The Role of Family-School Partnerships in Increasing Science Literacy in Rural Communities

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Presented at the Building Science Literacy Through Engagement In Community and Environmental Stewardship Seminar Series in the Rural Issues Connecting Rural Families Spotlight Session
WHY BOTHER?
What Promotes Learning?

- Supported learning experiences
- Performance monitoring/feedback
- Modeling learning behaviors
- High, realistic expectations
- Motivation
- Adult-child relationships

School Contributions

Home Contributions
What Strengthens Learning?

School

- Academic skills
- Academic behaviors
- Social skills & relationships

Family-School Partnership

Home
HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?
Family-School Partnerships

What are they?
Family-School Partnerships

- Student-centered learning, growth and development
- Meaningful relationships between families and schools beyond methods of “traditional education”
- A new way of doing business
Goals of Family-School Partnerships

- Improve experiences and outcomes for children
- Strengthen relationships (among adults & with child)
- Address education across settings (e.g., home, school)
- Increase:
  - cooperation and collaboration
  - diversity of expertise and resources
- Increase shared:
  - commitments to educational goals
  - understanding of problems, challenges, needs across settings
  - ownership for problem solution
- Adopt various perspectives
Characteristics

- **Relationships** involve: close collaboration between parents and schools that have clearly specified *rights* and *responsibilities*.

- **Relationships** that are:
  - Valued
  - Balanced
  - Cooperative and interdependent
  - Based on mutual respect, trust, and open communication
  - Student-centered

(Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2009, p. 1)
WHY DO THEY MATTER?
Key Research Findings

Highly correlated with many positive outcomes for students, families, and teachers

• Improved academic skills and performance
• Improved academic behaviors and decreased disruptive behaviors
• Long-term academic success; school completion
• Teacher enhancement in instructional skills
• Greater parental knowledge of school functioning
Federal Policy and Learning Across Settings

• Recognizes the need to address student’s time spent out of school - students spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school from birth-18 (Clarke, 1990); offers valuable learning time

• Mandates schools to engage in partnerships with parents to meet the increasing academic, behavioral, and social needs of students

• See IDEA, NCLB for federal mandates calling for parents as partners in their child’s education
HOW CAN WE ENSURE EFFECTIVE FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE SCIENCE LITERACY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?
Engage Parents as Partners to Expand STEM Learning Opportunities

• Linkages between home and school and expanded learning opportunities arise when families and schools work together to support learning

• Key is helping parents recognize and learn ways to take advantage of incidental, informal learning opportunities – at home and in the community

• Establish with parents how they can best enhance and expand learning opportunities and experiences, especially related to science
Maintain Meaningful Cross-System Communication

• Establish an easy method of frequent bi-directional communication between school and home (e.g., daily or weekly school-home notes)

• Establish regular, frequent communication early in the school year as part of the routine

• Share science literacy materials with parents to support expanded learning and provide opportunities for students to share what they and their parents learned / discovered together
Identify and Monitor Specific Goals

• Jointly determine goals for students in science at conferences or through some other simple means
• Set specific goals for individual students (e.g., who will contribute what on a topic) and/or for the class as a whole
• Record specific information related to the identified goals and send feedback as part of the school-home notes
• Provide a place for parents to record progress the student makes at home related to the topic and further questions about the topic
Schedule Celebrations in Science

• Periodically (e.g., 1-4 times/yr) schedule a family-community-school night for students to share with adults and other students what they have learned in science

• Include accomplishments that occur across home and school

• Allow students (e.g., in groups) to “be the teacher” with small groups of adults, showing them what they learned or leading them in a science learning activity

• Post pictures from these celebrations in the classroom to keep families and accomplishments across home and school “in the classroom” throughout the year
FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PROMOTE SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS NEEDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS
Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC)

A strength-based, cross-system problem-solving and decision-making model wherein parents, teachers, and other caregivers or service providers work as partners and share responsibility for promoting positive and consistent outcomes related to a child’s academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development

– Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008, p. 25
CBC Goals

• Bring together families and schools on behalf of children’s learning
• Establish and maintain positive home-school relationships via partnership
• Promote positive outcomes for students through joint, cross-system planning
• Promote parent engagement via meaningful participation
• Establish daily, positive home-school communication system
CBC Procedures

Implemented in a 4-stage process by semi-structured *conjoint* interviews used to guide meetings with the child’s parent(s) and teacher(s) and facilitated by a trained CBC Consultant

• Needs Identification (“Building on Strengths”)
• Needs Analysis/Plan Development (“Planning for Success”)
• Cross-setting Plan Implementation
• Plan Evaluation (“Checking and Reconnecting”)
CBC in Rural Communities

Addresses challenges to partnerships in rural settings:

• Provides access to effective instructional and behavioral supports

• Increases meaningful interactions and communication between parents and teachers

• Fosters shared responsibilities for parents and teachers who work as partners

• Focuses on and enhances strengths of all parties

• Strengthens relationships through cooperative, goal-directed, solution-oriented services
Early Findings within the Rural Context

For strengthening relationships and partnerships:

• Partnership-building strategies used by CBC consultants may effectively address family-school partnership barriers unique to rural settings:
  – small communities, perceptions and attitudes of participants based on generational histories
• Increased trust and altered negative attitudes may result from:
  – frequent contact, constructive problem solving, mutual input toward solutions, individual roles and responsibilities, and home-school communication
Summary of Preliminary Results

• CBC appears promising for students whose behavioral challenges interfere with learning in rural schools

• Effects of CBC appear to extend beyond student outcomes to positive practices and beliefs of teachers and parents who are responsible for students’ learning and adjustment

• Effects are especially encouraging given the need for effective services in rural areas for students with behavioral concerns
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The research reported here was supported, in part, by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant # R324A100115 and Grant # R305C090022 to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.