

type 2

Communicating to improve partnerships for student success



NATIONAL NETWORK OF
Partnership Schools
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Please make copies of *Type 2*
for all members of your
Action Team, Leadership Team,
Improvement Team, and
other interested partners!

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New 5-Year Grant Supports NNPS Growth and Studies of Student Achievement

The Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University was awarded a five-year grant to continue developing and improving the National Network of Partnership Schools. The project, *Family and Community Involvement: Achievement Effects*, is funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD). It is part of an interagency initiative with the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) to learn more about designing and scaling up school improvement programs and components.

NNPS will work with district and school members to learn how to increase the number and quality of programs of school, family, and community partnerships. We will study, with increasing rigor, the effects of family and community involvement on students' reading, math, and science skills and other indicators of student success in school.

There are four parts to the funded project. The main study, led by Dr. Joyce Epstein with all of the NNPS staff, will explore the long-term effects of NNPS approaches on school and district programs of partnership using longitudinal data from *UPDATE* surveys and schools' data on student achievement over five years. Epstein explained, "For the first time, we will be able to conduct 'nested' or hierarchical analyses to understand how district leadership can best assist schools to improve their partnership programs." The grant's emphasis on "scaling up" means that NNPS will wel-

come many new schools, districts, and states that are ready to build better programs of family and community involvement.

More Tools, Better Services

With this grant, NNPS will continue to assist schools, districts, and states across the country to develop, strengthen, and sustain their partnership programs. This is good news for all of us committed to improving student success through family and community involvement. NNPS will

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NNPS Partnership Awards Will Offer \$500 Prizes

NNPS will expand its Partnership Awards program to include \$500 prizes. Beginning in 2004, up to ten school, district, state, or organization partnership programs will receive a \$500 prize with their Partnership Award and the additional honor of *Special Recognition*.

The NNPS Partnership Award program, initiated in 2000, recognizes members that have worked with NNPS for two or more years and demonstrated excellent leadership, programs, and practices of family and community involvement. Award applications require evidence of effective action on "essential elements" that NNPS studies show have measurable influence on the quality, outreach, and results of partnership programs. These elements include *leadership, teamwork, plans for action, implementation, evaluation, and networking*.

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Issues and Insights

Joyce L. Epstein
Director

Consider TIPS Interactive Homework to Connect Home and School for Fall 2004

Parent: Are you finished with your homework?

Student: I need your help on one last thing. For language arts, I have to interview you about what it was like when you were my age and then write a paragraph comparing your experiences with my experiences at this age.

10 minutes later . . .

Parent: I enjoyed talking with you about what it was like when I was your age.

Student: I never knew you liked to do some of the same things I like to do now. I'll read you my paragraph after I finish writing it.

Did this conversation take place on another planet? Could your students and their families enjoy working on homework together? The answer is "yes" if a few changes are made to standard homework assignments.

Educators often discuss the *amount* and not the *quality* of homework that teachers assign students. A report last fall from the Brookings Institution concluded that students in the U.S. are not overloaded with homework.* Research studies show, too, that students who do their homework do better in school.

Purpose of Homework

It is important to look beyond time on homework to more interesting questions about the purpose, design, content, and results of homework assignments. NNPS studies identified 10 purposes of homework: practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent-child relations, parent-teacher communications, peer interactions, policy, and public relations. The 10th purpose, punishment, obviously, is not legitimate (Epstein, 2001).

NNPS researchers are developing and studying interactive homework for three of these purposes: increasing parent-child interactions and parent-teacher

communications, while building students' skills in math, science, and language arts. Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) interactive homework is an innovative approach to help students and their families discuss homework together.

Using TIPS Interactive Homework

The TIPS interactive homework process enables teachers to design homework assignments for students to share their work, conduct science experiments, gather reactions, discuss real-world applications of school skills, and celebrate successes with a family partner. TIPS assignments help parents understand what their children are learning in class; promote positive conversations about schoolwork at home; and improve students' homework completion, subject-matter skills, and readiness for classwork (Van Voorhis, 2003). All of this, without asking parents to "teach" school subjects at home. Manuals for teachers (Epstein, Salinas, & Van Voorhis, 2001), and a CD with over 500 TIPS assignments in math, science, and language arts for the elementary and middle grades (Van Voorhis & Epstein, 2002), are available from NNPS to help teachers design engaging, curriculum-related homework activities for students and families to share. (See resources on p. 6)

Plan Ahead to Use TIPS Next Fall

It takes some planning to use TIPS activities in math, science, or language arts. Educators can take three important steps this spring and summer to prepare to use TIPS interactive homework next fall.

1. Select a subject for TIPS interactive homework and a team of teachers or curriculum leaders who will develop the interactive homework assignments in that subject.
2. Using an outline of the curriculum for the school year, plan weekly TIPS assignments that match specific skills or learning objectives. The topics should lend themselves to enjoyable and

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New 5-Year Grant Supports NNPS Research and Services

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work to improve its training workshops and conferences; redesign the NNPS web site with additional information and tools; create helpful brochures, resource books, and tool kits for district leaders and school teams; and increase two-way communications with Key Contacts.

Special Studies

Dr. Mavis Sanders will conduct a study of eight school districts in NNPS, as they work over time to improve their leadership and partnership programs. The study will delve deeply into the strategies that leaders use to organize district-level activities and to guide schools in developing programs of family and community involvement. The results will be used to create new tools to help NNPS district leaders work more efficiently and effectively with schools' Action Teams for Partnerships.

Another special study will focus on Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) interactive homework in the elementary and middle grades, led by Dr. Frances Van Voorhis. This multi-year, comparative study will explore the effects of interactive and "regular" homework on parental involvement and on students' skills in math, science, and language arts. The results will help teachers learn how to use TIPS to design engaging, curriculum-related homework for students and their families to share.

In the third special study, Dr. Steven Sheldon will examine the impact of schools' partnership programs on parents' social networks and student achievement. With NNPS elementary and middle schools, this longitudinal project will study the effects of changes in partnership program quality on parents' connections and interactions with one another and their influence on student attitudes

and achievement. The results will be useful to all NNPS members who are interested in fostering parent networks to help improve results for students.

Thanks for NNPS Help

NNPS is grateful to several leaders who wrote letters of support for our proposal, including partners from Albuquerque, NM; Anoka-Hennepin, MN; Canton City, OH; Chaska, MN; Cleveland, OH; Fresno, CA; Howard County, MD; Long Beach, CA; Miami-Dade, FL; Naperville, IL; New Orleans, LA; San Diego, CA; Seattle, WA; Taunton, MA; and the Accelerated Schools district in the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The new grant enables NNPS to continue its unique mission to conduct research that will be useful in practice *and* to learn with educators and families about new topics and questions that will, in turn, advance research. We look forward to working with NNPS districts and schools on all of our new projects.

In the News: NNPS District Award Winner

Saint Paul Public Schools was featured in the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis-St. Paul) for incorporating information about the Hmong culture into the social studies curriculum in grades kindergarten through third. Of St. Paul's 45,000 students, almost one-third are Hmong. Many parents and community leaders have made requests over the years to have their culture reflected in what the children learn in school. St. Paul officials say that the the social studies curriculum will improve the cultural literacy of *all* children, as well as increase the number of families who feel welcome at their children's schools. St. Paul also expects increased achievement for Hmong students. A win-win situation for educators, students, and their families.

Partnership Award Winners Receive \$500 Prize

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Special Recognition

Award winners receiving *Special Recognition* and a \$500 prize will provide evidence of exceptional progress, quality, and sustained leadership on school, family, and community partnerships for more than two years. They will be invited to present their programs at an NNPS Leadership Development Conference to share details about how they have organized, customized, and implemented NNPS research-based practices in their locations. "The monetary awards will shine a spotlight on schools, districts, states, and organizations that have superior programs. The prizes may be used to support excellent activities or help pay travel costs to present at an NNPS conference," explained Joyce Epstein, NNPS Director.

All Partnership Awards

NNPS will continue to make annual Partnership Awards, without a limit on numbers, to honor all schools, districts, states, and organizations in NNPS that meet the rigorous criteria for excellent programs for two or more years. *All* Partnership Award winners, including those identified for *Special Recognition*, will receive one free registration to an NNPS Leadership Development Conference (a \$200 value), a banner or plaque for display, and national attention in the education media and on the NNPS web site.

2004 Partnership Awards applications have been mailed to all NNPS members of 2 or more years. The applications also may be downloaded from the NNPS web site at www.partnershipschools.org; click on "In the Spotlight." Applications are due June 30, 2004. Awards will be announced at the start of the new school year.

Meeting the Challenge

Steven B. Sheldon
Associate Research
Scientist

Connecting Your Partnership Program to Student Math Achievement

New provisions in the *No Child Left Behind Act* have encouraged many districts and schools to set improved student math achievement as one of their annual goals. Many schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) organize their partnership programs to include activities that help meet this goal.

Research suggests that involving families and the community in math activities can lead to gains in student performance on standardized math achievement tests. Analyses of data from NNPS's Focus on Results project showed that schools using more Type 4-Learning at Home activities reported greater improvement in the percentages of students passing state standardized math tests.

Support Learning at Home

NNPS schools reported using Type 4 math activities such as interactive homework (e.g., NNPS's Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) and maintaining a resource library from which family members can borrow math materials to work on at home with their children. Many schools use these and other Type 4 partnership activities to help improve student learning in math. For example, in Elkridge, MD, Deep Run Elementary School organized a math committee that created monthly curriculum-related projects for children and parents to do together. Each project asked students and family members to apply math concepts learned in the classroom to everyday activities using items commonly found at home. By connecting these projects to the school's math curriculum, the projects reinforced student learning outside the classroom.

Overcome Math Anxiety

A particular challenge to involving family members with students' math is that many adults do not feel confident in their own math skills. This issue becomes more prevalent as students move into middle school and begin to take more difficult math

courses. In response to this challenge, Thurmont Middle School, in Thurmont, MD, designed monthly student and parent workshops for their sixth graders. At these workshops, students and family members worked together on math problems while teachers provided guidance and instruction. At the end of each session, students and parents received materials to work on together at home.

Vena Avenue Elementary School in Arleta, CA used teachers, community members, and high school students to help provide after-school drop-in clinics for students who need extra instruction and help with their math homework. Parents of students were personally invited to join their children in these clinics and were shown how to use math manipulatives, games, and other resources. The result of these clinics was that parents learned how to work with their children and gained a better understanding of the school's math curriculum.

Partner with the Community

NNPS schools also collaborate with community partners to help improve student math achievement. At Kennedy Jr. High School in Lisle, IL, students practiced estimation skills by shadowing a local salesperson for a moving company. Students provided clients with moving cost estimates based on the approximate size and weight of the job. Students were provided with printed materials to prepare for the estimation task, bus transportation, and prizes for best estimates. This practice helped students apply math to a real-world situation.

It is essential for all students to master basic math skills. Schools can guide families and community partners to help students better understand math and succeed within and outside of school. For more details on these practices to involve families and the community in students' math, refer to the 2002 and 2003 annual collections of *Promising Partnership Practices*, mailed to NNPS members or available online at www.partnershipschools.org.

Leadership Line

In This Together: One District's Story of Building a Program of Partnerships

“We are a school district that has struggled to get our arms around parent involvement in a structured way. It has taken us a while to get to this point, but now we are moving in the right direction,” explained Dr. Brenda Holmes, Director of the Family and Community Partnerships Unit of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland.

MCPS, the 18th largest school district in the nation, has over 190 schools. The 2003-04 school year marked a new beginning for the district's efforts to build school and family partnerships. Using an organized approach, the MCPS Partnerships Unit's director and three facilitators began to provide vital program support to help the first cohort of schools develop their programs of family and community involvement.

The result? Twenty-seven schools created Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP) and began to implement goal-oriented partnership programs that are linked directly to their school improvement plans. MCPS' step-by-step approach provides an important story and useful guide for large and small districts.

Set Goals and Make Plans

MCPS began the year with specific goals in mind. The district leaders projected: “By the end of the 2003-04 school year, twenty-seven schools will have implemented comprehensive partnership programs linked to their school improvement plans using an action team approach.”

The goal was supported by a detailed outline of the tasks that would be conducted by the district facilitators, the school's ATPs, and school

principals throughout the school year. This included monthly site visits by district facilitators with each school's ATP; monthly ATP meetings; regular progress reports to the principals and to schools' leadership teams; a mid-year meeting for all ATP co-chairs and principals; and the completion by each ATP of NNPS' 2004 *UPDATE* survey to evaluate work and progress. All key stakeholders agreed to use the project plan as the compass for their first year of work on partnerships.

Connect Plans

MCPS leaders made an important link between the schools' One-Year Action Plans for partnerships and their school improvement plans. “We didn't want the action plan to be an island that was not connected to anything,” emphasized Holmes. The three district facilitators worked with their schools' ATPs to marry their goals and activities for partnerships to their school improvement goals. The schools then submitted their school improvement plans with their detailed plans for family and community involvement as one document to their community superintendents. The community superintendents hold the schools accountable for implementing their plans, while the Family and Community Partnerships Unit serves as the resource to assist schools with effective implementation of their partnership activities.

Support School Action Teams

The district provided training on partnerships to all schools' ATPs. The facilitators are charged with helping the ATPs find the resources they need in order to implement their planned activities. For example, the Partnerships Unit won an \$8,300 grant from a local family advocacy agency. Each facilitator attends the monthly ATP meetings at their designated schools. They offer on-going coaching, as needed, and always enthusiastically motivate and support their ATPs. “It's a religious kind of thing ... that nothing gets in the way of those meetings or any of those activities,” applauds Holmes of her team.

In less than a year, MCPS' district leaders and the 27 schools have gone from simply knowing how to implement an NNPS partnership program to truly feeling the value of their work. They are making the program their own. As Holmes described, more and more people are feeling, “Wow! This is what I want to be about when I am working with schools and families. It's that emerging passion for what could be that will propel us forward.” This spring the district will begin to “scale up” its program by inviting a second cohort of schools to join the burgeoning Montgomery County Network of Partnership Schools.

*By Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn
State and District Facilitator*



Cristina Riva-Chevez, Brenda Holmes (Director), Lola Crawford, Frank SooHoo, and Norma Montanaro.

TIPS Interactive Homework

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useful student-parent interactions.

3. Schedule 2-3 weeks for the team of teachers to work during the summer, with support for their time, to (a) examine existing TIPS activities; (b) align them with the curriculum; (c) design and edit any needed new assignments for the weekly learning objectives; and (d) produce the activities by using the TIPS CD or desktop publishing software.

Once the assignments are ready, other actions will be needed to implement TIPS. Teachers need to orient students and families to the new homework process; assign TIPS on a regular schedule; introduce each assignment to students before they leave class; and conduct appropriate follow-up activities when the homework is due.

Many schools in NNPS use innovative practices to help parents monitor assignments, work with students on specific skills, and review homework policies and practices (Salinas & Jansorn, 2003). TIPS is one way to increase good communications between school and home and between parent and child on homework. It is possible to make curriculum-linked homework fun and beneficial for all.

*Lovelace, T. (2003). *The 2003 Brown Center Annual Report on American Education. Part 2: Do Students Have Too Much Homework?* Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.



Research Synthesis Examines Diversity and School, Family, and Community Connections

No matter their race, ethnicity, culture, or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children's success. This is one of the findings in the latest research synthesis from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory's (SEDL) National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. The synthesis, *Diversity: School, Family, and Community Connections* is the third in a series of reviews of research on key educational issues.

The synthesis reviews over sixty-four studies on the roles that families can play in improving academic achievement of minority,

immigrant, and language minority students, and students from low-income families. The report also explores challenges to involvement for minority and low-income families and strategies that have been used to address those challenges. Several recommendations are made that educational leaders can use or adapt to address their specific needs. Two of the studies reviewed were conducted by NNPS researcher Dr. Mavis Sanders.

Copies of the research synthesis can be ordered or downloaded for free by visiting SEDL's web site at www.sedl.org.

NNPS Resources on Homework and TIPS

Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview. See chapter 6 on TIPS and other reports on homework.

Epstein, J. L., Salinas, K. C., Van Voorhis, F. L. (2001). *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) manuals and prototype activities for the elementary and middle grades*. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University.

Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2002). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. See chapter 8 on TIPS.

Epstein, J. L. & Van Voorhis, F. L. (2001). More than minutes: Teachers' roles in designing homework. *Educational Psychologist*, 36: 181-194.

Salinas, K. C. & Jansorn, N. R. (2003). *Promising Partnership Practices—2003*. Baltimore: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University. See examples of activities that increase family involvement with students on learning at home.

Van Voorhis, F. L. & Epstein, J. L. (2002). *Teachers involve parents in schoolwork: Interactive Homework CD*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University CRESPAR/Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Includes 500 prototype assignments in math (grades k-5 and middle grades review), and language arts and science (grades 6-8).

Van Voorhis, F. L. (2003). Interactive homework in middle school: Effects on family involvement and students' science achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 96 (9), 323-339.

To print a list of TIPS resources, visit www.partnershipschoools.org, and click on TIPS.

Elementary School Report

Seven Ways to Use Technology to Involve Families in Children's Education

Technological advances have rapidly changed the ways we communicate with others. As part of this evolution, schools can use technology to communicate with families more frequently and efficiently and to help families support students' learning at home. Consider implementing the following seven ways to increase family and community involvement using technology.

1. Multimedia Messages. Diverse methods of sharing information help increase the ease and frequency of school-to-home communications. For example, schools can share with parents a videotape and/or audio-cassette of a workshop they were unable to attend. Schools can also use automated phone messaging systems to alert families about unexpected early dismissals, report cards, and reminders to vote in the school board election. Finally, schools can offer a homework helpline which allows students and their parents to hear information about current assignments any-time.

2. Skills Training. A true learning community increases everyone's opportunities to use technology. Schools can offer workshops that increase parents' and students' computer skills and provide crucial information on Internet safety. Schools also can open their computer labs to families for use during non-school hours and lend laptops for use at home.

3. E-mail. Schools can use e-mail to efficiently increase two-way communication between school and home. For example, teachers can e-mail families to share information about homework and to provide

positive feedback about students' performance. The PTA/PTO can e-mail families with school board contact information so that families can give their opinions on important school and district issues. E-mail enables more families to communicate frequently with their children's teachers and voice their opinions without the constraints of time, location, or trepidation of speaking face-to-face.

4. Internet. Individual teachers, schools, districts, and the state can provide helpful information on their web sites to cover topics ranging from explanations of the curriculum to schools' performance on state and standardized tests. Teachers may suggest web sites to help students complete homework and provide extra practice or extensions of the curriculum. Counselors may suggest web sites for middle and high school students and their families to explore postsecondary education and careers.

5. Electronic portfolios and webfolios. The beauty of electronic portfolios and webfolios is two-fold. They provide families with a more detailed picture of their students' achievements than test scores and grades can do alone, because students share multimedia examples of their work. Electronic portfolios and webfolios also can serve as the focus of parent-teacher-student conferences, providing students a role in building partnerships between school and home.

6. WebQuests. WebQuests are an inquiry-oriented activity for students using the Internet. The activities are curriculum-linked, engaging, and interactive. Inter-

estingly, well-designed interactive homework activities have the same qualities (See TIPS on p. 2). Teachers can adapt traditional WebQuests so that they involve families and students in a purposeful activity using the Internet.

7. Technology Committee. By taking a leadership role on the school's technology committee, parents can help explore additional technology options. For example, parents can help find ways to increase students' hands-on opportunities with technology applications and increase teachers' use of technology in the classroom.

There are other innovative practices in addition to the seven listed here. Undoubtedly, the future holds even more opportunities. As exciting as the possibilities are, however, two important issues must be considered.

First, not all families have the access, the skills, or the opportunities to use technology to participate in their children's education. Schools must always provide alternatives to electronic ways of communicating and supporting students' learning at home. Schools can blend traditional methods with newer technologies to inform and involve all families in their children's education.

Second, the use of technology to involve families is *part* of a comprehensive, goal-oriented school, family, and community partnership program linked to student success. Technology is a means, not an end, to increase family involvement.

A longer version of this article will appear in the May 2004 issue of *Access Learning* published by Cable in the Classroom. See www.ciconline.org/accesslearning.

Karen Clark Salinas
Elementary School Facilitator

Our Growing Network

New Members in NNPS since September 2003

SCHOOLS (54 new members) ★ Avalon Elementary (St. Clair Shores, MI) ★ B. F. Day Elementary School (Seattle, WA) ★ Barcelona Elementary (Albuquerque, NM) ★ Berendo Middle School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Birchwood Elementary (Birchwood, TN) ★ Canterbury Elementary School (Greendale, WI) ★ Central Davis Junior High (Layton, UT) ★ Clinton Elementary (Clinton, UT) ★ Cook Elementary (Syracuse, UT) ★ Douglas MacArthur Elementary School (Albuquerque, NM) ★ El Sereno Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Elmwood Elementary School (St. Clair Shores, MI) ★ Emerson Elementary (Seattle, WA) ★ Graham Hill Elementary (Seattle, WA) ★ Hawthorne (Seattle, WA) ★ Highland View Elementary School (Greendale, WI) ★ Hollywood Elementary School (Memphis, TN) ★ Hubbard Elementary (Forsyth, GA) ★ Hubbard Primary School (Forsyth, GA) ★ Interagency Academy and South Lake High (Seattle, WA) ★ John Muir High School (Pasadena, CA) ★ Kimball Elementary School (Seattle, WA) ★ Kissimmee Elementary School (Kissimmee, FL) ★ Koepsell Education Center (St. Clair Shores, MI) ★ Latona Avenue Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Lincoln Elementary School (Eau Claire, WI) ★ Loyal Heights Elementary School (Seattle, WA) ★ Mary Persons High School (Forsyth, GA) ★ Monroe County Middle School (Forsyth, GA) ★ Naples Park Elementary School (Naples, FL) ★ Oconto Falls Elementary (Oconto Falls, WI) ★ Osceola Street Elementary (Sylmar, CA) ★ Pare Elementary School (St. Clair Shores, MI) ★ Rainier Beach High school (Seattle, WA) ★ Rainier View Elementary (Seattle, WA) ★ Raub Middle School (Allentown, PA) ★ S.O.S. Academy Charter Middle/High School (Jacksonville, FL) ★ Sacajawea Elementary (Seattle, WA) ★ Sanislo Elementary School (Seattle, WA) ★ Secondary Bilingual Orientation Center (Seattle, WA) ★ South Lake High School (St. Clair Shores, MI) ★ South Lake Middle School (St. Clair Shores, MI) ★ St. Paul ALC-Unidale (St. Paul, MN) ★ Stevens Elementary School (Seattle, WA) ★ Sunset Jr. High (Sunset, UT) ★ Thompson Middle School (Newport, RI) ★ Van Asselt Elementary (Seattle, WA) ★ Wasatch Elementary (Clearfield, UT) ★ Washington Middle School (Seattle, WA) ★ West Point Junior High School (West Point, UT) ★ Willow Cove Elementary School (Pittsburg, CA) ★ Wilson Sr. High School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Woodlands Middle/High School (Hartsdale, NY) ★ Woods Cross Elementary School (Woods Cross, UT) ★

DISTRICTS (6 new members) ★ Davis School District (Kaysville, UT) ★ Fayetteville School District (Fayetteville, AR) ★ Monroe County Schools (Forsyth, GA) ★ Pomona Unified School District (Pomona, CA) ★ Richland County School District One (Columbia, SC) ★ Romulus Community Schools (Romulus, MI) ★ Ypsilanti Public Schools (Ypsilanti, MI) ★

ORGANIZATION/UNIVERSITY PARTNERS (9 new members) ★ Drury University (Springfield, MO) ★ Indiana North Central Association (Terre Haute, IN) ★ Project GRAD USA (Houston, TX) ★ Region 10 Education Service Center (Richardson, TX) ★ Rocky Mountain Center for Health Promotion and Education (Lakewood, CO) ★ Stark County Educational Service Center (Canton, OH) ★ Tripod (Burbank, CA) ★ Upper Peninsula Middle Start Network (Marquette, MI) ★ WI FACETS-WI Family Assistance Center for Education, Training, and Support Inc. (Milwaukee, WI) ★

STATES (1 new member) ★ Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education Programs (Albuquerque, NM, serving schools in multiple states) ★

Current Active Membership in the National Network of Partnership Schools as of February 10, 2004

Schools: 876 Districts: 96 States: 17 Organizations: 67



Middle and High School Report

Involve Families and the Community in Postsecondary Education Planning

By the time you read this article, most high school seniors will have applied to college or for career technical education. They are eagerly awaiting the arrival of acceptance letters. Some students had a good experience planning the next stage of their education or training. Others experienced anxiety and still feel frustrated and unsure of what lies ahead.

How can all schools improve the process of helping all students plan their postsecondary pathways? Admittedly, this is a challenge. High school guidance counselors' caseloads often are too big to give students one-on-one attention. And, many parents are not sure how to assist their sons and daughters through the postsecondary planning process. What will it take to help more students develop better college and career education plans for life after high school? One part of the solution is to involve students' families and the community as partners in postsecondary planning, from the middle grades through high school.

Postsecondary Planning as a Goal

Every middle and high school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) can make postsecondary planning a priority by including it as one goal of their partnership program. In their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships, the ATP will select activities for the six types of involvement to involve families and the community in helping students think about their future plans. This kind of organized, goal-oriented approach should enable more students and families to make informed choices to meet their aspirations.

Informing Families

Starting in the middle grades, schools'

ATPs may select and implement partnership practices that inform parents about courses required for high school graduation, entrance requirements for college or other training, and financial aid. Families need this information several times and in different forms. Postsecondary Education Planning Nights, articles in the school newsletter, information on the school website, and Career Days are just a few ways for students and their parents to gather crucial information for future plans. ATPs also must address any language translations needed by families who speak English as a second language.

Involving Families

In addition to informing families, the ATP also can provide opportunities, such as interactive homework, for students to discuss goals, select courses, and plan strategies to reach goals with a family partner. Parents who have been given good information about high school graduation requirements and postsecondary education entrance requirements can help students select needed courses each year to fulfill their plans.

Schools in NNPS are showing how to do this. For example, Glenmary School* in Peace River, Alberta, Canada conducted several activities that involved families and the community in supporting students' postsecondary education planning. During *Career Portfolio Night*, eleventh-grade students showed their families a portfolio about a specific career. Students developed the portfolios by researching a career and talking with a professional to get first-hand knowledge of the job. At the evening event, community members spoke to the students and their parents about various

occupations and evaluated each portfolio. Later, on *Information Night*, students and their parents gathered important information about high school courses, choosing careers, and applying for scholarships. Also, they were given the opportunity to use the school's computer lab to search the Internet for information about colleges and careers.

Taking Next Steps

As I talk with educators around the country, I have learned that many ATPs are beginning to reach out to all families to inform and involve them in their teens' postsecondary education planning. All middle and high schools could hold college nights and financial aid sessions for students and their families at least once a year and make school computers available for students and parents to search for college and career information. All schools could team up with community partners for job shadowing opportunities, field trips for students and parents to local colleges, and forums with school alumni who have taken various postsecondary pathways. The possibilities and benefits are endless.

Teachers, students, and their families work hard to help all students graduate from high school. The same kind of effort and teamwork are needed to help students plan their futures.

*See *Promising Partnership Practices—2003* for more information on these practices.

By Katharine M. Gerne
Middle and High School Facilitator

Research Brief

Effects of Family and Community Involvement on Chronic Absenteeism

According to the U.S. Department of Education, student absenteeism is a serious issue for many elementary and middle schools. Research has shown that, as early as the elementary grades, higher levels of absenteeism predict whether or not students drop out of school. Partnership practices that improve student attendance may help improve graduation rates.

The National Network of Partnership Schools conducted the research study Focus on Results to examine the effects of family and community involvement activities on student attendance and absenteeism. Longitudinal data were collected from almost 40 schools about their use of attendance-focused partnership activities and levels of chronic absenteeism for 2 years. Participants represented elementary and secondary schools, as well as schools from large urban, small urban, suburban, and rural locales. Chronically absent students were those who missed 20 or more days of school a year.

Communicate and Connect

Analyses indicated that communications about attendance were most important. School-to-home communication practices were significantly associated with reducing the percentage of chronically absent students. In particular, schools that conducted orientations for parents about school expectations and attendance policies and those that sent home newsletters praising students with excellent attendance reported lower levels of chronic absenteeism from one year to the next. Also, schools that connected chronically absent students with community mentors reported declines in the percentage of students that missed 20 or more days of school.

Use a Well-Rounded Approach

Analyses also indicated that schools that used a wide variety of partnership activities to help improve attendance reported improvements in chronic absenteeism. This suggests that schools should develop comprehensive partnership programs, focused on reducing chronic absenteeism, by implementing practices for all six types of involvement—*Parenting, Community, Volunteering, Learning at Home,*

Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community.

This study further supports the important role of school, family, and community partnership programs in helping all students succeed. Students have to first attend school in order to learn the skills they need to achieve academically and later in life.

Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. *Getting Students to School: Effects of Family and Community Involvement on Chronic Absenteeism*. Under Review. For a preprint, contact the authors.

It's Time to Evaluate Your Partnership Program

At the end of each school year, every school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and every district, state, and organization leader should take time to evaluate progress. Here are four NNPS tools to help you end the year in good style and prepare for the next school year. Check the boxes as you complete each one.

- ☐ **Annual Review of Team Processes.** This NNPS checklist helps school teams assess team membership, meetings, and effectiveness of teamwork. Conduct one ATP meeting to discuss and review teamwork. See p. 111 of NNPS' *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition* (Corwin Press, 2002).
- ☐ **End-of-Year Evaluation.** This NNPS tool helps school teams reflect on the quality of partnership activities that were planned and conducted this year. Conduct one ATP meeting to complete this tool. See pp. 360-364 of the *Handbook* if your Action Plan is organized by school goals or pp. 353-359 if your One-Year Action Plan is organized by the six types of involvement.
- ☐ **NNPS 2004 UPDATE Survey.** UPDATE will be mailed to all NNPS members in early April. UPDATE helps schools, districts, states, and organizations assess progress on "essential components" of programs of family and community involvement. UPDATE also renews your membership in NNPS for 2004-05 at no cost. Conduct one ATP meeting to discuss and complete UPDATE.

Evaluations complete? Time to plan next year's partnership program *before the end of this school year.*

- ☐ **One-Year Action Plan for 2004-05.** ATPs should use the results of the above evaluations to select activities to continue, improve, or add in the next One-Year Action Plan. Conduct at least one ATP meeting to complete a goal-oriented Action Plan for partnerships. See pp. 349-352 of the *Handbook* to plan your program by school goals or pp. 343-348 to plan your work by the six types of involvement.

Have a question? Need a form? E-mail nnps@csos.jhu.edu. We will be happy to answer your questions or e-mail or fax the evaluation tool that you need.

Article in *Principal* Describes Leadership Roles for Partnerships

Prin cip als have im por tant roles to play in strength en ing school pro grams of fam ily and com mu nity in volvement. This theme is dis cussed by NNPS au thors Joyce L. Ep stein and Na talie Ro driguez Jan sorn in the lead ar ticle of the Jan u ary / Feb ru ary 2004 is sue of *Principal*, jour nal of the Na tional As so ci a tion of El e men tary School Prin ci p als.

The ar ticle, “De vel op ing Suc cess ful Part nership Pro grams,” out lines 10 ac tions that prin ci p als should take to sup port and strength en part nership pro grams, fam ily in volvement, and re sults for stu dents.

- Use the bul ly pul pit of the prin ci pal’s of fice to let ev er y one know that the school sup ports good part nerships to help all stu dents suc ceed at high lev els.

- Let *all* stu dents know that their fam iles are im por tant part ners in their edu ca tion.
- Al lo cate funds for the part nership pro gram and planned ac ti vi ties.
- Dis cuss all teach ers’ roles in build ing good part nerships at the first fac uly meet ing each year.
- Help teach ers be come more ef fec tive in com mu nicat ing with all par ents about stu dents’ home work, school work, grades, and test scores and in con duct ing par ent teach er stu dent con fer ences.
- Pub li cize sched uled in volvement ac ti vi ties through out the school year.
- Guide the school’s Ac tion Team for Part nerships (ATP) in mak ing pe ri odic re ports on part nership

plans and ac com plish ments to the school coun cil and other school groups.

- Work with com mu nity lead ers to lo cate re sources that will enrich the cur ric u lum and help stu dents, teach ers, and par ents in im por tant ways.
- Re cog nize and thank ATP lead ers, team mem bers, fam ily vol unteers, and other part ners for their in volvement each year.
- Work with dis trict lead ers to im prove school pro grams of part nerships from year to year.

To down load a copy of the ar ticle, use this link to the NAESP web site: <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=1121>.

Two Reports Spotlight the National Network of Partnership Schools

Two re ports re leased in late 2003 fea tured NNPS re search and ap proaches for de vel op ing stronger pro grams of school, fam ily, and com mu nity part nerships. In de pen dent re view ers found the NNPS Part nership Model use ful for in creas ing fam ily in volvement in middle schools and for de vel op ing par ent and com mu nity lead ership as part of school im provement.

Helping Middle Schools

Cre at ing Part nerships, Bridg ing Worlds: Fam ily and Com mu nity En gage ment by Turn ing Points: Trans form ing Middle Schools uses NNPS re search and the frame work of six types of in volvement to help middle schools de vel op bet ter pro grams of school, fam ily, and com mu nity part nerships to in crease stu dent achievement. The guide’s table of con tents in cludes sec tions and ap pen dixes for *par ent ing, com mu ni cat ing, vol unteer ing, learn ing at home, de ci sion mak ing, and col lab orat ing with*

the com mu nity. Ex am ples of fam ily and com mu nity in volvement ac ti vi ties are pro vided as strat e gies for ac tion. (Center for Col lab or a tive Edu ca tion, Bos ton, MA, 2003. For more in for ma tion, see www.turningpoints.org)

Increasing Leadership

Bet ter than Bake Sales au thors Lisa Wyatt Knowlton and Cy nthia Phillips re view ed pro grams for in creas ing par ent/ci tizen and com mu nity part i ci pa tion. From fifty two no mi nated or ga ni za tions, they se lected four “ex em plars” for par ent/com mu nity lead ership de vel op ment for school im provement in clud ing the Na tional Net work of Part nership Schools. Of NNPS, the au thors wrote: “NNPS... offers clear, struc tured pro cesses to in spire pro gram de sign and on go ing tech ni cal sup port. . . . NNPS ex plicitly in di cates that (it is) con cur rently build ing the com pe ten cies of schools about fam iles.” (That is, not just par ent lead ership, alone.) “NNPS

offers ... a re search based ap proach to par ent en gage ment with mul ti ple di men sions. An nual plans with eval uation and data col lec tion meth ods pro vide a cycle of se quenced ac ti vi ties that offer a step by step pre scrip tion.” (Ex ecutive Sum mary, Sep tem ber, 2003. For the full re port, see www.pwkin.com.)

Meaning of External Reviews

When in de pen dent re view ers com ment on the value of NNPS or use NNPS re search and ap proaches to pro gram de vel op ment, they are, in fact, re cog nizing the hard work that is be ing done by both NNPS staff *and* mem bers across the coun try. The NNPS’ *Handbook*, re search re ports, and prac ti cal tools are based on data from all NNPS mem bers and on the dy nam ic flow of NNPS re search to prac tice and the in flu ence of prac tice to im prove re search. Our work to geth er pro duces the kind of in for ma tion that oth ers find val uable.



National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3003 North Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, Maryland 21218
tel: 410-516-8818 fax: 410-516-8890
e-mail: nnps@csos.jhu.edu
website: www.partnershipschools.org

Director: Joyce L. Epstein
Communications Director and Editor:
Karen Clark Salinas
State and District Facilitator:
Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn
Middle and High School Facilitator:
Katharine M. Gerne
Associate Research Scientist: Steven B. Sheldon
Network Coordinator: Kenyatta J. Williams
Senior Advisor: Mavis G. Sanders

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Partnership Calendar

2004

- February:** Invitation to school, district, and state members to apply for the National Network's Partnership Awards 2003-2004 for excellence in programs of partnership.
- March:** Spring issue of *Type 2*.
- March:** Invitation to school, district, and state members to contribute to the National Network's *Promising Partnership Practices—2004*.
- March 12-13:** Leadership Development Conference in Baltimore for school, district, state, and organization leaders to prepare for the 2003-2004 school year.
- April 1:** Members will receive 2004 *UPDATE* in the mail. Due June 30 to renew NNPS membership for the 2004-2005 school year.
- May 17:** Promising partnership practices from members due for the 2004 collection.
- June 30:** 2004 *UPDATE* must be returned to the National Network to renew membership for the 2004-2005 school year. NNPS will waive annual membership fees for all members who return *UPDATE*.
- June 30:** Applications due for *Partnership School Awards*, *Partnership District Awards*, *Partnership Organization Awards*, and *Partnership State Awards* for the 2003-2004 school year.

TOP 10 Reasons to Return 2004 *UPDATE* to NNPS by June 30

All NNPS members will receive the 2004 *UPDATE* surveys by mail in early April. Schedule a team meeting to reflect on the year's work, fill out *UPDATE*, and return it to NNPS. Here is the NNPS Top 10 List of reasons to return *UPDATE* on time.

10. **David Letterman said so!**
9. **All the cool kids are doing it.**
8. **Punctuality is a virtue.**
7. **You will help save the planet.** If you return *UPDATE* on time, NNPS will not have to send you reminders and more reminders. We would like that. Trees would like that. A lot.
6. **We hate having to beg.** Please send in *UPDATE* on time. Pretty please?
5. **You will have more time to spend at the pool.**
4. **NNPS mail will reach YOU.** *UPDATE* keeps NNPS contact information up-to-date for snail mail and for e-mail.
3. **You will make the nation smarter about partnerships.** *UPDATE* adds new knowledge on partnerships every year. (Old knowledge smells funny when it gets moldy!)
2. **You have to play to win.** Return your *UPDATE* by June 30 and your site will be entered in a lottery to win free registrations to an NNPS conference (one registration is worth \$200). On July 1, four winners will be chosen.

And the #1 reason to return *UPDATE* by June 30 . . .

It's worth real \$\$! NNPS will pay your renewal fee for the 2004-05 school year. We do this because *UPDATE* is so important for learning more about developing strong partnership programs. That's worth \$100 for each school and \$200 for each district, state, and organization!