Strategies for Building Home-School Partnerships

Sample Lesson

Study Teams and Group Activities

If you register as an individual, ask a colleague or spouse to participate with you in discussion assignments. If that is not possible, use group activities for your own personal reflection.

Application Assignments and Access to a Classroom

If you are an administrator, counselor, or do not currently have access to a classroom, instead of reporting on implementation of application assignments describe how you plan to use the course concepts in your environment.

Session #1
Introduction and Establishing Course Goals

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By completing this session's learning activities, you will:

- Reflect upon your current understanding of the value of home-school partnerships.
- Examine your current approach to gaining parental support.
- Discover how improving parental involvement can improve student achievement
- Set a goal for improving your approach to parental involvement and support.
- Develop a plan to reach your course goal.

READING ASSIGNMENT:

In the course text. School-Family Partnerships for Children's Success, read the Foreword.

Teacher-Parent Partnerships

The partnership construct is based on the premise that collaborating partners have some common basis for action and a sense of mutuality that supports their joint ventures. Teachers and parents have a common need for joining in partnership: the need to foster positive growth in children and in themselves. It is their challenge to create a sense of mutuality so that their efforts are meaningful to all those involved.

PARENT AND TEACHER ATTRIBUTES THAT PROMOTE PARTNERSHIP

Research provides insight on parent attributes that support meaningful partnerships. These attributes include warmth, sensitivity, nurturance, the ability to listen, consistency, a positive self-image, and a sense of efficacy, personal competence, and effective interpersonal skills.

Marital happiness, family harmony, success in prior collaborations, and openness to others' ideas have also been related to parental competence in promoting partnerships (Swick, 1991). Schaefer (1985) has noted that parents who are high in self-esteem are more assertive in their family and school involvement. Not all parents achieve the competence that supports these attributes. Teachers can provide a setting that encourages the development of partnership behaviors in parents. Modeling respect and communication skills, showing a genuine interest in the children, responding constructively to parent concerns, promoting a teamwork philosophy, and being sensitive to parent and family needs are some ways to promote this process. Lawler (1991) suggests that teachers encourage parents to be positive through the example they set in being supportive, responsive, and dependable.

Teacher attributes that appear to positively influence teachers' relationships with children and parents include: warmth, openness, sensitivity, flexibility, reliability, and accessibility (Comer and Haynes, 1991). From the parents' perspective, these teacher characteristics are desirable: trust, warmth, closeness, positive self-image, effective classroom management, child-centeredness, positive discipline, nurturance, and effective teaching skills. Researchers have cited

the following teacher attributes as highly related to successful parent involvement: positive attitudes, active planning to involve parents, continuous teacher training, involvement in professional growth, and personal competence (Epstein, 1984; Galinsky, 1990).

TEACHER-PARENT PARTNERSHIP ROLES: A FRAMEWORK

The research on parent involvement indicates that parents and teachers can create viable partnerships by engaging in joint learning activities, supporting each other in their respective roles, carrying out classroom and school improvement activities, conducting collaborative curriculum projects in the classroom, participating together in various decision-making activities, and being advocates for children (Swick, 1991). Integral to these activities are the various parent and teacher roles and behaviors that make for successful partnerships.

- Parenting roles are performed within the family and within family-school relationships. Roles critical to family growth are nurturing, teaching, and modeling. Within the larger family-school structure, parents must carry out learning, doing, supporting, and decision-making roles. Naturally, parents use these various roles across contexts, but they emphasize particular roles as family or family-school situations dictate (Schaefer, 1985). For example, recent findings suggest that when parents sense an inviting school climate, they emphasize nurturing and supporting behaviors in their interactions with teachers; their participation in the school environment also increases (Comer and Haynes, 1991).

- Teacher roles critical to the partnership process include the family-centered roles of support, education, and guidance. Teacher roles that focus on family involvement in school and classroom activities include those of nurturing, supporting, guiding, and decision-making.

- Together, parents and teachers can foster their partnership through such behaviors as collaborating, planning, communicating and evaluating (Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Swick, 1991).

A FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIES: APPLICATIONS FROM RESEARCH

An action-oriented philosophy of family-school support and nurturance is a powerful force in creating a positive learning environment. Teacher actions that promote such a philosophy include the sensitive involvement of parents from cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds (Lightfoot, 1978). Relating classroom activities to the varying needs and interests of children and families is another reflection of a family-centered program.

Since teacher-parent partnerships are developmental in nature and best realized through a comprehensive approach, a framework for carrying out the process is essential. The following elements need close scrutiny: teacher and parent contexts, role understandings, and an appreciation of the partnership process itself. Further, sensitivity to each other's needs, situations, and talents is a requisite basis for a viable program.

Given that each program is and should be unique, particular elements, such as the following, are essential: needs assessments, goal statements, prioritization of activities, strategy development, implementation plans, and evaluation tools (Comer and Haynes, 1991). It has been noted that parents, when given the opportunity, are quite active in setting program goals (Powell, 1989). Swick (1992) notes that the availability of teachers and the offering of such services as transportation and childcare to parents increase participation in program planning significantly.

A plethora of strategies have proven effective in promoting strong partnerships. The degree to which strategies are related to the needs and interests of parents and to the unique situations of schools and teachers influences the level of success. Home visits, conferences, parent centers, telecommunication, involvement in the classroom, participatory decision-making, parent and adult education programs, home learning activities, and family-school networking are some of the many strategies that have effectively engaged parents and teachers in supportive and collaborative roles (Swick, 1991). Creative uses of technology offer new possibilities for building partnerships with parents that reach beyond traditional limits (Bauch, 1990).

FAMILY-CENTERED SCHOOLS

Early childhood education's commitment to families is strengthened through the partnership process. True collaborative efforts are prompting teachers and parents to plan from a family-centered perspective. Family-centered schools need to be intimately involved with families in planning and nurturing healthy environments. A significant part of this effort is the development of a curriculum for caring that promotes a shared learning process among children, parents, and teachers. This school-family curriculum should focus on the caring elements of self-image, pro-social relationships with others, development of multicultural understandings, sensitive and empathetic relationships, nurturing and positive discipline, and creative problem-solving strategies.

A family-centered focus must also become a part of the community's fabric. A human network of family, school, and community learners needs to be part of a covenant for creating positive human environments. In particular, intergenerational family wellness needs, the family's and the school's needs for learning and sharing, and related community partnership needs provide the foundation for a family-centered effort.

REFERENCES

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Galinsky, E. "Why Are Some Parent-Teacher Relationships Clouded with Difficulties?" Young Children 45 (1990): 2-3, 38-39. EJ 415 403.

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Association for the Education of Young Children, 1989. ED 309 872.

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Swick, K. Teacher-Parent Partnerships To Enhance School Success in Early Childhood Education. Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1991.

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PREPARATION:

Meet with your study team to discuss what you learned in the required reading.
Select and complete one of the following assignment options.

Option #1:

From the assigned reading, choose the two most important concepts that you encountered. Share these concepts with your study team and give your rationale for identifying them as "most important." In your explanation, you should:

1. Describe in detail each of the concepts that you identified.
2. Explain how you could use these concepts to improve parental support of your classroom efforts.
3. Describe how you could utilize these concepts to help you achieve your course goal.

After making your presentation, listen to that of your partner and give him/her feedback.

Option #2:

In a discussion with your study team, consider the following:

1. In the text Foreword, the authors state that parental involvement needs to be multidimensional. In what respect is (or is not) your current approach to parent involvement multidimensional? Explain your answer.

2. What are the strongest aspects of your current approach to parental involvement?
What aspects could use improvement?
3 What could be stopping your students' parents from being more involved in their children's education?

Notes from Reading and Discussion:
In your Progress Report for this session, you will be asked to identify one or two key concepts you learned in the assigned reading and discussion and explain how you might use them in your teaching situation. Take notes on the Note Page to use when completing the Progress Report.

VIDEO VIEWING:

View the video "Building Home-School Partnerships, Part One."

VIDEO PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

In the first section of "Building Home-School Partnerships, Part One." Dr. William Glasser and Dr. Jane Bluestein share their thoughts about how teachers can build strong, productive family-teacher relationships. In the second part of the video, Glasser Quality School principal Kaye Mentley describes how parents and family members play a critical part in the success of her school.

Key points:

Dr. William Glasser

• The basis of a Glasser Quality School is relationships.
• The use of choice theory helps people get along together and strengthens relationships.
• Children should be encouraged to teach choice theory to their parents.

Dr. Jane Bluestein

• Parental support is important because parents are the most important influence in a child's life, teachers are a close second.

• Teachers need to involve parents by letting them know what their policies and goals are, where their flexibility lies, and letting the parents know ahead of time what they expect from their child.
• When the children know their teacher has the support of the parent they are more likely to become cooperative.
• When kids go home and they hear their parent speaking badly of a teacher, it undermines the credibility of the teacher and the authority of the teacher.
• It also creates internal conflict because the children really want to like their teachers and they want to do well.
• If the parents are talking in positive ways, and the child overhears their parent talking positively about their teacher- it gives the student a sense that they are in the right place, it is okay to like this person, it is okay to do well in this person's care.
• Meet with the parents early in the year or send information home to start a relationship with the parent.
• If appropriate, go to the child's home to let the parent know they are an ally in this child's education.
• There should be regular positive contact. Parents are normally hostile or defensive if they only hear from the school when there is a problem.
• Dr. Bluestein sent home "good notes" to parents once a week to make a point to give kids credit for what they had done well.
• If every week a parent gets a note about their child's progress, then there are no surprises at the end of the semester.
• Then, if there is a problem, you already have a connection and stream of communication to talk to the parent.
• Do not try to drag the parent into the problem, or try to make the parent responsible. The parent wasn't there; the parent didn't see the problem. The parent should not be asked to solve the problem for you.

• Just the let the parent know what's going on, what you are doing about it, and let them know you will keep them up to date

Kaye Mentley

• A student isn't going to want to learn from a teacher unless he or she likes that teacher.
• Teachers at her school make one positive contact per month per student using postcards, notes, and phone calls.
• When planning conferences we should think about what parents really want for their children.
• The more proactive teachers are with parents the more easily problems are resolved to the best of everyone's satisfaction.
• Teachers need to treat parents as customers in the same way we want to be treated when we are customers.
Parent Conferences
• Parents want to know that their children are safe, that they are loved and cared for, and they are learning. We should keep this information in mind when we are structuring a conference.
• During the regularly scheduled conference:
    - Inform the parents of student's social progress.
    - Inform the parents of student's academic progress.
    - Communicate your concern for their child's success in school.
• If you bring up a problem, also be prepared to present one or more solutions to that problem.
• Parents need to be made confident that you can solve any problems presented.
• If you expect problems with a parent or family member, ask an administrator to sit in the conference with you or be available in a room nearby.
    - If the parent is emotional or unreasonable, reschedule the conference for a later date.

VIDEO ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Meet with your study team to consider the ideas presented in the video. Select and complete one of the following assignment options.

Option #1:

From information presented in the video, choose the two most important concepts that you encountered. Share these concepts with your study team and give your rationale for identifying them as "most important." In your explanation, you should:
1. Describe in detail each of the concepts that you identified.
2. Explain how you could use these concepts to improve parental support of your classroom efforts.
3. Describe how you could utilize these concepts to help you achieve your course goal.

After making your presentation, listen to that of your partner and give him/her feedback.

Option #2:

In a discussion with your study team, consider the following:
1. What steps do you currently take to establish positive communication with parents at the beginning of the school year? What could you do to improve this communication?
2. Both Dr. Glasser and Dr. Bluestein state that relationships are key to understanding and solving problems. Does your experience in dealing with parents and other family members confirm or deny their position? Why do you believe this is the case?

3. Dr. Bluestein states that when you contact parents about a problem you should take responsibility for finding a solution. Do you agree with Dr. Bluestein? Why? Why not?

4. Kay Mentley has her teachers make one positive home contact per month per student. (Her secondary teachers make one contact per period per student per month.) Is this too much to ask? Is it just right? Is it not enough? Explain your answer.
5. Kaye tells her teachers that they should view parents as customers.
6. Some educators argue that developing a positive relationship with parents is too time consuming and is asking too much of educators already over burdened with other responsibilities. Do you agree? Why? Why not?
7. What is one action you could take the very next school day that would improve you parent support?
8. Do you agree that it is important for teachers to attend community events in which their students are involved? Why? Why not?

APPLICATION ASSIGNMENT:

This is your application assignment for this session: Take a few minutes to look through this Course of Study book and read the session topics and learning objectives for each session. Then, complete the following planning process:

1. With regard to improving your approach to parental support, first set a reasonable goal to achieve by the end of the course. ("Parent Support" refers to parents agreeing with and endorsing your efforts.)
2. With respect to parental involvement in the education process, set a goal to be achieved by the end of the course. ("Parent Involvement" refers parents actually taking an active part in the educational process.)
3. Considering what you are about to learn in this course, briefly describe some strategies you will use to achieve your goals. (You will add and subtract strategies as you proceed through the course. This is just a beginning point.)
4. Describe how you will assess whether or not you reached your goals.

This will be your Parent Support and Involvement Plan. Record your goal, strategies, and assessment plan in the Progress Report for this session.

Example:
1. Parental Support Goal: To increase the positive feedback that I receive from parents by 25%.
2. Parent Involvement Goal: Increase the number of parent volunteer hours in my classroom per week from 2 hours to 4 hours.
3. Strategies that I pan to use include: making at least one positive phone call to parents every school day, increase the number of graded assignments that I send home each week, starting a brief classroom newsletter that I would send home every two weeks. Hold an information meeting for parents who might want to volunteer, arrange for a support group to invite other parents to join in helping in the classroom.
4. I will note the amount of positive parent feedback that I am receiving at the beginning of the project and at the end. I will note the number of parent volunteer hours at the beginning and end of the project. In addition, I plan to do some kind of informal survey of parents at the end of the project to see if they feel any different about their child's education.

PROGRESS REPORTING

To conclude your learning activities for this session, please turn to the Progress Report form for this session. Progress Report forms for all sessions are placed together at the back of this Course of Study book for easy removal and evaluation. Remember, since this is not a group activity, each enrollees should write his or her own progress report.