Family-School Partnerships in Rural Communities: Research Support

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WHY BOTHER?
Goals for Rural Students

Optimal development of:

- Academic Skills
- Academic Behaviors
- Social Skills & Relationships
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 ▸

Family-School Partnership

Academic skills

Academic behaviors

Social skills & relationships

Home ◅
HOW CAN THIS BE ACCOMPLISHED?
Family-School Partnerships

What are they?
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)
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