Strategies for Building Home-School Partnerships

Sample Lesson

Study Teams and Group Activities

If you register as an individual, ask a colleague or spouse to participate with you in discussion assignments. If that is not possible, use group activities for your own personal reflection.

Application Assignments and Access to a Classroom

If you are an administrator, counselor, or do not currently have access to a classroom, instead of reporting on implementation of application assignments describe how you plan to use the course concepts in your environment.

Session #1
Introduction and Establishing Course Goals

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By completing this session's learning activities, you will:

- Reflect upon your current understanding of the value of home-school partnerships.
- Examine your current approach to gaining parental support.
- Discover how improving parental involvement can improve student achievement
- Set a goal for improving your approach to parental involvement and support.
- Develop a plan to reach your course goal.

READING ASSIGNMENT:

In the course text. School-Family Partnerships for Children's Success, read the Foreword.

Teacher-Parent Partnerships

The partnership construct is based on the premise that collaborating partners have some common basis for action and a sense of mutuality that supports their joint ventures. Teachers and parents have a common need for joining in partnership: the need to foster positive growth in children and in themselves. It is their challenge to create a sense of mutuality so that their efforts are meaningful to all those involved.

PARENT AND TEACHER ATTRIBUTES THAT PROMOTE PARTNERSHIP

Research provides insight on parent attributes that support meaningful partnerships. These attributes include warmth, sensitivity, nurturance, the ability to listen, consistency, a positive self-image, and a sense of efficacy, personal competence, and effective interpersonal skills.

Marital happiness, family harmony, success in prior collaborations, and openness to others' ideas have also been related to parental competence in promoting partnerships (Swick, 1991). Schaefer (1985) has noted that parents who are high in self-esteem are more assertive in their family and school involvement. Not all parents achieve the competence that supports these attributes. Teachers can provide a setting that encourages the development of partnership behaviors in parents. Modeling respect and communication skills, showing a genuine interest in the children, responding constructively to parent concerns, promoting a teamwork philosophy, and being sensitive to parent and family needs are some ways to promote this process. Lawler (1991) suggests that teachers encourage parents to be positive through the example they set in being supportive, responsive, and dependable.

Teacher attributes that appear to positively influence teachers' relationships with children and parents include: warmth, openness, sensitivity, flexibility, reliability, and accessibility (Comer and Haynes, 1991). From the parents' perspective, these teacher characteristics are desirable: trust, warmth, closeness, positive self-image, effective classroom management, child-centeredness, positive discipline, nurturance, and effective teaching skills. Researchers have cited

the following teacher attributes as highly related to successful parent involvement: positive attitudes, active planning to involve parents, continuous teacher training, involvement in professional growth, and personal competence (Epstein, 1984; Galinsky, 1990).

TEACHER-PARENT PARTNERSHIP ROLES: A FRAMEWORK

The research on parent involvement indicates that parents and teachers can create viable partnerships by engaging in joint learning activities, supporting each other in their respective roles, carrying out classroom and school improvement activities, conducting collaborative curriculum projects in the classroom, participating together in various decision-making activities, and being advocates for children (Swick, 1991). Integral to these activities are the various parent and teacher roles and behaviors that make for successful partnerships.

- Parenting roles are performed within the family and within family-school relationships. Roles critical to family growth are nurturing, teaching, and modeling. Within the larger family-school structure, parents must carry out learning, doing, supporting, and decision-making roles. Naturally, parents use these various roles across contexts, but they emphasize particular roles as family or family-school situations dictate (Schaefer, 1985). For example, recent findings suggest that when parents sense an inviting school climate, they emphasize nurturing and supporting behaviors in their interactions with teachers; their participation in the school environment also increases (Comer and Haynes, 1991).

- Teacher roles critical to the partnership process include the family-centered roles of support, education, and guidance. Teacher roles that focus on family involvement in school and classroom activities include those of nurturing, supporting, guiding, and decision-making.

- Together, parents and teachers can foster their partnership through such behaviors as collaborating, planning, communicating and evaluating (Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Swick, 1991).

A FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIES: APPLICATIONS FROM RESEARCH

An action-oriented philosophy of family-school support and nurturance is a powerful force in creating a positive learning environment. Teacher actions that promote such a philosophy include the sensitive involvement of parents from cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds (Lightfoot, 1978). Relating classroom activities to the varying needs and interests of children and families is another reflection of a family-centered program.

Since teacher-parent partnerships are developmental in nature and best realized through a comprehensive approach, a framework for carrying out the process is essential. The following elements need close scrutiny: teacher and parent contexts, role understandings, and an appreciation of the partnership process itself. Further, sensitivity to each other's needs, situations, and talents is a requisite basis for a viable program.

Given that each program is and should be unique, particular elements, such as the following, are essential: needs assessments, goal statements, prioritization of activities, strategy development, implementation plans, and evaluation tools (Comer and Haynes, 1991). It has been noted that parents, when given the opportunity, are quite active in setting program goals (Powell, 1989). Swick (1992) notes that the availability of teachers and the offering of such services as transportation and childcare to parents increase participation in program planning significantly.

PROGRESS REPORTING

To conclude your learning activities for this session, please turn to the Progress Report form for this session. Progress Report forms for all sessions are placed together at the back of this Course of Study book for easy removal and evaluation. Remember, since this is not a group activity, each enrollees should write his or her own progress report.