



Harvard Family
Research Project



FINE Forum

Social Capital

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Harvard Family Research Project

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From the Directors

Social capital, or the networks of trust and reciprocity among groups of people, can be a powerful force to transform education. Today's educational policies tend to focus almost exclusively on what happens within school walls. However, when families, schools, and communities come together they can enrich children's learning and social development opportunities. This issue of the FINE Forum features some examples of relationship building processes and their outcomes.

In Questions & Answers, Robert Putnam, professor of public policy at Harvard University, describes the educational policies that affect social capital in schools, such as busing and small schools. He also shares his ideas about the role of extracurricular activities in the formation of social capital, school-community connections to support students and families, and within-school relationships to create a positive school climate.

Program Spotlight illustrates how a community-based organization can act as a catalyst of social capital by bringing together families and school people, and facilitating their dialogue and goal setting. The Parent Services Project (PSP) in San Rafael, California, works with several schools to engage parents as empowered members of the school community. In one school it facilitated parent leaders' efforts to strengthen the bonds among parents through a children's soccer game, and to bridge the relationships between parents and teachers of different sociocultural backgrounds through a garden project. Parent Perspective provides further insight into PSP's leadership development process by recounting personal transformation as parents organized a before school and after school homework club.

Teacher Talk describes how one teacher connected parents with one another in a Taiwanese elementary school through a series of learning activities involving parents and their children. The activities strengthened relationships among parents, between parents and the school, and among students.

Lessons From Leaders presents the insights of four program directors of Capital Kids in Columbus, Ohio, a citywide initiative that provides after school programs for poor children and support services to parents. These directors identify the principles of and activities for connecting families to after school programs and to other community resources.

The programs and projects featured in this issue share a common emphasis of expanding relationships, sharing experiences, and promoting mutual support. These elements of social capital provide a foundation for people to work together to create a stronger community in which children can thrive.

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Program Spotlight

Featured Program: Parent Services Project

Families play a crucial role in their children's education, yet schools have long faced varying levels of family engagement. One avenue for increasing family engagement is through building connections and networks among parents, developing parents' leadership skills, and fostering trust between parents and schools. Parent Services Project (PSP) paves the way for this type of engagement.

Background

The Parent Services Project (www.parentservices.org), based in San Rafael, California, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening families and supporting parent leadership in child care, schools, and community programs. PSP offers parent engagement and leadership training to eight schools and eight feeder early childhood programs in Marin County. The Marin Community Foundation funds PSP's parent leadership work.

One school, San Pedro Elementary, serves as a case study for understanding the PSP approach to family and community engagement. The school is located in an affluent neighborhood where most of the residents send their children to private school. San Pedro's students, who are mainly Latino, are bused to school from the poorer parts of the city. Because there is no convenient public transportation to the school, parents have few opportunities to share their educational hopes and concerns and find it difficult to be involved in the life of the school.

In the fall of 2001, Mauricio Palma, the PSP Project Director of Community Engagement and Leadership, approached Wendy Feltham,¹ the principal of San Pedro Elementary, with the idea of training a core group of parents to assume greater leadership roles in the school and in their children's education. Feltham identified 15 parents who showed interest in the school, but had never participated in leadership positions before. In explaining her desire to work with PSP and the dispositions of a principal to carry out this work effectively she says, "Principals must believe in shared leadership. You have to encourage and request and beg for parents to step up for leadership positions. It's a principal's job to foster an environment where there are many different opportunities for parents to be leaders."

Program Description

Leadership, as it is commonly regarded, focuses on an individual's capacity to direct a course of action. The PSP leadership development process emphasizes collective leadership. This distinction is critical. Collective leadership calls for all stakeholders to work together as an extension of the community and to take responsibility to build relationships with and engage all families. Through direct coaching and tailored technical

¹ In June 2003 Wendy Feltham left San Pedro Elementary.

PSP's Leadership Development Activities

- Facilitate a series of parent meetings that invite reflection and visioning about children's education and the leadership opportunities for parents.
- Conduct one-on-one conversations with individual parent leaders to share what they are passionate about and clearly identify what they want to do.
- Provide technical assistance to parents, including diversity training, accessing school leadership training resources, and identifying and prioritizing school concerns.
- Train parents to facilitate meetings with the principal and superintendent.
- Meet with school leaders to prepare them for dialogue with families.
- Partner with school programs, such as Even Start and Marin's School-Linked Services, to facilitate meetings between parent leaders and school authorities.

support (see box below), PSP staff members engage parent leaders in three inclusive and overlapping stages of leadership development.

Building Relationships

PSP's leadership development process begins with building relationships among parents, or what Robert Putnam describes as bonding social capital, the ties among like-minded people. (See Questions & Answers in this issue.) Storytelling is a powerful vehicle for building these relationships. Palma observes, "People come together not around issues, but around their stories, hopes, and concerns." Through activities like bagel breakfasts, dinners, and Tuesday coffee breaks, parents exchange their

stories, and from them issues begin to surface that they can take to their schools. PSP provides child care at each of these events.

In San Pedro, the core group of parents convened by PSP felt it was a priority to extend their nascent sense of community to a broader group of parents. This was a challenge given transportation difficulties to the school and parents' work schedules. Nonetheless, the parent leaders came up with the idea of organizing a children's weekend soccer tournament to bring more families together. To get the word out, the parent leaders sought out families in their own neighborhoods, meeting them at bus stops and laundromats. In the end, 250 families turned out for the soccer tournament and not one flier had been printed. It was all achieved through face-to-face contact.

The soccer tournament brought people who had shared individual stories to create a collective story for the community. This is the story of families who were inspired by an idea and learned to organize themselves to meet a achievable goal. As the soccer tournament has now become an annual event, it is a story that is experienced again and again. The tournament and the story that has grown around it created a foundation for leadership beyond any particular parent. Parents began to believe in their ability to make change happen. School staff saw strengths in the parents' demonstration of organization and respected their ability to connect so many families to the school. Soon after the tournament the leadership group named themselves Familias Unidas (United Families) to signify their strong bond and affiliation.

Taking Leadership Roles

There was an additional rationale to the soccer tournament. A few weeks before the soccer tournament was organized Mauricio Palma read to parents a newspaper article (many do not read English or read the paper) that had just been released ranking San Pedro Elementary among the lowest in the county. The parents were shocked and angered that that they were not more aware of the situation. Ursula Loret de Mola, the family outreach coordinator at San Pedro Elementary says, “This was a big shift. Families tend to see their children individually in the school setting, rather than seeing how the school performs as a whole. Parents follow their individual children to make sure they are getting good grades, but are rarely concerned with how other kids are performing at other schools. When the parents found out what was going on they got angry and began asking what they could do for all children.”

In response, this core group of parents organized the soccer tournament as a way for families to become more aware of what was happening in the school. They felt that this step would build the parent community that the school needed to support children's success. The soccer tournament was not only a community building activity, but also one designed to increase parent educational engagement.

After the soccer tournament, parents' academic concerns began to be addressed through their formal leadership positions in the school. Feltham invited the parents to become elected and appointed leaders in school committees such as the PTA, ELAC (English Language Acquisition Committee), and the site-based management council. Gabriela Garcia, a parent leader, recounts, “At first we did not accept the principal's invitation because we did not see ourselves as leaders. Then our group met and decided that this was an opportunity for parents to have an impact on what goes on in the school.” With the facilitation provided by PSP, the parents realized that it was not enough to express their dissatisfaction about the school's low performance to the principal; they also had to be part of the solution.

In assuming leadership positions, parents vowed to support one another as they tackled tough tasks such as reviewing language census data, conducting a parent survey, and revising the English language portion of the school plan. Parents were at the forefront of guiding curricular decisions around English language instruction. The parent leaders also opened the workings of these committees to the wider school community, making other parents aware of the committees' functions and the processes for involvement in curriculum development.



Mothers and daughters participating in the soccer tournament



A group of fathers participating in the soccer tournament

Explaining the PSP process of leadership development, Palma says, “Leadership is about parents actively making decisions in schools and taking responsibility for the involvement of other families. Our process is intentional, meaning that we provide training and support to bring people to the table to learn to negotiate. We present alternatives, and allow parents to fill the pieces of a puzzle and to do this creatively. We use an activity such as a soccer tournament or a homework club as a tactic, i.e., to provide an arena for mentoring and making small, winnable gains. We provoke questions and suggest multiple ways of looking at a situation. Then parents shape the strategy—that’s the training; it’s not classroom training but a one-on-one skill building experience. We have learned that families are their own best advocates. They need the opportunity to take the lead.”

As a family support organization, PSP emphasizes a collaborative rather than confrontational approach to working with parents and educators. Palma holds conversations with principals to let them know what lies ahead so that they are prepared for questioning on the part of parents. He says, “We focus on negotiation and creating dialogue around mutual interests. Family engagement is not about taking power away from the principal; it is about the well-being of children.” Feltham supported this cooperative environment through the strategy of charting progress. At the start of the next academic year, she and the parents set written academic and nonacademic goals and wrote them in Spanish and English on a large piece of chart paper. During the year at regular meetings Feltham tacked up the chart and together she and the parents reviewed all the goals together, checking off the ones they had accomplished and cheering, and bringing attention to what remained.

Currently, parents who have worked with PSP for over a year are reassessing their strategic directions. As parent leaders move from “event focused” plans to group dynamics and sustaining new cohorts of leaders, they are confronting important choices about future directions, especially those related to cultivating individual leaders and promoting leadership. This development adds another level of complexity to the evolution and dynamics of parent leadership, and will need creative forms of PSP facilitation and support.

Developing Agendas for Change

PSP takes advantage of opportunities to create bridging social capital, or the social networks among different groups of people. Its staff members facilitate dialogue between families and schools so that they can see that change is possible. For example, at the time of the first soccer tournament one teacher brought a black plastic bag filled with plants to sell and raise money for her classroom garden. When Palma brought this to the attention of the parent leaders, many of whom worked in the landscaping industry, they announced over the loudspeaker the sale of the plants, but they also asked the teacher about her dream for the garden. She told them that she wanted a larger garden that would provide a hands-on learning experience for the whole school. The parent leaders quickly embraced this as a project they would support.

Within a few months the parents bulldozed a huge field on the school property—much larger than the teacher ever imagined—and worked to create a garden. From the teacher's point of view the garden project was meant to enhance learning, but for parents it was about nutrition, and providing an alternative to the school lunch. Since its inception teachers have been working to align curriculum to the garden.

The garden project also surfaced another issue that was a high priority among parents—the absence of a cafeteria. Children ate outdoors, or when the weather was bad, in their classrooms. Although the school was scheduled for renovation, the parent leaders pressed the district for a portable unit to serve as a cafeteria. Lisa Jimenez Cameron, a PTA teacher representative recalls, “Parents developed their own voices in the school. The parents felt that getting a cafeteria was an absolute necessity. By being actively involved in the school the parents realized they could make things happen. It was a powerful experience to see what can be accomplished when people come together for a common goal.”

The community garden and the cafeteria serve as examples of how families and schools can achieve mutual goals. Nonacademic initiatives such as these paved the way for families to become involved in academic activities as well. Feltham says, “I valued what parents wanted and valued their vision, just as much as they valued mine. I fully backed agendas the parents identified, even when it wasn't something I myself might have identified as an immediate priority. I would have focused squarely on academic outcomes. But we all have agendas and we need to find a way to make them all possible.” Negotiating family-school priorities is an ongoing process, with parents continuing to advocate for improved family-school communication and greater opportunities for partnership.

Through their PTA involvement, parents and teachers, who belonged to very different social worlds, came to understand that they shared a common goal—the children's school success. Parents came forward with their desires and concerns, and teachers shared what they needed from parents. Parents, for example, expressed the difficulty of communicating with many teachers who were not bilingual. Teachers provided tips to parents about how to help children to prepare for school even if they were not fluent in English. They suggested providing a quiet space and time for homework and checking that homework is turned in on time.

Program Evaluation

As part of its reporting to the Marin Community Foundation, PSP keeps track of parent participation. In the first two years of its family engagement and leadership work, PSP exceeded its goal of promoting 120 parent leaders to engaging 175 parents in eight schools. To strengthen its evaluation PSP is working on a developmental matrix for assessing progress of the leadership and engagement at each of its school sites and a logic model for the project as a whole. It will share the model and evaluation instruments with school stakeholders and parent leaders. Staff observation and feedback from participants, though, indicates that parents have experienced a strong sense of belonging within the

school community and have expressed a stronger belief that their involvement makes a difference.

Questions & Answers

Dr. Robert Putnam

Dr. Robert Putnam is the Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University and founder of the Saguaro Seminar, a program dedicated to fostering civic engagement in America. He spoke with FINE about his new book, Better Together, co-authored with Lewis Feldstein.

Q: Can you define social capital for our readers and distinguish between its different forms?

Putnam: Social capital refers to the trust, reciprocity, and shared understanding that arise from networks of relationships. As you know, there are many different types of social capital, and one distinction is between bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is in your ties to people like you—birds of a feather flock together. These are the people who bring you chicken soup if you get sick. Bridging social capital arises from networks that encompass different types of people.

Both of these kinds of social capital are good for different purposes. Social capital turns out to have a lot of effects—on schooling, crime and safety, economic development, democracy, and physical health. And although there is still some debate in the literature, probably the factors that are most important for the health effects of social connections are things like whether you are married or have close friends. These are typically bonding social capital.

On the other hand, a society that has only bonding social capital looks like Belfast or Bosnia. In a complex, pluralist, diverse democracy you need to have lots of bridging social capital. But bridging social capital is harder to build than bonding social capital. Bridging social capital is about fostering relationships across social divisions; it's about coming together to argue as well as to share. Our society is characterized by many crosscutting dimensions of differentiation, such as cultural origins, religion, age, gender, and class. The corollary is that there are multiple potential dimensions of similarity. Groups that bond along some axes can bridge along others. The development of bridging social capital may depend on finding or creating a new dimension of similarity in which bonding can occur.

Q: What are some key lessons from your book about how to build social capital?

Putnam: One lesson we learned was the dilemma of scale. In general, smaller is better for building social capital. Small schools, small firms, small towns, small classes, and small countries all have more social trust and social capital on average than large schools, large firms, large towns, and large countries. On the other hand being able to increase scale is important. One of the examples we talk about is the Saddleback Church in Orange County, California. This is a church that has shown very rapid growth, from seven members to over 30,000 members in one congregation over the last 20 years. One reason

for that success is that they have relied on small groups within the church. Belonging to the church means belonging to the “Geeks for Gods” or the “Mountain Bikers for God” or another smaller group nested within the church.

Another lesson from the book is how valuable storytelling is as a technique for building social capital. When you ask people to tell you their story it's a good opener for personal introductions. In a group, it's also a good way to get people to see unexpected connections, because stories overlap. As people tell stories the “I” stories become “we” stories and begin to build a communal sense of identity.

Q: What role do schools have in building social capital?

Putnam: Schools are one of the two most important sites in which you can imagine how to systematically build bridging social capital. The other contender is the work place, which is actually even more diverse than neighborhoods, schools, or churches. On the other hand, schools are important because they help form attitudes and habits that people carry with them throughout life. Therefore I think a really important function of education is not just training cognitive skills, but increasing social capital skills—in particular increasing bridging social capital.

Q: How can schools go about doing this?

Putnam: One feature of the educational process that might have an effect on long-term bridging social capital is whether people are being educated together or apart. I think the debate about busing was implicitly a debate about the relative importance of bonding and bridging social capital. The people who opposed busing for racial integration opposed it because they said you'll break up the neighborhood schools and that's where people have their community. Then you'd lose one of the few sites in America where people do connect, mostly in the form of bonding social capital. The people who supported busing favored it largely for bridging social capital. The reason to ship the kids to other locales, rather than just shipping quality textbooks or financial resources, was that you couldn't get the bridging connections without people being educated together.

Class integration in education is also a major consideration. This was the single issue that had the most attention at a meeting in Dublin in March 2004 of all the education ministers from OECD countries (which are the 35 advanced industrial countries). Several education ministers pointed to the growing class gap in education with the children of rich folks going to different schools than the children of poor folks. This growing economic segregation in school was a concern for education leaders even in societies like Japan where racial integration is less of an issue.

There are many other things that happen in schools that are relevant to social capital. Small school size or schools within a school are one idea relating back to the dilemma of scale I mentioned earlier. Pedagogy and curricula also build durable social capital skills in children, especially through civic education and service learning opportunities.

Also, I think extracurricular activities in education are really important for building social capital. When you take part in a choir, a band, or a football team, you are learning team skills. In general, sports and arts are two platforms on which you can most easily build bridging social capital, because nonverbal skills are being drawn on instead of verbal skills, which may vary a lot across people. One of the cases in our book describes a project in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, that used modern dance to bridge ideological, political, and social class differences between workers at a nuclear submarine naval base and liberal community members who were concerned about the environment.

One of the accompanying stories for this newsletter is about Latino parents setting up a soccer game in order to build a bridge between them and the school.

That's a wonderful example in every respect—I think soccer is particularly resonant for the new wave of immigrants in the United States, and of course I love the idea that it's the Latino parents initiating that.

Q: How do people, and time-pressed teachers in particular, find time and motivation for the person-to-person contact required to build social capital?

Putnam: Pulling parents into the process inevitably has some “transaction costs” for teachers. I know—my wife is a public school teacher. However, all the research shows that kids perform better when schools and teachers are able to draw on community resources. Schools increasingly are called on to handle family and community problems because social capital in the family and community is declining. Kids in every kind of school often bring into the schools problems originating in families and communities. In effect, whether they like it or not, a larger portion of the job of every teacher is to be a kind of community social worker, as well as to teach students to read and write and so forth.

Schools cannot prevent the social and community problems that kids bring with them into the school. But schools can be thinking about how to also bring in the resources that are present in the community. So teachers can engage in ways that lead to parents and community members being part of the solution rather than part of the problem. That would surely make teachers' lives easier.

The social capital lens highlights not only the importance of relations between schools and those “outside the walls” of the school, like the community and families, but also the social capital inside the school walls. In other words, building trust and reciprocity among teachers and between teachers and administrators is also important. School leaders who remember teachers' birthdays, pay attention to people, have parties, and encourage teachers to help one another can create a positive school climate and a very high performing school. Trust and reciprocity and helping out are important qualities to strive for among and between all those who teach and raise children.

Related Resources

Better Together website: www.bettertogether.org

Coalition for Community Schools. (2004). Community school and social capital [Special issue]. *Coalition for Community Schools Newsletter*, 3(7) . Available at www.communityschools.org/newsletter/v.3.7.html

Saguaro Seminar. (2000). *Better Together. The report of the Saguro Seminar: Civic engagement in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Available at www.bettertogether.org/thereport.htm

Saguaro Seminar website: www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro

Sander, T. H., & Putnam, R. D. (1999, September). Rebuilding the stock of social capital. *The School Administrator*. Available at www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=3580&snItemNumber=950&tnItemNumber=951

Parent Perspective

Alma J. Martinez was among the first group of parents at Lynnwood Elementary School to work with the Parents Services Project (PSP), a family support organization in San Rafael, California. Below Alma recounts her experiences with PSP as a parent leader. Alma's story reflects PSP's principles of participant action and empowerment.

Parent engagement is about building relationships. Parents like myself often do not know how to connect with other parents and develop relationships. We need to hear each other's stories to make that connection. We were a group of parents at the school and functioned more like a social club. PSP then came along and helped us develop a vision.

PSP asked us what we wanted to see happen at the school and we chose three topics: safety—we were concerned about our children when we dropped them early in the morning and picked them up again after school; nutrition—the school food was so bad that kids threw it away; and homework—some parents could not help their children with homework because of new ways of teaching reading and math, and also some of the parents didn't speak English.

To solve the issue of safety and homework assistance parents came up with the idea of a homework club in the mornings and afternoons. We conducted a survey of all the parents in the school, which included Anglos and Latinos, and everyone was in favor of the homework club. We also needed funds for the homework club, so we had to develop a strong proposal. It took 6 months to develop a workable plan. That was the hardest part, but the process became a form of training for parent leaders. We held conversations with other parents, with the principal, the School-Linked Services team, and teachers to get their support. (School-Linked Services is a Marin Community Foundation initiative to bring social, health, and other services to families through the schools.) PSP facilitated this process so that we could create a professional proposal. We then presented our plan before a group of community leaders who belonged to the School-Linked Services Committee to request the funds.

The whole process—from sharing our concerns, developing our vision, and actually implementing the homework club—took 3 years. We had to learn to be patient. We also had to learn to make compromises. We had wanted the homework club to be for all kids in the school, but funds were available for only a targeted group of kids.

As I look back on my experience, it took me a long time to understand what leadership is and what it means to be a leader. I didn't know I was a leader. Becoming a leader is about first discovering who you are and then gaining the power to follow your life's goals. I first had to learn what I was capable of and that I had the power to make change happen. Parents need this kind of support to discover who they are and what they can do.

Teacher Talk

While serving as a teacher and administrator at an elementary school in Taiwan, Wen-Ching Steven Lin developed a family involvement project called Family Connections. Wen-Ching Steven Lin is currently a graduate student at University of Findlay, Ohio, and recently wrote The New Ideology of Family Education to be published soon in Taiwan.

When I was an administrator and math teacher in an elementary school in Taiwan, I developed a project called Family Connections to connect families in a class to one another. The project, implemented in a second grade classroom with 24 students, involved three steps. The first step, designed to have families get to know each other, involved a portfolio or a Family Growing Record Book. Each family wrote about parenting, life experiences, or ideas and resources to share with other families. All of the families' writings were collected into a book that was circulated among the families, with every family providing a treasure of experiences from which other families could benefit.

The second step of the project was an Assignment Project in which groups of four to five students and their families were assigned a particular research project by the teacher. The students and their families divided up responsibilities for collecting information on the topic, collecting pictures on the topic, and developing a PowerPoint presentation. Each family in a group connected with each other through meetings, the Internet, emails, or some other means. At the end of the semester, the class held an exhibition that displayed each group's work and presented the PowerPoint slides.

The third step, called Excellence Display, was a collective portfolio of students' stories, parents' perspectives, and other evidence of excellence in academic, moral, and leadership performance. Sometimes the teacher also added helpful newspaper articles on education. This portfolio was then circulated to each family in the style of a newsletter.

As a result of the project, parents in the class organized a group to get all of the families together. They organized sports activities, a study group, and holiday gatherings. In general, families seemed to learn more about parenting and more about each other through the sharing of experiences. Some parents learned new approaches to child-rearing and some learned to treat their children more respectfully. Families' initiative in supporting their children's learning increased. Finally, parents seemed to enjoy working on the portfolios because they were not time intensive, yet signified genuine involvement in their child's learning.

After its first year, the project seemed to have a small positive impact on student achievement, but a greater influence on students' interpersonal relationships and classroom discussions. The school experienced more support from families when they actively joined class or school activities.

The project experienced some challenges, including a short time frame in which parents could get to know each other, the desire of some families to keep family information private, negative feelings among some parents about themselves or other families, and the formation of small cliques of parents based on similar socioeconomic

status that excluded other parents. In my future studies and professional work I plan to make adaptations to the project and conduct future research.

Lessons from Leaders

Inner-city neighborhoods often compromise the development of children and impose on parents the burden of creating strategies to keep their children on the pathway to successful school completion.¹ More quality schools and after school programs are needed to provide positive developmental contexts for children and youth. The Capital Kids after school program in Columbus, Ohio, offers lessons for how a city can create wholesome neighborhood opportunities for inner-city children. Fostering connections among families, schools, and communities is a key strategy of the program, and one that promotes social capital. (See Questions & Answers with Robert Putnam in this issue.)

In 2001 Mayor Michael Coleman created Capital Kids to provide a safe and enriching environment for the city's young citizens. The program now operates in 35 sites and serves 2,800 children. Initially, the program was piloted in four locations in the most vulnerable neighborhoods of Columbus. Residents in these neighborhoods are predominantly poor, female headed, and African American, and some of them are homeless. An evaluation of the pilot sites found that the program had a significant impact in promoting school attendance and in improving grades.² It also revealed positive ratings for the family involvement component of the program. (Read a summary of evaluating family involvement in the Capital Kids program.)

Because many of the parents in the pilot sites work multiple jobs and struggle with other responsibilities, Capital Kids serves critical family needs by providing a safe and nurturing space for children during nonschool hours, connecting families to community resources, acting as liaisons to children's schools, and complementing children's learning with extended academic and social activities.

Program staff, parents, and school and community stakeholders in the four pilot sites describe the following practices to support parenting and family involvement:

1. Build strong and trusting relationships with families. Make it a priority to develop strong and trusting relationships with families. Be intentional about creating an open and welcoming atmosphere at the after school site, getting to know families well during the program's orientation, and sharing stories with parents when they come to pick up their children.
2. Communicate frequently with parents about what their children are doing and learning. Call home frequently to deliver positive messages about a child's development. This is essential for trust building and for supporting parents to be involved in their children's development. For working parents who have limited time to be present during

¹ Jarrett, R. L. (1999). Successful parenting in high-risk neighborhoods. *Future of Children*, 9(2). Available at www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol9no2Art4done.pdf.

² Anderson-Butcher, D. (2002). *An evaluation report for the Cap City Kids program: Phase two*. Columbus, OH: Center for Learning Excellence, John Glenn Policy Institute and the College of Social Work.

after school activities, maintain a bulletin board with pictures that show the many ways that children spend their time after school.

3. Create opportunities for families to participate in out-of-school activities with their children or to celebrate children's accomplishments. Provide many opportunities for family participation in program activities. Invite parents to award ceremonies and student performances. Sponsor evening and weekend field trips to soccer games or city-sponsored events so that working parents can attend.

4. Stay informed about resources available for families in the community. Keep abreast of available resources for families. Take every opportunity to learn more about the resources in the neighborhood and city. For example, staff members at Capital Kids attend a monthly meeting sponsored by the Columbus Public School's Center for Parent Engagement to learn about resources that parents can use to support their children's education.

5. Connect families to resources and opportunities. Learn about the interests of individual families so as to connect them to appropriate resources. An unemployed parent can benefit from free job training while another parent might need better health care for her son. Maintain a bulletin board and resource table where resources are posted and send information about community opportunities through a monthly newsletter.

Take Home Grocery Program

Capital Kids participates in a Take Home Grocery Program that engages parents and children in a fun learning activity while meeting families' needs. The Mid Ohio Food Bank delivers a large supply of food to Capital Kids bimonthly. After the program allocates its share for daily snacks, there are enough groceries left to send home to every family. Parents come to the after school site to pick up a box of groceries, and sorting and distributing the food becomes an interactive activity for children and parents.

6. Develop collaborative relationships with schools and teachers. Spend time in the school where children in the after school program are enrolled in order to observe children in the classroom context and to individualize their after school learning. The best way to develop working relationships with teachers and administrators is to be present and active in the school. Teachers will learn that you are there to support them, and you will know what homework assignments need to be done during the after school program.

7. Help connect families to schools or serve as a liaison to schools. Function as a broker between schools and families. After school staff can relay information between school and parents, especially when parents' working schedules prevent them from visiting the school on a regular basis, or if families find schools intimidating.

8. Complement children's school-based learning with extended academic and enrichment activities. Make sure that the homework assistance and the other academic enrichment activities align with the school curriculum. Schools can provide curriculum guides and additional supplementary resource materials to after school sites. Sometimes, a school's reading or math coordinator can work with after school staff to make sure that reading and math strategies being taught in the classroom are reinforced in the after school setting.

From Katheryn Moser, Principal of Sullivant Elementary School

“Capital Kids after school staff have been an invaluable resource for us at Sullivan Elementary School. Brenda Fields, the Capital Kids site director, comes to the elementary school at the end of every school day. She walks through the building, visiting classrooms, checking to see if students have returned their homework, whether there have been positive improvements with any of her kids during the day or any disciplinary issues she needs to communicate to families. In other words, she gets the full scoop on every child. Later, when parents come to pick their kids up from the after school program, she can relay information that otherwise might not get to the parent. Having after school staff act as liaisons to our families has helped all of our relationships become stronger. Of course, every parent would like to pick up their child at school so they can speak with the teacher in person, but we know that this is not always possible in today's society. Capital Kids has been an invaluable connection to the home.”

Related Resources

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