

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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I n T h i s I s s u e

Special Report—NNPS at 20	1
Research Brief—'15 UPDATE Data	1
Issues and Insights	2
Elementary School Report	3
Meeting the Challenge	4
Middle and High School Report	5
New Members	8
Leadership Line	9
NNPS Calendar	12

SPECIAL REPORT: NNPS AT 20 Continuity and Change in Services

NNPS is celebrating its 20th anniversary year as a national network for professional development to help districts, schools, state departments of education, and education organizations to develop effective and equitable programs of family and community engagement for student success in school. This goal was set at the start of NNPS in 1996, after about 15 years of basic research on the nature and results of parental involvement, engagement, and partnerships. NNPS at 20 is a good time to reflect on what we learned, which services and benefits for members to continue, and which to change to help current and future members of NNPS strengthen their leadership and programs of family and community engagement.

NNPS—A Unique Organization

NNPS presents a unique perspective on programs of school, family, and community partnerships. NNPS guidelines are based on the theory of *overlapping spheres of influence* (Epstein, 1987) that places students at the center of interactions of home, school, and community. NNPS asserts that programs of family and community engagement are, ultimately, about student success in school. Thus, partnerships are not about the parents, not external to schools, and not extra work for educators. Rather, we recognize that children's education is a shared responsibility of home, school, and community. To activate that reality, family and community engagement must

be a component of good school organization—very much like a reading, math, or testing program. Family and community engagement must be expected and equitable—part of every good school.

(Continued on page 10)

NNPS Annual Reports: Districts and Schools Increase Program Quality and the Engagement of Families

NNPS *Annual Reports* summarize UPDATE data from schools and districts each year.¹ This year, data from 399 schools and 39 districts provided important information. The analyses reveal patterns and trends in how members of NNPS are developing, advancing, and sustaining their programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

DATA FROM DISTRICTS

Districts in NNPS and their schools were located in highly diverse communities in all parts of the country. This included large and small districts in large cities (31%), small cities (21%), suburban (37%), and rural (11%) areas. On average, 63% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, ranging from 17% to 100% of students across districts.

About half (50%) of the districts joined NNPS since 2006 and about half worked

(Continued on page 6)

Issues and Insights

Joyce L. Epstein
Director

NNPS at 20 — Lessons Learned

When Kobe Bryant celebrated his 20th anniversary in basketball this year, he exclaimed, “Man! I can’t believe how fast 20 years went by.”¹ That is how we feel at NNPS (on most days). Still, 20 years is a long time. NNPS has been busy every day, every year. We followed the same growth-pattern as other educational programs from **start up**, to **scale up**, to **sustain and renew**. Along the way, we learned many lessons to more effectively guide districts, schools, states, and organizations that join the network. Here are a few.

Lesson 1: Work with the Readiest, Not the Most Reluctant. Although every educator knows that family engagement is important for student success, only some are ready for change. We have learned to work with leaders who want to use research-based approaches to strengthen their programs of family and community engagement. District leaders and school principals become “ready” to take research-based approaches to strengthen partnerships when they recognize that they already have official policies that require parental engagement in their children’s education. NNPS believes that policies on the books should be enacted. When leaders agree, they will seek on-going guidance and support from NNPS. Some leaders hear about the good work that others are doing with NNPS and decide that they, too, would benefit by networking. Indeed, Title I (in the newly reauthorized law now called the *Every Student Succeeds Act-ESSA*) states that educators can work with an organization to increase family engagement to improve student achievement and success in school. NNPS is ready to work with those who are or become ready to do just that!

Lesson 2: Every Site is Different. Every district, school, organization, and state is—and wants to be—different from the next. Educators do not like “canned” programs with no room for creative design. In NNPS we support a purposeful mix of essential ele-

ments (e.g., district-level leader, school ATP, written action plans, annual evaluations) combined with options for each site to select, adapt, or design involvement activities that fit their goals for students, needs of families, and budgetary constraints. For example, activities for school, family, and community partnerships must vary by grade level, goals for students, and the socioeconomic, racial, cultural, linguistic backgrounds of students, families, and communities. This balance of research-based requirements and flexible plans for site-based practices corrects the rigidity in some intervention models.

The diverse and creative practices that are implemented across the country are collected and shared in NNPS publications and recognition programs (i.e., annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices* and the *Partnership Awards Program*). In this way, good work is spotlighted and shared for others to adopt or adapt.

Lesson 3: Evaluation is Essential. When NNPS started, annual evaluations were optional. Historically, partnership programs were not systematically evaluated. Yet, educators know that “what gets measured gets done.” NNPS learned that educators need help in evaluating the quality and progress of their partnership programs. Now, NNPS provides a unique and thrifty service to schools, districts, states, and organizations. The annual *UPDATE* evaluates the strength of program organization, accomplishments, progress, and challenges to improve the next year’s plans and practices.

Data are collected every year from every member in NNPS in order to renew member benefits for the next school year. NNPS processes, analyzes, and reports data back to members in an annual report. As an added benefit, NNPS provides customized reports to districts and organizations with at

(Continued on page 11)

Engaging Parents and Community Partners to Improve Student Health and Well-Being

The NNPS *Annual Reports* (February 2016) summarized district and school data on family and community engagement to improve student health and well-being. Schools reported the extent to which they faced problems with students' physical health (e.g., obesity, poor nutrition, chronic health conditions), emotional health (e.g., anxiety, depression), and social well-being (e.g., bullying, tolerance of diversity) and related topics.

Most schools reported that health problems were relatively minor. A small number of students had serious health problems, but most students were generally healthy with normal illnesses and occasional social and emotional concerns. The patterns were similar in elementary and secondary schools and in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Most schools emphasized maintaining good health, good attitudes, and good social interactions among students. They addressed occasional health problems when they arose.

A few health-related patterns emerged. For example, secondary schools were more likely than elementary schools to address issues of high-risk behaviors such as student sexual behavior, smoking, and drug use, and intolerance for diversity.

Most elementary schools in NNPS focus on conducting activities that promote student health and well-being in positive ways. The following examples were reported in the 2015 book of *Promising Partnership Practices*.

- A *Wellness Fair* at **Castlio Elementary School** in St. Charles, MO, invited students and

families to school to engage in active games together. Parents also received information from teachers and service providers about health resources in the community. Information was presented on healthy summer activities by several camps and groups such as Boys and Girls Club, Junior Achievement, and Soccer Shots. Health tips were shared on school lunch nutrition, eye-care programs, sugar content in cereals, self-defense, stress relief, and posture. For active fun, families, teachers, and community members played a giant game of Ultimate Frisbee.

- For *All Pro Dads*, the ATP at **Greenwood Elementary School** in Florence, SC, planned a year-long series of activities in a variety of settings to engage more dads in their children's lives in and out of school, with a goal for increasing students' positive social behavior. At one of several breakfast meetings, a former San Diego Padres shortstop spoke to about 300 fathers, father figures, and their children. The sports theme continued in January, with a talk by a television wildlife and fishing expert. As a result of these actions and the dads' enthusiastic connections with the school and their children, discipline problems and referrals decreased by 10% compared to the previous year.
- There were many components to the *Bully-Free Kindness Challenge* by the team at **Wallace Gregg Elementary School** in Florence, SC. A *Pep Rally* started things off. The *Wallace Gregg Dance Team*

presented a dance that told the story of how to deal with bullies. Workshops for parents on *Buddies not Bullies, Smiles not Frowns* enlisted their support for kindness over bullying. Other presentations and role-play activities by students and parents demonstrated anti-bullying techniques. A *Bully-Free Bingo Night* in the cafeteria emphasized safe responses to bullies with each bingo letter called.

At *Buddies Not Bullies*, Part 2, the school hosted a *Family Reading Night*. At four stations, teachers read books on reducing or eliminating bullying and discussed them with parents and children. After the readings, families designed posters illustrating the bully-free messages in the stories. Each family presented its poster and to the group. Posters were displayed throughout the school and students chose a book to take home. Students received the *Kindness Challenge Checklist* with the goal of conducting as many of the 50 ideas for kindness that they could accomplish in 2 weeks, with parent support.

See these and other activities focused on student health and well-being in each book of *Promising Partnership Practices*. Some NNPS schools use page 3 to select health as a non-academic goal in the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships to engage families and community partners in ways that improve student health. ♦

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Meeting the Challenge

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Increase the Number of Families Who Attend Engagement Activities

At the end of each annual NNPS *UPDATE* survey, we ask members: *What is one question that you have for us?* One of the most common questions is: *How can we involve more families and get more to attend school events?*

We know that two essential ingredients for a strong partnership program are *effort* and *time*.

Effort

Successful practices to engage a lot of families take an investment of effort. Just as different students need various methods of instruction to master skills and concepts, different families need various communications to become engaged at school or at home. Communicating with families only one way (e.g., sending a newsletter home) will not reach or resonate with all families.

Successful ATPs reach out to families using several strategies. In addition to newsletters, efforts may include e-mail, phone calls, social networking media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, school websites), and even text messaging. Making the effort to contact as many families as possible using different, favored communications is the best way to ensure that more families learn about a partnership activity and why they should participate.

Time

Strong partnership programs take time to develop. Sometimes, even if an ATP develops a great practice *and* uses multiple communication strategies, only a few families attend. Rather than reflexively discard the practice, ATPs should take time to reflect together about how the activity was planned and implemented to identify reasons why fewer-than-hoped-for families attended. A Continuous Improvement approach to this work (e.g., Plan-Do-Study-Act) may be the best way to reach goals for participation by more and different families. If the ATP's reflections indicate that the partnership

activity was a good one, the team may revise the weaker elements and give the practice a second or third chance for success.

Focus on Results for Students

NNPS guides district leaders for partnerships and school ATPs to keep one main question in mind. Rather than wonder: *How can we get more families involved?* it is important to ask: *What results for students do we want families to help students achieve?* By starting with this question, many schools in NNPS have conducted partnership activities that are attended by hundreds of families. Here are two good examples at the secondary and elementary school levels from *Promising Partnership Practices 2015*.

In an effort to promote multicultural awareness and students' activities, the ATP and teachers at **LaGrange High School** in Lake Charles, LA, conducted a family reading night called *A Whole New World*. Over 400 students and families explored the many cultures at the school and promoted the upcoming student production of *Aladdin*. Across the school, families enjoyed an English tea-time, explored South America and India, learned about Louisiana folktales, explored books, fashion, artifacts, and cuisines of several countries, and experienced a poetry slam featuring students' creative work. The ATP, teachers, and students communicated with families using traditional flyers, phone calls, and new electronic connections. Keeping an eye on results for students, the school used the reading night to publicize the school play. Cast members in costume interacted with those attending to encourage families to support upcoming show.

In Kennewick, WA, **Westgate Elementary School** understood the importance of having as many family partners as possible support student learning in math. The ATP devel-

(Continued on page 8)

Middle and High School Report

When is the Right Time to Begin Thinking About Careers?

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” is a question that never grows old and never goes away. Schools aim to help students gain the skills they need each year to move through the grades and to graduate from high school “ready” for college or for a career.

If students master basic and advanced skills and learn about their deep interests, they will begin to think about a job, career, and/or profession that they may like to enter. Schools can help student gather information on the level of education required after high school to pursue specific career, and guide students to consider colleges or other postsecondary training programs.

Parents and educators know that young children’s interests and ideas about “what they want to be” will change over the years. Still, attention to students’ interests, aspirations, and awareness of the variety of potential careers start as early as kindergarten. It is common in the early grades students to explore “the community” and all of the occupations that are important in their own neighborhoods. They may meet and hear from fire fighters, police officers, teachers, doctors, nurses, and shopkeepers about the work they do.

By middle and high school, students begin to understand that there are many different careers in the field of medicine—for example—ranging from emergency technicians and physician’s assistants to medical researchers and surgeons. Students are helped by school counselors and teachers about required and elective courses to prepare for career choices and by conversations with parents, family, and community members about their

interests. With good partnership programs, more students will be better prepared to make a career dream into a reality.

In NNPS, many schools conduct practices to help students at all grade levels increase their career awareness and preparation for college and other postsecondary education. Here are two creative examples from *Promising Partnership Practices 2015* of ways to help students and parents think about the present, the future, and their imperative connections to students’ plans for education and training after high school.

Career Awareness Connections

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and colleagues at **Enterprise Middle School in West Richland, Washington**, adapted *Career Night* from a neighboring middle school in Pasco, WA, to guide students to explore careers and set ambitious education goals from middle school to high school and beyond. The ATP and teachers took steps to personally encourage the families and students who, typically, to not attend events to come to *Career Night*. Students were asked which careers they wanted to learn more about, and the ATP recruited parents and community partners to present information and talk with students and families about those careers.

Platt Regional Vocational Technical High School in Milford, Connecticut surveyed students’ parents early in the school year to learn what information they wanted to help students succeed in high school and plan their careers. The Action Team for Partnerships and teachers implemented several activities under

the umbrella of *Reaching Out to Build Life Skills*. The activities included the *Millionaire Luncheon* to stress the importance of reading for success in many school subjects. Students were challenged to read one million words in conjunction with the school’s Accelerated Reading program. The program culminated with a red-carpet luncheon for those achieving the goal and their family members. *Social Media and Your Teen* assisted families in continuing dialogue at home about internet and social media safety. Staff and community partners shared the benefits of technology and dangers of some sites, as well as the importance of keeping a clean digital footprint as it relates to college admittance and future employment. *Financial Literacy for Students and Families* was another activity. It shared the importance of smart goal setting: SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound. One parent shared “The information presented tonight was compelling. Learning to save money at an early age and ... paying attention to your finances regardless of whether you are working, going to college, starting a business, or working a trade ... are life lessons that everyone should learn.”

Your school, district, state, or organization may have good ideas about increasing students’ career awareness—starting in the early grades. The 2016 UPDATE survey selected this as its new topic this year. NNPS looks forward to these data to learn more about how career awareness is part of a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships.

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NNPS Annual Reports: Districts and Schools Increase Program Quality and the Engagement of Families

(Continued from page 1)

with NNPS for a longer time. About 24% were new members in 2014 and were just starting to systematize their plans and practices.

District Leaders for Partnerships reported that they assisted over 750 schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to strengthen their programs of family and community engagement. They estimated that in the last school year, the districts and schools engaged over 200,000 families in partnership activities to improve the school climate and to increase student success in school.

District Leaders as "Shepherds"

In NNPS, district leaders are expected to guide, facilitate, or "shepherd" schools' ATPs. The 18-item Facilitation Scale ($\alpha = .94$) measured how actively District Leaders for Partnerships guided school-based ATPs to plan and implement goal-linked partnership programs. Leaders conducted an average of 11 facilitative actions either OK or very well, ranging from 0 (not started yet) to 18 activities.

For example, last year over 80% of district leaders in NNPS conducted basic facilitative actions, such as helping school ATPs understand the framework of six types of involvement (88%) and write their annual plans (82%). Most (72%) collected their schools' Action Plans for Partnerships—an important way for district leaders to guide and assist school ATPs throughout the school year. Most district leaders met with each school's principal about how the district will assist the ATP. Most also helped schools meet specific challenges to engage all students' families.

There always is room for improvement. For example, fewer than half of the district leaders contacted their schools' ATPs each month or conducted an end-of year celebration for teams to share best practices, discuss challenges, and write the next action plan. Leaders who have not conducted these important facilitative activities should add them to their leadership plans for the 16-17 school year.

Support for Partnerships

A 13-item Support Scale ($\alpha = .94$) measured how strongly District Leaders for Partnerships were supported by colleagues for their work on school, family, and community partnerships. Figure 1 shows that the higher the quality of the district program, the stronger the support from colleagues. District leaders who reported more advanced stages of partnership program development (i.e., very good or excellent program where most schools were members of NNPS and assisted in their work on partnerships) felt stronger support from district and school colleagues, compared to those

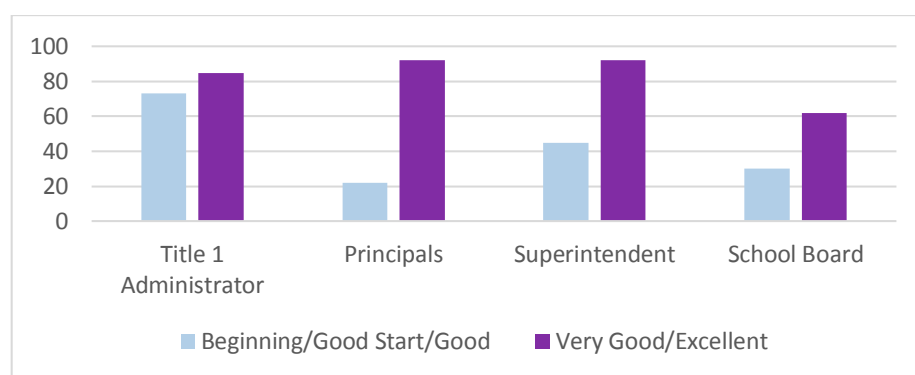
who were at early stages of leadership and program development (i.e., just beginning, good start, or good program).

Support from Title I administrators was an exception to this pattern. These leaders strongly supported both start-up and experienced programs—quite likely because family engagement is required and supported by Title I funds. By contrast, superintendents, principals, school boards, school improvement teams, and state leaders provided stronger support when the district leaders reported higher quality programs. Support also was linked to the number of years district leaders worked with NNPS, suggesting that it takes time to increase program quality and collegial support.

DATA FROM SCHOOLS

Data from schools on the 2015 UPDATE survey indicated that most schools in NNPS were working to implement research-based strategies to improve the quality of their partnership programs. Although elementary and K-8 schools (72% of the sample)

Figure 1. Difference in "A Lot" of Support between Start Up and Advanced Partnership Programs In NNPS Districts



N = 38 Districts, 2015 UPDATE

continued to do more than middle and high schools (26%) to engage families in their children's education, secondary schools in NNPS were catching up on several measures.

Schools served students from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. Across schools, about 35% of students were White (non-Hispanic); 40% were African American; 20% were Latino/Hispanic American; 2% were Asian American; and a few were Native American or from other racial or ethnic groups. The schools served communities in which an average of 4 different languages are spoken, ranging from 1 to 35 languages across schools.

Quality of Implementation

A 12-item Program Implementation Scale ($\alpha = .92$) measured how well ATPs organized a partnership program and implemented their One-Year Action Plans for family and community engagement. Schools rated whether they did not do a particular practice, need to improve, implemented it OK, or implemented it very well. Just about every school in NNPS (98%) said they were working to connect family and community engagement to goals in their own School Improvement Plans. From 65% to 80% of elementary and secondary school ATPs reported that they planned activities to cover all six types of involvement; implemented the activities scheduled in their One-Year Action Plans; involved all families in at least some activities; and evaluated each activity that was implemented. From 70% to 90% of all schools also reported that their principals strongly supported their work on partnership program development.

Support from ALL Teachers

One of the most common challenges in schools is to gain all teachers' support for partnerships—not just the teachers on the ATP. Figure 2 indicates that ATPs with higher quality programs were more likely to report that most or all teachers strongly supported the school's work on partnerships. The patterns for schools mirror and reinforce the results for district leaders in Figure 1. Schools with programs that were just starting to develop had the lowest levels of teacher support, whereas schools with very good and excellent programs said that large majorities of teachers actively supported the ATP's work on family and community engagement. Both Figure 1 at the district level and Figure 2 at the school level indicate that it is important to sustain work on partnerships from year to year to improve program quality and collegial support.

There also is room for improvement at the school level. Only about half of the ATPs reported that they met monthly as a team. This is a very important requirement for improving teamwork, discussing plans, and conducting evaluations of implemented

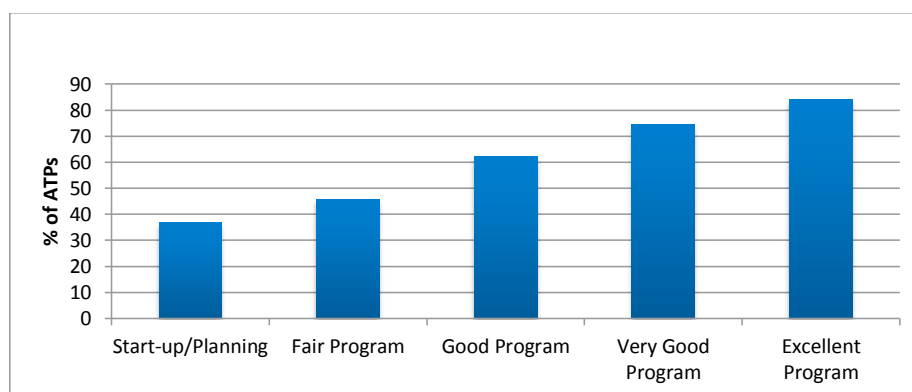
activities. All teams should schedule a monthly ATP meeting in their next One Year Action Plan for Partnerships for the 16-17 school year.

SUMMARY

The 2015 UPDATE data tell us that despite demographic differences across districts and schools in NNPS, leaders for partnerships and school-based ATPs in any location are using many research-based tools and approaches to help their schools engage all families in ways that contribute to student success in school. Further, the data show that stick-to-it-ness on the partnership agenda pays off over time with higher quality programs and stronger support from district and school colleagues. The data are important because they show that partnership programs can be developed systematically and systemically—something that rarely occurs in non-NNPS locations. And that is both encouraging and commendable! ♦

1 Also see the column Leadership Line, p. 9 in this issue, for additional statistics about NNPS Districts. See the full reports (Epstein & Ames, 2016; Sheldon & Ames, 2016) on the NNPS website, www.partnershipschoools.org, in the section Research and Evaluation, or follow the link from the homepage.

Figure 2. % of School ATPs Reporting 75% or More of Teachers Supported Partnership Programs in 2015, by Overall Program Quality



N = 399 Schools, 2015 UPDATE

Our Growing Network

New Members in NNPS since December 1, 2015

SCHOOLS (54 new members) ★ Cottonwood Elementary (Kennewick, WA) ★ Ridgeview Elementary (Kennewick, WA) ★ Cascade Elementary (Kennewick, WA) ★ Keewaydin Discovery Center (Kennewick, WA) ★ Young Scholars of McKeesport Charter School (McKeesport, PA) ★ Gabe P. Allen Elementary School (Dallas, TX) ★ Stevens Park Elementary (Dallas, TX) ★ Raul Quintanilla MS (Dallas, TX) ★ Eladio R. Martinez Learning Center (Dallas, TX) ★ Sidney Lanier Elementary Vanguard for the Expressive Arts (Dallas, TX) ★ Amelia Earhart Learning Center (Dallas, TX) ★ Lorenzo De Zavala Elementary (Dallas, TX) ★ George Washington Carver (Dallas, TX) ★ L. G. Pinkston High School (Dallas, TX) ★ Dallas Environmental Science Academy (Dallas, TX) ★ C. F. Corr Elementary (Dallas, TX) ★ Arcadia Park (Dallas, TX) ★ Chief Sealth International School (Seattle, WA) ★ Holmes Middle School (Northridge, CA) ★ Cohasset St. Elementary School (Van Nuys, CA) ★ Anatola Elementary School (Lake Balboa, CA) ★ Sylmar Elementary School (Sylmar, CA) ★ Sunland Elementary School (Sunland, CA) ★ Ranchito Ave Elementary School (Panorama City, CA) ★ Glenwood Elementary School (Sun Valley, CA) ★ Wood Crest Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Wilshire Park Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Raymond Ave Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Moore MST Academy (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Thomas Alva Edison Middle School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Roybal- Allard Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Sunrise Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Alfonso B. Perez Career and Transition Center (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Nightingale Middle School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Florence Ave Elementary (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Jaime Escalante Elementary (Cudahy, CA) ★ John W. Mack Elementary School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Logan Span School (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Glassell Park Elementary (Los Angeles, CA) ★ 49th Street Elementary (Los Angeles, CA) ★ McClure Middle School (Seattle, WA) ★ The Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science (Bronx, NY) ★ Ranchito Ave Elementary School (Panorama City, CA) ★ Jane Addams Middle School (Seattle, WA) ★ Ingraham High School (Seattle, WA) ★ Denny International Middle School (Seattle, WA) ★ Cleveland High School (Seattle, WA) ★ Aki Kurose Middle School (Seattle, WA) ★ Pepperhill Elementary School (North Charleston, SC) ★ North Charleston Elementary School (North Charleston, SC) ★ Minnie Hughes Elementary School (Hollywood, SC) ★ Edmund A. Burns Elementary (North Charleston, SC) ★ W. B. Goodwin Elementary School (North Charleston, SC) ★

DISTRICT (10 new members) ★ E. L. Haynes Public Charter School (Washington, DC) ★ Los Angeles Unified School District-Local District South (Gardena, CA) ★ Los Angeles Unified School District-Local District East (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Los Angeles Unified School District-Local District West (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Los Angeles Unified School District-Local District Northwest (Los Angeles, CA) ★ Los Angeles Unified School District-Local District Northeast (Arleta, CA) ★ Guilford County Schools (Greensboro, NC) ★ Baltimore City Public School System (Baltimore, MD) ★ Ontario-Montclair School District (Ontario, CA) ★ South-Western City Schools (Columbus, OH) ★

ORGANIZATION/UNIVERSITY PARTNERS (2 new members) ★ Arkansas Department of Education (Little Rock, AR) ★ Child Care Aware of Northwest Arkansas (Springdale, AR) ★

STATE Departments of Education (2 new members) ★ Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (Pittsburg, PA) ★ Vermont Agency of Education (Barre, VT) ★

Current Active Membership in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) as of May 10, 2016

Schools: 667

Districts: 65

States: 16

Organizations: 23

Meeting the Challenge

(Continued from page 4)

oped *Focus on Math* to share strategies with families for practicing math skills with their own child at home. They used save-the-date announcements, Facebook, individual invitations, and stickers on students to invite and remind families about attending *Focus on Math*. Most importantly, perhaps, the school had each teacher personally invite five families they thought might not otherwise attend. The event was

scheduled across three nights to tailor the content for different grade levels (K-1, 2-3, & 4-5). The school provided translators in four languages so that all families would have easy access to the information. Over 195 families attended and are better equipped to support their children's math achievement at home. Families who did not attend also received the math games and materials to use at home.

All schools want to know how to engage more families as active partners in their children's education. Meeting this challenge requires effort (with multi-communications) and time (to continually improve the design and implementation of an activity focused on results for students). These ingredients will ensure that planned events cook up just right. ♦

UPDATE Data Reports How Leaders Develop Partnership Programs

Data on the 2015 District UPDATE—the annual NNPS evaluation survey—confirmed that NNPS districts and schools are in highly diverse communities. An average of 43 languages are spoken by students and their families across districts. On average, 63% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, ranging from 17% to 100% across districts. Although diversity abounds, all leaders in NNPS are committed to improving family and community engagement to maximize conditions and opportunities for a welcoming school climate, regular student attendance, high academic achievement, and positive attitudes about school.

The annual District UPDATE surveys measures two major responsibilities of district leaders—overall leadership for partnership program development and active facilitation of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). The data show that district leaders in NNPS become more expert about partnerships over time. Leaders in NNPS for more years reported conducting more advanced facilitation activities with their schools. Here are four examples of how district leaders guide the work of school ATPs.

Leaders in **Alvord Unified School District** in Riverside, CA, organized *Alvord Parent Involvement Week* to spotlight district and school commitments to improving partnerships. At district networking meetings, the ATPs shared ideas with each other. Each school submitted its plans in October to the Parent Engagement Office. The district leaders supported the activities conducted by schools, such as classes or workshops for parents on grade level topics; a Principal's

Coffee to discuss questions about the school; Family Fridays for parents to volunteer as reading buddies for students or groups; lunch picnics with books for parents and children to read together; Gratitude Day with an assembly, breakfast, and art activities focused on the theme of thankfulness; and presentations to introduce parents to Common Core State Standards. With district encouragement, each school showed that it was a "partnership place" ready to work with families as partners in students' education.

The **Connecticut Technical High School** System in Middletown, CT conducted *Our Time to Shine—a CTHSS Regional Meeting*. All 17 technical high schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) shared one of its most promising practices in a visual presentation or display. At the district's regional meeting, ATPs discussed challenges and celebrated important milestones and accomplishments. District leaders benefitted by hearing about the schools' practices and by obtaining feedback on plans for future meetings with the schools' ATPs. The meeting also gave each school an opportunity to highlight its good work, learn from each other, and improve their on-going partnership programs.

Pasco School District in Pasco, WA completed its 10th year as a member of NNPS. District leaders know the importance of communicating clearly with all schools to help them build strong programs of school, family, and community partnerships. *Sustaining & Improving Communication in the Second Decade* promoted good communication skills of district leaders and school teams. Over the years, their innovative actions have proven

that district leaders can work with all schools and can strengthen and sustain good partnership programs at the district and school levels. Pasco has done this despite changes in district and school leaders. A few tools they have developed are: *Event Planning Checklist*, *District Brochure*, *District Update*, *ATP Meeting Agenda Planning Guide*, *ATP Connections Newsletter*, *ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs Key Contact List*. Visit this district's website for many examples of leadership on partnerships-- <http://www.psd1.org/>

Little Rock School District in Arkansas conducted *Keys to Successful Partnerships Back-To-School Bash* on the first day of school. District Leaders for Partnerships encouraged geographic clusters of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to combine efforts on the *Back to School Bash* in each area. Clusters of ATPs designed unique approaches to introduce families to their own schools for on-going partnerships and identify neighborhood and community resources and services that would be useful to parents. Parents, administrators, teachers, and community partners agreed that by collaborating, the schools sent a strong message that they were going to work with families as partners. Parents appreciated the opportunity to meet and talk with teachers and with each other.

Visit the NNPS website, www.partnershipschools.org, for books of *Promising Partnership Practices* in the section Success Stories for more examples of district-level leadership activities that reflect findings in UPDATE data. ♦

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SPECIAL REPORT: NNPS AT 20 — Continuity and Change in Services

(Continued from page 1)

Well-organized programs ensure welcoming schools where all parents are partners with teachers in their children's education from preschool through high school. Presently, over 600 schools, 60 districts, 30 organizations, and 12 state departments of education are active members of NNPS. NNPS provides publications, training, tools, and on-going communications to guide district and state leaders and school teams to strengthen their programs from their own starting point. All active members of NNPS must work to continually improve their plans, programs, and practices of partnerships to engage all families and to help all students do their best in school.

Continuing Benefits

NNPS will continue to emphasize professional development for district leaders and their schools, with attention to the work of state and organization leaders to advance this agenda. Strong district leaders guide school-based ATPs to organize, plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve practices to work well with their own students' families and communities. The aim is to make every school a welcoming place where families are engaged in purposeful, goal-linked engagement activities that support and advance students' academic skills (e.g., improve reading, math, and other subjects), good behavior, attendance, post-secondary planning, and other indicators of student success in school.

NNPS will continue its low membership and annual renewal rates for 2016-17 and provide all members with the following training, communication, recognition, and evaluation services.

- New Member Packet including a copy of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (now in its 3rd edition) and other books, posters, and guidelines.
- Website – www.partnershipschoools.org. Each section of the NNPS website contains helpful information and ideas for strong partnership programs.
- E-Brief – a monthly communication with news, reminders, and resources.
- Periodic E-Alerts for new information and opportunities for program improvements.
- Annual book of *Promising Partnership Practice* for members to share best practices and learn from each other.
- Annual *Partnership Awards* to celebrate excellent work using NNPS required structures and processes and local, customized practices to engage all families in ways that support student success.
- Annual *UPDATE* evaluations for each site to assess its progress and plan improvements.
- *Annual Reports* on the *UPDATE* data
- Customized reports for districts with 8 schools or more in NNPS on their own schools' data.
- On-call consultations with NNPS Facilitators to discuss challenges and find solutions to improve plans and practices.

Changes Ahead

NNPS will make three major changes in professional development services for new and experienced members.

1. **Leadership Institutes.** NNPS is changing its professional development services from a fall Conference to fall and spring Leadership Institutes. These

2-day, intensive workshops are for new members in NNPS or leaders who are ready to start facilitating school-based ATPs.

NNPS Leadership Institutes help Leaders for Partnerships:

- (a) organize their offices, plans, and budgets for partnerships;
- (b) conduct the NNPS One-Day Team Training Workshop with school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPS);
- (c) facilitate or “shepherd” ATPs throughout the school year to implement their plans and improve their programs of family and community engagement; and
- (d) scale up the number and quality of school-based partnership programs over time.

NNPS is making this change because Leadership Institutes are more targeted and less costly for members than the large fall conferences. For many members, the fall conference was prohibitively expensive. Others could not attend because of restrictions on out-of-state travel.

2. **Customized on-site advanced workshops.** To reduce costs, NNPS will emphasize on-site workshops, presentations, meetings, and discussions that can be contracted to bring an NNPS Facilitator to your site. This encourages NNPS staff to work with many participants, not just the few who are able to travel to the conference in Baltimore.

(Continued on page 11)

SPECIAL REPORT

(Continued from page 10)

Targeted on-site workshops will:

- (a) Address specific challenges at each site to increase family and community engagement for student success in school. This may include basic ATP training and advanced topics to engage more and different parents and community partners.
- (b) Help district leaders “scale up” the number of schools in their local network, the quality of school programs, and the focus on results for students.
- (c) Serve one district, multiple districts and/or schools in the same geographic region.

See basic training and advanced topics listed in the NNPS *Workshops on the Road* at ([NNPS Workshops on the Road--targeted on-site professional development](#)) or follow the link from the homepage to Professional Development and to *Workshops on the Road*.

3. **New Type 2 Blog.** With the rise of E-Everything, NNPS will introduce the *Type 2 Blog*.

It is time to *e-volve*. The *Type 2 Blog* will be a quarterly communication on a selected topic. This may feature good partnership practices from members on a particular theme—e.g., involve fathers, engage multicultural families—or summarize results from a new NNPS study to help members improve their programs.

With the *Type 2 Blog*, NNPS will have a more frequent and streamlined way to communicate with

Issues and Insights

(Continued from page 2)

least eight schools in NNPS on their own schools’ data to help them continue to improve their programs.

The longitudinal data are used by NNPS researchers to continue a rigorous research agenda on whether and which program components help schools and districts improve outreach to engage all families in their children’s education at school and at home. Results contribute to new tools and training to help members address emerging challenges. In this way, NNPS and its members are partners in research and in improving practice.

Lesson 4. Leaders Change. We have learned that one constant in Education Land is change. Programs and priorities keep changing in schools, districts, states, and organizations. Leaders change every year as people move to new positions, are promoted, or retire. New parents and young children enter school, and others graduate to the next school level. Changing leaders and new priorities may affect the progress and sustainability of school, district, and state programs of family and community engagement. It is not a case of *if* leaders will change, but *when*. Research shows that even when leaders change, good partnerships remain critically important.

members to share new knowledge and hone leadership skills.

NNPS at 20 and Counting. . .

One thing that will not change is our commitment to guide all NNPS

NNPS will continue to develop tools and workshops to help members solve the challenge of changing leaders.

Lesson 5. Persistence Means Progress.

The most important lesson learned from many members in NNPS is that those who sustain their commitment to partnership program development are most likely to improve the quality of their plans and practices, engage more and different families, and record measurable results for students. Over time, leaders and school ATPs learn to organize their work, conduct productive meetings, meet the needs of diverse populations, build collegial support for partnerships, evaluate progress, and plan improvements. Then, all partners—teachers, administrators, parents, and students—reap real rewards.

Districts and their schools, organizations, and state departments of education, are welcome to join NNPS. To encourage leaders to persist in improving their programs over time, NNPS pledges to persist in providing professional development that enables all programs to progress—step-by-step—on the path to partnerships. ♦

¹ Los Angeles Time, April 14, 2016.

members to use research-based structures and processes for strong, inclusive, and effective partnership programs for student success. ♦



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Partnership Calendar

2016

- May 31** **Deadline extended!** *Promising Partnership Practices* submissions due for review for the 2016 book.
- June 30** **2016 UPDATE due** with \$200 fee to renew membership in NNPS for the 16-17 school year.
- On-time *UPDATES* are entered in the 2016 UPDATE Lottery for free renewal of membership in NNPS for the 16-17 school year.
- 2016 Partnership Award Applications due**
- August** **Members of NNPS for the 16-17 school year** receive the new book of *Promising Partnership Practices 2016*.
- Monthly E-Briefs** resume from NNPS Facilitators to all members.
- September** **NEW Type 2 Blog Begins.** Will be sent via E-Alert and website.
- October 20-21** **NNPS Leadership Institute in Baltimore** for new district, state, and organization leaders and experienced members who are starting to work with school-base Action Teams for Partnerships.
- This 2-day intensive professional development institute is the best way to ensure that you make real progress in leadership and in helping school ATPs work with their own students' families in ways that support student success in school.



It's SPRING!
TIME TO REFLECT, REVIEW,
and PLANT NEW IDEAS!
Evaluate progress! Share your best!

Submit YOUR Best Practice by MAY 31

for consideration in *Promising Partnership Practices 2016*.



APPLY for a PARTNERSHIP AWARD by JUNE 30

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



EVALUATE Program Progress by JUNE 30

Members must return 2016 *UPDATE* and renewal fee to continue for the 16-17 school year.
(For those in NNPS before December 2015.)

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

NNPS PAYS A MATCHING FEE to support your membership.