

# Introduction

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**T**here is no topic in education on which there is greater agreement than the need for family and community involvement.

- **Teachers and administrators** want to know how to work with parents in positive ways and how to involve the community to increase student success.
- **Parents** want to know if schools are providing high-quality education, how to help their children do their best, and how to connect and communicate with teachers and administrators.
- **Students** want to succeed in school. They know they need guidance, support, and encouragement from their parents, teachers, other family members, and others in the community.

Despite strong agreement about the importance of these goals, most schools, districts, and states still need help in developing comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

For over 25 years, researchers at Johns Hopkins University have worked with educators, parents, students, community partners, and other researchers to learn how preschools and elementary, middle, and high schools can develop and maintain more effective programs of partnerships. We have worked with district and state education leaders to understand how they write and support policies that encourage schools to improve partnership programs. We have collaborated with organizations that assist schools, districts, and states with their work on partnerships. We have continued an active research agenda to study the nature and effects of systematic interventions that increase family and community involvement. With many partners and participants, we have learned how programs of school, family, and community partnerships can be organized to improve schools, strengthen families, and help students succeed.

With many partners, we have learned that new concepts are needed to organize effective partnership programs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006):

1. ***School, family, and community partnerships is a better term than parental involvement.*** The concept of “partnership” recognizes that parents, educators, and others in the community share responsibility for students’ learning and development.
2. ***School, family, and community partnerships is a multidimensional concept.*** A framework of six types of involvement—the result of research and exemplary practices—helps schools develop programs that involve families in many different ways.

3. **A program of school, family, and community partnerships is an essential component of school and classroom organization.** No longer off to the side, family and community involvement must be planned and evaluated just as any aspect of school improvement. In each school, an Action Team for Partnerships—a committee of educators, parents, and other partners—can work together and with colleagues to plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve the outreach and quality of partnership programs.
4. **Programs of school, family, and community partnerships require multilevel leadership.** Although educators in a single school may organize a partnership program, district leaders play important roles in establishing a “culture of partnerships” and in assisting *all* elementary, middle, and high schools in the district to develop and sustain programs that involve students’ families in productive ways. State leaders, too, may support policies and take actions that help districts and schools understand partnerships as an organizational imperative.
5. **Programs of school, family, and community partnerships must focus on increasing student learning and development.** No longer partnerships for partnerships’ sake, strong programs of family and community involvement ensure that all communications among partners and all involvement activities are purposeful and productive. Practices to engage parents, community members, and others need to be linked to important goals for students in order help improve attendance, achievement, behavior, and other indicators of success in school.
6. **All programs of school, family, and community partnerships are about equity.** This *Handbook* guides schools to develop programs with practices that engage all families in all communities, not just parents who are easy to reach. Some parents have always been involved in schools and in their children’s education. Now, districts and schools must conduct programs that enable all families to help their children do their best in school.

These new directions change the way partnerships are understood in schools, districts, and state departments of education. For example, when an Action Team for Partnerships is an official school committee, and its written plans are part of annual school improvement plans, more family and community involvement activities will be conducted, and more and different parents will be engaged. When activities that are implemented are evaluated, outreach to families should increase, and the quality of the partnership program should improve from year to year. These and other changes are needed to turn activities that were accidental and peripheral to school improvement into well-planned and intentional programs that are central to school improvement and that contribute to student success.

Over the past few years, our studies of partnership program development identified eight essential elements that contributed to the improvement of program quality from one year to the next. These include strong leadership, teamwork, annual written plans, well-implemented activities, adequate funding, thoughtful evaluations, strong collegial support and networking, and continuous planning for improvement. The third edition of the *Handbook* provides step-by-step strategies so that every program will take new directions and include these essential elements.

This *Handbook* translates lessons learned in research and fieldwork into practical approaches that will assist any school, district, or state with partnership program development. This includes the research-based framework and field-tested tools that help schools (a) understand the six types of family and community involvement, (b) create an Action Team for Partnerships, (c) plan and implement family and community involvement activities to reach school goals for student success, (d) mobilize community resources, (e) resolve challenges to reach all families, (f) evaluate results, and (g) continue to improve plans, practices, and programs over time. Two chapters give special attention to partnerships in middle and high schools and to interactive homework that promotes parent-teacher and parent-child communications about classwork. The *Handbook* also guides district, state, and organization leaders to strengthen their knowledge and leadership of partnerships.

Of course, each school, district, and state is different from the next. Each serves a different population of students and families, has different improvement goals, and faces unique challenges for helping all students succeed in school. We have found that all programs benefit from proven structures, but each site must tailor or customize its plans and practices to meet specific goals for student success. This mix of formal structures and flexible practices is a winning combination for involving families and community partners in ways that benefit students, families, and schools. To see how this works in diverse communities, visit [www.partnershipschoools.org](http://www.partnershipschoools.org) and click on Success Stories.

## What's New in the Third Edition?

The *Third Edition* of this *Handbook*, like previous editions, draws upon work conducted with thousands of educators and families over the past five years. It includes new and improved research summaries, tools, and guidelines for leaders in schools, districts, states, and organizations to increase their knowledge and skills in developing their partnership programs. These include the following:

- New article on how partnership practices help produce specific results for students (Chapter 1)
- New examples of successful partnership activities in elementary, middle, and high schools (Chapter 2)
- Improved workshop agendas and activities, with increased attention to connecting family and community involvement to goals for student success (Chapters 4 and 5)
- New inventories to guide district leaders and state leaders in developing their leadership roles and actions on partnerships (Chapter 7)
- A new chapter on how to evaluate school-based partnership programs and updated evaluation forms and guidelines (Chapter 9)
- Clearer guidelines and updated references in all chapters
- A CD (attached) with a PowerPoint presentation for team-training workshops and electronic copies of all workshop handouts, activities, planning forms, and evaluations. The CD also includes Spanish translations of selected materials for Latino parents who participate in workshops and in other audiences.

## Overview of Chapters

Ten chapters offer step-by-step strategies to establish, strengthen, and sustain excellent partnership programs.

**Chapter 1: A Comprehensive Framework.** Three articles summarize the theory and research on which the *Handbook* is based. The first article describes the framework of six types of involvement, identifies challenges that must be met, and provides results of well-implemented programs of school, family, and community partnerships. It also discusses an action team approach for developing comprehensive partnership programs. The second article presents an overview of how connections with the community can be organized to strengthen partnership programs. The third article summarizes research on the effects of family and community involvement on student academic and behavioral outcomes. Along with excellent teachers and well-managed schools, goal-oriented family and community involvement can affect a range of important student outcomes in reading, math, science, attendance, behavior, and other important indicators of student success in school.

**Chapter 2: Use the Framework to Reach School Goals—Stories From the Field.** Examples from elementary, middle, and high schools illustrate how the six types of involvement and action team approach work in diverse schools and communities. The examples show how elementary, middle, and high schools are working to create a welcoming climate for partnerships and to implement partnerships that contribute to student success.

**Chapter 3: Take an Action Team Approach.** Twelve common questions are addressed on how to organize an effective Action Team for Partnerships. Team members—principals, teachers, parents, other school staff, and community members—play important roles and share leadership for planning, implementing, and evaluating partnership programs. Several tools and guidelines are included to help develop strong and successful teams.

**Chapter 4: Conduct Workshops.** Agendas are provided for district, school, and other leaders to conduct team-training workshops and end-of-year celebration workshops for schools' Action Teams for Partnerships. The chapter includes scripts, group activities, and other guidelines to help workshop leaders present key topics and to enable attendees to apply the content to their own schools. These workshops, which prepare educators, parents, and community partners to work together, are important professional development activities.

**Chapter 5: Select Materials for Presentations and Workshops.** Charts and diagrams are supplied for presentations, handouts, and activities for the team-training workshops described in Chapter 4 and for other presentations on partnership program development. These materials guide workshop leaders to present and discuss the framework of the six types of involvement, challenges that must be solved, results of partnerships, team structures, and how to write a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. These materials also are on the *Handbook* CD, along with PowerPoint slides for team-training workshops and other presentations.

**Chapter 6: Strengthen Partnership Programs in Middle and High Schools.** Three articles summarize research and practical approaches to family and community

involvement in secondary schools. Reproducible materials are included to use in workshops attended by Action Teams for Partnerships from middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools, or in presentations to leaders who will assist middle and high schools with their partnership programs. The discussion of goal-oriented partnership programs is pertinent for elementary and secondary school teams.

**Chapter 7: Develop District and State Leadership for Partnerships.** District and state leadership activities are outlined and discussed to increase expertise on school, family, and community partnerships. Information is included on the costs of partnership programs and sources of funds. New inventories are provided to help district and state leaders organize their offices and activities and guide school-based partnership programs. Improved templates are included for district and state leadership plans for partnerships.

**Chapter 8: Implement Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS).** Two research-based partnership approaches are described. *TIPS Interactive Homework* increases family involvement with students at home in positive conversations about interesting work that students learn in class. Ten purposes of homework and the components of an effective interactive homework process are discussed. *TIPS Volunteers in Social Studies and Art* increases family and community involvement at school by organizing volunteers to present prints of art masterpieces that are linked to social studies units to increase students' art appreciation and critical thinking. The chapter includes sample interactive homework assignments for the elementary, middle, and high school grades and a sample social studies and art presentation.

**Chapter 9: Evaluate Your Partnership Program.** An introductory article discusses basic ideas for evaluating the quality of partnership programs and results. It identifies guidelines and tools for Action Teams for Partnerships to use each year to monitor progress. An inventory, *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, assesses how well a school is implementing activities for the six types of involvement and is meeting challenges to reach all families. The *Annual Evaluation of Activities* helps a team assess the quality of each activity for family and community involvement as it is implemented throughout the school year.

**Chapter 10: Network With Others for Best Results on Partnerships.** Readers of this *Handbook* are invited to join other schools, districts, states, and organizations in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University. NNPS provides ongoing professional development on school, family, and community partnerships and organizes opportunities for members to share ideas and progress. A Web-map is included for readers to obtain more information about NNPS, about promising practices in schools across the country, and about partnership program development.

## Time for Action

Some say of partnerships: This is not hard work, but *heart* work. Not more work, but *the* work. Not harder work, but *smarter* work to mobilize all available resources that will contribute to student success. Educators and parents know *that* family and community involvement is important. This *Handbook* shows *how* to organize effective partnership

programs. There are, now, research-based strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving effective programs of family and community involvement in all schools, districts, and state departments of education. It is time for action.

## Reference

- Epstein J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2006). Moving forward: Ideas for research on school, family, and community partnerships. In C. F. Conrad & R. Serlin (Eds.), *SAGE handbook for research in education: Engaging ideas and enriching inquiry* (pp. 117–137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.