The Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

The Challenge

Many states, districts, and schools struggle with how to execute partnerships and cultivate and sustain positive relationships with families. A common refrain from educators is that they have a strong desire to work with families from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and to develop stronger partnerships of shared responsibility for children's outcomes between home and school, but that they do not know how to accomplish this.

If effective cradle-to-career educational partnerships between home and school are to be implemented with fidelity and sustained, engagement initiatives must include a concerted focus on developing adult capacity, whether through pre- and in-service professional development for educators; academies, workshops, seminars, and workplace trainings for families; or as an integrated part of parent-teacher partnership activities. When effectively implemented, such opportunities build and enhance the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of stakeholders to engage in effective partnerships that support student achievement and development and the improvement of schools.

Opportunity Conditions

There are many types of effective capacity-building *opportunities* for LEA staff and families. Research on promising practice suggests that there are certain *process* conditions that must be met in order for adult participants to come away from a learning experience with not only new knowledge but with the ability and desire to apply what they have learned. Research also suggests important *organizational* conditions that must be met in order to sustain and scale these opportunity efforts across districts and groups of schools.

Process Conditions

The term *process* here refers to the series of actions, operations, and procedures that are part of any activity or initiative. These conditions are key to the design of effective initiatives for building the capacity of families and school staff to partner in ways that support student achievement and school improvement. Initiatives must be:

- *Linked to Learning*: *Initiatives are aligned with school and district achievement goals, and connect families to the teaching and learning goals for the students.*
- *Relational*: *A major focus of the initiative is on building respectful and trusting relationships between home and school.*
- *Developmental*: *The initiatives focus on building the intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program.*

- *Collective/Collaborative*: *Learning is conducted in group versus individual settings and is focused on building networks and learning communities.*

- *Interactive: Participants are given opportunities to test out and apply new skills. Skill mastery requires coaching and practice.*

Organizational Conditions

Research on the conditions necessary for educational entities to successfully implement and sustain family engagement identifies the following organizational conditions that support fidelity and sustainability.[i] Initiatives must be:

- *Systemic*: *Purposefully designed as a core component of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround.*

- *Integrated: Embedded into structures and processes such as training and professional development, teaching and learning, curriculum, and community collaboration.*

- *Sustained*: *Operating with adequate resources and infrastructure support.*

Policy and Program Goals

The goals of policy and programming directed at improving family engagement efforts must include a dual focus on building of the *capacity* of staff and families to engage in partnerships.

We break down this capacity into four components — the "4-C's" [ii]:

- *Capabilities: Human Capital, Skills and Knowledge*

- *Connections: Important Relationships and Networks — Social Capital*

- *Confidence: Individual Level of Self–Efficacy*

- *Cognition: a person's assumptions, beliefs, and worldview*

Staff and Family Partnership Outcomes

Once staff and families have built the requisite capabilities, connections, confidence, and cognition, they will be able to engage in partnerships that will support student achievement and student learning.

Staff prepared to engage in partnerships with families can:

- Honor and recognize families' existing knowledge, skill, and forms of engagement

- Create and sustain school and district cultures that welcome, invite and promote family engagement and development
- Develop and connect all family engagement initiatives to student learning

Families, regardless of their race/ethnicity, educational background, gender, disability or socioeconomic status, are prepared to engage in partnerships with school and districts can engage in diverse roles such as:

- *Supporters* of their children's learning and development
- *Encouragers* of an achievement identity, a positive self image, and a "can do" spirit in their children
- *Monitors* of their children's time, behavior, boundaries and resources
- *Models* of lifelong learning and enthusiasm for education
- *Advocates/Activists* for improved learning opportunities for their children and at their schools
- *Decision-makers/choosers* of educational options for their children, the school, and community
- *Collaborators* with school staff and members of the community on issues of school improvement and reform

As a result of this enhanced capacity on the part of district and school staff and families, districts and schools are able to cultivate and sustain at scale active, respectful, and effective partnerships with families that are linked to learning and support children's learning and development and school improvement.

Figure 2: The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships

[i] Weiss, H. B., Lopez, M. E., Rosenberg, H. (2011). *Beyond random acts: Family, school, and community engagement as an integral part of education reform.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved from Footnote: Beyond Random Acts: Family, school, and community engatement as an integral part of educators reform

[ii] Higgins, M.C. (2005). *Career imprints: Creating Leaders across an industry.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass