



NCPIE Update

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An Expert at Family-Community Engagement Shares with NCPIE A View from the Field

The June NCPIE meeting offered a rare chance to hear the story of a family and community engagement expert who has "crossed over" to work in a school district. She spoke about her efforts to implement an effective parent involvement initiative in Boston.



Karen Mapp

If you are working to build family/school/community partnerships in your state or local district, then Karen Mapp is someone for you to know. She is many things: co-author of the latest review of the research on parent involvement (*A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*), president of the Institute for Responsive Education, and most important to this discussion, Interim Deputy Director of the Boston Public Schools (BPS), Office of Family and Community Engagement, since September 2003.

But First, Some Background

In January of 2000, BPS Superintendent, Tom Payzant appointed the Family and Community Task Force. Co-chaired by Mapp and a member of the Boston School Committee, its charge was to recommend ways that BPS could "more fully include, engage and support families as school partners." (*Family and Community Engagement Task Force Report*). The Task Force knew that the BPS must have a coherent system-wide strategy to support parents and families in their efforts to enhance their children's educational experience .

The Task Force asked BPS parents and community partners three key questions:

1. What services should parents expect from the Boston Public Schools?
2. What is working well now in your school, in the BPS and in the community to help their children to succeed in school?

3. What services should the BPS add, change, or eliminate to improve parent involvement and communication between home and school?

Instead of holding big public meetings, the Task Force conducted several focus groups, a direct mail campaign, community forums, and surveys throughout March and April of 2000. In addition, the Task Force heard from parents via written comment including e-mail and telephone. Out of the tremendous amount of data collected came nine recommendations, including establishing a Deputy Superintendent-level position to firmly establish BPS commitment to family and community engagement, with resources both financial and human.

The data also showed that the structure of BPS parent involvement initiatives was “incomprehensible, caused tension, and needed restructuring” (*Mapp, NCPIE Meeting June 30, 2004*). Payzant next established a working group, which created the Office of Family and Community Engagement (FCE).

Establishing a Firm Foundation

At the outset, a FCE developed a three-year strategic plan with a critical mission statement: “FCE...seeks to create a culture of partnership in the district among schools, families and community members that supports high standards and quality educational outcomes for all students.” From the mission statement, three goals were developed to support children’s learning, a critical focus that Mapp strongly emphasized. The FCE goals are to:

1. Cultivate and sustain partnerships among BPS staff and Boston families and community members that support children’s learning and whole school reform.
2. Provide support and resources to support the efforts of families and community members to engage in children’s learning.
3. Provide support and resources to BPS staff to create strong and effective school, family, and community partnerships that support student learning.

Out of these three goals come seven strategic objectives.

One: Restructure and enhance how BPS disseminates and shares information and materials to parents, BPS staff, and community members.

- The entire BPS web-site has been upgraded and made more user-friendly for families and the general public. For example, families now have pin numbers so they can get specific data on their child’s performance.
- A new cable television show airs twice a month in the Boston area. The emphasis of the show is, of course, family and community engagement, and the show’s host talks about topics like the importance of school site councils.
- A public awareness campaign helps the public become more familiar with BPS. Mapp’s office frequently goes out to meet parents in their communities and at fairs, ethnic days and festivals. Booths are set up to distribute information about school to families and community members.

- The first-ever Parent Manual has just been written for families to help them help their kids at home and at school. It has been translated into seven languages. The manual will soon be available on the BPS website.

Two: Develop and implement a series of school-family-community partnership initiatives that span the district and focus on 1) creating family friendly schools, and 2) BPS students reaching proficiency in literacy and math. Specific emphasis will be placed on initiatives to support schools in need of improvement.

Mapp and BPS decided to let the schools design their own initiatives. Principals at each school will get a 3-day family-community partnership training followed by technical assistance. This training and TA will provide them with “the stuff” needed to seriously implement partnerships with parents, such as sample letters and examples of specific activities for parents and other adult learners. Seed money is available for schools with FCE-approved initiatives.

Three: Create a student registration process that is family-friendly and utilizes the latest technology.

Mapp spent her first three months on the job working on this objective. Every year, the Boston Globe had written articles criticizing the district’s student registration process. It was Mapp’s goal to have that **not** happen in 2004. After adopting cutting-edge technology to improve the process, Mapp took it upon herself to personally escort the Globe staff writer around the registration center. She pointed out exactly what was taking place and changes that had been made. The result: a “decent article” in the Globe this time.

Four: Provide ongoing training and technical assistance to parents and school staff on effective school-family-community practices that support students’ learning.

Each month, BPS offers workshops on parent involvement, Massachusetts’ achievement test (MCAS), and NCLB. Mapp established a collaborative relationship between BPS, the Institute for Responsive Education, and the local PIRC. Instead of each entity running their own workshops and pulling in small numbers of participants, a web-based calendar has been developed and each agency has developed a monthly schedule where they are 1) not duplicating services, and 2) making sure that important workshops are available every month.

Five: Update materials on and provide support for school parent decision-making structures and government activities.

To show its commitment to empowering parents, 22 FCE staff are dedicated ambassadors to parents and school staff. They visit district schools to collect and share information with parents and principals about opportunities for parents to get involved in Boston’s decision-making councils. In addition, information about the council is included in the *Parent Manual* and is a key component for the 3-day training each BPS principal will receive in August.

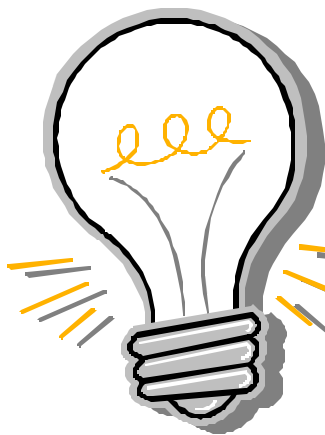
Six: Deepen level of community partnerships on the district level that support children’s learning.

The goals here are to enhance systemic partnerships. Examples of how this has been done include kiosks in grocery stores about FCE and BPS. The Face-to-Face program, another example, is run by the local PIRC and it helps FCE with training and its public media campaign.

Seven: Build an infrastructure to support and carry out the mission and objectives of the FCE initiative.

The Office of FCE has a 44-member staff who are committed and well-compensated for being on the front lines with parents in Boston. They are full-time employees that staff each of BPS’ three Zone Centers from 9-5pm daily and during peak periods for extended and weekend hours.

For more information go to: <http://boston.k12.ma.us> and www.responsiveeducation.org



Spotlight on *The Evidence*

A continuing column highlighting the research from “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement” by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp.

This month we are spotlighting a study that reviews psychological theory and research about why parents become involved in their children’s elementary and secondary education. Originally published in the Spring 1997 issue of *Review of Education Research*, authors Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler found three major constructs that are central to parents’ basic involvement decisions.

Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children’s Education?

Constructs Influencing Parents Decisions About Involvement:

1. Role construction: How parents identify aspects of parenting has the biggest impact on whether and how they are involved. This includes the activities parents feel are important, necessary and permissible to be involved in with their children as well as expectations and influences of groups with which parents’ identify.
2. Efficacy: Whether parents believe that their efforts make a difference in helping children succeed in school is also critical. Parents who believed that their efforts would have a positive impact were more likely to allocate time and effort to being involved.
3. Invitation: Opportunities and invitations to be involved, and an overall school climate that invites involvement are also factors. The school staff and children themselves provide signals to parents, which in turn influence decision about involvement.

The Construction of Choosing How to Be Involved

After having decided to be involved, the authors suggest that decisions by parents about *how* they are to be involved are shaped by: (*see Evidence pg: 44*)

- Their perceptions of their own skills, interests and abilities;
- Their experiences of other demands on time and energy; and
- Their experiences of specific suggestions and invitations for involvement from children, teachers, and schools.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler offer several recommendations for educators, researchers, and policymakers to influence and improve parent involvement. They are:

- ✓ School staff should make an explicit effort to include parents in the school's mission;
- ✓ Parents and school staff should work together to define the parent's role;
- ✓ Teachers and parents should spend time together agreeing on mutual expectations for the parent's role and devising specific ways for parents to offer academically useful help to their children;
- ✓ Encourage community employers to offer parents time away from work to be involved in school;
- ✓ Encourage teachers to make regular communications to parents about learning goals, activities, and focused suggestions for parental help; and,
- ✓ The parents' perspective should be included throughout the entire process.

New Parent Involvement and Engagement Resources

Federal Parent Involvement Guidance: The Department of Education has released guidance on the parental involvement provisions of No Child Left Behind. This guidance addresses questions that are primarily based on issues raised by state and local school officials and staff, education leaders, technical assistance providers, parents, parent advocacy organizations, parental involvement coordinators/liaisons, and others who are actively engaged in working with parents to improve student achievement and learning.

This guidance is divided into five major sections:

1. General issues related to parental involvement;
2. The parental involvement responsibilities of state educational agencies (SEAs);
3. The responsibilities of local educational agencies (LEAs);
4. The responsibilities of schools; and
5. The responsibilities of LEAs and schools to build parents' capacity for becoming involved in improving their child's academic achievement.

Also included are appendices which provide relevant definitions, key parental notice requirements, a list of research-based resources for improving teaching and learning, a sample template that might be used for the development of a district-wide parental involvement policy, and a sample template for a school-parent compact. *This guidance is available online at:* <http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc>.

The Education Trust Announces New Web Resources for Latino Parents, Community Leaders and Advocates: The Education Trust launches its Spanish-language website featuring reports and resources for Spanish-speaking parents, community leaders and advocates.

Reach the site at: <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/spanish.htm>

No Child Left Behind User Guide Now Available from The Education Trust- This guide provides user-friendly information on NCLB that parents and communities can understand and use. This guide highlights key aspects of the NCLB law in user-friendly language helping parents and communities use NCLB for advocacy. View on-line version of these materials at: <http://www2.edtrust.org/EdTrust/Parents+and+Community>

And don't forget to check the NCPPIE web site periodically for new information on parent involvement: www.ncpie.org.

Standing in Support of Continued Funding of America's Parent Involvement Resource Centers

America's Parent Involvement Resource Centers (PIRCs) provide parents, schools and organizations working with families with training, information, and technical assistance to understand how children develop and what they need to succeed in school. They support families in their efforts to help children learn. The workshops, programs, and training activities implemented and managed by the PIRCs help families and schools work together to raise student achievement. Because of PIRCs parents are able to enhance their parenting skills, foster their child's academic readiness, understand their child's academic development, and use resources to improve their child's learning.

As President Bush has once again issued a proposed budget that strips funding for the PIRCs, NCPPIE urges Congress to reinstate the federal dollars desperately needed to operate these valuable programs that are making a difference in America's communities by providing parents with the tools, information, and skill-sets they need to successfully support their child's well being and academic achievement.

The PIRCs are a unique, critical resource to families and communities and deserve continued funding. Here's why:

- By providing information, education and support, as well as links to other available community resources, the PIRCs promote educational self-sufficiency and well-being of families.
- By serving children, parents, and educators in school districts throughout individual states and by providing a variety of services that assist schools and parents in building closer home-school connections, the PIRCs increase parents' involvement in their children's education, and thus foster the developmental process of children.

- Central to all PIRC programs are the goals of strengthening parenting skills and increasing the confidence of parents to communicate effectively with school personnel.

PIRCs reach out to parents, in their individual communities, in languages they understand, about topics that are important to children's learning. We need to keep them funded!

The NCPIE Update is on summer break.
We hope you get one too.
See you in September.