



National Center for **Research** on
Rural Education (R²Ed)

Family-School Partnerships in Rural Communities: Research Support

Gina M. Kunz & Susan M. Sheridan

Presented at the

2013 Leadership for Educational Equality Rural Summit



WHY BOTHER?



Goals for Rural Students

Optimal
development
of:

Academic Skills

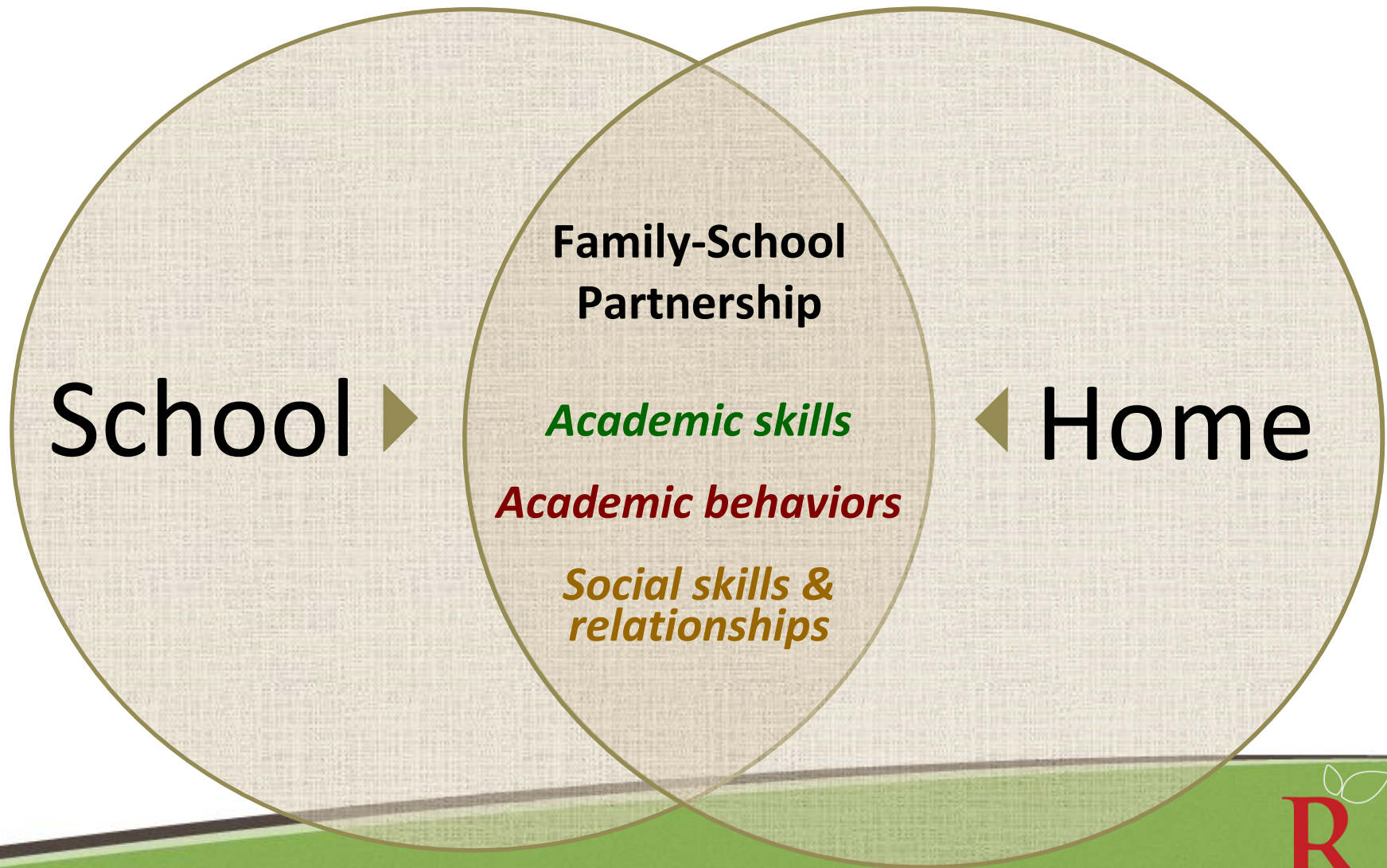
*Academic
Behaviors*

*Social Skills &
Relationships*

What Promotes Learning?



What Strengthens Learning?





HOW CAN THIS BE ACCOMPLISHED?

Family-School Partnerships



Family-School Partnerships

- Student-centered learning, growth and development
- Meaningful relationships between families and schools beyond “solving a problem”
- A new way of doing business



Goals of Family-School Partnerships

- Improve experiences and outcomes for children
- Strengthen relationships (among adults & with child)
- Address concerns 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

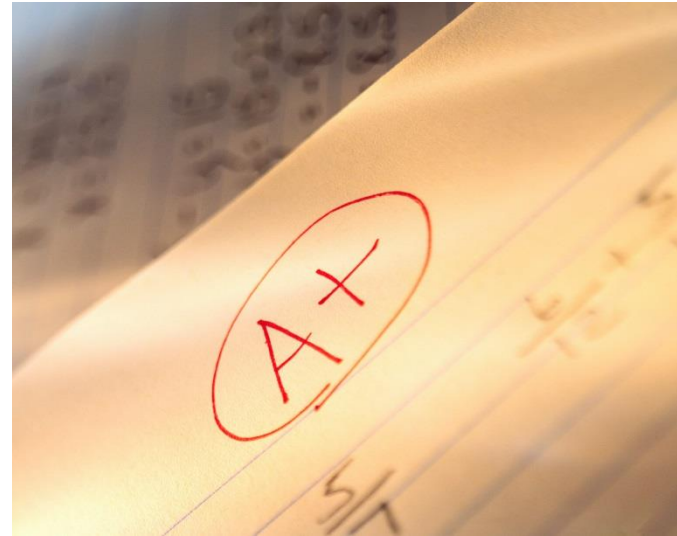


Characteristics

- **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



Key Research Findings

- Children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)
- Consultation with teachers alone is effective at promoting school success (Sheridan, 1997), but success at home occurs only when parents are involved (Sheridan, Eagle, & Dowd, 2005)
- Quality of the parent's relationship with the teacher and school personnel is a valid indicator of a successful transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 1999)



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



**WHAT INTERFERES WITH
FAMILY-SCHOOL
PARTNERSHIPS IN RURAL
COMMUNITIES ?**



Barriers

- Lack of access to services
- Lack of specialized information
- Physical distance
- Limited interactions
- Feelings of isolation
- History of negative relationships
- Lack of perceived need; reluctance
- Stigma





**HOW CAN WE OVERCOME BARRIERS TO
INSURE EFFECTIVE FAMILY-SCHOOL
PARTNERSHIPS?**



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



Teacher and Parent Quotes

- “These approaches were so classroom friendly! I am seeing tremendous success and think every school should participate in this service.” (Teacher participating in CBC)
- “The plan didn’t add a lot of time; it actually took away from the work I was already doing nagging [my son]. Now instead of having a bad time, we are focusing on having good times as a family.” (Parent participating in CBC)



Contact Information

Gina M. Kunz

gkunz2@unl.edu

National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)

Website: <http://r2ed.unl.edu>

**Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and
Schools**

Website: <http://cyfs.unl.edu>

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant # R324A100115 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.

