

Executive Summary

In local communities across the country, NEA affiliate members and leaders are working closely with parents, families,* and community members to close achievement gaps, improve low-performing schools, and transform relationships between schools and their communities.

This report identifies and describes key partnerships that Association members have forged in 16 communities and includes the Association perspective on these efforts.

Part I of this report reviews recent research on school and family collaboration and presents 10 key strategies for creating effective family-school-community partnerships that are focused on advancing student learning. It also includes recommendations for moving this important work forward.

Part II contains profiles for each of the 16 partnership programs. In many cases, Association members have been catalysts for or taken on key roles in these effective programs. These profiles demonstrate very clearly that family-school-community partnerships with a central focus on advancing student learning can have a powerful impact.

Methods

To learn more about local family-school-community partnerships, an interdepartmental NEA work group reviewed a host of parent and community engagement initiatives designed to advance student learning in schools and districts represented by NEA's local and state affiliates. In this first scan, the team identified 16 partnerships that meet the following criteria:

- ▶ Educators and leaders who are active members in NEA local and/or state affiliates
- ▶ A two- to five-year track record
- ▶ Success in engaging families and/or community organizations
- ▶ Evaluation plans in place to measure student outcomes
- ▶ Increased family or community involvement over time
- ▶ Reasonable costs and potential for others to replicate the program

Three Types of Initiatives

The 16 programs profiled in this report fall into one of three categories:

- ▶ **Community and family-community programs:** These are efforts to engage the community (including families, local residents, and community organizations) in advancing student learning.
- ▶ **Programs to engage parents and other family members:** These are programs/efforts to engage families in children's learning and development.
- ▶ **Wraparound social and community services programs:** These are programs that provide social and health services to strengthen and support children and families.

* Throughout this report, we define "parents" and "families" to mean any family members, legal guardians, or other adults acting in a parental role to a student.

Ten Key Strategies for Effective Partnerships

Across these programs, the NEA team identified 10 major strategies and approaches that define the direction of program efforts and appear to be critical to their success.

Strategy #1 - Agreeing on core values: Taking time at the beginning to think deeply and reflect about what participants believe, and why they think the efforts will work.

Strategy #2 - Listening to the community: Identifying priorities and developing an action plan in a collaborative way that creates community consensus around what needs to happen and in what sequence.

Strategy #3 - Using data to set priorities and focus strategies: Looking closely at current achievement trends and addressing areas of weakness in students' knowledge and skills.

Strategy #4 - Providing relevant, on-site professional development: Basing professional development on data and conversations among stakeholders, in a way that builds both educator-educator and educator-parent collaborations.

Strategy #5 - Building collaborations with community partners: Pulling in strategic partners and developing community buy-in—with colleges, social service agencies, community groups, faith-based organizations, local leaders, public officials, and businesses—to improve student learning and other outcomes.

Strategy #6 - Using targeted outreach to focus on high-needs communities, schools, and students: Identifying groups that need special attention, learning about their concerns and needs, and responding in culturally appropriate ways.

Strategy #7 - Building one-to-one relationships between families and educators that are linked to learning: Taking time to have conversations and reach agreement on how best to collaborate in order to improve student achievement.

Strategy #8 - Setting, communicating, and supporting high and rigorous expectations: Making it clear that success is the norm by creating pathways to college, especially for students at risk and those at the margins, and providing students with support to succeed.

Strategy #9 - Addressing cultural differences: Providing support for teachers and education support professionals to bridge barriers of culture, class, and language.

Strategy #10 - Connecting students to the community: Making learning hands-on and relevant to students' lives while also showing that students and schools serve the community.

Conclusions

These initiatives to engage families and advance student learning, many of which are led by teachers and education support professionals, are a positive development, but they are not yet a trend. They do, however, show that NEA and its affiliates can leverage significant change in local communities. This work is in the beginning stages and it deserves to be studied further and scaled up, with guidance from the research.

More infrastructure and capacity-building are needed at the state and district levels to support, evaluate, replicate, and report on this work. Finding ways to fund

development, dissemination, and implementation of the effective strategies discussed in this report is also part of the challenge.

Identifying these 16 successful programs is a first step in what will be a yearly effort to collect more examples of Association-supported practices that strengthen family-school-community ties in ways that transform schools and advance student learning.

Following are recommendations to scale up and strengthen this work so it becomes a focus for the Association and other organizations committed to creating great public schools for all students.

Recommendations

1. At the local level: Build capacity in schools

- ▶ Use professional development to enhance educators' knowledge and skills in collaborating with families and community members.
- ▶ Bargain contract language or create Memorandums of Understanding that provide time, opportunities, and reimbursement for teachers, as a way to support stronger and deeper teacher-parent connections. Work with the school district to support capacity-building for educators on family engagement, using district professional development days.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance on appropriate use of Title I funds for teacher-parent collaborations to achieve the goals of the school improvement plan, such as using the School-Parent Compact required under Section 1118.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance for educators to show parents how to use data to monitor and support their children's progress.
- ▶ Identify cultural brokers in the community who can help enhance communication between teachers and families and develop shared expectations around learning.

2. At the school district level: Work collaboratively on policies and practices

- ▶ Support districtwide policies that promote effective family-school-community partnerships and commit resources such as funding and professional development to make them work.
- ▶ Support wraparound community services to address the health and social needs of students, as well as their academic ones.
- ▶ Ensure that needs of families from diverse cultures are addressed in a systemic way, and provide needed translation and interpretation services.

- ▶ Give first priority to those sites with the greatest needs.
- ▶ Create structures such as action teams and regular community conversations to ensure student progress.

3. At the state level: Provide opportunities for dialogue and offer technical assistance

- ▶ Train local facilitators to conduct communitywide conversations that can leverage change, focusing first on the neighborhoods with the greatest needs.
- ▶ Disseminate information on appropriate and effective use of Title I funds to further engage families in partnerships that advance student learning.
- ▶ Use the strategies described in this report to make recommendations to public officials and policymakers.

4. At the national level: Promote research-based strategies on family-school-community partnerships

- ▶ Place family-school-community partnerships at the center of school reform.
- ▶ Include provisions for family-school-community partnerships in proposed legislative and policy language, in comments on federal regulations, and in policy forums and conferences.
- ▶ Continue to advocate for meaningful, research-driven family-school-community partnerships in federal legislation.
- ▶ Disseminate the strategies for family-school-community partnerships recommended in this report throughout the Association.

These recommendations are provided to support and inform NEA's mission to create a great public school for every student and to give priority attention to the schools and communities with the greatest need.