomes that

can be very persuasive to potential funders—and to some family members. Successful family involvement programs also may eventually reduce children's and parents' use of medical, social, and even criminal-justice services, though perhaps after a period of higher use of those services to solve family problems. Reduction in use of other services can be a significant, positive result of family involvement, justifying greater funding of family involvement programs even in the face of tightening constraints

on government and private funding.

A final caveat: Both cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses can be simplistic, even misleading, if performed by those who do not understand what's most important about family involvement or what it takes to make family involvement work. For that reason, family involvement professionals—that is, *you*—are best positioned to design, initiate, supervise, and interpret cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses of their own programs.

**Brian T. Yates, Ph.D.**

*Department of Psychology, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20016-8062. Tel: 202-885-1727. Email: brian.yates@mac.com*

*Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses can give the family involvement field the data it needs to make the case for continued and increased funding.*

### Related Resource

Temple, J. A., & Reynolds, A. J. Benefits and costs of investments in preschool education: Evidence from the Child-Parent Centers and related programs. *Economics of Education Review*, 26, 126–144.

This article uses cost-benefit analysis to explore the effectiveness of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers and other early childhood programs. The authors find that the economic outcomes associated with high-quality early childhood education programs far surpass interventions occurring later in children's school lives.

## Standards for Success: Linking Families, Schools, and Communities to Support Student Achievement

*Sheri DeBoe Johnson from the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) discusses the PTA's newly revised National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.*

Promoting and supporting parent involvement in the education of all children has been a priority of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at the local, state, national, and international levels for more than 100 years. Throughout its history, PTA has been both an activist and an advocate for children, creating opportunities for parents to connect with each other and with their local schools, while also leading the discussions and influencing the national policies that affect the educational success and healthy development of our youth.

### Developing the Standards

Building off the organization's reputation as a leading voice for parent participation in student learning, in 1997 PTA enlisted the support of over 100 education, health, and family-strengthening organizations to develop the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs. Supported by over 20 years of research and stories of success from schools across the country, the Standards were developed to serve as an organizing framework for creating programs that promoted and strengthened family involvement in schools.

By using the Standards as both a unifying message and a tool, PTA leveraged its presence in all 50 states at the local, district, state, and national levels to demonstrate that, when parents and schools work together, children do better in school.

The impact of the Standards has been phenomenal. Since their inception, thousands of local and state PTAs have used the Standards to advocate for the adoption of parent involvement policies in their schools, districts, and state offices of education; some states have even incorporated the Standards into legislation.

### Revising the Standards

In 2006 PTA determined that the Standards should be updated to more intentionally reflect the ongoing research that demonstrates the importance of connecting family and community engagement to student learning. As a first step, we determined that the Standards should be positioned as the foundation for all PTA programs. Working with leading experts in parent involvement and community engagement in schools, staff used research findings and practice to guide the update of the Standards. This months-long process included many opportunities for input and feedback from PTA leadership and partners from other national organizations.

In June 2007, at its national convention, PTA introduced the new Standards, which now expand the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to what parents, schools, and communities can do *together* to support student success. To reflect this shift in focus, the standards have been renamed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

While the Standards provide an organizing framework for strengthening family-school partnerships to support student learning, the critical next step is to establish indicators by which the partnership can measure whether they are living up to the Standards. To that end, PTA has begun identifying indicators of success for each standard. These indicators are intended to be a guide for continuous improvement, rather than a checklist representing the maximum effort required to achieve complete adherence to the Standards. PTA believes these standards and indicators have the potential not only to impact how family-school partnerships plan their programs, but also to influence how PTA leadership engage schools and other organizations in order to influence policies and practices that support family and community involvement in education.

**Sheri DeBoe Johnson**

*Director of Programs, National PTA, 1400 L St., NW Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005. Tel: 202-289-6790, ext 212. Email: [sjohnson@pta.org](mailto:sjohnson@pta.org)*

### PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

**Welcoming all families into the school community.**

Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

**Communicating effectively.** Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.

**Supporting student success.** Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

**Speaking up for every child.** Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children to ensure that children are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

**Sharing power.** Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

**Collaborating with community.** Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

## Beyond the Bake Sale: How School Districts Can Promote Family Involvement

*This article is adapted from Chapter 9, “Scaling Up: Why Can’t All Schools in a District Create Strong Partnerships With Families?” of Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family–School Partnerships by Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson, and Don Davies.<sup>1</sup>*

Since all public schools are part of a larger school district, family and community involvement at individual schools depends, in part, on district expectations and support. The job of creating and coordinating a serious, consistent, systemic program of family and community engagement for any district requires senior leadership—preferably at the superintendent level—to establish beyond a doubt that the district is fully committed to family and community engagement.

What can district leadership do to develop system-wide policies and practices that support families to enhance their children’s experience in school? In the interviews and focus groups we conducted across the country, the districts that showed the best results took action in three key areas:

*Creating a culture of partnership throughout the district by setting high standards for family-friendly schools—and expecting all district and school staff to meet those standards.* A culture of partnership grows best when the community is engaged in the process of planning and setting goals for family involvement in its district’s schools. From our conversations with district leaders, the following strategies emerged:

- Engaging all community members with an interest in schools—not just educators and parents—in setting the goals for family and community engagement
- Conducting and analyzing parent surveys about school satisfaction
- Setting a clear standard for what’s expected at schools and offering help to meet the standard
- Staffing the effort by creating a high-level family involvement position and committing real resources to it

*Connecting family–school partnerships to the district’s school improvement initiative and performance goals for students.* In high-achieving districts, school board members, administrators, and teachers alike can link district improvement goals to actions to be undertaken in individual schools and classrooms. Tying family involvement to the school improvement process can help increase visibility and understanding of how families fit into the larger school improvement picture.

When families are seen as part of school improvement, district and school staff can name and act on the specific ways in which the district involves parents and community. In districts around the country, we saw several approaches to integrating parents into

1. This article encapsulates the main themes of *Beyond the Bake Sale’s* chapter on district-level family involvement. For specific examples of successful district strategies from around the country, please see Chapter 9 of the book. The book also offers more specific strategies and examples, checklists, and other practical tips and tools on how to improve family involvement in districts and schools. To learn more about or to purchase the book, visit [www.thenewpress.com/bakesale](http://www.thenewpress.com/bakesale).

the school improvement process, including:

- Districts hiring teachers or well-trained paraprofessionals to fill parent coordinator positions
- Superintendents and deputies holding principals accountable for strong and measurable outreach to families and community members
- Administration leaders sharing examples of effective family involvement practices with school staff
- Districts offering professional development in many settings, including sessions at principals’ meetings, leadership academies, and cluster meetings
- Districts including parents in ongoing student assessments—for example, by providing a website where they can view their children’s performance and progress and get ideas for how to help their children
- Districts tying materials for parents to the district improvement plan

*Organizing district resources to create a structure of support so that all schools can establish and sustain strong partnerships.*

Why is there so much variation in parent involvement from one school to the next? Even in the same neighborhood, one school can be a fortress locked against parents, while another is wide open to parent involvement. Districts can help reduce these disparities by providing and organizing resources and infrastructure in a way that provides all schools with the support they need to engage families effectively. Specific strategies include:

- Offering technical assistance, funding, and other supports to principals, teachers, and other school staff
- Supporting parent decision-making structures at schools
- Sustaining teacher action research<sup>2</sup>
- Creating and maintaining written district policies on family engagement

For a district to be serious about closing the achievement gap, it will also have to be serious about closing the gap between schools that do and do not welcome partnerships with families. All of us—teachers, parents, administrators, office holders, community members, students, family members, and local organizations—must work together to make this happen. With strong leadership, constant and open communication, and a passion for partnership, this vision of family–school partnerships is possible in all districts and schools.

**Anne T. Henderson**

*Senior Consultant, Community Involvement Program, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 1640 Roxanna Road, NW, Washington, DC 20012. Tel: 202-882-1582. Email: [Henderam@aol.com](mailto:Henderam@aol.com)*

**Karen L. Mapp, Ed.D.**

*Lecturer on Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138. Tel: 617-496-3095. Email: [karen\\_mapp@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:karen_mapp@gse.harvard.edu)*

2. Action research allows teachers to look at their own practice, reconsider their teaching methods, or solve a problem. A team of educators can study a problem or issue and tests out ways to approach it.

## A Collaborative Approach to Parent Outreach

*Amy Aparicio Clark and Amanda Dorris describe how the PALMS Project supports educators' efforts to engage Latino parents in college preparation and enrollment.*

The PALMS (Postsecondary Access for Latino Middle-Grades Students) project at Education Development Center aims to increase the number of Latino students who pursue postsecondary education. PALMS assists middle school leaders in developing parental outreach programs through its *Tools for Latino Family Outreach*, a set of 13 self-facilitated tools that guide schools in planning, implementing, and assessing programs that engage and empower families to support their children's pursuit of higher education.

Since 2006, PALMS has worked with Helen Tyson Middle School in Springdale, Arkansas, and Hommocks Middle School in Larchmont, New York, to study how these schools develop outreach programs using the PALMS tools. Each site recruited a planning team to lead the program development process, which includes a) creating a vision of their desired future, b) collecting data on postsecondary aspirations and perceptions of school-family relations, c) setting outreach goals based on this data, d) choosing and implementing strategies to accomplish these goals, and e) assessing their progress through data collection and analysis.

Over a 2-year period, PALMS will document the process and outcomes associated with creating programs at each site. The data we collect will inform the development of a second edition of the tool kit, to be released in 2009. Our data collection methods include quarterly site visits to attend meetings and outreach events, biweekly phone interviews with the planning team facilitator, and face-to-face interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents at various points during the year.

One year into our study, the results are promising. By July 2007, both schools had used all 13 tools. At Hommocks, parents had founded the school's first-ever Latino parent group. The 20 members and elected officers of Hommocks' *Padres Unidos por la Educación* work with school staff to increase involvement of Hispanic families. Meanwhile, at Tyson, Hispanic parents had participated in focus groups led by bilingual school staff and interacted with local, bilingual higher education representatives at a school-sponsored College Night.

According to our initial data, central to the efforts at both sites is the school leaders' conviction that programs must be codeveloped with parents in order to achieve genuine change. The two schools have implemented a variety of tactics to foster this collaboration, including:

*Using data to plan and develop programs.* The PALMS tool kit include surveys for teachers, parents, and students, which ask questions about care and respect at the school, communication between parents and school staff, and plans for postsecondary education. In December 2006, both schools used surveys from the

tool kit to collect data on how parents perceive their relationship with the school. In the spring, they again solicited parents' opinions in contexts conducive to open dialogue. For example, Tyson staff held focus groups at a nearby community center, where they asked parents for suggestions about improving communication between home and school.

*Facilitating mutual responsibility for program development.* Both schools have created opportunities for parents to contribute to program activities. At Hommocks, the PALMS planning team held a joint meeting—conducted in Spanish, with simultaneous interpretation for English-speaking staff—with *Padres Unidos* in March to discuss ideas for spring outreach events. Upon learning that parents wanted more opportunities to speak with their children's teachers, the team began to plan parent-teacher events such as joint home visits by faculty and *Padres Unidos* members.

*Maintaining flexibility in the face of unexpected developments.* When severe spring flooding occurred in their town, Hommocks staff and *Padres Unidos* members reacted quickly, putting aside longer term plans and working together to organize a clothing drive for affected families, most of whom were Hispanic. In 2007–2008, the school team and the parent group will resume planning parent-teacher events, aided by the experience of having successfully collaborated on the clothing drive.

Over the next year, as the schools continue to reach out to parents, they will need to assess their progress in ways that extend beyond traditional quantitative approaches (e.g., counting how many parents attend an outreach event). We are addressing the need for researchers to develop robust, qualitative evaluation tools that capture the nuanced process of building partnerships. Because of PALMS' focus on college, we plan to develop and add to our tool kit instruments to help leaders at these and other schools document interactions and activities shown to increase graduation and postsecondary education rates, such as conversations between parents and school staff about the students' future educational plans. We look forward to meeting the challenge of developing self-facilitated materials that both recognize the demands on practitioners' time and the need for examining school-family relationships at a deeper level.

*Lumina Foundation and Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation provide support for research and development activities undertaken by the PALMS project.*

**Amy Aparicio Clark, M.Ed.**  
Project Director. Email: [aclark@edc.org](mailto:aclark@edc.org)

**Amanda Dorris, M.Ed.**  
Research Associate. Email: [adorris@edc.org](mailto:adorris@edc.org)

PALMS Project, Education Development Center, Inc., 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02458. Tel: 860-683-8593

*Central to the efforts is the school leaders' conviction that programs must be codeveloped with parents in order to achieve genuine change.*

## The Best Dissertation I Never Wrote

*HFRP asked leading family involvement researchers about the most important research questions facing the field today and in the future. The highlights below represent just a cross-section of their responses to the following question: Based on your experience and the state of the family involvement field today, what are the most critical questions or topics for future research?*

### Nancy Chavkin

*Director, Richter Research Institute, Texas State University*

Research on parent involvement in education has come a long way. We know that it works. Children benefit, families benefit, schools benefit, and communities benefit. What we need to know next is which methods work best for whom. What are the most effective parent involvement methods for young children, for middle school children, or high school students? Which methods work best with which cultures or types of communities?

### Nancy E. Hill

*Visiting Associate Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Much of the research on family involvement in education is based on elementary school contexts. Parental involvement is important (and also required by NCLB) for middle and high school students. However, there is very little research on the most effective ways for families and teachers to work together during adolescence. Research is needed that bridges the fields of developmental science—which outlines the cognitive and social advances during adolescence—with education and policy, so that developmentally appropriate strategies that fit the structural context of middle and high schools can be identified and implemented.

### Concha Delgado Gaitan

*Independent Researcher/Writer and Visiting Professor, University of Texas, El Paso*

We still need a better understanding of how to forge strong connections between families and schools in communities of color, including Latinos, African Americans, Asians, American Indians, and others. As researchers, we need to enter into the community and work with families to confront questions organic to the specific community. What is the power base of this particular community? How does this community perceive itself relative to the school? What are the families' strengths and how does the community want to relate to the school from the beginning of their child's schooling through their high school graduation? How can the community empower and organize itself to partner with the school? How does a given community forge effective communication with its schools?

### James Rodriguez

*Associate Professor, College of Education, San Diego State University*

A key gap in the literature continues to be our knowledge and understanding of Latino families. As a rapidly growing and

younger population in the United States, it is increasingly important that culturally sensitive theoretical models and conceptual constructs be developed to capture the dynamics and intricacies of Latino family life. We need to develop models and constructs specifically for these communities to allow us to more effectively respond to their strengths and needs, and to use caution in adapting existing models for these populations. It is also critical to avoid the treatment of Latinos as a monolithic population. Increased knowledge and understanding could lead to the creation of more effective programs and narrowing the achievement gap.

### Arthur J. Reynolds

*Professor, Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota*

A major question for the field is what strategies can reliably strengthen parent involvement in early education and in the transition to school that make a difference in children's learning. Based on the findings from the Child-Parent Center early education program, the presence of a parent resource room run by a parent resource teacher and a school-community representative was linked to higher levels of parent involvement in early schooling, which led to enduring effects of early education into adulthood.

### Diana B. Hiatt-Michael

*Professor, Graduate School of Education and Psychology, Pepperdine University*

One recommendation for the direction of future research is to study the effects of connecting community agencies with the school on family involvement issues and student educational outcomes. Public education is fragmented and agencies are separated into silos. Educators and researchers must jump across these silos to connect their services to school sites. Despite the current paucity of research on this subject, promising family-community research sites exist in almost every locality. Research data could reveal the factors and activities that lead to a program's desired outcome.<sup>1</sup>

### Joyce L. Epstein

*Director, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University*

How does district-level leadership for partnerships affect school-based programs and practices of family and community involvement? In earlier times, it was enough to study how one school or another improved its partnerships with families. Now, it also is necessary to understand systemic leadership and support for partnerships to see how all schools in a district—not just one or two, here or there—may be assisted to engage all families in ways that support student success. In future studies of school, family, and community partnerships, researchers may explore the effects

1. Diana Hiatt-Michael's response is summarized from Hiatt-Michael, D. B. (2006). Reflections and directions on research related to family-community involvement in schooling. *The School Community Journal*, 16(1).

## > ask the expert

of levels and combinations of leadership, including state policies and encouragement, district policies and leaders' direct facilitation of schools, and school organization of teamwork and written plans.

### **Anne Henderson**

*Senior Fellow, Community Involvement Program, Annenberg Institute for School Reform*

We know that there is a correlation between family involvement and positive student outcomes. Now we need to know: What is the relationship between the *practices* schools employ to engage families and the extent and impact of family involvement? We need to study what school improvement interventions, such as small schools and smaller class sizes, can enhance family involvement and whether there is evidence that the gains in achievement associated with these interventions are related to teachers' increased capacity to engage families. Along the same lines, we need to know what schools are actually doing to engage families. What is standard practice to engage families in most schools? Are they effective in engaging diverse families? Are these practices related to improved outcomes for students? What is the impact of new practices such as family resource centers, community discussions, focus groups, and study circles?

*HFRP's Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) tracks, produces, and disseminates family involvement research. If you know of an upcoming study, dissertation, or other resource in the field, please share it with us at [fine@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:fine@gse.harvard.edu). To add your voice to our growing network of family involvement researchers and stakeholders, join FINE at [www.gse.harvard.edu/bfrp/subscribe](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/bfrp/subscribe).*

### **Suzanne Bouffard, Ph.D.**

*Project Manager, HFRP. Email: [bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:bouffasu@gse.harvard.edu)*

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### **District-Level Partnerships**

*continued from page 11*

in staff and resources committed to family involvement in districts throughout the U.S. Moreover, the collaboration between the CPIO and the case district's office of parent and community involvement has arguably been aided by NNPS, another external partner. NNPS provided a conceptual framework, vocabulary, and core principles around which district and CPIO leaders could agree. This collaborative approach serves as a model for other districts seeking to improve the quality and scale of school, family, and community partnerships.

### **Mavis G. Sanders, Ph.D.**

*Associate Professor of Education and Research Scientist for the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships. Johns Hopkins University, 6740 Alexander Bell Drive, Suite 180, Columbia, MD 21046. Tel: 410-516-9768. Email: [msanders@jhu.edu](mailto:msanders@jhu.edu)*

### **Boston Public Schools**

*continued from page 10*

The FCOC initiative responded to concerns raised by the task force with its focus on building relationships rather than running programs or mediating school prerogatives. A key component of the FCOC program has been its use of data and evaluation. The FCOCs are assessed on a range of indicators, from cultivating relational trust to helping increase parent involvement in school events and governance.

Although the FCOC program has identified some challenges regarding getting teachers' buy-in with the program and navigating a complex accountability system with the schools, the program has been largely successful. In part due to ongoing evaluation with positive findings, the FCOC program has expanded each year, more than doubling the number of participating schools since it began with 17 in 2005.

### **Lessons Learned**

Many school districts can learn from Boston's experience of implementing a system to support family and community engagement. First, school districts must listen to the diverse voices of parents and community members and coconstruct a family and community engagement strategy with them. Much of the story of BPS's progress can be traced to the outside forces that exerted pressure on the district and to the district's willingness to listen to and negotiate with them. Other school districts can benefit from engaging in an inclusive process that reaches into the community, as did Boston's task force, and from identifying local grassroots organizing groups that can foster community dialogue among parents.

Second, school districts should consider making evaluation and accountability a key component of their family and community engagement efforts. BPS took important first steps in committing to evaluation when it engaged the task force to conduct a needs assessment of what was and was not working in the district. Like Boston, other districts also evaluate the impact of specific family and community engagement programs.

The next step is expanding programmatic evaluations to include a deep and critical look at progress towards system-wide change. In order to demonstrate a commitment to family and community engagement, districts can also set goals, benchmarks of success, and an assessment timeline for their overall family and community engagement strategy. Also critical for districts is establishing accountability mechanisms. Clear accountability at the district, school, and classroom levels ensures a district's family and community engagement strategy is being implemented faithfully and also gives legitimacy to this work.

### **Helen Westmoreland**

*Research Analyst, HFRP. Email: [westmoh@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:westmoh@gse.harvard.edu)*

### **Abby R. Weiss**

*Executive Director, Full-Service Schools Roundtable, 443 Warren Street, Dorchester, MA 02121. Tel: 617-635-6537. Email: [aweiss@boston.k12.ma.us](mailto:aweiss@boston.k12.ma.us). Website: [www.fullserviceschoolsroundtable.org](http://www.fullserviceschoolsroundtable.org)*

*This section features an annotated list of papers, organizations, initiatives, and other resources related to the issue's theme.*

Allen, J. (2007). *Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families*. New York: Teachers College Press. JoBeth Allen's new book, which features a foreword by Concha Delgado Gaitan, is designed to help parents, teachers, and administrators create meaningful partnerships between schools and diverse families. The author describes the attitudes and everyday practices necessary to create an inviting school environment for diverse families—from recognizing families' funds of knowledge to engaging in genuine dialogue. [store.tcpress.com/0807747890.shtml](http://store.tcpress.com/0807747890.shtml)

Barton, P. E., & Coley, R. J. (2007). *The family: America's smallest school*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. This report reviews literature on the role of family in student achievement both in the U.S. and internationally and looks at how factors such as single parenting, reading to children at home, family finances and home-school partnerships predict student outcomes. The report suggests that, in addition to school improvement, attention be paid to home and family factors in order to improve student achievement. [www.ets.org/Media/Education\\_Topics/pdf/5678\\_PERCReport\\_School.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/5678_PERCReport_School.pdf)

Coleman, A. L., Starzynski, A. L., Winnick, S. Y., Palmer, S. R., & Furr, J. E. (2006). *It takes a parent: Transforming education in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, DC: Appleseed. This report from Appleseed looks at how family involvement occurs in elementary and secondary schools and makes recommendations for future policy and practice, including increased funding of parent involvement initiatives. The report finds a strong link between parent involvement and children's academic achievement and posits that link as key to closing the achievement gap. [www.gaappleseed.org/docs/it\\_takes\\_a\\_parent.pdf](http://www.gaappleseed.org/docs/it_takes_a_parent.pdf)

Enyeart, C., Diehl, J., Hampden-Thompson, G., & Scotchmer, M. (2006). *School and parent interaction by household language and poverty status: 2002–03*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept. of Education. This issue brief draws on data from the Parent and Family

Involvement in Education Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program to compare communication practices and parent involvement opportunities at schools, as reported by parents of school-age students from English- and Spanish-speaking households. [nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006086](http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006086)

Hiatt-Michael, D. B. (Ed.). (2007). *Promising practices for teachers to engage families of English Language Learners*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age. This monograph provides a set of tools, resources, and activities that teachers and other practitioners can use to effectively engage families of English Language Learners. The monograph, which is part of the *Family-School-Community Partnership Issues* series, includes contributions from a diverse group of experts on family engagement. [www.infoagepub.com/products/content/p46bbca6b5eb46.php](http://www.infoagepub.com/products/content/p46bbca6b5eb46.php)

Mediratta, K., Shah, S., McAlister, S., Fruchter, N., Mokhtar, C., & Lockwood, D. (2008). *Organized communities, stronger schools: A preview of research findings*. Providence: Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. This research brief from the Community Involvement Program at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform describes findings from a 6-year study of the benefits of community organizing for school reform. Using quantitative and qualitative data across 7 community organizing programs, the researchers found positive results for outcomes including family engagement and involvement, school climate and policies, and student achievement, engagement, and behavior. [www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/OrganizedCommunities.pdf](http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/OrganizedCommunities.pdf)

Project Appleseed. (2007). *Parental involvement toolbox*. St. Louis, MO: Author. This tool kit contains a set of easy-to-implement ideas for improving parental involvement in public schools, as well as tips for building and sustaining a parent organizing database. The Toolbox can be accessed for a fee, which includes resources for schools for creating a parent involvement pledge website, parent involvement report cards and certificates, recruitment tools, and a parent organizer database. [www.projectappleseed.org/chk1st.html](http://www.projectappleseed.org/chk1st.html)

Public Education Network. (2007). *Open to the public: How communities, parents and students assess the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act: 2004–2007: The realities left behind*. Washington, DC: Author. Through a series of consultations, surveys, public forums, and focus groups across the nation over a 3-year period, Public Education Network (PEN) engaged stakeholders in conversations about the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. They found that while stakeholders support the NCLB goals, they call for greater involvement of families and communities in the reform and systemic changes in “resources, capacities, and will” in order for the goals to be achieved. [www.publiceducation.org/nclb\\_main/2007\\_NCLB\\_National\\_Report.pdf](http://www.publiceducation.org/nclb_main/2007_NCLB_National_Report.pdf)

WestEd. (2007). *Engaging parents in education: Lessons from five Parental Information and Resource Centers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. This report, part of the *Innovation in Education* series, highlights Parental Information and Resource Centers' best practices for building parents' understanding of No Child Left Behind and for preparing educators and parents to collaborate in support of student learning. [www.ed.gov/admins/comm/parents/parent-involve/engagingparents.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/parents/parent-involve/engagingparents.pdf)

*An expanded New & Noteworthy, including a list of recently published journal articles, is available on our website at [www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue35](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue35).*

### IRE Resources Archived at Harvard

In September 2007, the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) closed its doors after 34 years in the family involvement field. “The place of parent involvement in the education landscape has changed dramatically since IRE began,” reflected Don Davies, IRE founder (and co-author of *Beyond the Bake Sale*, an excerpt of which is featured on page 35 of this issue). “From an abstract notion exemplified by limited school support activities like bake sales, parent involvement as a theory and practice has become a fundamental feature of American education...firmly institutionalized by law and even more clearly engraved in the attitudes and behavior of parents and educators.”

IRE's papers are now being housed in the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Gutman Library, and much of the material is already inventoried and available to researchers. For more information about Gutman Library, its services, and its collections, visit [www.gse.harvard.edu/library](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/library).

## Seven Takeaways About the Future of Family Involvement

*HFRP summarizes key observations raised in this issue of The Evaluation Exchange. Based on findings from research and evaluation, these themes highlight what the field needs to know and do to move family involvement forward in policy and practice.*

**1. Families are an essential component of complementary learning.** To succeed in school and in life, children and youth need access to multiple supports for learning. These supports can be more effective when connected in an intentional and systemic way. HFRP calls these networks of supports complementary learning. Families are central to complementary learning as contributors, collaborators, and consumers.

**2. Recent research warrants a reconceptualization of family involvement, which includes three primary components:** Family involvement matters from birth through adolescence but changes as children mature. Family involvement occurs in all the contexts where children and youth live and learn, not only in homes and schools but in out-of-school time programs and many other settings. Family involvement must be a shared and meaningful responsibility among families, schools, communities, and society.

**3. Family involvement practices and policies need to move beyond individual programs to more systemic efforts.** Family involvement efforts and investments should build on programs in individual schools and communities to implement and study more systemic approaches. Growing initiatives at the district and state levels, including family involvement reforms, policies, and standards, represent potential models.

**4. More rigorous evaluation of family involvement policies and initiatives is needed to build knowledge about effective approaches.** Although correlational research has made a strong case about the benefits of family involvement, there is a need for

more rigorous evaluations of specific interventions and policies to understand what works, for whom, and why. Promising strategies include cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses, large-scale evaluation of federal programs, and family involvement assessments within educational accountability systems.

**5. Evaluations are only as useful as the strategies for applying them.** To ensure that emerging knowledge does not end up in “digital graveyards,” the field needs to leverage and create new forums and opportunities for researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, parents, and others to share and utilize this knowledge. One promising strategy is to create communities of practice—informal networks of stakeholders who regularly share information and build collective knowledge.

**6. In research, policy, and practice, a more nuanced understanding of family involvement across cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds is emerging but incomplete.** Several researchers featured in this issue are part of a growing movement to develop and use knowledge about the predictors, patterns, and processes of family involvement in traditionally understudied populations. This includes developing and validating measures that are culturally relevant and appropriate.

**7. Committed leadership is fundamental to building family involvement, and leadership development is a priority for the field.** In schools and other organizations, leaders establish the expectations, opportunities, and incentives for family involvement. They are also largely responsible for using evaluation for continuous improvement. Preparing future leaders to value family involvement and invest in evaluation continues to be a critical issue, from teacher and administrator education programs to state standards to mentoring future family involvement researchers.



Harvard Family Research Project  
Harvard Graduate School of Education  
3 Garden Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138  
hfrp\_pubs@gse.harvard.edu  
www.hfrp.org

nonprofit org.  
US postage  
PAID  
Boston, MA  
Permit #56376

