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*Effective Family and Community Connections with School Programs: Challenges at the Middle and High School, Opening the Next Level of Involvement*

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A.F. We are, as Karen Mapp indicated in her presentation, on that 10-second spot. And as Kris and I were spending time planning this session, even 40 minutes was really too short. But we wanted to let you know what we did as we began to bring both the Power Point presentation and our own comments to you. First of all, thank you for all of the information you sent in to us. If you sent in answers to the questions—the assessment that we sent out for each one of the sessions, first of all we tried to address those issues. And, secondly, as Catherine pointed out, this is an exciting session because you represent a lot of different walks of life. If we were to present to superintendents, we would have a much different presentation than if we were working with colleagues that represent not only students—there are a lot of students in this group, and we want to welcome you. We did have a pre-session or inservice—because we contend that as you begin to take a look at new standards-based reform, that as you prepare for, or as you go back into your communities, we are going to make a pitch that if you want to make AYP, and if we want to provide the best educational opportunity for every one of our kids, we've got to start with parental involvement and not end with it. I want to lead off with a story and we're going to get started. But I wanted to let you know that what we did was try to incorporate all of your questions into a single session. It's very difficult to do, but there's also going to be a Q&A session. We promise to end at 11:30, and if we don't end at 11:30, I understand there's someone with a fork and a knife that's going to yank us off the stage. So we respect that as well. There is—I come to this presentation from two walks of life. First, as an educational, as an educator, both as a teacher and a school administrator. But also, another walk of life, as a parent involvement advocate, but also as an advocate for involving parents in the democracy of our communities and our state and our nation. So there are two major roles. But I did have a principal, when I was assistant superintendent, who said that, you know, my parent involvement, if I had a list of things to do and parent involvement was on that list, it'd be last, it'd be number 10. And I said, within six months, you had better find a way of getting number 10 up to number one, or you may want to take a look for another job in another school district, perhaps in another state. But as you all look at the research, as we all contemplate what these framing questions are, as we begin to develop—and remember, I said this morning, I thought that this was an element of educational reform that was clearly underdeveloped. It's not undeveloped, it's just underdeveloped compared to the other elements of educational reform. Our colleagues are beginning to understand the relationship between achievement and involvement, and the success of the community and the importance of having a strong involvement of parents in the democratic system. But as you think about this research question, the question is, if the schools elevated parental involvement to number one, what would they do differently, what would their organizations look like, and what would inservice, both for administrators and teachers, look like at the higher end level and also at the mid-career service and professional development the school districts provide. Just think about that one for a minute as you contemplate a lot of the other pieces of the conference today as you go back home, because I guarantee you that our school districts would look much different than they do now. We are going to stay at the table, if we could indulge you, rather than go to the podium. We are not in control except when it comes to the protocol. So we, so we're going to try to move this between us. I'm Arnold Fege of the Public Education Network. And for any of you that are more interested in the work of the Public Education

Network, it's [www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org). And I'm going to put in just a two-second pitch. But we do a weekly newscast on some of the top education research of the week. It is free, and if you go into [www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org), you can sign up for that. We have a membership of about 75,000 people, and it's funded by a number of funders, including the Ford Foundation. And we thank our funders for that, for those funds. We are a national network of 90 local education funds. We represent district parental—community engagement, including parents rather than just at the individual school level. All of these organizations are independent school districts, they're professionally staffed, and they are focused on how we can increase achievement in poor and disadvantaged school districts. And using that through the route of public engagement. We believe, interestingly enough, that all of our kids are high achievers, but if the schools were not integrated and the parents were not involved, we have not put together a very good program in the education system.

KO: I'm Kris Olson and I come to you from the trenches, because I am a public school parent. Our younger of two daughters graduated this past May. Our school district in Waco, Texas is about 16,000 students, 80 percent free and reduced lunch, 43 percent Hispanic, 18-19 percent whites, the remainder African-American, one percent others. The work that we have done in Waco through constructive parent engagement is phenomenal, given that profile and given the fact that prior to Parents for Public Schools existing in Waco, there really was virtually no parental involvement on the Waco school campus. I'm part of the national Parents for Public Schools—Waco—PPS is what xxx. PPS is part of a national non-profit organization of 25 chapters in 14 states. We are little bitty tiny rural school districts like Jefferson Davis County, Mississippi, and San Francisco and Cincinnati. We run the gamut. We believe that constructive engagement of parents at all levels, the school level up through the district level, is critical to improving public schools for all children. Most of our chapters are volunteer only. We have about four chapters of the 25 that have staff. I'm a half-time staff for the Waco chapter. Our membership is diverse. We believe that parents, better than any other entity, can bridge those traditional dividing lines—race, class, gender, neighborhood. So that's what we do. And we are somewhat distinctive from other organizations because we recruit families to enroll their children in public school. Like PEN, we believe that public education is the key to a strong democracy. And so we believe that the public schools need to reflect the community at large, so we really do a lot of recruiting. Management does not need more information about what is happening inside the organization, it needs more information on what is happening outside. Please note that this is not an education quote, this comes from the business world. It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transition. Change is situational. The new site, the new boss, the new team roles, policy. Transition is a psychological process that people go through to come to terms with a new situation. Change is external, transition is internal.

AF: I come from the corporate sector. My family has always wanted to do when I grow up. Because if you didn't be the vice president of some corporation, it wasn't fulfilling. So my father's been a bit of a frustrated father for a number of years. But I will say that while these two quotes come from American business, American business is not doing this very well either. It is a reminder that the businesses who are doing the transitional piece very well are China, eastern Europe, western Europe, Japan. They really do these pieces much better. So I don't know whether it's in the water, but the institutional barriers now to involving both their employees and their citizens, we thought that would be somewhat of an interesting segue into our high school piece this morning. I wanted to add—this session would not be complete without at least beginning to recognize that there are some form of parent involvement. I deal with another research question, and that question is if we had to codify involvement, what would those policies look like. We actually go back to 1965, which is really the first of the policies that the federal government in—somehow I lost my wire here—this is the first set of policies that the federal government began working with. The parents at that time, or the involvement policies at that time, were not to encourage home involvement, but it was designed to empower parents to work in the community to demand their public schools. And so there was a lot of policy implications. And now under No Child Left Behind, there are a number of provisions of No Child Left Behind that we consider to be real opportunities for us to take a look at, but in many cases our school districts don't know much about them. If you don't know about Title 1, Section 18, Title 2-Teacher Quality, Title 3, which is the ESL Title, and what we're calling corrective action schools, they are all elements of those, of No Child Left Behind that requires that parents be involved either in framing committees or in the development of policies, but more importantly, in the development of school capacity, which I'm going to talk about in just a little bit. Some of you are working with 21st Century schools, which I think is one of the best partnership models of any federal legislation in the country, along with other programs that you may have in your school districts that you should be able to access. Because all of these required parental involvement—as I go from school district to school district, either schools don't know about it, or they do know about it and they don't report these to their parents. The drug-free schools. Head Start is one of my favorite models. It's just been reauthorized. Any of you working with the disabilities community, you know that this is the only program that parent involvement has TIF—it has the federal courts. And if you're a school administrator, you know that all you have to hear is a parent is

going to sue your school district, and you change your habits very quickly. Comprehensive school reform xxx other programs at the federal level. In Arkansas you know that you're one of the first states to mandate parental involvement at the state level. Of course, we're looking at about 14,700 school districts around the country that are also, to some extent or another, engaged in some kind of xxx. We wanted to take a look at some of the research. There was a congressional-mandated study on educational goals and opportunities in the U.S. Department of Education. One of the things that we do recognize when we look at the research that Karen was talking about, and Ann was talking to you about, is a lot of the research around high schools especially, but also the elementary and middle schools, all of the more extensive and large-scale research stopped around 1995 and 1996. I have not the slightest idea why. But the research really indicates around high school—and all of this is common sense but bears repeating again—that the contact between family and school, as not only the child grows older, but as the parent grows older, this also declines in number and in the positive natures of the contacts. Parents tell us that as their children move up through each spectrum, that the quality of their contacts and the duration of those contacts diminishes. Also, involvement drops dramatically at the middle grades in this area of transition. Schools do a horrible job of transition. And Kris is going to talk a little bit about this. There is a, volunteerism drops. Fewer involvement opportunities. And we can identify that, we can interpret that as fewer high school opportunities, fewer school outreach opportunities for parents. There is clearly more of a hands-off attitude from schools, the let's make a deal that Karen was talking about, it's not the exception, it's the rule. And those of us that are visiting high schools around the country are finding that hands-off is, it's progressing. It is increasing rather than diminishing. Especially around issues, especially around issues of decision making and parent councils. And there's more focus on subject matter, less focus on students and children, and there is an increased amount of bureaucracy that parents really do not know how to access. One of the things that both of us talked about is that we do want to make it look like that there aren't pockets of success around the country. Pockets of success. But on scale, we've come to the conclusion that we are not making progress at the high school level.

KO: These are, oh goodness, very short amount of time, these are the six topic areas that we felt like we wanted to hit on, particularly looking at middle school and high school. So I'm not going to read them because we have another slide to go with each of them. We did want to acknowledge that in spite of that list of great programs and the requirements of No Child Left Behind legislation and district policies that mandate parent involvement, that there are still significant barriers that have to be honestly addressed. Because if we don't look at those barriers, it doesn't matter what we do to bring parents in, the barriers will stop success. Schools are not organized for involvement. Some of these, particularly a sense of powerlessness, some of the barriers can be fairly easily overcome with just some adjustments. Some like that sense of powerlessness and lack of access take much longer. I appreciated Karen's comments today about four years before you can begin to see a real change in the culture of a school regarding parent and community involvement. It takes time, but these barriers have to be looked at and identified on each specific campus.

AF: Isn't she great?! We wanted to show you the results of a survey that Public Education Network just conducted on 10,728 surveys on the Internet. By the way, this is not always scientific, but we did get a great xxx demographic racially. We found out just related to No Child Left Behind—and this is the third year of implementation of No Child Left Behind. Parents, only seven percent of those questioned, and these were not only parents, but they were other community members, only seven percent had any input into the development of state standards. Only three percent had any input into the development of a state test required by No Child Left Behind. Four percent had any input into the development of a local report card. And by the way, one of the new opportunities is this reporting system of No Child Left Behind. But if the report card format and layout of information that parents get is not xxx, it's totally useless. Developing the district Title 1 parent involvement program, only six percent were involved. And only about 11 percent knew that they had rights under Title 1 provisions. Only nine percent had input into the district annual Title 1 program—plan—yet each district is required by law to include parents in the development of the Title 1 plan. You know how it goes. The superintendent knows a parent, the parents have been a friend of the family, the parents are put on the Title 1 advisory council, doesn't attend any meetings, their name goes on the application blank, the district says it's complied, and that's the extent of it. What's sad about it is that the district loses an opportunity to talk about visioning around achievement and engagement and developing a real community-based consensus and plan. Only five percent made any recommendations on what constitutes a highly qualified teacher, although all the states have to have that worked on by the end of the school year. And we're doing a little bit better in parents and community participating in school districts that will identify their schools as needing improvement. And none of the above, over three-quarters of our population, said they were not involved, or even asked—and we phrased the question as literally as we possibly could. This is a problem. And I dare say that if we superimpose this question over, say, district policy and district work on plans around high school reform or other changes that are taking place in the district, I presume—besides

the pockets we have—we'll find the same percentages. I'm going to go through this one quickly. Karen really talked about it. I'm the OD person. I'm the organization development person. But if we do not have a parent map in every one of our school districts, or someone that represents parents at the table, this work of parental involvement will not start at the middle. Nothing moves when you get into the middle. Actually, our political parties have really understood that too well. The fact is, the fact is that it's very, very difficult for parents to access in the middle. If there's a committed principal who wants to have access—he's going to have the support of the principal and the superintendent. My feeling is that if the support for parental involvement and a parental involvement program does not start at the district level, it's not going to be as effective as it could be as a formal program and as a formal commitment by the district. The district puts parents into about five strategies. The new place they're putting parents in these days is parents as instructional strategists. Just think about it. And they're beginning to get this deal that in order to make AYP, that they really do need the help of the family in the home, because if you don't bring in the family, it's going to be very, very difficult to meet these higher levels of AYP increase. But what happens frequently is parents now take the blame for lower test scores in schools and not making AYP, rather than being positively. I think there needs to be a comprehensive plan. Parents need to be involved in that comprehensive plan. There needs to be people that are devoted, similar to the instructional program. And when you get to the departments of education and the schools of education, you do not have the Heather Weisses that keep pushing parents. You frequently have three-quarters of your faculty devoted to instruction and pedagogy, and the rest of the, the 25 percent, devoted to democracy, political science, parental engagement, involvement. And I would personally like to see the ed department move closer to the political science department rather than to the home ec department, and to really begin building a team. The other places that school districts put parents in, they love public relations. Fundraising is huge for parental involvement. And very, very few of the parents are involved in the role of decision making. Boards of education are very concerned about that, as well as the superintendent of the school district. If you don't have those pieces, it is my contention—and if the school district doesn't commit this as number one, and if—don't forget, I'm a former assistant superintendent—that if the principal is told we do not have a policy and involvement program at the local level, you are fired. And I don't know of any district that has a—there may be a few—where the superintendent has sent that message down to every one of their principals. And I will tell you, for those that know how to do it, they will do it quickly. And for those that don't know how to do it, they're going to volunteer for additional professional development. But we've got some real changes to take place. And frequently, what the districts now want us to do is to change the family rather than to reorganize the school. The family is restructured, but the school is not, it looks like the old school that looked like it responded to the old type of family.

KO: Transition from elementary to middle or middle to high school is an enormous issue. I'm going to stand up because I feel like I'm not seeing half the room. We need to start the transition process early. I get so frustrated when it's March or April, and the middle schools start thinking about hmm, maybe we need to plan something for May. Transition needs to start when the students and the parents at that elementary school level are beginning to get nervous, which is about January, when it dawns on them that this wonderful little spot where they have been happy in this elementary school for all these years, and nurtured and adored, is going to become, they're going to move to this big middle school or this even bigger high school. And the bureaucracy gets bigger and it's frightening, it's very frightening. There's a wonderful article in the last couple of months of the National Middle School Association publication, journal, about a school in Bismarck, North Dakota, that began a process in January, and that had multiple steps. And they documented the evidence of impact, and it is fabulous. They had parents talking to parents, they had students talking to students, which makes so much sense if you step back and look at—which we'll get to later—building relationships in the school setting just like we would in every other aspect of our lives. A way that parents can drive this—in several PPS cities, Waco being one of them, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Portland, Oregon, all have middle school fairs, where all the middle schools were brought together in one location and all the fourth- and fifth-grade parents in the schools were invited to come and get information about what sets each middle school apart. What's the individual aspect of this middle school that might be best for my child? Phenomenally successful from the parents' perspective. Look at the needs of the students and the parents. What are the questions that students and parents need answered? Not just about where the school is located and the schedules, but what happens to my child when this lovely fifth grader becomes a young adolescent? How do I deal with this kid who wakes up one day and hates me, and sat on my lap the day before. And might sit on my lap the next day. Look at the big picture. Put middle school or high school into the larger context, like what are the decisions that are being made right now for scheduling, how are they going to impact college or technical training after high school? Because it's decisions at middle school and high school that will have an enormous impact on scholarships, on options that are available for you as a high school graduate. So putting things like that into context is very important. One of the big gripes that I have is how little schools talk with other schools within their district. Again, I'm wearing a parent hat. Talking to parents—talking to parents. Oh, middle schools, find out who are the leaders

in elementary school. Observe in elementary school meetings and see who are, who do other parents naturally gravitate to? Communicate what programs work well with this elementary school through the parents. And carry some of those ideas into the middle school so that there's some sharing of information. I'm going to stop here. Oh, communication. I struggled with whether to put building relationships or communication first. We decided we would go with communication because if you're not communicating, then you're never going to build a relationship. The key for parents in communication is that it—effective communication—is that it has to be two-way. Most often, schools will tell you that they communicate with parents, and what they do is talk at parents. Very little school time, face-to-face time, with parents is structured so that the educators are doing the listening and the parents are doing some talking. So that is a key change that must happen if communication is going to be improved. Communication has to be timely. It does not do any good to send a note home on a Friday about a parent meeting on Monday when parents have many children, they have jobs, and they have soccer practice or they have church, whatever. It does not—and what we find as parents is that often the notice is sent home, and particularly in middle school and high school. Please, you cannot tape a notice around the wrist like you can elementary school students. You think those teenagers are going to give those notes to their parents? There have to be some more effective ways to get timely communication out to parents. Go to places like we named off in Karen's session. Post notices in your neighborhood grocery store. Post notices in the laundry mat. Go to the churches. If it's important, go to the places where your parents are. Find the largest employers. Prove to those parents that it is so important that you are willing to come and post a notice or give information to them at a site where you knew that they would be. Information has to be understandable to non-educators. There's a handout that you all got—I'm baring my school district's soul. Now mind you, our school district is parent-friendly. They truly are. But what you have here, there's a half-page letter. Sort of a letter. The back side of that—it's not on your paper—the back side of that same half-piece of paper that went to parents was in Spanish. No letterhead, no contact information except a business—I mean, an office and a phone number. Pitiful excuse for communication. And you also have an attendance form. In our school district, if you are not in class 90 percent of the days, you will not pass, it doesn't matter what your grade point average is in that class. This is the attendance form. For years parents have received this with report cards and said, what in the world. Parents for Public Schools in Waco got together with these two forms and created what you all have as a two-page memo, proactive engagement of parents. This is not acceptable, these are some recommendations we make that will be more acceptable. The district didn't ask for that, the parents said we have a right and a responsibility to share that information with the district, make it user-friendly. This is a school report card that looks specifically at reading. Please, can anyone here tell me what that tells us about that school's reading program? No. You can't and you're educators or you're graduate students. How can parents? So this is a perfect example of potentially powerful information that is lost because it is not translated, and it's a, it's a piece that parents can help you educators—or help educators—interpret in a way that is helpful for parents. Go to your parents, ask them to review your communications, and you will be shocked at how, how many recommendations they will make to make it more friendly. Use native language. It is hard, it is a hassle, it requires thinking ahead, but if our goal is to communicate with parents, then it doesn't do any good to speak in a language that they do not understand. We are also finding in our district that the communication can't just be in writing, because a lot of our parents who have come up from South and Central America and Mexico, they can't read in Spanish or in English. So we're looking at other ways to get the information to them. Training. My gosh, I can't tell you how often that came up in a survey of parents in our district. Training for parents. Parent-to-parent recruiting. One of the things that we've discovered, now that there is a requirement for sub-populations that will end up leveling an entire school, it is my responsibility if your child doesn't do well in school, because if your child or this group of children don't do well, then the whole school is going to be labeled as needing improvement or whatever. So use that peer pressure, if you will, of parent-to-parent, to say we have to get involved, because our whole school is dependent on every child doing well. So I will stop there.

AF: We wanted to use the report cards as an example of what the minimum—usually the minimum communication for the high school level is the report card. We found out that by going to the web site and bringing up school districts, you'll find every version of a report card that you can possibly find, and one's more complex than the other. Now a lot of this relates to the requirements of No Child Left Behind. But school districts really miss one engagement opportunity by saying before we begin to report this information, let's begin to bring together parents, town meetings, focus groups. Yes, it takes a lot of time, but it's a developmental issue. School districts that are now beginning to focus group their parents find out that there's a lot of information about No Child Left Behind that parents don't want. But they want other information besides what's on No Child Left Behind. And the smart school district will decide how to best merge those two. And, of course, the larger your district, and the more diverse your school system, the more racial and ethnic groups there will be divisions and numbers for. If this is the minimal communication we have with parents at the high school level, and they don't understand this aggregation, or they don't understand, they don't understand the link between this report card and their child and achievement,

then that is, that's basically the only opportunity we have to bring parents back into the school. We've got a big project just doing focus groups and encouraging school districts to do some focus groups. And if you want more information, just give me a call and I'll send you all of the information you need to do—you need to have—about how to develop a community focus group and how to bring parents together. You can do this, it's fairly simple, but it is a means for a district to take advantage of engagement, and frequently they lean on the side of compliance. I'm going to go over this one very briefly as well, but it also relates to what Kris and I were talking about. If there isn't in the district a culture to share decision making, that is, if the superintendent and the board does not wish to share their power, this issue—and I'm very heavy on building social and political capital—the parents that are in districts that do not have the political and social capital, I have—by the way, we have a lot of parents —. One of the things we haven't talked about is there are many groups of parents who are involved. I am working in Florida against a group of parents, a huge group of parents, that would like to eliminate Planned Parenthood as providing additional information around pre-productive health and sex education. There are other groups of parents that live in Beverly Hills and Shaker Heights and Fairfax County, Virginia—those parents are frequently involved. It's those parents that Karen was talking about that districts really have given up on, and frequently it's at the high school level where many districts have given up on the kids as well—xxx statistics, are sure that high schools know how to intervene instructionally, they frequently do at the elementary level, it's more difficult at the high school level. And I think this other piece is a big piece for me, and that is if we as a community don't demand good schools after we know what the assessment data looks like, if we as a community feel that we don't have the social and political capital to go into our neighborhood school, which may or may not meet the AYP, and demand better instruction and demand better teachers, and if the public doesn't take responsibility, then I think No Child Left Behind and any other program is not going to increase either the issues of equity that I'm so close to or the other issues of achievement and poverty and racism that both Kris and I have talked about.

KO: Relationship and trust building, as I see it, is a continuum. And Karen, again, touched on some of this. We have seen many schools that have tried to jump into the deep end of the pool and have touchy-feely good conversations with parents when they've never done the preliminary work that's required. I believe that there is a continuum. You cannot jump to one end of the continuum. You can shorten the timeline, but you have to follow the process of relationship building. It's like becoming an acquaintance to a friend to a date—a partner. You have to make that progression. And it begins with mutual respect. I commend you all that *The New Wave of Evidence* which we'll be getting, read that. It really reads very well. And if a particular study in there catches your attention, much of—because of the condensation of the study, much of the meat of the individual study is lost. Go find that study and read it. But it begin with mutual respect, honoring people where they are. That is critical. Acknowledging that parents know their children. Again, going back to this listening. Asking parents about their child. Tell me, does your child go to bed early. Does your child like to read? Those are keys that will help make us better educators. Training school staff. I don't know if you all are familiar with Ruby Paine's work. If you are not, please get a hold of some of her material. It looks at the differences and rules of class and race. Fabulous, fascinating, very practical work. Ruby Paine out of Texas. Teachers need to be educated, need to be trained. And recognizing and acknowledging that differences are not always wrong, they're just different. And that's a huge shift in the way that educators tend to view parents who are different from them. Information and training for parents is critical. Contact information. Especially as you move into the middle and high school levels, with multiple teachers for one child. Who do I contact? Where do I go to access this bureaucracy? Especially if I'm angry and my child, I've thought my child is under attack. When it comes to the shared decision making, training for parents to do that job well is very important. We have several PPS chapters that have developed training for shared decision-making councils. What we find is it's not just the parents who need it, but it's everybody who sits on the council. Our access point is through the parents. There are peer support groups. Cincinnati PPS is working through their Gear Up program, doing some fabulous work supporting parents whose children are involved in the Gear Up program, which means they are at risk and they don't know how to access, and they're afraid to go to the school. So they will contact the parent. I get so many cold calls from frustrated parents, not just in my district but in the whole surrounding county. They don't know where to go to get help, and they find Parents for Public Schools in the phone book. Now that's desperate. But they know they need to do something. Time and priority to building relationships, as Karen said. When principals make it a point—and teachers—of going to the grocery store in your neighborhood school, whether you live there or not, going to the churches. Just worship in a place of faith where your students' families are. Making connections at that level is critically important. Build on previous successes. When people come, even if it's five or six, get those five or six to help bring other people in. Shared information, again, as I said, between schools, is very important. And addressing the needs of parents. Addressing the needs of parents is a tough one because with limited funds, it becomes harder to know, do I, how do I provide funds for ESL classes and citizenship classes and literacy classes when I don't have enough money to teach the students that I'm being held

accountable for teaching. Well, that's when you can bring in the community aspect. But when we meet the needs of the parents, we will meet the needs of the students.

AF: This is the last of the six elements. And, by the way, we did link these to *The New Wave of Evidence*, and they are a lot of common sense. But I think that at the end of the day, this board and professional development piece is the most important. If Karen said that parents don't have the tools, frequently teachers and school administrators do not have the tools either. But we've gone through it very randomly in a short period of time, six different elements with a lot of different components. But if schools don't sit down and begin to formalize these processes based upon the xxx which they don't know is out there, based upon frequently the training that they had, and I'm talking to a lot of superintendents. And interestingly enough, training follows people through their career. Superintendents who are now superintendents really are not reading some of the recent literature. What they remember is the research and the literature they read when they were in school. And Edmonds and Lazotte, Madelyn Hunter—if you remember clinical supervision—those of you who are younger, will not remember those. And I apologize for dating, at least myself and my peers. But the fact is, those are the people in control of your school districts. And we somehow have to figure out how, without intimidating districts, how to get the tools in their hands once they have the commitment. I also have a lot of school districts who know how to do this stuff and refuse to do it because they think they're going to lose control of the parents. Higher ed plays a huge role. It's amazing how many communities do not—it's amazing how many schools are in districts with colleges and universities, but you would think that they were miles apart. There's real opportunities for higher ed to begin taking a look at their new curriculum. If we're going to ask schools to reorganize around the parents, we're going to have to ask higher education to reorganize around the teaching and learning of standards-based reform. Harvard and the Family Research Project, along with SEDL, really are working on that, and I'll bet you that all of you are working on these pieces in your community. But without getting this professional development piece straight, it's going to be very difficult getting the other pieces. And lastly, there are a lot of pucksters out there looking to make money off of parents either around parental involvement—there's a group, if you go on the Internet, that has form letters. Three hundred form letters complying with No Child Left Behind. They are the most boring, minimally relational, sterile pieces of communication, if you can call it that, than ever. What has to happen is the district has to go through this process. I recommend—as a matter of fact, Ruby Paine's, one of my favorites, it's called *The Framework of Poverty*. It's awesome! But there is also a professor at NYU, her name is Ellen Shaw. Ellen writes about community development and parent involvement being the swamp work of public education. That means that there is a lot of it above the iceberg. You can see a lot of these pieces around policy, conferences that you attend, recommendations, tips. But at the end of the day, the most difficult piece of that iceberg is below the surface. It is about the mores and the values. It is that swamp work that defies technical analysis. We can't codify it, we can't describe it, but we know what it is. It is that swamp work piece that can't be researched—we have to know which pieces can't be researched, but we know that it's important. And the reason that we know it's important is because the superintendent, the board, and the culture build a culture of parental involvement priority. We're going to stop there because no one has done Q&A, and I know —.

KO: I want to add one thing. On the board, board development, we had in our community several years ago a major crisis in our school board leadership. And our PPS chapter developed characteristics of an effective school board member, because what we've found is that there was nothing concrete against which to measure candidates. That has proven to be significantly effective. Obviously, parent involvement, working by consensus, those are pieces of it. But that, again, was an example of parents setting the agenda for the school board, for the voters on what was needed to have effective professional development for school board members. And it has proven to be very effective. Other chapters have used it and it's on our web site. Also, I just wanted to mention, there are several, three different versions of the newsletter. We have a national newsletter that comes out every so often. They're all on our web site: [parents4publicschools.com](http://parents4publicschools.com). Under publication. The latest one is on school finance. Stories from the PPS chapters, all ranges of topic. These are written to give information about a specific topic, some of which we discussed here, in parent-friendly language. No educator language. There are also tools for parents in the community to use, once they gain that information, so that they have something to act on. So I commend those to you. Some of them, they're all on the web site, so feel free to look at those.

AF: I'd like to recommend, it's very rare to do presentations, and your former school board member and state representative is in the audience, and then to say she gets it. But Chris Almanson, who is in the Virginia state legislature, a very good friend of mine, is here. But also a very good friend of involvement and really understands this issue and how to balance policy with the importance of parental and shared decision making. It is another challenge for us, so it's not just sufficient to keep all this good information at the school level, but to begin to groom policymakers at your level. And we hope it's the right color. I came in on a plane, it was about a 60 mph wind last night. And I will have to say that as we were descending in all that wind, the reds and the blues, we were all

praying together... reds on one side and blues on the other. I mean, we were all praying. But it is very important to have policymakers at that level. And Kris will agree with me, sometimes it's like, sort of like being out on the limb by yourself because these other policymakers, there's a machismo about foreign policy that seems to be lacking in parent involvement. But I think we're making a lot of progress. Let's open it up for —.

CA: You gave me the opportunity, so thank you. I am Chris Almanson, and thank you very much for that very kind, those kind statements. This is as much a comment as it is a question. So I'm just speaking for—oh, this is the dead mike. Okay. Okay, that's fine. What I wanted to comment on is that based on my experience, first as a school board member and now as a state legislator, and started out originally as a teacher, is that I think that the danger in looking at parent involvement is if we see it only as a problem of what do we do to the poorest, we're going to xxx that whole issue. And my experience is that middle-class parents who are the ones who are going to drive the reforms, are just as frustrated, just as excluded, just as puzzled about where they go. And particularly, I think, around the issue of transition to middle school and transition to high school. We just scare the living bejeezus out of them. They don't know what to do, they don't know where to go, but they are the ones who can, if you reach out to them, they are the ones who can then drive the reforms, I think, that will help all of the other parents. And as Arnie said, I mean, in Fairfax, we have no shortage of them. It is not unusual for us to have 80 to 90 parents to testify at a school board hearing on which we are adopting fourth-grade spelling textbooks. I mean, that gives you a sense of where we are. But I think it's a mistake only to think about this as something for poor people.

AF: You could also, you know, looking at it, Chris, you're absolutely right. We, those of us who believe in democracy really need to fill a void because the other piece of this is parental special interest groups. And there are organized, localized, well-informed parent groups around the country that have special agendas that are going to make our jobs even more difficult. So to say that this is just a home issue really does it disservice xxx the larger piece of how to mobilize and organize a parental constituency for public education, but also for school reform. And that hits middle and upper class as it does less affluent, and I think we've got to—I'm going to be on my high horse. But we're more segregated as xxx. Eighty percent of our kids that are at an all-white school, they will not have an opportunity to go to school with other kids or to take advantage of diverse schools. If we want to divide the society and arrive at issues, and then we continue to desegregate—segregate—our schools, we better take a look at this integration issue demographically before we get down the line.

CA: And I think when parents see that the public schools are no longer for, places where middle-class kids can get a good education, then they just, they have the ability to —.

KO: Exactly.  
Will the agenda to involve parents is driven by, merely the need to meet AYP, it really discredits ability to establish a trusting and successful relationship to recognize stakeholders as equal partners. And that's a big dilemma. You know, so parents know, on a grassroots level, are not really wanted, but the school system needs us and that's what's driving their attempt to involve us.

KO: I agree with you. The piece that we have as parents working in our favor is that when you give parents a piece of engagement, a taste of successfully changing or improving, of being involved in meaningful ways, they don't want to give it up. And when you look at the timelines for teachers and principals and superintendents and school board members, the only consistent voice at the table over a period of time is parents. So it is incumbent upon middle school—I mean, middle-class parents who understand how to access power and use power, to look beyond themselves to bring in all parents that work on behalf of all children, because they are the voice that will insist from changing leadership to changing leadership, this is what we want. Now your job as principal is to figure out how to help us continue to improve in this arena. Not come in with all the answers and we sit back and change just because we called you in as the superintendent or as the principal. No. This is what we want. Your job is to help us continue to be engaged. And that's, once you give parents a taste, that's in our favor.

AF: Where you have a situation of what we're talking about is where there is little or no community connective tissue. If you don't, the best way to address democracy is more of it. And the best way to promote autocracy is to have no democracy. So to the extent of, that you have little democracy, is the extent to which AYP, No Child Left Behind, xxx. Then parents become part of it—because there is no voice, there is no opposition voice, there is no debate on the table, there is no public space to have this discussion. Part of what we're talking about is, it's not the outcome that's most important, it's bringing people of different colors, races, and ideas together, and to say that this is your school. We're going to have a void. Where you have the democracy, the social capital and political capital voids is where school districts are thinking of parents as the extension of democracy, as an extension of the

instructional program. And to the extent then that we don't need AYP is the extent to which parents often now are being blamed. So we have got to be the voice. That's another critical research, that parents need to come together and mobilize, not as—and I'm PTA. PTAs have to really understand that their best defense against that is coming together for parent involvement. So that has raised a very important issue.

KO: Many of you all in your surveys asked, you wanted specific strategies. And I have really struggled about how, in this short amount of time, we could share specific strategies. There will be a, like a chat room or, I don't know, LISTSERV, whatever, based on all these conversations that SEDL and, I think, Harvard are going to set up. And so we can share some of those with each other. That would be great. I have lists of things that I would love to talk about. But one of the things that you have to remember is that the process in this kind of relationship building, connecting people to people, is equally or more important than the outcome. You cannot skip the process because even, I could tell you what you could do, but you in your community of parents need to come up with that yourselves. It may be exactly what we would share with you. But it's the process of talking together and wrestling with these questions that strengthens the relationships, that honors each other's perspective, and that ultimately brings value and sustainability to any ideas that you have. So we can do that, but —.

Please, just let me say something before I explode, because I cannot leave this school without letting you know, as a parent, as a Latino immigrant working in this country, that is raising kids here by herself, I have to struggle to be part of the top of the ladder here. And many of the barriers that I see going to school is that we are a threat to you, the people in the administration. I'm just saying in a figurative way. We are a threat because we know what we need, we know what we want. This is not a restaurant that you go to, and someone says what are you going to eat. We know what we need. You don't hear it. We've been saying it. But when you find somebody like myself that is getting the information, that is getting the education, then you need to listen. And we are making so much noise to engage, it's not engagement, it's empowerment.

KO: Exactly. Absolutely. And it feels good, doesn't it?