

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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UPDATE Data in 2013 Show Schools and Districts Use Research-Based Approaches in Practice

In 2013, 433 schools and 40 districts completed UPDATE surveys to assess the progress of their partnership programs for the 12-13 school year and to update their information on contacts to NNPS. UPDATE reinforces the importance of evaluating progress, identifying challenges, and improving plans for family and community engagement every year. NNPS pays a matching renewal fee for every site to process the data, report results, and provide member-benefits for the next school year. This unique collaboration ensures that NNPS gathers national data on partnership program development and supports the work of schools, districts, states, and organizations to improve their programs of family and community engagement.

Headlines from NNPS Districts

Districts Serve Diverse Communities.

In 2013, NNPS districts served diverse students and families in large cities (22%), small cities (22%), suburban (40%), and rural (16%) areas. The districts ranged in size from 1 school to over 200 schools, with families who spoke an average of 40 languages at home (ranging from 1 to over 80 languages and dialects across districts). On average, about 58% of the students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals (ranging from 10% to 100% of students in these districts). The diversity of district members is a strength of NNPS that helps us identify effective leadership strategies for improving partnership programs in very different communities.

District leaders affected the quality of district and school-based partnership programs. NNPS asks district Leaders for Partnerships to conduct district-level leadership activities and help their schools' Action Teams for Partnerships

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Sheldon Named Associate Director of Center on SFCP

Steven B. Sheldon, Director of Research for NNPS, was named Associate Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. In this position, Dr. Sheldon will work closely with Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director, in conducting fund-raising campaigns to assure on-going support for the Center and for NNPS.

Dr. Sheldon earned his Ph.D. in educational psychology from Michigan State University. A member of the team at Johns Hopkins University since 2000, he is a prolific scholar with many articles, chapters, and books on the nature and effects of family and community engagement. Over the years, Dr. Sheldon conducted studies of how the quality and outreach of partnership programs affected parents' responses and student outcomes, such as attendance, behavior, reading and math achievement. He is co-author, with Mavis Sanders, of the book *Principals Matter: A Guide to School, Family, and Community Partnerships* (Corwin Press, 2009) on principals' leadership for developing

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Joyce L. Epstein
Director

No Such Thing as a Silly Question! Answers to Questions on 2013 UPDATE Surveys

The 2013 UPDATE surveys invited school teams to ask NNPS questions about puzzling issues. Here are answers to a few of the common questions that were raised by school teams and district leaders.

How do we get more families to participate in activities?

Schools and districts always want to engage “more” families and community partners. That is a good thing. NNPS is all about *equity*. The goal for all partnership programs is to engage all families, not just those who are easiest to reach. However, there is no “magic” way to engage all families all of the time. Districts and schools will increase the number of parents-as-partners as they conduct activities that build mutual trust and respect with all parents and other family and community members. Here are a few steps to success in reaching more and different families.

Step 1. Plan enjoyable and meaningful involvement activities that are linked to specific goals in the School Improvement Plan. The One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships will help Action Teams for Partnerships write good plans (now for the 2014-15 school year). Choose goals for the 4-page template in the NNPS *Handbook for Action* so that activities will attract all families—not just those whose children are falling behind in skills. Goal-linked activities that are connected to teachers’ curricula and state standards at each grade level can be feasible and fun for all families, *and* can help boost student learning and good behavior. Is it important to improve students’ reading skills? Then, plan some informative and celebratory activities to engage all families with children on reading. Similarly, well-designed activities will encourage family engagement to improve student attendance, discipline, health, homework completion, on-time graduation, and plans for college and careers.

Step 2. Plan activities that will engage families at school and at home. Not all parents can come often to the school building. ATPs should design and implement some reading, math, and other goal-linked activities that can be conducted by parent and child at home. It also helps to provide information and materials to families who cannot attend a school-based event. Some schools send workshop materials home to all families; some use streaming videos of workshops; others make information available in the “partnership section” of the school website for parents who could not attend an activity at school. A good, balanced partnership program is not only about “bodies in the building.” Parents can be importantly involved at home.

Step 3. Decide how many meetings or events you want ALL parents to attend.

A large majority work full- or part-time during the school day. Although not all parents can attend every engagement activity, every parent can arrange to attend one or two. ATPs must consider: *Which activities in the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships are so important that all (or just about all) parents and/or other family partners should attend?* Open House Night? Report Card Pick-Up? Orientation for families new to the school? Planning for on-time graduation, college, or careers?

For the few imperative meetings, the ATP must plan well and communicate effectively. These events may feature dinner, student presentations, invitations from students in family languages, incentives for parents to attend, and other personal outreach. If the content, energy, and purpose of engagement activities are sustained, then the school will earn a reputation for having well planned, goal-linked activities that respect parents’ time and help them contribute to their children’s success in school.

How do we engage the families who have

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Elementary School Report

A School Garden May Help Your Partnership Program Grow

Last spring, *Earth Day Hurray* at **Dolby Elementary School** in Lake Charles, LA, led to months of science enrichment, lessons in responsibility, and lots of fun. Nearly 500 students spent the holiday planting flower boxes around the campus. Throughout the rest of the semester, they continued to care for the plants, gaining science skills and environmental stewardship values in the process.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) spearheaded the project, after receiving suggestions from several families. The ATP applied for a \$500 grant from the Lake Charles Junior League to turn the idea into a reality. The League provided funds and offered to help weed the garden. The school's Watch Dog Dads, a volunteer group, constructed enough flower boxes for all grade levels so that each student could plant his or her own flower. On Earth Day, the community of students, parents, teachers, and community members completed the planting tasks.

A Garden to Nurture the Soul

Monet Family and Community Gardening Day helped students at **Apalachee Tapestry Magnet School of the Arts** in Tallahassee, FL, relate to French Impressionist painter Claude Monet's love for his garden. As city-dwellers, many students had never planted seeds, harvested vegetables, or weeded flower beds. What did Monet mean, they wondered, when he said, "Flowers—I must have flowers, always, and always"?

By creating a garden, the students came to understand the power of plants to nurture the soul. Now, the school's garden, called the *Monet*

Friendship Garden, is a source of pride for the school and community. It also is an excellent educational tool. Each year, students, families, school staff, and community members spend a Saturday working in the garden planting flowers, vegetables, and shrubs.

The students and others check to see that the garden's birdhouses, murals, fish pond, friendship fence, and stepping stones are well-maintained. Throughout the school year, the garden is regularly tended and is incorporated into art, science, and nutrition lessons for students. Teachers hold reading classes in the garden, and students develop writing skills by keeping journals about their favorite plants and growth patterns. The garden also provides an opportunity for community service. Students donate some of the vegetables that they grow to a local homeless shelter.

Local businesses and parents donate some of the plants and other materials. School funds cover the rest at an annual cost of about \$300. High school students and Master Gardeners volunteer to guide participants' efforts. Everyone enjoys working together to beautify the school grounds.

A Garden for Community Partnerships

You, too, may find that local businesses, such as Lowe's, Home Depot, and smaller flower and gardening shops are willing to support your ATP's plans to start a school garden. They will appreciate a thank you and recognition in a school newsletter that goes to all families. It's good education and good business to grow a garden in the spring.

Over the years, schools in NNPS planned and implemented activities to beautify the school grounds. Some obtained support from State Extension Services for volunteers to work with students on school gardens over the summer. Harvests have been used in school lunches. Others collaborated with state and local Parks Departments for students to participate in planting and maintaining community gardens. In a preschool, a compost garden grew with support from Lowe's. In a high school, students with special needs partnered with local farms on an agriculture curriculum and career planning. And where real gardens were not feasible, students created paper flower gardens to encourage reading.

A Garden to Encourage Reading

Your ATP may also find a garden spot at or near the school to support student learning. On *Picnic with Parents* at **College Oaks Elementary School** in Lake Charles, LA, over 170 students and 148 of their family members read stories together and enjoyed a picnic lunch on the school's park-like grounds. The hour-long literary picnic was evidence that the school lives up to its slogan: "*At College Oaks Elementary, We Read, Read, Read.*" The event was designed to encourage students, parents, and other family partners to read together.

Parents brought blankets and a book to school and purchased tickets for a picnic lunch. The picnic was a community affair, with the picnic food donated by local businesses so that the ticket proceeds could go toward a new school playground. Parent and community volunteers prepared and assembled the lunches. All were sold. At noon, students met their families

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Meeting the Challenge

Steven B. Sheldon
Director of Research

Ease the Transition to a New School

Each year, NNPS adds a topic to the UPDATE survey to learn about a specific challenge facing districts and schools in organizing and implementing their programs of family and community engagement. In 2013, we explored whether and how districts and schools were helping students and their families make successful transitions and adjustments when they moved from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, or middle to high school.

Making a successful transition is important to reduce the number of behavioral and academic problems that some students experience when they enter a new school. For example, in 2013 about 40% of schools' ATPs reported that up to one fourth of their students struggle to succeed in the first year at the school. Change is challenging and adjustments are necessary. Good transition activities that inform and engage students and their families should help more students feel comfortable in a new place and be ready for academic learning.

Different Transition Practices by School

The good news is that about 90% of ATPs reported they have implemented several practices to help students and families transition into the school. Activities included inviting incoming students and parents to visit prior to the opening school year (e.g., a visiting day, a before-school picnic); communicating with parents and students about attendance (e.g., attendance policies, importance for learning); conveying expectations for student behavior; and providing information on goals for student achievement and promotion.

There were some differences, however, in which schools conducted these activities. More elementary than secondary schools communicated with families about how to continue monitoring their child's academic progress. Interestingly, many secondary schools conducted visiting days for parents and students before school started. More large urban schools than those in other loca-

tions were not yet implementing these transition activities.

Different Transition Practices by District

At the district level, Leaders for Partnerships confirmed the school reports. Most district leaders reported that most of their schools conducted various transition activities, such as inviting students and parents to visit, meet teachers, and ask questions about the upcoming transition before the start of the school year to increase chances of a good adjustment to the new school. Interestingly, district Leaders for Partnerships who reported stronger collegial support for partnership work, in general, said more feeder and receiver schools worked together to conduct transition activities.

Over 90% of district leaders described at least one effective activity conducted by a school or the district to help students and their families make successful transitions to the next school level. Here are a few useful practices that can be adapted or adopted by any school.

SAMPLE school activities for successful transitions

- Elementary school invited preschoolers and parents to school four times a year for activities, parent workshops with guest speakers, and materials for preschoolers to prepare for kindergarten.
- Schools conducted meetings for parents and students entering kindergarten.
- The middle school principal visited each 5th grade class before students entered 6th grade. Parents were invited to attend.
- *Bridging to Middle School* included a panel of former elementary students to help non-English speaking families and students understand how middle school works.
- Each high school now has a team of

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Middle and High School Report

Welcoming Transitions Lead to Student Success in High School

Students and families enter middle and high school with great excitement, high hopes, and some worries about whether they will feel welcome and part of a large secondary school. Over the years, schools in NNPS have reported activities to ease the transition into middle and high school. *Promising Partnership Practices 2013* shares several ways to ensure that every student and family enters a “partnership place” at the start of the school year or as a transfer student during the school year.

Mid-Year Transitions

The *Huskie K-9 Mentoring Program* at **Naperville North High School** in Naperville, IL, helps students who transfer to the school mid-year. Transfer students must adjust to a new building, new classes, teachers, and friends. Two juniors at the school understood this very well—both had been transfer students at one point. Two parents also saw the need to welcome new families in friendly ways. Students, parents, teachers, and the school’s partnership team (SFCP) collaborated to start a mentoring program.

Now, when transfer students register at the school, they receive a questionnaire asking about their interests and background. The questionnaire is used to pair them with a Huskie K-9 Companion—a current student who has applied to be a mentor to new students. By design, the peer mentor has the same lunch schedule as the transfer student so that newcomer never has to sit alone at lunch. More than lunch buddies, the mentors are trained for other responsibilities. They help students find their classes, introduce them to other students and school activities, and address their questions and concerns. Parents of new students

also complete a questionnaire, and are invited to chat by phone about the school with a parent mentor.

Mid-Year Military Family Transitions

It is well known that children of military families move often. It is necessary to improve how they are welcomed when they transfer to a new school, often in the middle of the year. **Northridge High School**, in Layton, UT, serves over 150 students from military families. The Action Team for Partnerships and other school leaders worked with the local military base to develop and implement the **Military Family Support Program** to ease students’ and families’ transitions to the school.

The first step was to familiarize the school administrators, teachers, and counselors about life on a military base so that they could better understand the students and families. Hill Air Force Base (HAFB) invited the staff to tour the base, learn important terms for day-to-day operations, and see the commissary, child care center, and youth center. The HAFB and school staffs discussed the effects of frequent school transfers on children in military families and how to make students welcome to the new environment. A school counselor now serves as the school’s liaison to HAFB for students from military families to ease the registration/enrollment process, provide a welcome letter and packet of information, offer a customized orientation program for students and families, and meet at the base throughout the year. A recognition program included posting photos and biographical sketches of parents who were deployed outside the U.S. near the counseling office for school staff, students, and visitors to see. The program also recognized students for

the support they give to their parents in the military.

Welcoming Ninth Graders’ Parents

Parents were invited to *Bring Your Parents to School Day* at **W.F. Kaynor Technical High School** in Waterbury, CT. The goal was to increase their feelings of welcome, improve parents’ connections with teachers and staff, and to actively engage parents in their education, particularly for ninth grade students who were new to the school.

Parents were greeted by students and Family Engagement Committee (FEC) members, who offered them coffee and pastries and gave them information about the school and upcoming events. In their child’s classroom, the teachers of the high school’s 12 technology trades planned information and activities in their special shops: electrical, drafting and design, manufacturing, hairdressing/barbering, fashion, merchandising, plumbing and heating, automotive, culinary, carpentry, and other technologies.

Parents worked alongside their teens on a variety of projects. In the process, they gained insights into the skills their students were developing. Teachers enjoyed meeting the parents, and said that future conversations with them would be easier and more personal. Teachers reported that, after the family event, students were more connected to the school.

These and other transition activities in each issue of *Promising Partnership Practice* give ideas for supporting students and families entering middle and high schools as new and transfer students. Studies indicate that a successful transition to a new school

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Research Brief

UPDATE Data in 2013 Show Schools and Districts Use Research-Based Approaches in Practice

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(ATPs) gain skills to work with their own students’ families. Over 90% of district leaders reported that they organized their offices, identified budgets, conducted professional development on partnerships, and shared information on best partnership practices with their schools. Such actions help build collegial support for the partnership office and agenda.

In 2013, districts ranged in overall program quality from *just starting* or *planning* (9%) to rating their programs as *good* or *good start* (35%), *very good* (35%), or *excellent* (20%). Excellent programs were reported if all schools in the district were in NNPS and the program was sustainable even if district leaders changed.

District Leaders for Partnerships conducted an average of 11.8 of 18 actions in the measured Facilitation Scale either *OK* or *very well*, ranging from 2 to 18 of the activities. About 70% helped their schools form or maintain their ATPs, write annual Action Plans for Partnerships, and work to meet challenges to engage all families in goal-linked ways. Nearly 70% collected their schools’ plans to keep track and guide the schools’ ATPs throughout the year. Many district leaders reported that they still could improve how they assist each school’s ATP as they move their programs forward.

2013 UPDATE data indicated that strong district leaders were members of NNPS for more years, reported adequate funding, felt strong collegial support, and actively facilitated school-based ATPs to engage all families. Strong leaders also used more NNPS tools, emphasized evaluations, and focused on transition activities to help students and families move on to the next school. These variables were *not* significantly related to the demograph-

ics of the districts. That is, Leaders for Partnerships who used research-based approaches to organize their work can be effective in diverse communities.

Some leadership actions are more important than others. This year, we examined how two actions were associated with leaders’ assistance to schools’ ATPs. Table 1 shows that writing a Leadership Action Plan is significantly associated with leaders’ assistance to ATPs to organize, share, and evaluate their practices. By contrast, reviewing district policy on partnerships was not linked to helping schools improve their own programs of family and community engagement. It is necessary—but not sufficient—for District Leaders for Partnerships to understand the district’s policy on family and community engagement. It is critical for leaders to write Leadership Action Plans each year that specify and schedule the actions they will take to guide their schools’ ATPs to plan, implement, evaluate, and improve the partnership program with their own students’ families.

HEADLINES FROM SCHOOLS

Schools in Diverse Communities are Making Progress. In 2013, 433 Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) that completed UPDATE were located in 25 states in elementary (67%), PK-8 (8%), middle grades (13%) and high schools (10%). The schools were in suburban communities (33%), small cities (27%), large central cities (24%), and rural areas (16%). A large majority of schools (64%) received Title I funds. Families in the schools spoke an average of 4.9 languages, ranging from 1 to 44 languages and dialects across schools.

The data showed that most schools in NNPS were working to implement core research-based components to improve their partnership programs over time. Figure 1 shows that some schools—especially elementary schools—were at advanced levels of engaging more and different families. Other schools—mainly secondary schools—were at basic levels in planning and implementing goal-linked

Table 1. Contrasting correlations of district leadership actions with assistance to schools’ ATPs to improve their partnership programs

Assistance to Schools	Contrasting Leadership Actions	
	Reviewed District Policy on Family and Community Engagement	Wrote a Leadership Action Plan for Partnerships for 2012-13
Help ATPs organize their teams?	.211 NS	.378*
Help ATPs understand the 6 types of involvement?	.070 NS	.388*
Help ATPs meet challenges to engage all families?	.047 NS	.443**
Held End-of-Year Celebration to share best practices?	.152 NS	.466**
Helped ATPs evaluate their work and progress?	.171 NS	.352*

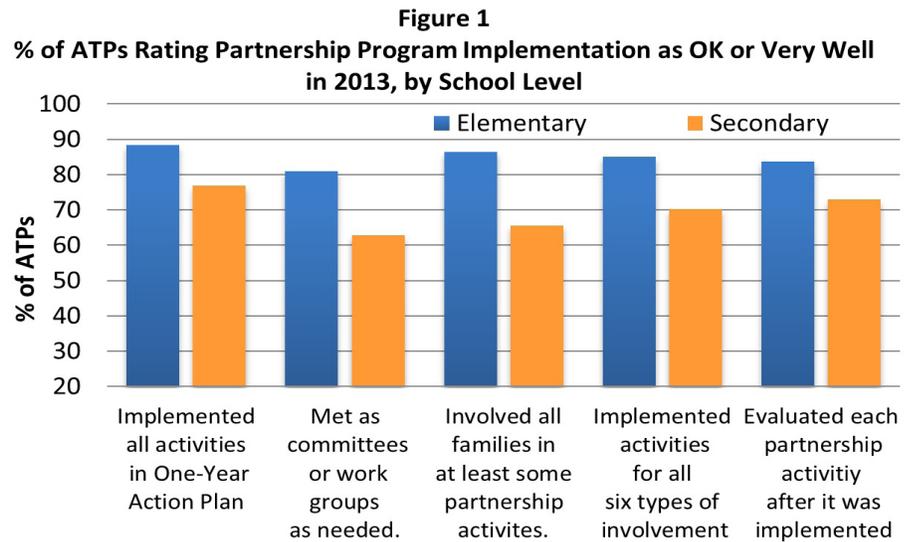
Source: Epstein & Elmore (2014). 40 Districts, 2013 District UPDATE Zero-order correlations:

family and community engagement practices. The encouraging news is that schools at all levels and in diverse communities were able to apply NNPS approaches to improve plans and implement goal-linked partnership practices. Almost all schools (90% or more)—even those just starting in NNPS—reported that they had an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) of six or more people; had written an action plan for the 12-13 school year; and linked partnership activities to school goals for student success. These are three basic steps that lead to program improvements over time.

Strong ATPs Build Teacher and Parent Support. Schools with stronger ATPs reported more teacher support for partnership activities and said that more parents were “good partners” in the education of students. All NNPS schools are working toward strong teams, teacher support, and the engagement of all families. The data in 2013 suggest that a school-based team can encourage more teachers and more parents to work as partners for student success in school.

Special Topic – Transitions. Every year, UPDATE collects longitudinal data on important program qualities and adds one exploratory topic. In 2013, we explored the topic of helping students and families make successful transitions from one school level to the next. See related columns on pages 4 and 5.

Data from district leaders indicated that those with strong partnership programs reported that more schools at all levels conducted collaborative activities with their feeder and receiver schools to help students and families adjust to the next school. Data from ATPs indicated that just about all schools conducted activities to help families navigate the transition from one school



to next. Elementary schools reported stronger communications with parents about how to monitor their child’s academic progress. Secondary schools reported more efforts to invite incoming students and families to visit the school *prior* to the beginning of the school year.

Districts and schools in NNPS recognize that families make transitions *with* their students. Good transitions are expected to reduce students’ stress and behavior problems and help more students focus on academic learning.

Districts and Schools Can Keep Improving. Even the best partnership programs must continually improve. At the district level, NNPS encourages all district leaders for Partnerships to complete a written Leadership Action Plan, just as school ATPs write One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships each year. Presently about 72% of district leaders reported this in 2013, but as Table 1 suggests, all district leaders should write clear Leadership Action Plans to improve their direct assistance to each school’s ATP.

At the school level, NNPS encourages all ATPs to meet at least monthly. In

2013, about 45% of ATPs reported meeting monthly. Time for school meetings is always tight, but monthly meetings ensure that ATPs strengthen teamwork, develop and discuss plans, evaluate activities conducted in the prior month, and share leadership for upcoming involvement activities.

SUMMARY

The 2013 UPDATE data show that NNPS schools and districts in diverse communities are able to use research-based structures and processes to strengthen teamwork and support for school, family, and community partnerships. See the [full reports](#) for 2013 on the NNPS website for details on how districts and schools are working to improve their partnership programs at www.partnershipschoools.org in the section Research and Evaluation

Full Reports

Epstein, J. L. & Elmore, J. (2014). *Annual NNPS Report: 2013 District Data*. Baltimore: National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University.

Sheldon, S. B. & Jung, S. B. (2014). *Annual NNPS Report: 2013 School Data*. Baltimore: National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University.

Our Growing Network

New Members in NNPS since October 16, 2013

SCHOOLS (29 new members) ★ Booker Arts Magnet (Little Rock, AR) ★ Carver Math-Science Magnet School (Little Rock, AR) ★ Central International Studies High School (Little Rock, AR) ★ Don R. Roberts Elementary School (Little Rock, AR) ★ Fair Park Early Childhood Center (Little Rock, AR) ★ Forest Park Elementary School (Little Rock, AR) ★ Fulbright Elementary (Little Rock, AR) ★ Gibbs Magnet Elementary School of International Studies and Foreign Languages (Little Rock, AR) ★ Hamilton Learning Academy (Little Rock, AR) ★ Horace Mann Arts and Science Magnet Middle School (Little Rock, AR) ★ JA Fair (Little Rock, AR) ★ Jefferson Elementary School Metropolitan Career-Technical Center (Little Rock, AR) ★ MS 50 K (Brooklyn, NY) ★ Parkview Magnet High School (Little Rock, AR) ★ Williams Traditional Magnet School (Little Rock, AR) ★ Woodruff Early Childhood Center (Little Rock, AR) ★ Banner School of Milwaukee (Milwaukee, WI) ★ Carteret Elementary School (Bloomfield, NJ) ★ Berney Elementary (Walla Walla, WA) ★ Flatwoods Elementary (Northport, AL) ★ Matthews Elementary School (Northport, AL) ★ Myrtlewood Elementary School (Fosters, AL) ★ Skyland Elementary (Tuscaloosa, AL) ★ Tuscaloosa Magnet Elementary School (Tuscaloosa, AL) ★ Longfellow Elementary School (Mount Vernon, NY) ★ Englewood Elementary School (Tuscaloosa, AL) ★ Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary (Tuscaloosa, AL) ★ Southview Elementary (Tuscaloosa, AL) ★

DISTRICTS (3 new members) ★ North Slope Borough School District (Barrow, AK) ★ Dallas Independent School District (Dallas, TX) ★ Oak Grove School District (San Jose, CA) ★

ORGANIZATIONS/UNIVERSITY PARTNERS (5 new members) ★ Fundación CAP/Aprender en Familia (Santiago, Chile) ★ Black Family Development Inc. (Detroit, MI) ★ Literacy Inc. (LINC) (New York, NY) ★ Region 3 Education Service Center (Victoria, TX) ★ Family Engagement Institute (Palo Alto, CA) ★

Current Active Membership in the National Network of Partnership Schools as of March 31, 2014

Schools: 575

Districts: 60

States: 12

Organizations: 33

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October 23-24, 2014**



**NNPS Leadership
Development Conference
on school, family, and
community partnerships**



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Materials.**

Agenda and Registration
on the website.

Follow the link from the
homepage.



**READ what others say
about the NNPS
professional development
experience.**

**MORE THAN A WORKSHOP.
It's a Path to Partnerships!**

Sow Seeds in Spring for a Partnership Harvest

“**D**istrict and state leaders play important roles in determining whether and how well schools develop and maintain successful programs of family and community involvement.” Sound familiar? This is the first sentence of Chapter 7 on District and State Leadership in the NNPS *Handbook*.¹ When district, state, and organization Leaders for Partnerships guide schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to conduct good partnerships with their students’ families, they plant the seeds for an important harvest of more successful students. Similarly, when State Leaders guide districts to name a leader who will help all schools develop their partnership programs, they, too, plant seeds to grow family and community engagement. NNPS research-based approaches help school teams, district and organization leaders, and state leaders take systematic steps to organize their work, implement practices that matter, evaluate progress, and continue to “grow” their programs over time.

Planting and Sowing the Seeds for Partnerships

The NNPS Model encourages leaders to develop, implement, and customize plans for partnerships that will support students to reach important learning and behavioral goals. The model requires teamwork, goal-linked plans, the use of the Six Types of Involvement to engage parents in different ways and in different places, and evaluation of progress. In thoughtful work, district and organization leaders build ATPs’ capacities to engage families and community partners to boost student achievement and other indicators of success in school (e.g., attendance, health, on-time graduation, college and career

plans). By planting strong roots in research-based approaches, educators can produce a healthy crop of leaders and harvest positive results for students. Here are a few examples of how district and organization leaders in NNPS are using research to grow their partnership programs. See these and other examples in the books of *Promising Partnership Practices*.

Take Root with Principal Support

Seattle Public Schools in Washington is working to have strong teams (Family Engagement Action Teams or FEATs) in all schools. The district faces a challenge of too few staff to provide on-going technical support to all school-based teams. To get a better start, they developed start-up guides so that principals will support the teamwork that is needed for strong, research-based partnership programs. The *Principal FEAT Toolkit* is filled with useful information including NNPS and Seattle-adapted forms and information. District Leaders for Partnerships developed a *tiered-structure* approach to give more assistance to schools with FEATs that are just getting started, and less guidance to FEATs that are well-developed, goal-linked action plans for partnerships. Assistance, then, is tailored to the stage of the schools’ program development, and training is focused on the next topics needed to advance each school’s outreach to engage families and communities.

Strong Organizations Can Guide Many Districts and Schools

Francis Marion University Center of Excellence (COE) in Florence, South Carolina continues to nurture districts and schools to improve their programs of family and community

involvement. COE provides on-going training, creative outreach, and targeted funds to support schools in 15 partner-districts in South Carolina to write clear Action Plans for Partnerships linked to School Improvement Plans and goal-linked practices to increase the number of families engaged in their children’s education. In addition to supporting district and school memberships in NNPS, COE provides NNPS workshops to prepare school teams to organize effective ATPs. Small grants are offered on a competitive basis for schools’ ATPs to design and implement creative and responsive activities to increase students’ academic success at all grade levels. COE leaders conducted numerous partnership presentations throughout the state. In 2013, COE and one of its districts and schools were among the NNPS Partnership Award winners for making excellent progress in outreach to more and different families with welcoming, goal-linked practices.

Districts Linked to Organizations Become Award Winners

Florence County School District Three, a district benefiting from its association with COE at Francis Marion University and its membership in NNPS, has Leaders for Partnerships who are guiding the ATPs at its eight schools. The district also organizes an annual district-wide *Back-to-School Family Conference* and a series of workshops for parents called *Parent Academy*. Results of district-wide surveys of parents and feedback from parent-teacher conferences indicated that families wanted to support their children’s education, but needed assistance in determining how to do so. This takes activities at the district level and goal-linked practices at each

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Issues and Insights

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No Such Thing as a Silly Question! Answers to Questions on 2013 UPDATE Surveys

been hardest to reach?

Engaging those who have been uninvolved or who are wary of the school requires extra effort. In addition to the three steps for good planning outlined above, many schools in NNPS have found that the following factors improved their plans for school-based activities and increased family participation.

•**Serve dinner.** Ask business partners to donate meals for well-planned, goal-oriented activities.

•**Spotlight Students.** From preschool through high school, when students perform a song, dance, dramatic reading, poem, debate, or other literacy-linked production, parents are more likely to attend. Change the featured students' grade levels throughout the year to engage more and different families.

•**Engage the Parents.** Make sure activities are meaningful—not boring. Help parents share ideas, conduct discussions, create materials, and celebrate students' successes to ensure that they share knowledge while gaining good information.

•**Publicize Effectively.** Communicate with families in welcoming words and in languages that they understood. Flyers, student-created invitations, foreign language media, parent-to-parent connections, telephone trees, e-mail lists, and other good communications should be used.

•**Incentives.** Surprises and prizes may

encourage parent participation. Schools have used raffles and door prizes, free books for students to take home, and “no homework” passes for students to encourage family participation at school activities.

•**Child Care.** Supervised care may be needed if children's parents also have infants and toddlers.

•**Transportation.** Provide transportation (check for support from community partners with busses, vans) to attract families without transportation and those who live far from the school. Sometimes, transportation is used in the other direction for teachers, ATPs, and principals to hold meetings and events in community locations where parents live. The goal, however, is for all parents to see the school as a great place to come for many activities.

District leaders can help schools' ATPs identify best practices to meet the challenge of engaging all families. See many caring and creative activities in the annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices* and in *NNPS Samplers* (on the website). Also see details in the NNPS books: *Family Reading Night* and *Multicultural Partnerships Involve All Families*. For extra help, send an e-mail or give a call to an NNPS Facilitator who will help you find useful resources

Elementary School Report

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near the playground for a reading-picnic outdoors.

The examples also show that a garden may help your ATP recruit volunteers and engage many parents in your partnership program. Students' family members, school alumni, faith-based groups, middle and high school students working for community service hours, and others in the community may be happy to help your school grow a garden.

These creative ideas may suggest how your ATP can design and implement a garden for student learning and for appreciating springtime right in your own backyard.

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Middle and High School Report

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reduces student behavior problems and promotes student academic success. Thus, transitions are important to consider. Also see a summary of data on transitions in the Meeting the Challenges column on page 4 of this issue of *Type 2*.

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**Do you have questions about your partnership program
to discuss with an NNPS Facilitator?**

**Contact Marsha Greenfeld (410-516-4193, mgreenfeld@jhu.edu)
or Brenda Thomas (410-516-8819, bthomas@jhu.edu).**

We call this “on-call consultation.” It's a benefit of your membership in NNPS!

Meeting the Challenge

(Continued from page 4)

students trained to help guide incoming 9th graders. Families are very much in the loop.

SAMPLE district activities for successful transitions

- We provided families of students entering Pre-K and K with pertinent information and resources.
- We made the registration process simpler, including open registration days.
- Preschool and kindergarten teachers discussed data to understand academic and social skills needed for kindergarten readiness.
- A parent university session assisted parents to help their teen prepare for life after high school.

More Information is Needed

Although all or most schools may invite parents to visit, all parents may not participate. NNPS will need detailed data from districts and schools to understand whether and how many students and families are well-prepared to move to the next school level or whether transitions remain a serious challenge.

NOTE: Also, read about transition activities to welcome high school students and families in the Middle and High School report column on page. 5 .

See the data and details on transition activities in: Epstein, J. L. & Elmore, J. (2014). *Annual NNPS Report: 2013 District Data*. Baltimore: National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University.

Sheldon, S. B. & Jung, S. B. (2014). *Annual NNPS Report: 2013 School Data*. Baltimore: National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University.

Sheldon Named Associate Director

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effective partnership programs. He also is co-author of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Third Edition* (Epstein, et al., Corwin Press, 2009).

Presently, he is working on a grant from the Flamboyan Foundation to evaluate the effects of a Family Engagement Program in Washington D.C. Public Schools. An expert in survey design, data collection, analysis, and reporting, Dr. Sheldon also has evaluated after-school programs for the Boys and Girls Club of America and a Baltimore-based project on school libraries.

In the broader field of research on school, family, and community partnerships, Dr. Sheldon served as President and Past-President of the Family, School, Community Partnerships Special Interest Group (SIG) in AERA. He is an Associate Professor of Education at the Johns Hopkins School of Education, where he coordinates the Graduate Certificate Program on Leadership for School, Family, and Community Collaboration. He teaches courses and guides graduate students to specialize in research, policy, and practice of family and community engagement.

As Associate Director, Dr. Sheldon will continue as a valued colleague in setting and achieving plans for the future of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and its flagship project of NNPS. He will retain his role as Director of Research for NNPS.

Leadership Line

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school so that families are supporting their own child's learning and development.

State-wide High School District Meets Many Challenges

To ensure continuous partnership program improvement in their schools, the District Leadership Team for the **Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS)** in Middletown, CT designed a tool called the *Family Engagement Program Tier Rubric*. The rubric, based on NNPS surveys and guidelines and CTHSS school visits, lists 17 program elements necessary for building successful family engagement programs. The elements include managing meetings, aligning partnership plans with School Improvement Plans, reviewing the quality of implemented activities, engaging all members of the school staff, and other components of strong school-based partnership programs. The rubric is helping the district Leaders for Partnerships to provide customized assistance to each school's ATP, based on areas that need improvement. CTHSS leaders attended advanced workshops at NNPS Conferences and, now, offer their schools ATPs many of the advanced topics that will help the schools continually improve their programs.

When state, district, and organization leaders use research-based approaches to develop leadership skills and strong school-based partnership programs, it is possible to engage all families at all grade levels in ways that improve student outcomes. The seeds planted by good leaders ultimately help students to bloom!

Reference

Epstein, J. L. et al. (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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Partnership Calendar

2014

- April** Spring issue of *Type 2*. Sent by E-Alert and available online at www.partnershipschools.org.
- April** Invitation for NNPS members to contribute to **Promising Partnership Practices 2014**. Due May 15.
Eligible members will be invited to apply for **NNPS Partnership Awards** for 2014. Due June 30.
- April** Members will receive **2014 UPDATE** in the mail. Due June 30.
- May 15** *Promising Partnership Practices* submissions due for review for the 2014 collection.
- June 30** **2014 UPDATE** due to NNPS with \$200 fee to renew membership for the 2014-15 school year.
- June 30** **Partnership Awards Applications due.**
- August** **Members of NNPS for 14-15 school year** receive new book of *Promising Partnership Practices 2014*.
Monthly *E-Briefs* resume from NNPS facilitators to all members.
- September** **Fall issue of *Type 2* - #37** via E-Alert and website.
- October 23-24** **Leadership Development Conference** in Baltimore for new and experienced school, district, state, and organization leaders.
This professional development conference is the best way to start or continue to strengthen YOUR programs of school, family, and community partnerships. Plan to attend!

NNPS gratefully acknowledges support from

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TIME TO REVIEW ALL THAT YOU DO!
Share the best! Assess progress!

Submit YOUR Best Practice by MAY 15

(Note: Extended deadline)

for consideration in *Promising Partnership Practices 2014*

APPLY for a PARTNERSHIP AWARD by JUNE 30

Spotlight your hard work and progress!
Members of NNPS for 2 years or more may apply.

EVALUATE YOUR Programs' Progress by JUNE 30

Members before December 1, 2013 must return **UPDATE** and renewal fee to continue membership for the 14-15 school year.

These forms are on the NNPS Website.
Follow links from the home page.

NNPS WILL PAY A MATCHING FEE to support your membership.