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Community support of schools: what kind and with what success?

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Abstract

Among currently popular education reform ideas are school-community partnerships that link the educational mission of the school with the needs of the whole child, their families, and the broader community. However, a review of the research reveals diverse partnership models. To develop clarity and advance research on this reform agenda, we have developed a typology of four categories organized from the least to the most comprehensive: Family and Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and a Community Development Model. In this paper, we explain the four partnership models and the empirical evidence of successes and challenges for each.

1. INTRODUCTION

School-community partnerships are currently in the forefront of educational reform efforts. But the literature on these partnerships indicates a variety of models, strategies, and purposes that require different commitments and resources. After reviewing hundreds of articles by using a range of key words and search approaches, we narrowed our review to 37 conceptual, empirical, and research synthesis sources that met high standards of research and reporting rigor (AERA 2006, 2008). The empirical research included a broad range of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research, including case studies of single-site partnerships, survey research, longitudinal evaluations, and quasi-experimental comparative designs. Most studies included more than one data source: test scores, attendance records, satisfaction surveys, interviews, and observations. From this literature, we developed a typology consisting of four categories organized from the least to the most comprehensive in purpose

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and design: Family and Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and a Community Development Model. We argue that such a typology is a necessary tool to guide systemic educational reform, especially those that go beyond traditional school dimensions (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2013). The four categories provided the framework necessary to analyze the theories of action implicit in the partnerships and enabled us to comparatively examine the processes necessary to establish and sustain various types of partnerships, their purported outcomes, and reasons for implementation successes and challenges. (See Table 1 for a summary of sources in each category).

Table 1: Summary of Study Types by Category

	Family & Interagency Collaboration	Full-Service Schools	Full-Service Community Schools	Community Development	Total
Conceptual Studies	1	2	3	2	8
Empirical Studies	7	9	4	4	24
Research Syntheses	5	0	0	0	5
Total	13	11	7	6	37

1.1. Family and Interagency Collaboration

We name this first institutional partnership *"Family and Interagency Collaboration"* because its primary purpose is to increase family and community involvement in schools by coordinating delivery of services. Partnerships within this category make "family and community involvement an expected part of district and school life" (Epstein, 2010, p. 21) and require an organizational commitment on the part of the school and parents and/or participating agencies. One criticism of this model, however, is that even with the intent of "two-way" communication and reciprocity, families and community agencies tend to serve the more limiting role of merely supporting rather than helping to shape the mission and goals of the school (Schutz, 2006).

We reviewed one descriptive, seven empirical, and five research synthesis sources in this category. The common theory of action within this partnership model is that coordinating the delivery of educational, health, and social services is key to strengthening families and meeting the learning and developmental needs of students. To be successful, these partnership models required attention to relationship building; human, fiscal, and material resources; school leadership that valued this extended role of the school; and an evaluation system that was implemented early in the partnership. As Blank, Melaville, and Shah (2003) argue from their evaluative review, successful partnerships are built on more than good intentions; they are characterized by effective leadership and resources beyond those typically found in traditional schools. Of the studies reviewed for this model, Community in Schools (CIS) exemplified the best evaluation practices. CIS was able to assess not only a broad range of outcomes, but how and why the model worked, and in what situations it worked. The five-year, national evaluation design included a data inventory, a quasi-experimental study, a natural variation study and case studies, a comparative study, and an experimental study (CIS, 2010).

While there was some empirical evidence that these partnerships improved students' attitudes toward school and that teachers and parents found them beneficial, the evidence was stronger for improvements in student achievement indicators such as standardized test scores, grade point averages, attendance, and graduation rates. One of the strongest examples of an effective family and interagency collaboration was found in the Communities in Schools (CIS) model. CIS works within the public school system, establishing relationships with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, and parent and volunteer organizations to provide