

### The Importance of Building Capacity at the District and School Levels

District leaders in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) have two major responsibilities:

- Conduct district-level leadership activities.
- Facilitate the work of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to help them strengthen their school-based partnership plans and programs.

These tasks require district Leaders for Partnerships to build their own expertise *and* help others increase their capacities to understand, implement, and continually improve goal-linked programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

At the district level, Leaders for Partnerships may work with colleagues from other departments to integrate family and community involvement in curriculum and instruction, student services, special education, and other programs that require school and family collaborations.

At the school level, district Leaders for Partnerships help ATPs build their capacities with initial and on-going professional development for principals, teachers, and parent leaders who serve on schools' ATPs. Team-training workshops, end-of-year retreats, monthly communications, and other individualized guidance from district Leaders for Partnerships help educators and parents see that their ATPs' efforts are fulfilling district policies for family and community involvement and are helping students reach school improvement goals.

Title I legislation [presently Section 1118, Part (E) of *No Child Left Behind*

NCLB] stresses the importance of building capacities in districts, in schools, and among parents to work together to help students increase their achievement and success in school. Yet, many districts in the U. S. have not named a Leader for Partnerships. In NNPS, districts must have designated leaders who continually "grow" their expertise on family and community involvement so that they can help schools ATPs become more expert, as well.

Here are a few examples of district leadership activities that serve parents and educators well and improve the quality of partnership programs at the district and school levels.

#### Provide Parents with Training in Technology

Leaders in **Kennewick School District**, in Kennewick, Washington, implemented a new computerized grading and attendance system. Because they knew that some parents shy away from technology, they initiated *Adult Basic Computer Classes* to help parents learn basic computer skills and navigate the system for their children's academic information. District leaders publicized these classes to reach Spanish-speaking parents and scheduled the classes to accommodate its population of agricultural workers.

Classes met twice a week for two hours during the winter term. Some classes covered very basic computer skills (e.g., turning the machine on and off). By the end of the course, participants were able to send and receive e-mail, write a resume, fill out an online application, and check their children's grades and attendance online. Kennewick's computer classes built parents' capacities to monitor

their children's schooling and academic progress.

#### Share Information in Parents' Native Languages

**Hampton City Schools**, in Hampton, Virginia, opened a Welcome Center for parents to gain information about school and community services. The Center—*36 Languages Under One Roof*—focuses on helping students and their families start the school year off on the right foot. At the Center, children and adults can register for school, sign up for ESL classes, learn about workshops for families, and find helpful community resources.

The Welcome Center also houses the ESL Parent Resource Center, which offers games, books, and information in multiple languages. Families can check out materials to use at home to enhance children's learning. In its first two years, the Center helped build capacities of about 1,000 parents by communicating useful information in parents' native languages. In so doing, more of these parents could help their children succeed in school.

#### Establish a District Advisory Council

**Francis Howell School District**, in Saint Charles, Missouri, believes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Following this motto, district administrators bring together representatives from its 23 schools' ATPs to form the *District Parent Involvement Advisory*. At council meetings, the schools' representatives share best practices, hear from and question district leaders (e.g., superintendent, chief academic office), and make joint plans for improving programs of family and community involvement. In this way,

*(Continued on page 10)*

## NNPS Schools Win Honors

(Continued from page 1)

### National Title I Schools

#### Grasonville Elementary School

in Queen Anne's County, Maryland, and **Gadsden Elementary School** in Gadsden, South Carolina, were named National Title I Schools in 2010. The awards from the National Title I Association of State Title I Administrators recognize high-poverty schools that make progress in closing achievement gaps between groups of students. In addition to attention to students' test scores and individualized assistance for students who need extra help, these schools' are working, as members of NNPS, to increase family and community involvement that contributes to student success.

### Maryland Parent Involvement Matters

Parent leaders in five NNPS schools in Maryland were their districts' finalists for the state's Comcast Parent Involvement Matters Awards. One parent from each school system was nominated for their leadership, advocacy, and participation on school committees. The schools include **Accident Elementary School** in Garrett County, **Rock Hill Elementary** in Kent County, **Kennard Elementary** in Queen Anne's County, **Leonardtown Middle School** in St. Mary's County, and **Princess Anne Elementary School** in Somerset County. The parents selected from these schools will attend a May event where one parent

will be the Maryland State Winner. In fact, all parent leaders (including ATP members and all who support their schools' partnership activities) are winners in many ways.

### Other Awards?

If your school, district, state, or organization is recognized for excellence, let NNPS know so that we can report your accomplishments. If your site has been a member of NNPS for two years or more, you can apply for a 2011 Partnership Award to spotlight your good work on family and community involvement. See the awards applications on the NNPS website in the section, Success Stories.

## Leadership Line

(Continued from page 3)

all schools learn that their ATPs have on-going support and guidance from the district.

Building capacity on partnerships goes well beyond "compliance" with federal, state, or local policies. A checklist to identify whether a district or school is in or out of compliance on parent involvement gives a "snapshot" of a program. Capacity building is like a "moving picture" that becomes more interesting over time. The examples show how district leaders are helping ATPs make their schools more welcoming, engage traditionally "hard-to-reach" populations, and support a district "culture" for partnerships. Capacity building at all levels—district, school, and family—is important for sustaining programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Darcy J. Hutchins  
dhutchins@csos.jhu.edu

## Meeting the Challenge

(Continued from page 4)

networks at the school and improved home-school relationships with families based on mutual respect.

It is not always easy to meet the challenge of having more diverse representation in decision-making roles at a school. The ATP provides NNPS schools with ways to increase the number of parents who take leadership roles—first on an ATP activity, later as an ATP member, and then on the School Council or other committees.

These and other schools in NNPS are showing that there are many different ways to provide more families with opportunities to voice ideas, take leadership roles, and increase their own and others' involvement at the school and in their children's education. Increasing parents' participation in school decisions can benefit the school, families, and the students. More information about these and other practices are in books of *Promising Partnership Practices* and on the NNPS website.

## NNPS in Numbers

# 70.8%

Percent of schools reporting that 75% - 100% of families attended at least one parent-teacher or parent-teacher-student conference in the 09-10 school year.

Source: 2010 School UPDATE Survey.  
872 school teams

# 553,000+

Number of families involved in students' education in schools guided by districts in NNPS in the 09-10 school year.

Source: 2010 District UPDATE Survey.  
110 district leaders