

RESEARCH BRIEF

N P B P T I By Rhonda Barton

As Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2002) point out, such partnerships have moved from the category of “luxury” to “necessity.”

The No Child Left Behind Act’s commitment to parent involvement is primarily driving the attitudinal shift. Under NCLB, parents are treated not simply as participants but “informed and empowered decisionmakers” in their children’s education (Gomez & Greengard, 2002, p. 1). Another motivating factor in forging stronger relations is a solid 30-year research base that consistently links meaningful family involvement to student success in school.

The most comprehensive research synthesis on this topic was completed by Henderson and Mapp in 2002. They summarized 51 studies—31 of which looked at the relationships between student achievement and parent-community involvement. The researchers concluded, “When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more” (p. 1).

Many of the studies showed that students with involved parents were more likely to have higher grades and test scores; enroll in higher level programs; be promoted; pass their classes; attend school regularly; have better social skills and improved behavior; graduate; and pursue postsecondary education. And, the benefits cut across socioeconomic class, ethnic/racial background, and parents’ education level.

Several studies pinpointed specific family involvement activities that make a difference. For example, teacher outreach to parents (holding personal meetings, sending materials home, and communicating about progress) was

linked to consistent gains in students’ reading and math performance. Reading and math scores also went up as a result of workshops showing parents how to help their children at home.

When it came to engaging families from very diverse backgrounds, Henderson and Mapp found successful schools share three key practices:

They focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members

They recognize, respect, and address families’ needs, as well as class and cultural differences

They embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared (p. 1)

Five years after their synthesis was published, Henderson and Mapp—together with Johnson and Davies—put forth a rubric describing four versions of school-family-community partnerships (2007, p. 1):

The Partnership School believes that all families and communities have resources to share; it does whatever is necessary to work together so every student is successful.

The Open-Door School provides many different opportunities for parents to become involved; it asks for—and receives—help from the community.

The Come-if-We-Call School believes there’s only so much parents can do and emphasizes parents’ role in helping children at home. It knows where to go in the community for help, but doesn’t access those resources on a regular basis.

The Fortress School thinks that parents belong at home and that community groups should mind their own business.

While providing tools for developing so-called “Partnership Schools,” the authors stress that positive results aren’t automatic. Careful planning and



Photo by Karie Hamilton

