

## Report outlines strategies for school reform partnerships

A recent report from the National Education Association's Priority Schools Campaign outlines key strategies for effective partnerships. The report, *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning*, was written by a team including lead author Anne T. Henderson, a senior consultant to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Below is a summary of ways school leaders can apply the strategies from the report:

- **Core values:** Before delving into implementation, think about and discuss key beliefs and why a certain plan makes sense.
- **Community input:** Don't plan and implement in isolation. Reach out to the community for input as you set priorities and create an action plan.
- **Data-driven:** Don't relegate family and community engagement to "feel-good" events. Instead, focus on achievement trends and ways to address challenges.
- **Professional development:** Offer relevant, on-site training that is based on data and stakeholder input and encourages "educator-educator and educator-parent collaborations."
- **Community partners:** Build community buy-in and work collaboratively with a wide range of community partners to tackle student needs.
- **Targeted outreach:** Consider the specialized needs of a specific niche within your community, such as Hispanic families.
- **Relationship-centered:** Build one-to-one relationships between families and educators that focus on how to improve student achievement.
- **High expectations:** Make it clear that "success is the norm" by emphasizing ways to help students excel, including college-readiness.
- **Culturally responsive:** Help educators "bridge barriers of culture, class, and language."
- **Community connections:** Consider hands-on learning, including community service, to make programs relevant to students.

## Report showcases partnership-driven school reform

By Tricia Offutt

A new report from the National Education Association's Priority Schools Campaign provides 16 school and district profiles that defy the notion that school improvement requires a turnaround specialist, firing principals, or turning things over to a charter school operator, said Anne T. Henderson, senior consultant to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and coauthor of *Beyond the Bake Sale*.

Henderson is the lead author of the NEA's *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning*, which shows how family-school-community partnerships can boost student achievement, especially among at-risk students in Title I schools.

Indeed, heart-to-heart community conversations sparked change at Shanks Middle School, a Title I school profiled in the report. The school is located in Quincy, Fla., and 92 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Community talks led to parents and community members forming a Strategic Organizing Group that focused first on building and grounds improvements. The group's first steps resulted in 500 volunteers working for eight days to spruce up the school campus, which saved the Gadsden County School District over \$100,000.

Today, test scores continue to rise, and Shanks Middle has moved from a state accountability grade of D to B within a few years.

The school's success underscores that family and community engagement is a core school

reform strategy, Henderson said. "I've been tracking the research for 30 years and it's really clear that schools that are failing will never turn around unless they work closely with their families and communities."

### Local reform key

It's critical that schools, families, and communities forge a path together rather than wait on solutions from politicians, said Lily Eskelsen, vice president for the NEA. Such local, individualized reform is ideal because it's "designed by those people who know the kids' names," she added. "It's not rocket science. It's common sense."

Programs featured in the report were chosen based on criteria such as a track record of at least two to five years, whether they have evaluation plans that measure student outcomes, and also if it's feasible to replicate them, and if so, at a reasonable cost.

Also included is a list of strategies that reflects how the programs developed effective partnerships as well as recommendations for encouraging such partnerships at the local, state, and national levels.

As part of its Priority Schools Campaign, the NEA will continue to gather more examples of local school reform movements, such as those included in the report, Eskelsen added. The NEA also is providing technical assistance and other supports to the 39 struggling schools participating in the campaign and will track and report on their progress.