

Harvard Family Research Project



The National Network of Partnership Schools

A Model for Family-School-Community Partnerships

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The National Network of Partnership Schools: A Model for Family-School-Community Partnerships

...increasing the desire and capacity of schools to engage communities may be one of the most promising strategies for long-lasting reform.

– Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 1998, p. 49

The importance of family and community involvement in children's education is increasingly evident in a growing research base, educational policies, and reform movements. This emphasis highlights the need for schools that can successfully involve all families and community members in the educational process. But how can the capacity of schools be strengthened to implement meaningful, effective, and sustainable family-school-community partnerships? The National Network of Partnership Schools is a prominent example of a national organization dedicated to this task.

What Is the National Network of Partnership Schools?

Dr. Joyce L. Epstein founded the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University in the 1996-97 academic school year. The Network's mission is to help schools, districts, and states develop comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs as part of their school improvement efforts. The Network grew out of basic research on school, family, and community partnerships conducted since 1981 by Epstein and her colleagues (Sanders & Epstein, 2000).

Epstein describes the Network's main vision as building schools' capacity by changing how schools and classrooms are organized and how they conceptualize their relationships with families and communities. As Epstein explains, "We want this to be as normal a part of classroom and school organization as curriculum, instruction, assessments, and other standard components of school improvement. It's not something that's extra or off to the side."

To this end, Epstein has created a national network that provides its members (now more than 1,100 schools, more than 130 school districts, and 14 states) with research-based tools and strategies for implementing partnership activities. Specifically, the Network provides newsletters, a web site, a handbook, and individual technical assistance. These tools allow the Network to share with its members promising practices, a conceptual framework of activities, and other information for guiding program implementation and evaluation. The Network also provides an annual workshop for training new members, holds a special-topic meeting for districts and states, provides training to districts upon request, and supplies practical tools (such as agendas, charts, diagrams, and forthcoming videos) to help schools, districts, and states conduct partnership work.

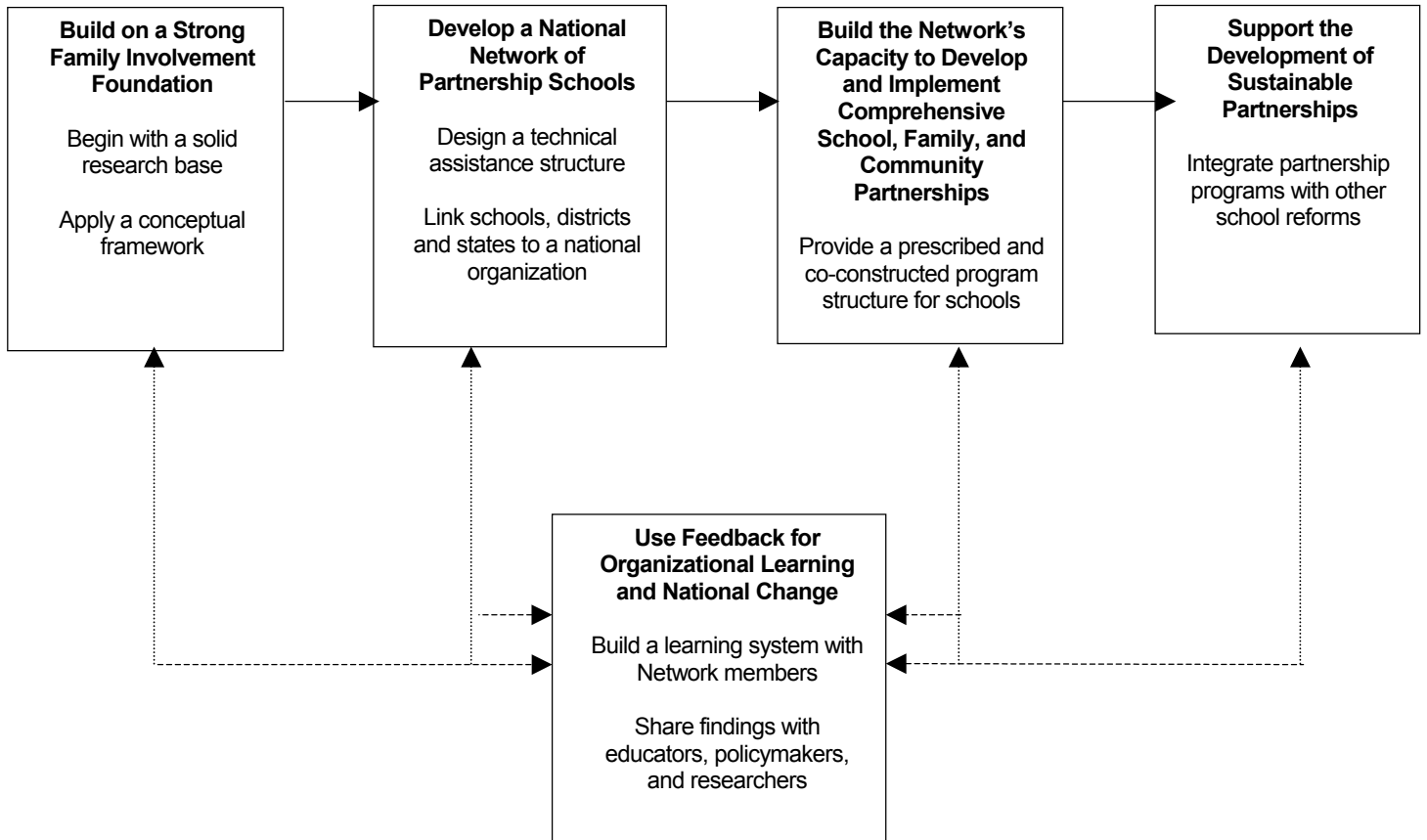
To create a knowledge base that reflects lessons learned from implementation, the Network collects information through various means. These include an annual survey of members' partnership programs, a survey of effects of partnerships on specific student outcomes, and discussions and feedback gathered through training workshops.

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How Does the Network Build the Capacity of Schools for Partnership Programs?

A theory of organizational development is implicit in the Network's strategy with schools. First, several provisions must be in place to build schools' capacity to implement successful partnership programs. Specifically, successful partnerships must begin with building a strong foundation for family involvement, which includes a solid research base, a clear conceptual framework, and good technical assistance structure. With this foundation in place, the Network is able to develop links among schools, districts, and states that are committed to partnerships and connect them to the national organization. To build schools' capacity to implement partnership programs, the national organization must then provide both prescribed research-based program structures and more tailored practices that meet each school's goals. The Network helps to support the sustainability of these partnership programs, in part, by integrating them with other school reform efforts. Finally, the Network maintains a learning system with its members so that feedback can be used both to expand and improve the national organization and inform the broader policy context. Each of these organizational steps is held together by a clear vision and strategic leadership (See Figure 1).

Figure 1
National Network of Partnership Schools
 Theory of Organizational Development



I. Build on a Strong Family Involvement Foundation

There are two major challenges to making family partnerships a reality in schools. One challenge is convincing schools that partnerships can have a positive impact on student achievement and other school goals. For example, at a recent Network meeting, district and state members requested more concrete evidence of partnerships' impact on achievement because such information will compel more school administrators to support partnership work. A second challenge is helping schools view various partnership activities as integral to education, rather than as add-ons or separate endeavors from other school improvement efforts.

Epstein has provided the foundation necessary to address these challenges. First, she has created a solid research base; a conceptual framework that specifies a typology of home and school involvement activities; and a theory of overlapping spheres of influence of schools, families, and communities. Second, she has applied research findings to the development of a technical assistance structure that supports schools' efforts. These two features have helped the Network successfully build the capacity of schools for partnership programs.

Begin with a Solid Research Base

Since 1981, Epstein and her colleagues have been initiating their own research, as well as reviewing the research of others, to form a solid research base for the Network. Epstein has used these research findings in several important and strategic ways. First, she has argued convincingly for family-school-community partnerships by pointing to decades of “first generation” research on the benefits of family involvement to students and others (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Second, Epstein has demonstrated the need to build schools’ capacity for family-school-community partnerships by highlighting studies that reveal school-level barriers to partnership and how they can be overcome. These barriers include the lack of staff training (e.g., U.S. Department of Education, 1997), different ways that families and schools conceptualize family involvement (e.g., National PTA, 1997), and negative attitudes or lack of confidence among school personnel (Epstein, 1991; New Futures Institute, 1989; Fine & Vanderslice, 1990). At the same time, other studies have shown that schools can overcome these barriers and foster relationships with families (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Sanders & Epstein, 2000). Finally, since 1995, Epstein, Assistant Director Mavis Sanders, and their colleagues have conducted research on specific patterns of partnership, program implications, and the success of organizational supports. This work has provided additional information on how to build schools’ capacity for partnership work with all families.

Specifically, the Network’s mission of building schools’ capacity is fueled by research on the patterns of family involvement and supportive school practices. Epstein synthesizes her own and others’ research on family involvement to draw the following conclusions about partnership patterns and program implications (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997):

- Partnerships tend to decline across the grades, unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level.
- Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, unless schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students’ families.
- Schools with more economically depressed communities make more contacts with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, unless they work at developing balanced partnership programs that include contacts about positive accomplishments of students.
- Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers are less involved, on average, at the school building, unless the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children (Epstein, 1995, p. 703).

Epstein also concludes from research that families, schools, and students are all motivated to work together for children’s success:

- Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children’s education.
- Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a “rhetoric rut” in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action.

- Just about all students at all levels – elementary, middle, and high school – want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school (Epstein, 1995, p. 703).

Apply an Organizing Conceptual Framework

But how can the capacity of schools be built? In addition to using research to form a compelling argument for family-school-community partnerships, Epstein also used the research to create an organizing framework, theory, and program structure to guide the schools' work.

Both families and schools have basic responsibilities to fulfill in raising and educating children. Epstein developed a highly usable framework of school, family, and community partnerships that outlines six areas of shared responsibility, as shown in Figure 2 (adapted from Epstein, 1995). The framework is based on years of research and has been adapted from lessons learned during pilot program work to include a sixth type of involvement with the community. Each type of involvement presents different implementation challenges and results for students.

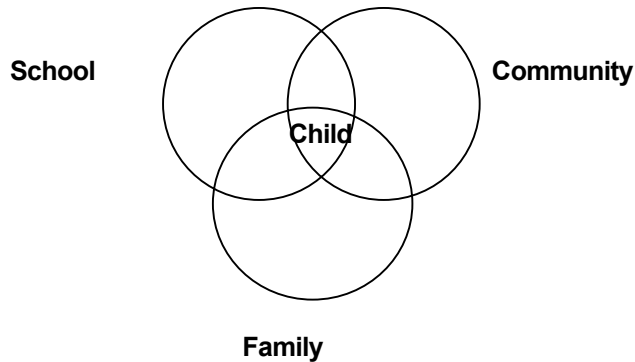
Table 1
Conceptual Framework of
Family-School-Community Involvement

Type of Involvement	Definition
Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing, health, nutrition, clothing, safety • Parenting skills for all age levels • Home conditions to support children as students • Information to help schools know child and family
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-to-home communication • Home-to-school communication
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In schools and classrooms, for schools and classrooms, or as audiences
Learning at Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with homework and subject skills, curriculum related decisions, other skills and talents
Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership in PTA, advisory council, other committees and independent school advisory groups
Collaborating with the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community contributions to school and families, and school and family contributions to the community

To accompany this research-based framework of involvement types, Epstein maintains a theory about how social organizations connect. Specifically, she points to three spheres of influence important to children's learning: families, schools, and communities (See Figure 3). These spheres and their relation to one another can be viewed in several ways -- as separate, shared, or sequentially related. A shared approach, in which the spheres overlap with one another through frequent interactions, increases the likelihood that students and those who influence their learning will receive common messages about school, working together, and helping one another.

Figure 2

Overlapping Spheres of Influence



By espousing this theory of overlapping spheres, Epstein provides schools with a vision of what they can strive to be: “family-like schools.” These schools recognize each child’s individuality and treat each child as special. They welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. Likewise, her theory supports “school-like families,” which recognize children as students and reinforce the importance of school, homework, and other activities that build on students’ feelings of success. Epstein (1995) argues that when families, schools, and communities adopt one another’s practices to benefit children, learning and caring communities are created.

In sum, Epstein conducted and reviewed research and presents it in an accessible and convincing way that conveys to schools the benefits of partnerships, the range of involvement activities these partnerships represent, and the complementary roles of family, school, and community in children’s learning.

II. Develop a National Network of Partnership Schools

By building a solid research base, Epstein created a stronger foundation on which to develop a national network of partnership schools. Still, another challenge that many schools face is their isolation from other schools and other sources of support, such as their local communities, school districts, and state departments of education. To address this challenge, Epstein strengthened the Network by designing a technical assistance structure that connects schools to other groups that will support their partnership work.

Design a Technical Assistance Structure

The Network counters schools’ isolation through several components of its technical assistance structure. These components are facilitating links between and among stakeholders; providing prescribed and tailored support to Network members; encouraging the integration of partnership programs with other school reforms; creating reciprocal information exchange between the Network and its members; and disseminating information to policymakers and practitioners. The following sections describe how each of these organizational steps is informed by research, and how the Network has succeeded in developing, implementing, sustaining, and improving partnership programs in schools.

Link to a National Organization, Other Schools, Districts, and States

As part of its effort to build the capacity of schools, the Network facilitates linkages among schools and between schools and other key institutional players that can support schools. The web of support for schools includes education departments at the district and state

level, as well as universities and organizations, communities, and national school reform movements.

In 1981, Epstein began conducting research on elementary schools. Several years later, this research expanded to include middle and high schools, school districts, and states. The intention was to better understand all of the critical players in education before developing the Network. Research supported the importance of including school districts and states as Network members. For example, research shows that support from school district leaders is one factor contributing to high program quality for schools (Sanders & Simon, 1999). School districts with strong leadership provide more help to schools after their start up year (Epstein, Clark, & Van Voorhis, 1999). States, in turn, have an impact on district programs. Specifically, school districts in states that are Network members report that they receive more state-level support, including technical assistance and funding. Interestingly, state support, but not state policy, has an impact on school districts' reports of program quality.

However, work with districts and states also can be challenging. Unlike schools, districts and states are diverse, especially in size. Larger districts operate like state departments of education while smaller districts often have few or no personnel to devote to partnership work. Like schools, districts and states also experience unstable staffing and positions. For example, superintendents often have short tenures, and it is not uncommon to hear about rapid changes in state personnel and positions. In addition, Network data show high rates of turnover for its members' "contact persons" at all levels (e.g., about 34% change in school leaders, 22% change in district leaders, and 38% change in state leaders over two years).

The Network responds to these challenges and generally helps to build the capacity of districts and states for partnership work through training and other resources. Annually, a special topics meeting for districts and states provides opportunities to gather and distribute information, develop relationships among members, and share ideas. The Network's research on the special topics meeting and other district and state support suggests that such adaptations to this additional member constituency are effective.

Specifically, most districts and states utilize materials and information provided by the Network. Most districts also conduct leadership activities and help schools by implementing plans and activities, addressing challenges they face, and conducting evaluations (Epstein, Clark, & Van Voorhis, 1999). (See "Examples of Successful District and State Work" for additional examples of state and district supports.)

The Network also helps to link schools to other key stakeholders in children's education. For example, several university programs and community-based organizations are members of the Network and participate in joint training sessions with schools or other Network members. The Network also facilitates links to other national school reform efforts (See section "Integrate Partnership Programs with Other School Reforms" for details).

Examples of Successful District and State Work

Epstein describes the Network's role as a facilitator of school, district, and state linkages: "The actual work has to be done at the site, but we can help to change what that effort looks like. And we have helped change the way districts help their schools, and states help their districts."

Barbara Jarzyniecki, Executive Director of Public Engagement and Communications Services in the district of Rochester, New York has organized a team of parents who are actively and positively affecting families in their local schools. The parent group submitted a proposal and budget to the district's board of education to develop parent action centers. To start the process, the parent group members also attended all 60 open houses in the district to inform other parents of their plan. With district approval and support, the first of four parent action centers has already opened. Staffed by trained parents, the center offers information and guidance to parents on all issues related to their children's education. For example, the center offers links to community resources and parent liaisons in the schools, houses a library of materials on education and family involvement, and conducts computer classes for parents. These four centers will benefit from a parent library and connections to local agencies (As described in <http://www.rochester.k12.us/pac/index.htm>, March 29, 2000).

Dr. Suzanne Darmer, Coordinator of Federal and State Programs for the district of Columbus, Ohio, has created a traveling literacy academy for young children and families. Dr. Darmer cites earlier advice from Joyce Epstein in explaining the origin of this early intervention strategy designed to promote good literacy practices. Epstein argued that learning at home is a critical ingredient to student achievement. To incorporate this concept, the program uses a van, equipped with books, tools, and a reading specialist, that travels to community and school sites to teach and model good literacy practices and provide tools and materials to families.

The work of other school districts and state departments of education are also noteworthy. For example, in Baltimore, Maryland, the training and support of a full-time district-level facilitator and other district-level supports allowed partnership programs to move from eight pilot schools to nearly citywide participation (Sanders & Epstein, 1999). Examples of state work supporting the work of districts and schools include web sites, grant funding, public service announcements, annual conferences, integrated training efforts, networking support, and mission statements.

For more information and examples see the National Network's web site, <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000> and follow links to Publications-Type 2 newsletters and In the Spotlight-Promising Partnership Practices.

Finally, the Network's conceptual framework calls for school collaborations with the community. The Network has conducted research that provides guidance on how to strengthen these connections and recently has shared findings with its members (National Network of Partnership Schools, 1999b; Sanders, 1999). This research shows that almost half of all community partners are businesses, which suggests that other community partners may be underutilized. Most partnerships are also student-centered, rather than

family-, school- or community-centered. The research also documents member schools that are collaborating with communities in more extensive or unique ways. Some member schools are partnering with non-business community organizations and others are engaged in collaborations that support a variety of involvement activities and school improvement goals.

III. Build the Network's Capacity to Develop and Implement Comprehensive School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Many nationally replicated programs must address the "fidelity to the model" issue. This refers to the extent to which a program model is flexible or rigid in its implementation in different communities. For the Network and others, the challenge is how to maintain universal program components across sites that have been proven effective through research while also accommodating to the unique needs, goals, and characteristics of individual schools and communities.

Provide Prescribed and Custom-Tailored Program Structures for Schools

The Network meets this challenge by allowing for both structure and flexibility. Standard components of each school partnership include a research-based framework and strategies for program implementation, such as the Action Team approach (see "Prescribing a Team Structure" for details). This constitutes the "prescribed" program structures. However, this prescribed structure is combined with a degree of flexibility at each school site. Schools have the opportunity to define their own goals and activities and receive technical assistance to tailor their partnership programs to the local context. In this way program implementation is also "co-constructed" between the Network and each member.

As Epstein and her colleagues summarize, "Despite differences in geography, policy contexts, and populations served, data from states and districts in the Network indicate that a common theory, research-based framework, and field-tested approaches can be customized and applied to help develop and implement increasingly comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships" (Epstein, Clark, & Van Voorhis, 1999, p. 4). This combination of prescribed and co-constructed approaches is key to building schools' capacity for partnerships.

The prescribed portion consists of research-based components, including the conceptual framework introduced earlier. This typology of involvement provides a common language and expectations for the work of all members, who can then communicate that work and progress easily to each other and the public (Epstein, Clark, & Van Voorhis, 1999). The 1998 data from an end-of-the year survey called *UPDATE* suggest that the framework is well-utilized by programs; 60% report using it. The 1999 *UPDATE* data show that about 80% of school district leaders report helping their schools use the six types of involvement (other districts leave the schools to do so on their own). Over 70% of schools report using all six types of involvement, but all schools are working toward their goal using the framework of six types.

Other prescribed aspects of the partnership programs, or requirements for membership, include the creation of an Action Team, a budget for work and planned activities, a time allotment of one day for an initial training workshop and at least one hour per month for Action Team work; and communication with the Network through the survey *UPDATE*.

The co-constructed portion allows schools to select involvement activities that meet their own goals and needs. It also allows schools to gather and adapt ideas from other schools.

The Network tailors its support to each member by providing individual technical assistance and tools to help schools individualize their planning. These tools include forms for a One-Year Action Plan, an agenda, and schedules (e.g., small group discussion guides, forms to schedule monthly activities to ease students' transitions to new schools, forms to link goals and practices with expected results). Using these tools, schools identify goals and appropriate partnership activities that will help them work toward those goals. The promising practices shared in trainings, on the website, and in the newsletter, offer a wealth of examples of tailored activities that meet individual school interests, needs, and goals while addressing the different types of involvement laid out in the prescribed framework (see Appendix B for examples).

Recent observations by Network staff indicate that some schools, especially those with high staff turnover, may need more guidance and structure than other schools. In response to this, the Network will work to make more step-by-step tools available. A recent Partnership Planner is a good example of this, providing an easy-to-follow checklist for programs. The next version of the handbook will be more directive to meet this emerging need.

Prescribing a Team Structure

Schools implement partnership programs through Action Teams. This is one of the central and prescribed components of partnership programs. Action teams *should* include at least two to three teachers from different grades, two to three parents with children in different grades, and one administrator. The Network recommends that a community member, two students in the upper grades, and other school personnel also are included. If a school council or other improvement team exists in the school, at least one member must also serve on that team (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

Over 90% of schools in the Network in the 1998-1999 year report having Action Teams for partnerships, and the others are working to form their Action Teams (Sanders 2000).

This structure has been very effective in the areas of program implementation, quality, and continuity. Specifically, supportiveness of the Action Team toward the program is one of two variables (along with the adequacy of funding) that predicts schools' successful implementation of partnership programs. Successful implementation is defined as writing an action plan, implementing all six types of partnership activities, meeting regularly, and evaluating program effectiveness (Sanders, 1998). Action Team support also predicts the self-reported quality of partnership programs (Sanders, 1998; Sanders, 1999).

Action Teams also serve the important function of maintaining leadership continuity in schools. The Network has continually faced and come to accept the challenge of high staff turnover in schools and districts. As Joyce Epstein explains, "change is inevitable," but the Network has also responded to these transitions through program adaptations. The Action Team approach, which replaced a lone "project director" in pilots of the Network model, offers increased sustainability for programs.

IV. Support the Development of Sustainable Partnerships

Another challenge facing national organizations is how to sustain local programs. The Network has developed strategies to address this issue, such as the team structure mentioned above that contributes to stable program leadership, as well as a deliberately broad conceptual framework that can persist and even grow despite different fads in education reform. Another strategy for sustainability involves connecting partnership programs to other reform efforts.

Integrate Partnership Programs with Other School Reforms

By design, the Network approach encourages integration with other school improvement programs. By intentionally aligning itself with reform movements, the Network has been able to sustain school sites as well as expand to new ones.

The potential for integration offers promise for initial implementation and sustainability of programs. This is especially true in schools that are overburdened with pre-existing priorities. For example, district members at a recent meeting reported that school administrators commonly protest that partnership work is “just one more thing” to add to schools’ already-full agendas. Such resistance can be quelled by showing schools how partnership work can integrate with other school reforms by offering a better process for achieving schools’ existing improvement goals.

Network data indicate that at least 100 school members also are part of some other national improvement effort such as Success for All, Comer Schools, Talent Development Middle and High Schools, and Essential Schools. Future analyses are planned to examine this subsample and determine how the Network impacts the success of partnership activities in whole-school-change programs.

A recent example affirms the Network’s status as a whole-school change movement and its value for program sustainability. In 1998, the Network was identified by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students of the U.S. Department of Education as one of several research-based comprehensive school reform models (National Network of Partnership Schools, 1998, p. 1). This means that schools can apply, through their states, for school improvement grants using the Network’s Action Team approach. Already, one elementary school has been awarded funds to develop a Partnership School-CSR (Comprehensive School Reform) model. The Network will study how its structure works for broader school reform at this school.

The Action Team structure facilitates schools’ capacity to make holistic and integrated improvement efforts by bringing together educators, parents, and other representatives from existing school programs, such as Title I, local business partnerships, after-school programs, PTAs, and school improvement teams.

Linking a Community-based Literacy Program and a School Partnership Program

The Network's action team structure appealed to the organizers of Literacy Inc. (LINC) in New York City. LINC is a three-year old community-based literacy program with a goal of helping children become good readers by the third grade. More specifically, the program's goal is to change parents' perceptions and expectations of everyone in the community about the community's children as readers, as a first step toward a broader and more ambitious goal of changing actual literacy achievement.

From its beginning, LINC has been using a partnership approach. The first job of LINC coordinators has been to build community literacy networks comprised of representatives from schools, families, and the community. The resulting teams plan literacy activities and events.

LINC is in its first year of membership in the National Network of Partnership Schools, as part of a three-year process of connecting to schools using the Network's partnership approach. The Network's Action Team approach is an ideal structure to work with LINC, not only because LINC has community-based literacy teams in place, but also because New York schools currently have funded Leadership Teams of 14 to 15 people, 50 percent of whom must be parents, according to state law. LINC staff hope that literacy teams in the community can serve as Action Teams for Partnerships, which are committees of the school leadership team. At a fall 1999 state and district leadership meeting sponsored by the Network, LINC staff sought the advice of Network staff and other Network members about implementing this integration, such as addressing school resistance to community representatives on its leadership team and resistance to new programs in a well-established and mature school system.

In Spring 2000, LINC and the National Network of Partnership Schools began working with two school districts in the Bronx and Brooklyn to build comprehensive programs of partnership focused on improving student literacy.

V. Use Feedback for Organizational Learning and National Change

Organizations often struggle to gather and use research and evaluation findings in ways that inform program implementation, organizational improvements, and policymaking. The Network offers several research and program practices that build a reciprocal learning system between schools, the national organization, and policymakers.

Build a Learning System with Network Members

The Network is dedicated to creating a knowledge base about family-school-community partnerships. Meetings, materials, and surveys provide some of the mechanisms by which the Network gathers and shares this information and maintains ongoing communication, learning, and improvement. For example, Network research resulted in the initial identification of key components for program success: 1) creating an Action Team made up of key players in children's learning; 2) obtaining funds and other support for the Action Team; 3) identifying existing partnership work and future goals; 4) setting a one-year and three-year plan for action; and 5) continuing to plan and work toward partnership goals (Sanders, 1999).

A research philosophy and a focus on specific types of learning – namely, national and local program effectiveness – accompany this commitment to survey research, training workshops, and other mechanisms for learning.

As Epstein explains, knowledge grows from implementation. Viewing the Network as an organization that combines research and knowledge development with program implementation, Epstein recognizes that collaboration is essential. Hence, in all its practices, the Network strives toward mutual information exchange and reciprocal relationships with its members.

Knowledge and research are organic parts of Network decisions and activities. For example, the Network conducts annual surveys of partnership schools that focus on results for student success (e.g., improving reading, math, attendance, and behavior). Epstein also explains that the goal of knowledge generation drives her decision to keep both membership and training offered by the Network at Johns Hopkins University free of charge. The Network has stuck by this decision, requiring schools to invest in the topic of partnerships, their own programs, and the sharing of information with the Network rather than in membership or workshop fees. In exchange, the Network raises funds, conducts research, and shares results. Because it charges no fees and provides so many services to members, the Network is able to require members to participate in evaluation activities to renew their membership.

Because the majority of members participate in the annual *UPDATE* surveys on their progress and challenges, the Network has generated ample evidence that its services are supporting program implementation and quality, as earlier examples illustrate. These findings on quality also make the Network's services more appealing from a social marketing point of view – buying in to the Network means buying in to quality.

Evaluation results also illuminate common challenges faced by programs, including time limitations and inadequate funding. The Network then uses this information to adapt its technical assistance structure. For example, Epstein explains that time is a constant challenge for all involved – school personnel, district personnel, and even families. In Network training discussions and survey findings, time emerged as a key challenge to the development of partnership programs. The Network recently responded to this challenge by requiring that schools that want to be members allocate time in the school schedule for partnership work to occur. Existing members are also encouraged to allocate at least one hour per month for full Action Team meetings and other time for committee work on scheduled activities (National Network of Partnership Schools, 1999a).

In conducting its training workshops, the Network also discovered how little time schools have to devote to training and professional development. In many places, teacher training must occur on non-school days. This means that teachers need to be paid for their time. If teachers receive compensation for their training time, parents receiving training should also be paid. The Network has responded to this challenge by incorporating all of its training into a content-full, purposeful, one-day workshop for schools. District and state workshops follow a similar format, condensing a substantial amount of information and activities into an intensive one-day experience that results in the drafting of a One-Year Action plan.

In addition to learning and improvement regarding time, the Network has also researched funding. Adequate local funding is positively associated with successful implementation of family-school-community partnership programs and with the quality of schools' partnership programs (Epstein, Sanders, Clark, & Van Voorhis, 1999; Sanders, 1999).

In line with these research findings, the Network requires members to include a budget line for their planned partnership activities. The Network has also assessed and shared local funding information with members. Common sources include federal funds, such as Bilingual Education, Drug Prevention, Even Start, Goals 2000, Special Education and Title I, VI, and VII, as well as state, district and private sources. One-third of schools have written grant proposals to fund their family-school partnership programs; nearly three-fourths of these proposals have been funded (Sanders, 1998). Average per-pupil expenditures at the school, district, and state level also have been calculated by the Network, which may help members judge their funding requirements.

The Network also alerts members to funding sources and opportunities through its newsletter, web site, and special notices (Sanders, 1998). This funding information may be particularly valuable for school programs' longevity, which has been shown to predict the quality of schools' partnership programs (Sanders, 1998). This is also true for the longevity of district programs (Epstein, Sanders, Clark, & Van Voorhis, 1999).

The Network is constantly using research to adapt its support, including an upcoming handbook revision and new partnership planner. Improvements and additions to the Network's web site, training workshops, recruitment tools, planning tools, and training tools also are in process. The development of an informational video and special training videos are now underway.

In addition to measuring the success of the Network in supporting quality programs and adapting its practices accordingly, evaluations are also underway to understand the broader impact of partnership programs, especially on student achievement. Individual studies reveal promising results. For example, two studies of Teachers Involve Parents (TIPS) programs, a component of the Network curriculum, showed positive outcomes for students in the middle grades. Positive effects range from increased awareness of and preference for subject matter, to the quality of students' writing assignments and end-of-year report card grades (Epstein & Dauber, 1995; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997).

A study of Baltimore schools also showed that partnership programs have positive effects on students. Controlling for prior attendance and student mobility, high quality partnership programs were associated with significant improvements in attendance among middle and high school students. High quality programs also significantly improved third graders' achievement in math and especially reading and writing, as measured by state performance assessments (Epstein, Clark, Salinas, & Sanders, 1997). Another study examined the effects of school, home, and community effects on the academic achievement of African American adolescents and found that home, school, and church support, and the combination of these supports, positively affected students' attitudes and behaviors, which in turn, positively influenced their academic achievement (Sanders, 1998).

A more comprehensive data collection effort is well underway. So far data have been collected on attendance, math achievement, and behavior. Data collection on reading achievement is in progress in the 1999-2000 year. Each year, the Network collects this data on a different topic through a voluntary survey of partnership schools. A recently hired post-doctoral fellow has begun to analyze this data. Research reports and practical products are planned.

The Network is also committed to helping schools, districts, and states become learning organizations themselves. In addition to providing general information about school programs of partnership, the Network has recently offered to synthesize district and state-specific evaluation data for members whose districts or states have a sizable number of partnership programs. The Network also provides members with a plethora of evaluation tools and advice, including scoring rubrics, end-of-year evaluation forms, inventories of

good practice, and guiding evaluation principles. In a recent evaluation discussion at a Network-sponsored training, one member shared an evaluation success story that illustrates the Network's influence and the growing capacity of schools to connect with hard-to-reach parents. An area of an urban district developed a "Customer Satisfaction Survey," but worried that the survey might not yield a high-return rate for certain parent groups, such as low-income and ESL parents. To remedy this, they added a focus group component, which helped to capture the reflections of this otherwise underrepresented group of parents.

Share Findings with Policymakers and National Organizations

Epstein has used research findings strategically in another way as well -- to influence policy and the profession. This effort has contributed to a receptive political atmosphere for partnership work, making funding available to research organizations and schools and providing impetus for federally funded schools to join the Network.

First, Epstein and the Network help shape policies at the district, state, and federal level. As Epstein explains "The challenge for me really has been: what can leaders at each of these policy levels really do, and how can the Network help them facilitate partnerships effectively?"

Perhaps most notable is Epstein's influence on key federal legislation, specifically Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. She has helped to strengthen family involvement language with each reauthorization. As Epstein explains, "the Title I revisions have been very helpful in linking partnerships to student learning and success."

The Network has also conducted research to better understand the linkages between Title I and Network efforts, through discussions with Title I leaders in Baltimore. These discussions uncovered differences and similarities between the Network and Title I; problems with Title I such as loose monitoring, fuzzy definitions, and confusion over school-parent compacts; and a continuum of 'connectedness' between Title I and Network partnerships determined by such factors as program history, leadership organization, service delivery processes, and current program connections. One outcome of this research is a Network plan to "create explicit tools so that states, districts, and schools will understand, develop, explain, and interchange policies and plans for Title I and the National Network of Partnership Schools..." (Epstein, 1998, p. 4).

Recently, Epstein also participated in an independent review panel that wrote a report to Congress about Title I, which called for even more emphasis on family-school-community partnerships. This report was based on her research and the work of Title I schools in the Network.

In addition to federal legislation, Epstein has found support in national professional organizations, such as the National PTA, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers, which use her involvement framework and research findings as a basis for documents, training, and drawing national attention to the topic of partnerships.

Connecting Research, Practice, and Federal Policy

Efforts by Epstein and the Network to strengthen Title I legislation through research have yielded at least two benefits for programs. First, Title I policy has motivated many Title I schools to join the Network. Epstein explains, "The impetus for joining the Network, in many cases now, is coming from the Title I office."

Second, as one of the first recipients of OERI funds for school-family-community partnership research, and as a current recipient of these funds, Epstein knows firsthand how instrumental federal support is to continuous, incremental research and to program implementation and sustainability. The provision of funds for partnership work in low-income schools has been the other major benefit of Title I legislation. "Most of the new members receive Title I funds, including all states, over 90% of districts, and nearly 70% of the schools in the Network" (Epstein, 1998).

Conclusion

The intentional, incremental, and strategic leadership choices of Joyce Epstein provide the National Network of Partnership Schools with its momentum and continuous self-improvement. Her leadership is evident by the strategic choices that have been made at each of the Network's organizational steps. These choices have created a national organization that effectively builds the capacity of schools for family, school, community partnerships.

In summary, Epstein's pioneering research has created a theory-driven, research-based foundation for family involvement. Next, initial and ongoing research has informed the development of a national network of educators dedicated to partnerships. The National Network has involved members from school, district and state levels, and has fostered partnerships between them. Balancing universal membership requirements with tailored services and activities has helped the Network develop and implement high quality school programs of partnership. Program sustainability has been facilitated through integrating partnership efforts into whole school change and through the Network's active participation in policy reforms. Finally, through ongoing research and implementation, the Network continues to make organizational improvements that will further build schools' capacity for partnerships. The Network's new emphases on using technology and on compiling student achievement results speak to its strategic and expanding role in supporting the partnership work of schools.

Research Method

This case study draws from various data collected in 1999. Two formal interviews with Joyce Epstein form the basis of the case. Also central was an observation and informal conversations occurring at a two-day state and district leadership meeting in Baltimore in the Fall of 1999. An extensive review of published research articles by Joyce Epstein, Mavis Sanders, and their Network colleagues provide additional information, as does a thorough review of Network materials, such as the *Type 2* newsletter, Network web site, member handbook, training handouts, and member-produced materials.

Multiple drafts of the case study were shared with Joyce Epstein to assure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information presented. Network members whose names are mentioned in the body of the text were also contacted for permission to cite their programs by name and for verification of the accuracy of the examples.

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Appendix A: Case Study Summary of the National Network of Partnership Schools

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Brief History

The National Network of Partnership Schools was first implemented in the 1996-97 academic school year to help schools, districts, and states develop comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs as part of their school improvement efforts. The organization grew out of more than 15 years of research on partnerships conducted by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University.

The national organization provides over 1,000 schools with tools and strategies for developing partnerships that promote students' success. These tools and strategies are provided through the Network's newsletters, web site, handbook, and a technical assistance structure. In this way the Network is able to disseminate promising practices, a conceptual framework of activities, and other information to guide program implementation and evaluation.

Number of Sites

Schools:	1,151
Districts:	136
States:	12
University/Organization Partners:	19

Sources of Funding

The Network receives funds from the Disney Learning Partnership and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (both to the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships); and from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education (to the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk).

Operating Budget

Approximately \$800,000 (not including research budget)

Organization

The organization consists of 11 staff members. Director Joyce L. Epstein and Assistant Director Mavis G. Sanders oversee all aspects of the organization. Other key staff members have responsibilities in specific areas of Network activity, such as coordination, communication, dissemination, research, middle and high school efforts, and state and district efforts.

Description of Training

Each spring, a leadership training workshop is held at Johns Hopkins University for new Network members. In 1998, more than 150 individuals from member schools, districts, and states attended. The workshop addresses topics such as how to develop a successful Action Team, identifying and developing strategies to address common challenges (e.g., lack of time, developing clear goals, or building trust), and so forth. In fall 1998, an annual special-topic meeting for districts and states began on issues of leadership and evaluation. In Spring 2000, the Network also conducted a workshop to help school, district, and state leaders develop interactive homework programs. About 80 Network members attended.

In addition to direct training, the Network's handbook offers agendas, charts, and diagrams that schools, districts, and states can use to offer their own short-term and extended training workshops.

Technical Assistance Services

Type 2 is a semi-annual newsletter published by the Network. The newsletter includes examples of school, district, and state developments; new Network developments and tools; funding information; a question and answer section; a research brief; a new members list; a calendar of events; and other information.

The web site (<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000>) offers electronic information and support. It includes an interactive bulletin board, hotlinks, a search engine, a list of promising practices, a publications list, membership information and services, and answers to frequently asked questions. The web site is frequently updated.

Each new Network member receives one complimentary copy of *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. The handbook includes Epstein's typology and tools for making an inventory of practices, outlining a vision, creating a one-year action plan, and evaluating end-of-year progress. The Network also creates supplements to the handbook, such as new evaluation tools and Spanish translations. Network staff members provide individual technical assistance to members via telephone, e-mail, and the web site.

Evaluation

The Network conducts an annual survey, entitled *UPDATE*, to assess its own progress and that of its members. Each member must complete this survey to renew membership. *Focus on Results* is another yearly cross-site survey that examines a specific outcome of partnership work, such as math achievement or student behavior. This survey relies on volunteer participation by schools, districts, and states.

The Network also provides access to evaluation tools for schools and districts. These include inventories to assess current practice, evaluation tools to reflect on progress and identify next steps in action plans, and an evaluation tool to assess district-level facilitators.

Appendix B: Examples of Promising Practices

From “In the Spotlight” on the Network’s web site: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000>.

Organizing an Action Team

Bonnie Trey, School/Family/Community/Partnership Chairperson
Harbor View School
Baltimore, Maryland

“As School/ Family/ Community/ Partnership Chairperson for Harbor View School, I decided that an organizational chart would help Action Team members manage their responsibilities and workload. The chart identifies the following four positions on the Action Team.

“The Key Contact Chairperson oversees the entire school-family-community partnership program in the school. This person brings together the total group and makes sure each committee understands its goals. The Key Contact Chairperson works with the Action Team’s committees to discuss ideas, concerns, complaints, and opinions. This person represents the school in meetings with the district facilitator and helps coordinate meetings on school-family-community partnerships with other schools and with the broader community. The Key Contact Chairperson also makes sure all required information for the district facilitator and the National Network of Partnership Schools is turned in on time.

“The Co-Contact Chairperson is designated to take over meetings and other responsibilities if the Key Contact Chairperson is unable to do so. This person serves as a ‘vice-president’ to the Key Contact Chairperson. The Co-Contact Chairperson should have as much knowledge about school-family-community partnerships as the Key Contact Chairperson. The two team leaders may report to the school improvement team and other groups about the school’s program of partnerships.

“Co-Chairpersons are responsible for overseeing a committee on one of the six types of involvement. These committee chairpersons serve as a source of knowledge to keep their committees organized and implementing specific activities. It is the Co-Chairperson’s responsibility to make sure that all committee members follow through with their responsibilities. The Co-Chairpersons report directly to the Key Contact Chairperson.

“The fourth position on the Action Team is the Committee Member. Committee members work together to implement the activities for each type of involvement in the One-Year Action Plan. They become the school’s experts in each type of involvement. The Key Contact Chairperson may delegate new work that arises during the school year to the appropriate committee to share the workload. Committee members report to the Co-Chairperson.”

Dollars for Scholars

Neil Glazer, Principal
Shaker Middle School
Shaker Heights, Ohio

“Students can be intrinsically and/or extrinsically motivated to work hard and achieve success in school. While the ultimate goal of most educators is to help instill in our students an intrinsic love for learning, we have also recognized the value of extrinsic motivation.

“One of the goals of our Partnership Schools initiative was to increase the involvement of the business community with the school. At the same time, we wanted the students to understand the importance of sharing their accomplishments with businesses in Shaker Heights. "Dollars for Scholars" was created as a vehicle to meet both of these goals.

“Shaker Heights is the home base for Office Max, an international office supply company. They are educationally oriented in terms of product line, and therefore, were selected over other businesses not related to education. With the support and encouragement of our Action Team, I contacted the president of Office Max. Through persistence and perseverance—and numerous telephone calls—we finally spoke about our school’s proposal. These were the points covered:

“Business and education should forge a strong partnership in working towards mutually shared goals. This is particularly important for locally-based companies. Students need encouragement. Extrinsic rewards serve a useful purpose in schools. Office Max would receive recognition for their support of scholarship and garner all of the publicity and possible increased sales generated by the plan. Students who make the honor roll with a grade point average of at least 3.0 at the end of each semester would qualify for a one-time-only 10% discount on all Office Max non-electric supplies or equipment, up to a maximum of \$50.00 for the total purchase. In addition, students who improve their grade point average 1.0 (i.e., a 1.6 to a 2.6) for the semester would also qualify for the discount.

“About 225 students, 25% of the student body, were mailed letters stating they had made the honor roll for the semester. Along with the letter, students received a discount coupon for Office Max. We are currently exploring the possibility of expanding this to students who receive all superior effort grades for the semester, therefore recognizing effort in much the same way as we recognize achievement. It is our expectation that this community partnership will help us build a strong school-family-community partnership program.”

Speakers' Bureau

Kay Lyons, Partnership Schools Facilitator
Rush-Henrietta Central School District
Henrietta, New York

"The Rush-Henrietta Speakers' Bureau was started in the Fall of 1998. The principals wanted to bring in speakers on parenting topics and had little or no funds to pay presenters. As a result, we began to look for "free" speakers.

"Our Partnership Schools Facilitator began by meeting with the Administrative Council and the principals requesting suggestions for volunteer speakers. From this meeting, a list was generated, which gradually grew and grew. A few community professionals agreed to be added to the list as well. Information on the list included speaker names, topics, telephone numbers, and availability.

"The list was sent to all principals, PTA groups, and Action Teams. Then, they made their own arrangements to bring in the speakers they would like to have at their buildings. All speakers agreed to participate at no cost, so a budget was not necessary..."

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