

Essential Elements of Strong Parent Involvement Programs

Seven elements are common to successful parent involvement programs.

From 1986-1988, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) sought to identify and describe the characteristics of "promising parent involvement programs" in their five-state region, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

SEDL staff gathered information concerning elements that made parent involvement programs successful by interviewing "key informants"—educators with expertise in this area. Staff members visited selected programs across the region and obtained reports of their activities; they also obtained evaluations of the programs from local and district-level staff members to determine their effectiveness. Those programs identified as "promising" featured several types of parent involvement and included many roles for parents: audience, home tutor, program supporter, co-learner, advocate, and decision maker (Epstein 1988). Although some programs were affiliated with resources such as the National Education Association or the National School Volunteer Program, others were small, homegrown efforts. Thus, each program had its own nature and had taken its own steps

toward developing stronger links between parents and schools.

Seven Essential Elements

SEDL staff found seven elements common to all these promising programs:

1. *Written policies.* The programs had written policies that legitimized

the importance of parent involvement and helped frame the context for program activities. These policies helped both staff and parents better understand how parents would take part in the program. Written policies also gave superintendents leverage with central office, building, and classroom staff for ensuring that parent involvement was central to the school program. In the Houston Fail-Safe Program, for example, strong administrative policies served as the foundation for developing and sustaining parent involvement in the schools.

2. *Administrative support.* Administrative support was provided in at least three ways. First, funds were designated in the main budget for implementing programs. Second, material/product resources—meeting space, communication equipment, computers, duplication/media equipment—were made available to complement specific program activities. Third, people were designated to carry out program efforts or events.

In Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, for instance, the superintendent provided support by allowing administrative staff to serve as school volunteers one day per month. Volunteers worked

Promising programs included many roles for parents: audience, home tutor, program supporter, co-learner, advocate, and decision maker.

with teachers and parents to enhance classroom instruction and enrich parent participation.

3. *Training.* Promising programs made training available for staff as well as parents. These efforts were not one-time or one-shot activities; instead, they occurred over time and focused on developing partnering skills. Many schools sponsored workshops that both parents and educa-

tors attended to improve their skills for working together as well as working with children.

The Albuquerque Public Schools' Parent Center, for instance, trains school staffs and undergraduate education majors about parent involvement and offers training to parents as well. Parent training covers topics such as improving parent/teacher conferences, supporting school learning

at home, and working as joint decision makers with educators.

4. *Partnership approach.* SEDL's promising programs made the partnership approach their essence. This emphasis was reflected in such activities as joint planning, goal setting, definitions of roles, program assessment, development of instructional and school support efforts, needs sensing, and setting of school standards. Such

Parent Involvement Resources

Appalachia Educational Laboratory
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
(304) 347-0400

Center for Early Adolescence
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Suite 233, Carr Mill Mall
Carrboro, NC 27510
(919) 966-1148

Center on Parent Involvement
Johns Hopkins University
c/o Joyce Epstein
3505 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
(301) 338-7570

Cornell University Family Matters Project
7 Research Park, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 255-2080 or 255-2531

Council of the Great City Schools
1413 K St., N.W., 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 635-5431

Home and School Institute
1201 16th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 466-3633

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
119 N. Payne St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 683-6232

National Committee for Citizens in Education
10840 Little Patuxent Pkwy., #301
Columbia, MD 21044-3199
(301) 977-9300
(800) NETWORK (638-9675)

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
1201 16th St., N.W., #619
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 822-7878

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke St.
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 838-6722

National School Volunteer Program
701 N. Fairfax St., #320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

Parent Involvement Center
Chapter I Technical Assistance Center
RMC Research Corporation
400 Lafayette Rd.
Hampton, NH 03842
(603) 926-8888

Parent Involvement in Education Program
San Diego County Office of Education
c/o Janet Chrispeels
6401 Linda Vista Rd., Rm. 407
San Diego, CA 92111-7399
(619) 292-3500

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 E. Seventh St.
Austin, TX 78701
(512) 476-6861

University of California/State Department of Education
Joint Task Force on Parent Involvement
c/o Susan Brand
Department of Education
University of California at Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 95064
(415) 526-3864

Work and Family Research Council
The Conference Board, Inc.
845 Third Ave.
New York, NY 10022
(202) 759-0900

involvement enabled both staff and parents to develop a sense of ownership and pride in the school's efforts to enhance the success of all learners.

In Los Lunas, New Mexico, for example, The Parent-Teacher Committees program seeks to involve parents as partners at all levels of the educational system. Committees of parents and teachers examine the district's curriculum needs, provide support for the district's instructional program, and recommend ways to meet children's special needs.

5. *Two-way communication.* In these promising programs, communications between home and school occurred frequently and on a regular basis. Parents felt comfortable coming to the schools, sharing ideas, and voicing concerns. School staff did not feel threatened by parent input, but welcomed it and used it to fashion relevant learning activities for students. Schools developed their own means of communicating that best served parents (for example, walk-in visits,

With a defined evaluation component, principals were better able to monitor parent involvement activities and to guide adjustments.

special times for phone calls).

6. *Networking.* SEDL's promising programs networked with other programs to share information, resources, and technical expertise. In addition, they helped program staff identify additional resources for their own use. Examples of networking include the Telephone Hotline in Houston, Coffee Klatches in Little Rock, and Parent Interaction Rooms in the Tulsa school volunteer program.

7. *Evaluation.* Promising programs had regular evaluation activities at key

stages as well as at the conclusion of a cycle or phase. These enabled parents and staff to make program revisions on a continuous basis to ensure that activities strengthened the partnership. Some evaluation efforts led directly to planning sessions open to both staff and parents. With a defined evaluation component, principals were better able to monitor parent involvement activities and to guide adjustments.

The Volunteers in Public Schools Program in Little Rock, Arkansas, for instance, prepares a detailed evaluation of its efforts every year, including a calculation of how many dollars the district has saved by using volunteers to provide services.

Endless Possibilities

The possibilities seem endless when parents and educators join together to help children become more successful in school. Obviously, there is no one "perfect" parent involvement program that can serve as the model for all others. However, the seven essential program elements that SEDL has identified do furnish a useful framework for developing parent involvement programs.

If these seven elements are made integral to parent involvement programs, the programs will supply parents and school staff with a wider range of relevant opportunities for supporting student learning at home and at school. As a result, parents can be seen, valued, respected, and held as responsible as school staff for the educational success of all children. In short, the foundation upon which effective parent involvement programs must be built is the primary concept of an equal, mutually supportive partnership supported by these seven elements. □

Reference

Epstein, J.L. (Winter 1988). "How Do We Improve Programs for Parent Involvement?" *Educational Horizons* 66: 58-59.

David L. Williams, Jr., is Assistant Executive Director, Resources for School Improvement, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 E. Seventh St., Austin, TX 78701. **Nancy Feyl Chavkin** is Assistant Professor, Richter Institute of Social Work, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX 78666-4616.

SEQUENCED Language Arts & Math SKILLS

The SLAMS program has been developed for two groups of educators: those charged with the responsibility for administering a basic skills program in language arts and/or mathematics and those desiring help with basic skills sequencing. **SLAMS may be used to:**

- check for omissions or for over emphasis in the school district's basic skills program.
- aid in the textbook selection process.
- improve the image of the school district by improving the basic skills program.

SLAMS Manual . . . \$25.00
SLAMS Handbook for Administrators . \$ 4.00

Phi Delta Kappa, 8th & Union Sts., P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789

Copyright © 1989 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.