School-Community Relationships

Why Is This Strategy Useful?

One of the tasks of a strong school leader is to develop and maintain positive and constructive school-community relationships. School-community relations are frequently cited among the key pillars of successful schools and successful school improvement. School-community connections may include a broad range of external partnerships, including schools events sponsored by local businesses, immunizations provided on school campuses by a local health department, or retired citizens who volunteer as tutors. In addition, schools can play a crucial role in the community, serving as an important partner to improve the lives of children and their families. While negative community relationships will not further a school’s academic goals, research that establishes a definitive link between such relationships and student achievement outcomes is limited. Thus, schools may opt to include community partnership strategies as part of a range of improvement efforts, but improving community relations will not—in of itself—turn around student performance.

Description of Strategy

To foster productive school-community relations, consider the following (from the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools):

- Think about the ways that schools, parent, and community groups are working to connect in your school community. Create a list of the possible partnerships, grouping similar efforts together into categories.
- Ask the people involved in these efforts what kinds of outcomes they are hoping will result from the connections. Try to get a variety of perspectives—from school personnel, parents, and community partners—since each partner may have different goals for the connection.
- Based on your conversations, think about these questions: Do you have a mismatch between the connections you are working to create and the kinds of outcomes you are hoping to produce? Are you missing any connections that would help your school community accomplish its goals?
- Share the results of your planning efforts with your local school, family, and community partners. Discuss how you can work together to make sure that your connections are effective and meet the goals of all of the partners involved.

Research Evidence

At least two correlational studies and one research review provide support for this strategy. The correlational studies both relied on longitudinal student achievement and attendance data coupled with other data sources on school-community partnerships. Authors of both studies point to limited positive (but not always significant) relationships between school-community partnerships and student outcomes; the research summary draws a similar conclusion.
Sample Studies Supporting this Strategy


This study examines the relationship between the quality of school, family, and community partnership programs and student performance on state-mandated achievement tests. Data from 82 elementary schools, located in a large urban area, were collected to explore the relationship between family and community involvement and students’ achievement test performance. Analyses show that, controlling for school characteristics, the degree to which schools were working to overcome challenges to family and community involvement predicted higher percentages of students scoring at or above satisfactory on state achievement tests. The findings suggest that schools' efforts to involve families and the community in students' learning may be a useful approach to help students achieve in school, especially for students in early elementary grades. Also, the findings illustrate the importance for schools located in large urban areas to address obstacles to family and community involvement to realize the benefits associated with family and community involvement.


The purpose of this report is to summarize the literature available on school-community relationships. The nature and purpose of school-community collaborations were identified as having the two goals of increasing social capital through the establishment of strong social networks and of utilizing that social capital to produce community renewal. The role of faith-based organizations, students as community members, and the benefits of collaboration were discussed. Three stages of the collaborative process were outlined as planning and development, implementation and management, and monitoring and evaluation. Several obstacles to forming collaborations were presented, including turf/culture and political/economic conditions. School-community collaborations can take a number of different forms such as the school as a community center or the community as curriculum. A third form, school-based enterprise, can be further categorized into school-business partnership, school-based business, or school incubated business. This study units the present body of literature regarding school-community relationships to define the purpose, role, and challenges to school-community collaborations. Furthermore, this study suggests that partnerships have not been directly linked with increases in test scores due to the problems inherent in testing the programs rather than the programs themselves.


This study reports the impact that the quality of school-family-community partnership programs had on student attendance and achievement in 80 Baltimore schools. The results were drawn from the first phase of a project to "scale up" school-family-community partnership programs in the National Network of Partnership Schools. They indicated that the best predictor of student attendance was prior attendance, with student mobility also having an impact. However, when researchers controlled for previous school attendance, the quality of the school's partnership program significantly boosted attendance. Similarly, prior achievement was the best predictor of student achievement. However, after controlling for prior achievement, the quality of the
partnership program also contributed to a small but significant improvement in reading and writing standardized test scores of third graders. Researchers accessed data on student attendance and achievement from the Maryland State Department of Education's annual data collection records. Facilitators who assist the schools evaluated the quality of the school-family-community partnerships programs. The results of this study suggested that as a way to evaluate the impact of the program on student outcomes, it is feasible to link annual data on attendance and achievement with evaluations of the quality of a school's partnership program.

Additional Resources


School Community Relations is Great PR and Then Some. Available at: http://www.education-world.com/a_issues/chat/chat143.shtml


The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database. Available at: http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bibsearch.html