Building Block: Education

Indicator: Teachers regularly make "interactive" assignments and otherwise encourage parent–child interaction relative to school learning.

Evidence Review:

> Nothing we do is more important than encouraging interactions between parents and their children that focus on studying, reading, and responsibility. Compacts, policies, and activities do not improve children's lives unless they result in changed behaviors. When parents interact with their children at home in ways that support their children's learning at school, this is the most important of all *parental involvement*. (ADI, 2011)

Interactive homework, especially when coupled with teacher outreach and invitations for two-way communication, can be especially effective in bridging home and school with powerful, positive outcomes for students. In a randomized experimental study, Kraft and Dougherty (2013) found that frequent teacher phone calls and text/written messages with families increased students' engagement in learning. Van Voorhis (2003, 2011a, 2011b) has done several studies based on TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork, developed by Epstein, Van Voorhis, and colleagues); Bennett-Conroy (2012) also used TIPS and teacher phone calls as the basis for a quasi-experimental comparison. In all cases, students' homework completion and parental involvement increased, and (where measured) grades improved. Reading School–Home Links, available from the U.S. Department of Education (1999), are another example of student assignments that require parent–child interaction, link to school learning, and simultaneously educate parents about school learning (Redding, 2006).

We have significant research that shows that schools can improve their students' learning by engaging parents in ways that directly relate to their children's academic progress, maintaining a consistent message of what is expected of parents, and reaching parents directly, personally, and with a trusting approach (Redding, 2006). The "curriculum of the home"—the bundle of attitudes, habits, knowledge, and skills that children acquire through their relationship with their family and that facilitates school learning—is more predictive of academic learning than the family's socioeconomic status (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Redding, 2000, 2006). This includes monitoring homework, of course, but also includes many other aspects of home life that are important for school adjustment that teachers may or may not recognize as parental involvement (Ferrara, 2009). Even parents who rarely or never come to the school are often deeply involved with their children at home (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Shumow, 2010). In a series of meta-analyses, Jeynes found that subtle aspects of parental involvement—such as expectations and parenting style—were actually the most salient to children's achievement (Jeynes, 2010, 2011). Based on his recent meta-analysis (Jeynes, 2012), Jeynes (2013) recommends:

> First, school leaders and teachers can enhance the efficacy of parental involvement by offering advice to parents on the most vital components of *voluntary* expressions of family engagement, such as setting high expectations and adopting parenting styles that are associated with positive student outcomes. This guidance is particularly important because many parents do not realize how powerful and effective these factors are in promoting positive student outcomes. Second, the school can take an active role in encouraging parental engagement in areas such as checking homework and shared reading activities, given that school-based guidance appears to increase the efficacy of those particular behaviors. (para. 9)

Dotger and Bennett (2010) propose that teachers and school leaders need both preservice training and ongoing professional development, including practice in engaging with a variety of family contexts, to develop the necessary skills to foster effective school–home partnerships. One study found that student performance in math and reading improved at a 40–50% high rate when teachers reached out to parents in these three ways:

- Met face-to-face with each family at the beginning of the school year
- Sent families materials each week on ways to help their children at home

- Telephoned routinely with news on how the children were doing, not just when they were having problems or acting up (Westat & Policy Studies Assoc., 2002, cited in Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 94)

Teacher training is even more essential when the teacher and the students' families have different home cultures. The Bridging Cultures Project used in-service training and action research to help a cadre of teachers learn about collectivistic cultures vs. individualistic cultures (Trumbull et al., 2001; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). Though the project aimed to promote more effective instruction, the teachers found that it also greatly facilitated improved communication and partnerships with their students' families. Kugler (2012) notes that something as basic as eye contact can easily be misinterpreted by those from different cultures—school personnel born and raised in the U.S. expect to have eye contact during conversation as a basic sign of attention and respect from the listener. However, for many people in other cultures, the opposite is true—looking away or down shows respect and deference to the speaker. Similarly, wording can be easily misinterpreted: offering a workshop or tip sheet on "parenting" may insult families ("They think we're not doing a good job! I don't want someone telling my how to raise *my* kids;" Henderson et al., 2007, p. 83). Instead, offer suggestions for maximizing learning outside of school, and invite the families to suggest specific topics of interest for interactive assignments.

Weiss and Stephen (2009) report that programs that train parents to be appropriately and effectively involved in their children's homework have found positive effects on parents' supportive involvement and increases in the time children spend on homework, higher homework accuracy, and higher grades. These benefits of family involvement at home extend into high school, although it is important for parental engagement practices to be developmentally appropriate and responsive to maturing adolescents' needs (Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2009).

Examples:

1. Teachers give homework assignments that require students to interview their parents.

2. Schools include parents in their shared reading projects: Parents read and discuss with their children the books that the students are reading at school.

3. Students maintain assignment notebooks that parents review and sign.

4. At the end of a school day, the teachers ask students to write a sentence or two about what they learned that day and take it home to discuss with their parents.

5. Every student in the class writes on a strip of paper a brief statement describing something good about one student. The teacher reviews the statements (just in case) and then puts the strip in a paper bag. That night, the student opens the bag with his/her parents and reads the statements. Through the school year, each student gets a turn at being the "spotlight student." (ADI, 2011)

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Building Block: Education

Wise Ways® / Academic Development Institute

Indicator: The school provides a family resource library that includes materials with information about parenting and parents' roles in children's education.

Evidence Review:

A Family Resource Library is a section of the school's library, a shelf of materials in the parents' room, or even a cart in the hallway that includes books and other materials that parents may check out. The materials include:

- books on parenting,
- materials for parents to help children establish good study habits,
- copies of learning standards and related guides for parents,
- storybooks for reading to children,
- family educational activities and educational games, and
- materials for parents to use with preschool age children.

Materials for the library may be purchased or made. Interactive Reading Workshops provide one way to make materials for the library. Publishers and bookstores may donate materials to the library. Perhaps the parent organization will include purchases for the library in its fundraising plan. (ADI, 2011)

A contact person or coordinator, ideally a parent member of the School Community Council, should be responsible for the resource library (ADI, 2011; Church & Dollins, 2010). If possible, this library can be housed in a parent center or family room—a warm, welcoming space "where families can go for support, information, and learning" (Church & Dollins, 2010, p. 84). Swap (1990) identified three basic models for organizing parent centers: a home to school model provides information supporting students' transition from home to school, but the information tends to be one-way (school providing information to parents); a partnership model supports open collaboration, but may be time consuming and therefore difficult to start and maintain; interactive learning models are also collaborative but are parent-led, providing an avenue for continued growth and development (Church & Dollins, 2010; Swap, 1990). Parent volunteers can make this a welcoming place, offering resources and also acting as a hub for other volunteer opportunities within the school; some offer adult education options or share information on other community resources (Church & Dollins, 2010).

Parent centers can provide differentiated resources and serve different functions at elementary, middle, and high school levels (Church & Dollins, 2010). Elementary schools may focus on developmental needs of the students and parents and loan out materials to support learning at home. Middle schools might help connect families to community service, arts, or recreation opportunities and specific topics of interest, including preparing for the transition to high school. High schools often focus on helping parents support their children in preparation for college and career pathways. In middle and high schools, it is helpful if the parent center can also be used as a center for connecting with teachers, as access to teachers is more difficult after elementary school (Church & Dollins, 2010). Based on meta-analytical research, Henderson and Mapp (2002) recommend that all parent outreach be explicitly linked to students' learning, so this principle should guide the creation of a family resource library (whether housed within a parent center or elsewhere). Making it inviting is also key:

Establishing centers which are visible and welcoming may also be a useful involvement strategy to engage parents. Past research has similarly found that a warm and inviting school climate (e.g., having a warm family room with a homelike atmosphere and open door policy, the smell of fresh coffee) will help to get parents involved. (O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008, p. 158).

Example:

A family resource lending library can be one part of an effective intervention with populations considered at-risk. St. Clair, Jackson, and Zweiback (2012) report on a study of one such intervention:

> This six year follow-up study to the previously published quasi-experimental study on this group of children and their migrant families examines the effects of a parent involvement program on kindergarten children's families. Parents in the original study participated in sessions available throughout their child's kindergarten year that helped them engage their children in academic activities linked to their children's curriculum in school. These parent involvement sessions were implemented as one component of a Migrant Education Even Start family literacy program. The study was conducted at a rural Midwestern elementary school with 22 kindergarten children from families participating in the parent involvement training program, and 28 kindergarten children from families not participating. This longitudinal study first followed these children through the end of first grade. Findings indicated that by the end of first grade, children from families participating in the parent involvement training program scored significantly higher on language measures than children in the control group. Now researchers at the University of Nebraska Medical Center have followed these children through 5th or 6th grade and have collected state reading assessment scaled scores. Results demonstrate that children in the treatment group again scored significantly higher than children in the control group. This suggests that equipping migrant families with new abilities to nurture their children's language skills leads to positive and lasting reading outcomes for their children. (p. 9)

> Participating families were offered a total of 25 one-hour training sessions over the course of the school year. Typically, families participated in about half of the offered sessions. There was a wide range of participation, with families participating in as few as 8 and as many as 24 sessions. MEES staff, working closely with the kindergarten teachers to design the weekly offerings, facilitated educational and networking sessions with the parents. The content of the parenting curriculum was drawn from their child's kindergarten curriculum (e.g., letter of the week, theme, literacy skills, sight words, and literature). In addition to modeling ways to support their children's learning in these content areas, families were also provided resource materials to support learning at home. These resources included Play Station equipment and *Light Span Achieve Now* software to be played on the Play Station equipment (reading and math concepts in game form), Leap Pads (talking books), Leap Desks (letter and word identification), and books. Materials were checked out on loan to families. Duplicated materials, such as nursery rhymes and sequencing activities, were provided on a timely basis to support kindergarten classroom curriculum. (p. 12)

References and other resources:

Academic Development Institute (ADI). (2011). *Solid Foundation*® *planning guide*. Lincoln, IL: Author.

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Indicator: The school encourages parents to volunteer and provides orientation and training for them.

Evidence Review:

Encouraging parents to volunteer is one way to invite them into the classroom. Volunteers should always be given training and guidance to maximize the benefits for all involved (Redding, Murphy, & Sheley, 2011). Some parents may not be comfortable in the classroom at first:

> Although volunteering in the classroom is a good way to see what students are learning, many parents don't feel confident taking on that task. Mary Lou Amato, a principal in Los Angeles, has this advice: "We had a big push to get parents involved in the classrooms, and it didn't work. There were language issues, and parents felt they lacked content knowledge. Then parents came up with an interesting idea: why can't we work in the parent center to support the teachers? This was a big stepping stone to getting parents into the classrooms. The Open Court reading program has take-home books and other things that need to be put together. Parents were proud to do that and bring them to the teacher. They started reading things. They felt productive and that they were doing something important. Then they were ready to go into the classroom." (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 90)

While all parents may benefit from visiting their child's classroom, inviting immigrant parents into the classroom may be especially beneficial, assisting them in learning about teaching practices in American schools and ways they can support their children's achievement (Lim, 2012). This also provides school staff with opportunities to learn about the home cultures of their students, which can lead to more effective teaching (e.g., see Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). The variety of ways parents can assist in the classroom are as diverse as the parents themselves. Of course, they can also volunteer to help outside the classroom, doing work at home or in the community, in accordance with their schedules and interests. Church and Dollins (2010) give numerous examples, pointing out that regardless, it is very important for administrators and teachers to acknowledge the contributions parents make to support the classroom and school. Small, personalized actions are important—an introduction, a warm handshake, a brief thank you note (Church & Dollins, 2010).

Even with only a few days training, volunteers can make a significant contribution to helping students' grades improve (Allen & Chavkin, 2004). According to Feuerstein (2000), increasing the number of contacts between the school and the parent does appear to stimulate parent volunteerism. "Parent volunteers often feel like they are truly making a contribution to their child, the school, and the education system itself" and may develop a deeper appreciation for the school (Church & Dollins, 2010, p. 87).

Examples/Ideas for Implementation from ADI (2011):

Studies have shown that parents who volunteer convey confidence in the schools they serve and at the same time send a message to the students that parents care about the school and the students. If parents were viewed by the school as they are viewed by their community, the school would see a pool of potential volunteers from clerical support to technology specialists; gardeners to craftsmen; musicians, artist, environmentalists, business professionals, and humanitarians. Putting the expertise of parents to use in the school provides support to educators and administrators and offers a meaningful and productive use of parental talent. Having knowledge of the specific talents and interests of the parent resource pool can serve to benefit the school and strengthen parental involvement.

School volunteers need not be restricted to serving the school only during school hours. Good planning can create task lists that can be completed at home, before school, after school, or during evening school activities.

Using the Parent Resource Pool

Make a Wish List – Every organization, business, and industry has that nagging task list that, if accomplished with regularity, would inject relief and optimism into an overwhelmed staff and allow regular staff to focus on their primary functions. Perhaps you would like an office volunteer to greet visitors, answer the phone, and make photo copies. Maybe your wish list includes a volunteer gardener to relieve the custodial staff of seasonal grounds keeping – or snow removal. Maybe you need a carpenter to head up the set building crew for your school play or a seamstress to help with costumes. Maybe your teachers just need an extra set of hands in the classrooms. Maybe you need a volunteer to organize and manage your volunteer program. Make a note of these tasks and list them by category.

Conduct a Survey - Before you can dip into the parent resource pool, you need to know what re-sources you have and when they are available. The best way to reveal this information is to ask. Take time to develop a brief survey for parents. Items to include in the survey might be:

- Parent's contact information
- Best times to call/text/email (preferred mode of communication?)
- Areas of expertise (Offer categories as possible choices)
- Hobbies and other interests (Offer categories as possible choices)
- Areas in which they are willing to volunteer (Offer categories as possible choices)
- Hours available to volunteer
- Allow space for comments
- Offer "Other" as a category choice

Create a Volunteer File or Database

Information is of no use if it can't be easily accessed. Convert this volunteer information into a resource by storing it in a database. If you don't know how to build a database, check your parent volunteer surveys. Chances are that your surveys may reveal the name of an individual who has experience in office software applications. Not only might this person assist in building a database, they could also show your staff how to use it. Your parent resource pool data base could also prove to be useful in planning a "Career Day."

Develop Volunteer Orientation

Time training volunteers is time well spent. Present the volunteer with a clear job description and a packet of printed information for future reference. Items that might be included in the packet are listed:

- Volunteer agreement
- Job description
- Volunteer schedule
- Volunteer welcome letter
- Parking information
- Building map
- Operating instructions on applicable equipment
- Emergency evacuation plan
- School handbook and calendar

Use orientation time to familiarize your volunteers with the school's mission, programs, policies, and procedures and to tour the building. Emphasize the importance of a welcoming environment at the school

and express how the volunteer is expected to contribute to that friendly environment. Other things to discuss in the orientation might include:

- A place to sign in and record hours
- A safe place to keep personal belongings
- Location of supplies
- Familiarize them with equipment related to the volunteer position
- Introduction to regular staff members with whom they will work
- Review school policies and procedures
- Thank them for their willingness to volunteer at the school

While parent volunteers can fill many needs in the school, community organizations and businesses should not be overlooked as potential resources and partners. A community resource pool can nicely compliment existing elements in your parent resource pool. Service organizations are often looking for projects in which to invest manpower and money, and businesses are often willing to share with the community in productive ways. School administrators should capitalize on the purpose of service organizations and entice the interest of local businesses in their communities by simply expressing (in a personal format) what the school could use in the way of manpower and amenities.

Example from Trumbull et al., 2003, p. 59–60:

Figure 3. Developing a Cadre of Volunteers.

Both the parents and I had difficulty approaching each other for help. Most parents had little formal education and probably did not know how they could actually assist in the classroom; only a few had attended junior high or high school. I had to conduct my own informal ethnographic research about my families and began to build relationships with parents in the process.

Through simple conversations I had with some of them after school, I became aware of how much formal schooling they had. This gave me a good idea as to who could help my students to practice reading skills and who would rather assist putting materials together in the classroom or at home. As I became more familiar with my parents, I built a bridge between school culture, their culture, as well as my own. I started getting a better response regarding my call for volunteers.

Although I was now averaging five parent volunteers a week, I still felt like there was something missing. Many parents would stay but were uncomfortable [interrupting me] while I was teaching a lesson and ask what they could do…[When they had finished a task] they would sit and wait until reading time came. During my conferencing in November, I showed my parents a folder I compiled. In this folder I included a paragraph about how much I needed them to help their children achieve different academic goals. I developed a specific schedule, including days and times. I told them they were very welcome to bring younger siblings and emphasized how being in the classroom may help them (the younger siblings) when they were actually in school later on. (Excerpted from Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, et al., 2001, pp. 85-86)

Tried New Approaches to Engaging Parent Volunteers

Increasing the number of parent volunteers is a goal of most teachers. Mrs. Hernandez, more than any other Bridging Cultures teacher, has systematically addressed the goal of engaging parent volunteers successfully. We have followed Mrs. Hernandez over a period of years and through two schools, as new realities interact with her own efforts. Early in the Bridging Cultures Project, Mrs. Hernandez decided she would transcend her fears of having parents observe her, and she began a campaign to entice parents to

volunteer in her classroom—on whatever terms that would work for them. Figure 3 gives an abbreviated account of how she first went about the task of developing a group of volunteers. (Note that ethnography, discussed later, plays a strong role in her process.)

As a result of this process, Mrs. Hernandez succeeded in getting 12 regular parent volunteers from the 17 families represented in her classroom, whom she matched to specific tasks that were geared to their level of skills. She also posted a folder, titled "Volunteers," in the classroom that had a page for each parent with a listing of the activities he or she could do as well as other tasks that might attract other parents who happened to look in the folder. At the request of teachers of native English-speaking children, Mrs. Hernandez translated her parent folder into English so that they could use it. In the 1999-2000 school year, Mrs. Hernandez's school recorded that 25 volunteers had each put in over 100 hours; 10 of these were from her classroom.

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Trumbull, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., & Hernandez, E. (2003). Parent involvement in schooling—According to whose values? *School Community Journal, 13*(2), 45–72. Retrieved from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

Indicator: The school offers parent education programs focused on what parents can do at home to support their student's learning, are led by trained parent leaders, and programs include some multi-session group experiences with specific agendas.

Evidence Review:

Henderson and Mapp's 2002 review of research found that the parental involvement *at home* best predicted student achievement. Based on his recent meta-analysis (Jeynes, 2012), Jeynes (2013) recommends:

> First, school leaders and teachers can enhance the efficacy of parental involvement by offering advice to parents on the most vital components of *voluntary* expressions of family engagement, such as setting high expectations and adopting parenting styles that are associated with positive student outcomes. This guidance is particularly important because many parents do not realize how powerful and effective these factors are in promoting positive student outcomes. Second, the school can take an active role in encouraging parental engagement in areas such as checking homework and shared reading activities, given that school-based guidance appears to increase the efficacy of those particular behaviors. (para. 9)

Jeynes (2010) elaborates on what he means regarding parenting styles: "parental styles with a combination of high levels of love and support and a beneficial degree of discipline and structure tend to provide the healthiest environment" ("Parental Style," para. 2). "Socialization in the form of setting behavioral boundaries, giving reasons for the rules, providing developmentally appropriate guidance, and supporting children's developmental needs is consistently related to academic adjustment" (Shumow, 2010, p. 70). All of the above guidance might be best received when trained parent leaders present the information in small group sessions to other parents, avoiding the problem of parents feeling insulted when school personnel are perceived as "telling me how to raise *my* kids" (see Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 83). Weiss and Stephen (2009) report that programs that train parents to be appropriately and effectively involved in their children's homework have found positive effects on parents' supportive involvement, increases in the time children spend on homework, higher homework accuracy, and higher grades.

Walberg (2007) notes, "cooperative efforts by parents and educators to modify alterable academically stimulating conditions in the home have had beneficial effects on learning for both older and younger students" (p. 96). Offering courses for parents of preschoolers can pay huge dividends by enriching the "curriculum of the home," (see Example below) which can be much more predictive of academic learning than the family's socioeconomic status (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Redding, 2000, 2006). Parents of elementary-aged children benefit from courses on interactive reading, developing good reading and study habits, and practicing responsibility (ADI, 2011). While the benefits of family involvement at home extends into high school, it is important that engagement practices are developmentally appropriate and responsive to maturing adolescents' needs (Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2009). Catsambis "found that adolescents whose parents were aware of their coursework, encouraged college attendance, and obtained information about postsecondary opportunities completed more course credits in science and mathematics. She also found that parental supervision at home was strongly associated with academic achievement in 8th grade, but not in 12th grade" (Sanders, 2011, p. 142).

> The school community is a learning community, and teachers and parents are learners as well as the students. The SCC [School Community Council] can plan educational opportunities for teachers to build their skills in working with parents. The SCC can plan parent education programs. Some parent education programs may take the form of the typical "event," with a speaker or group sessions led by other parents or teachers. An especially productive, high-quality parent education program might span two or three

meetings of a small group of parents, led by a parent, with a curriculum to study and discuss. Multiple sessions allow the group to jell and parents to get to know each other. Topics for these sessions might be drawn from the curriculum of the home—supporting children's reading habits and study habits at home; encouraging respectful and responsible behavior; or getting preschoolers ready for school. A parent course for parents of children with disabilities might help parents support the learning of children with special needs, provide an opportunity for parents to share experiences, and increase parents' understanding of special education. The curriculum contains informational content, opportunities for discussion, and activities to carry out with children between sessions. (Redding, 2006, p. 161)

Such education programs were included as part of a comprehensive parental engagement program (Solid Foundation®) delivered to 129 low-achieving schools; a study of those schools published by the Harvard Family Research Project found that the gain on state assessment tests demonstrated by these schools over a two-year period was nearly double that of a control group of schools with identical beginning scores (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). Church and Dollins (2010) also cite research that connects parent workshop programs to improved test scores. In another study, migrant parents participated in 8–24 group training sessions over the course of their child's kindergarten year and were also loaned educational materials to use at home; their children scored significantly higher on reading assessments than children in a control group both at the end of first grade and again at the end of fifth or sixth grade (St. Clair, Jackson, & Zweiback, 2012).

In one study (O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008), parents' and community members' survey responses indicated they were most interested in taking classes that were directly related to their child's academic success. O'Donnell et al. also found the involvement of low-income, urban parents may be highly dependent upon personal outreach efforts and relationship building, so establishing welcoming parent centers and encouraging parent leaders to initiate personal contacts is highly recommended.

As all leaders do, parent leaders require training and support (Henderson, 2010; Henderson, Jacob, Kernan-Schloss, & Raimondo, 2004; Redding, 2006). Well-designed parent leadership programs prepare parents for their leadership roles with training on:

- Human relations strategies;
- Effective team functioning;
- Communication skills;
- Research and practice on the family's influence on student learning;
- Use of a variety of data;
- Goal-setting, planning, and program evaluation;
- Developing organizational constitutions, bylaws, and procedures;
- Defining roles for parents and parent leaders; and
- Understanding and working with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

Coaching, mentoring, and follow-up support to training are key elements of a well-designed parent leadership program. Organizations that promote and train parent leaders offer on-site technical assistance and consultation. District and school personnel who serve as family facilitators, trained for the purpose, may also provide consistent training and support for parent leaders. (Henderson & Redding, 2011, pp. 106–107)

Example: Excerpt from *Parents and Learning* (Redding, 2000, pp. 7–8):
Research on the curriculum of the home isolates specific patterns of family life that correspond with a child's success in academic learning. Specifically, studies have positively linked certain family practices with a child's learning. These family practices are listed here under three headings…:
THE PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP

- Daily conversation about everyday events;
- Expressions of affection;
- Family discussion of books, newspapers, magazines, television programs;
- Family visits to libraries, museums, zoos, historical sites, cultural activities; and
- Encouragement to try new words, expand vocabulary.
  ROUTINE OF FAMILY LIFE
- Formal study time at home;
- A daily routine that includes time to eat, sleep, play, work, study and read;
- A quiet place to study and read; and
- Family interest in hobbies, games, activities of educational value.
  FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND SUPERVISION
- Priority given to schoolwork and reading over television and recreation;
- Expectation of punctuality;
- Parental expectation that children do their best;
- Concern for correct and effective use of language;
- Parental monitoring of children's peer group;
- Monitoring and joint analysis of [screen time]; and
- Parental knowledge of child's progress in school and personal growth.

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Indicator: Professional development programs for teachers include assistance in working effectively with parents.

Evidence Review:

"Although most educators agree that family involvement is important, few enter their profession knowing how to develop excellent partnership programs" (Patte, 2011, p. 147). Dotger and Bennett (2010) propose that teachers and school leaders need both preservice training and ongoing professional development, including practice in engaging with a variety of family contexts, to develop the necessary skills to foster effective school–home partnerships. Teachers may incorrectly assume parents know how to help their children, and they may express surprise that parents find school personnel threatening (Shumow & Harris, 2000).

> The major emphasis in teacher preparation programs is on the technical aspects of professional performance, not the deeply interpersonal aspects of their task. Such interpersonal aspects include empathy, communication, and in-depth knowledge of the lives of the families in which their students dwell outside the classroom. (Hiatt-Michael, 2006, p. 12)

Carefully planned professional development can help teachers learn about effective two-way communication and other components of partnering that are vital to leverage this key to student success. One study found that student performance in math and reading improved at a 40–50% high rate when teachers reached out to parents in these three ways:

- Met face-to-face with each family at the beginning of the school year
- Sent families materials each week on ways to help their children at home
- Telephoned routinely with news on how the children were doing, not just when they were having problems or acting up (Westat & Policy Studies Assoc., 2002, cited in Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 94)

Many teachers report receiving little or no preparation for working with parents during their undergraduate teacher education programs (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Patte, 2011; Shumow & Harris, 2000). In contrast, a few isolated programs do offer examples of practical, engaging course and field work that provide a solid foundation for teachers to build on when interacting with students' families (Baker & Murray, 2011; Bartels & Eskow, 2010; de la Piedra, Munter, & Giron, 2006; Katz & Bauch, 2001; Murray, Handyside, Straka, & Arton-Titus, 2013; Power & Perry, 2001; Sutterby, Rubin, & Abrego, 2006; Warren, Noftle, Ganley, & Quintanar, 2011), although the quality of parent contacts and interaction can vary by placement—urban vs. suburban, and general education vs. special education (Hindin, 2010).

> Understanding what teachers believe is especially important in order to design effective professional development workshops about parent involvement.…Teachers are valuable informants because they have a unique and proximal vantage point from which to observe family participation and influence on children's school. Teachers can also inform us about the strategies they find effective and the barriers that they encounter in involving parents. It is particularly important to understand these barriers when planning programs (Shumow & Harris, 2000, p. 11)

Teacher training is even more essential when the teacher and the students' families have different home cultures, even if they share the same ethnicity. In one study, teachers seemed stymied by the question about what knowledge the families or communities might have that could contribute to the school children's education, possibly indicating that the teachers held a deficit view of these families, or that the teachers perceived academic skills and knowledge as separate from typical family activities (Shumow & Harris, 2000). "The evidence did not support the assumption that teachers from the same ethnic background as the families were able to apply their tacit knowledge to parent involvement practices or to reflect the children's background in delivery of the school curriculum" (Shumow & Harris, 2000, p. 18). The Bridging Cultures Project used in-service training and action research to help a cadre of teachers learn about collectivistic cultures vs. individualistic cultures (Trumbull et al., 2001; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). Though the project aimed to promote more effective instruction, the teachers found that it also greatly facilitated improved communication and partnerships with their students' families. Kugler (2012) notes that something as basic as eye contact can easily be misinterpreted by those from different cultures—school personnel born and raised in the U.S. expect to have eye contact during conversation as a basic sign of attention and respect from the listener. However, for many people in other cultures, the opposite is true—looking away or down shows respect and deference to the speaker. Similarly, wording can be easily misinterpreted: offering a workshop or tip sheet on "parenting" may insult families ("They think we're not doing a good job! I don't want someone telling my how to raise *my* kids;" Henderson et al., 2007, p. 83). Instead, offer suggestions for maximizing learning outside of school, and invite the families to suggest specific topics of interest. Teacher training can bring awareness of the deficit view many hold toward parents of poverty, language difference, or low education by showing how to recognize and build on families' strengths and funds of knowledge (Chen, Kyle, & McIntyre, 2008; Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2005; Moll & González, 2004). "When school staff have a better understanding of their students' home cultures, families' parenting practices, home contexts, home crises, or significant family and community events, they can develop processes and strategies to bridge school-based and home-based activities and increase support for student learning" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 14).

Symeou et al. (2012) reported on a professional development course that involved training teachers to use active listening and other communication skills (typically used by counselors) and provided opportunities for practice and reflection, which resulted in teachers reporting increased confidence and better communication with the parents of their students. "Two-way communication involves the importance of listening as well as informing" (Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 26). Positive communication sets the stage for developing a relationship built on trust and respect, including beneficial home–school relationships (Bartels & Eskow, 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2003). "Every interaction between family members and school staff, therefore, is an opportunity to develop or erode trust" (Sheldon & Sanders, 2009, p. 34). Jeynes (2010, 2013) meta-analyses predict that educators who consistently show love and respect for students and their families, hold high expectations of students, and communicate effectively and frequently will be successful. Overloaded teachers and busy parents may face a variety of barriers to beneficial communication, but wise school leaders will establish a healthy climate and find ways to promote ongoing, candid, supportive, bidirectional communication (Redding, 2006).

> Most communication between the teacher and the parents revolves around disciplinary actions or student grades.…Communication is a key in Epstein's six categories in developing stronger home–school relationships. Teachers can expand on this by phoning all their students' families. Should a high school teacher have over 150 students, this may seem daunting. However, it can be done by scheduling phone calls within the preparatory period and staying on the phone just long enough to introduce yourself and make one positive comment about the student, and both the parent and the student will become allies. As a high school teacher, I felt I would never be able to call all my parents. I soon realized that if I scheduled my phone calls during my prep period, I was able to contact all

160 of my student's families. Often I left messages on answering machines, and at times parents would call me back to ask questions, or to thank me for introducing myself. I found that by making positive contacts with parents, I was better able to communicate other issues later on during the school year should the need arise. (Ramirez, 2002, p. 56)

Teachers can also learn to use interactive homework, which can be especially effective in bridging home and school with powerful, positive outcomes for students, especially when coupled with teacher outreach and invitations for two-way communication. In a randomized experimental study, Kraft and Dougherty (2013) found that frequent teacher phone calls and text/written messages with families increased students' engagement. Van Voorhis (2003, 2011a, 2011b) has done several studies based on TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork, developed by Epstein and colleagues); Bennett-Conroy (2012) also used TIPS and teacher phone calls as the basis for a quasi-experimental comparison. In all cases, students' homework completion and parental involvement increased, and (where measured) grades improved. Reading School–Home Links, available from the U.S. Department of Education (1999), are another example of student assignments that require parent–child interaction, link to school learning, and simultaneously educate parents about school learning (Redding, 2006).

Professional development is enhanced by opportunities for teacher practice and reflection. Kyle et al. (2005) describe the reflection process:

It is just this process that enables a teacher, away from the immediacy and demands of the day, to consider decisions made, consequences, purposes, and next steps. In our study, this provided a time for the teachers to consider ways in which they did or could have connected their teaching to what they were learning from their students' families. (p. 33)

To achieve a healthy school learning community, Cavey (1998) recommends "hands-on," interactive professional development, followed by brief refresher trainings throughout the school year and focus group discussions on implementation.

It is imperative that administrators and school boards also participate in preservice and ongoing professional development on the importance of and strategies for cultivating positive home–school relationships (Dotger & Bennett, 2010; Hiatt-Michael, 2006, 2010; Sheldon & Sanders, 2009). In Bartels and Eskow's (2010) study, "participants reported school administrative support to be important for both their motivation to complete the coursework and their ability to foster change in practice" (p. 68). One education professional they interviewed said this:

Throughout all of these courses I have learned the value of forming and strengthening relationships between families and professionals. By putting aside our assumptions, we can hear the needs of each other more clearly. Additionally, I learned that families and staff have many common beliefs and that we can activate small steps in order to improve our relationships. Also, that listening is definitely important, but taking action to initiate change is what families and professionals find most significant. (Bartels & Eskow, 2010, p. 69)

Example, Excerpt from Henderson et al. (2007, p. 60):

Melissa Whipple, coordinator of the parent academic liaison program in San Diego, tells this story:
I was at a staff development training where teachers were discussing an issue in small groups. One teacher was very good at listening. After a colleague offered an opinion, she repeated what she

understood that person had said. Then she checked to make sure the group understood the speaker's point of view.

This really let us work efficiently and avoid misunderstandings, because she could listen and rephrase the ideas of others so well. After the meeting, I complimented her on this skill and asked her if she had received it through teacher training.

"Oh no," she said. "I used to be a bank teller. I received what they call 'active listening' training because people are so sensitive about their money. We were thoroughly prepared on how to discuss money-related issues with customers."

This really struck me: if people are that sensitive about issues related to money, they must be super-sensitive about issues related to their children. Even when people share a common language and culture, we still have miscommunication. Think what happens when differences in upbringing, language, social class, religion, and personal experiences change the relationship dynamic!

Teachers deserve training to increase their confidence and capacity to have sensitive conversations with parents. Parents deserve to be treated with insight, skill, and finesse when discussing their child's education and development. If bank tellers get this training, teacher prep and staff development programs should offer it, too.

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