

### Suggested Activities and Questions

1. Check with teachers you know, and ask how they welcome children and their parents to their classrooms each year. What welcoming activities do their schools do in addition to what is done by the classroom teacher?
2. Interview parents who volunteer in their children's classroom. Solicit their opinion of this involvement, asking how often they volunteer, how they became involved, why they think it is important, and what they are learning from the experience.
3. Think back to your own childhood and the family configurations you encountered. Compare these to the families you are reading about in this text, and consider

how you will welcome all kinds of families into your classroom.

4. Create three objectives on curriculum or school activities that a beginning teacher might devise and want to communicate to parents of her second-grade classroom. Then decide on the best ways to communicate these ideas with the parent group.
5. Locate a commercial establishment that displays children's work, and ask how the school became involved. Compare notes with classmates who have interviewed other establishments to determine what kinds of involvement your community appears to have with schools.

### Resources and Websites

Family Equality Council

Learning First Alliance

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

Parent-Teacher Association

Aspira Parents for Educational Excellence Program seeks to empower the Puerto Rican and Latino community through advocacy and the education and leadership development of its youth.

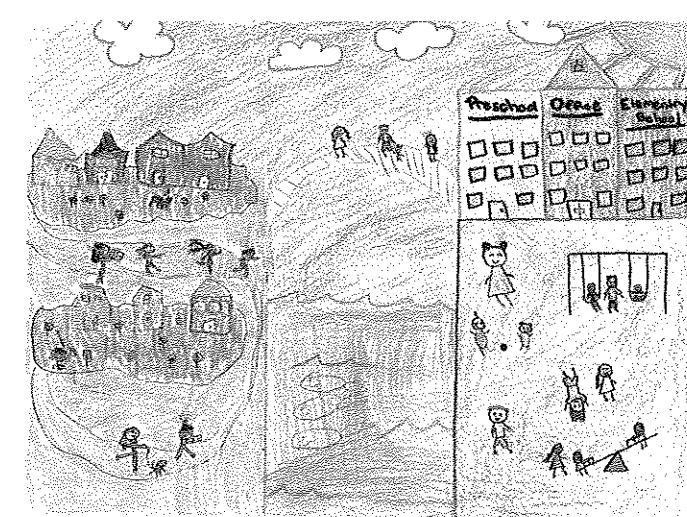
The Council for Exceptional Children is an organization for professionals and parents that provides multiple resources, such as training opportunities and legislation updates.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's website offers short articles for teachers, parents, and community members that are suitable for newsletters.

Strong Fathers-Strong Families is a training, technical assistance, and facilitation organization focused on strengthening children by strengthening fathers.

## CHAPTER 11

# Building School Partnerships with Families and Community Groups



### WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

We can agree that good teachers and schools work hard to involve parents and community members. Perhaps you even remember parent-teacher conferences and families arriving to watch the school play during your own schooling. However, some schools have decided to specifically plan, implement, and then examine strategies to increase and maintain family and community collaboration. Collaboration implies that the groups involved have a common goal, and in this case, the goal is serving young children in the best ways possible. A number of exciting programs have been refining their cooperative arrangements for some time, and as a teacher, you will want to learn about and take advantage of the fine work already done. Remember, partnership programs can start with a few small projects or grow from a well-conceived and well-directed program. However it grows, a plan must call for teachers and administrators to be committed to the new practice. Being committed, gaining knowledge about other programs, devising a plan, establishing means for communicating the plan, and involving others are necessary to the success of any project.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Discuss the levels of involvement by community adults in collaborative programs among families, schools, and communities.
- Identify the common elements of successful partnerships.
- Explain how current models of school, community, and family partnerships are able to use relationships to support healthy child development.

Much is right with US educational experiences in spite of some well-publicized problems. Education planners and policymakers in most communities have a suitable base upon which to build, and they can draw from numerous models to bring about improvements and viable partnerships. Schools are still the catalysts in most new educational endeavors. No other social institution in the United States has the oversight or the trained personnel to serve in this capacity.

Although they seldom use the term *collaboration*, residents in rural and urban communities have always exercised ways of influencing the upbringing of their youngest citizens. In the following vignette, a retired teacher recalls her childhood years in a poor 1930s rural community, and indicates some ideas that can serve us well in the 21st century.

Our minister, the school principal, and our town fathers frequently discussed school problems in our little town and recommended solutions. Their efforts were supported by local parents, and our party-line telephone system, where most families could listen in, aided communication. For example, one child, returning late from school on a spring day, was easily found, reprimanded by a passerby, and sent on his way with the knowledge that his parents would follow through on the reprimand. Children who needed clothes were identified at school, and with the support of "town fathers," teachers and sometimes others visited their homes. Food, clothing, and other resources were found and delivered, and at times, negligent parents were counseled informally by other parents. Our teachers taught formal lessons in the schoolrooms, but they often walked home with us, continuing our education as they discussed the natural world around us. The community was our playground, and adults who were present supervised everyone's children. Older children educated younger ones in many skills and safety rules. One could feel that this was a cohesive community and one marked by caring. It was, of course, not an ideal system: A few children didn't reach their potential. An overarching support system enhanced our opportunities, though, and all 13 children in my first-grade class completed high school, and seven went on to college in the 1940s.

Society at the beginning of the 21st century is different from that of several decades earlier. It is more difficult to establish common objectives toward which social institutions can work effectively together. Families have new pressures and heavier burdens, and children have fewer advocates. In many locations, schools have assumed more of the educative, counseling, and social oversight for children, but from many accounts, it is apparent that schools cannot effectively do the job alone (Epstein, 1987, 2016).

In this chapter, we discuss six program models that have shown success in improving schools and children's education through family-school-community collaborations. We examine the components that have led to the success of these models, and remark on some of the changes made as a result of implementing them on a larger scale. First, though, we discuss some basic principles and distinctive features that characterize collaborative efforts.

### LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT IN COLLABORATIONS

Good collaborative efforts mean individuals in an evolving group endeavor will recognize that different levels of involvement exist in a partnership. Some community participants will participate at a minimum level, others at an **associative level**, and still others at a **decision-making level**. Although educators are in the best position to encourage and establish partnerships in any area, parents and community members can and do work toward leadership roles in a collaborative effort.

#### Understanding Involvement

Laypeople interpret parental and community involvement in school affairs in different ways. Some citizens are proactive and feel naturally connected to their schools. A larger

group views teachers as having total control of children's education, and they either do not seek involvement or feel shut out of the process. This latter group tends to view schools from afar, but its members are often critical when their children don't progress well. Therefore, all educators and involved community workers have a duty to work on attracting this part of the constituency.

So, how much involvement is productive? Different programs will call for differing amounts of involvement by parents and community members, and generally, participatory intensity varies with the level of involvement. The key to successful collaboration is for many community citizens to be involved at one level or another, with a few individuals contributing at all levels.

**MINIMUM LEVEL** For generations, school personnel have reached out to parents and community members to seek basic support for school programs. For example, children have homework, which teachers request parents to supervise. Or a principal may request help from citizens to advertise school events. Educators expect parents and other community members to respond to these requests and help with the projects.

The community at large normally is invited to school-sponsored events, and teachers often seek assistance. For example, parents and community members help make costumes for school plays or props for exhibits. Schools have various fund-raising events, such as bake sales and fairs. Again, school personnel seek cooperation from parents and others to attend, contribute items to, and help with the events.

Gianni had a difficult year in first grade. "Small and immature for his age," was a comment his parents were getting used to hearing. He didn't want to participate in early-reader lessons, and often was uninterested when it was time to play rhyming games or try writing words. In January, Gianni's teacher approached his parents with the idea of retaining Gianni in first grade so that he could have another year to develop his skills. His parents agreed, but they were heartbroken; even though they helped their son with his homework every night, he was not learning to read like his peers.

The next year went much better for Gianni. Although he was in first grade again, he was learning to read and more actively involved in class activities. On the night of the winter concert, Gianni was dressed up in his church suit, and his family brought cupcakes from the local warehouse store. As he and the first grade enthusiastically sang songs on the stage, Gianni's parents were in the front row. His father was recording the performance on his phone, and his mother had tears in her eyes.

After the performance, they found Gianni's teacher. "We were so proud of Gianni tonight! He looked so happy and confident on stage. He is really growing up!"



Some parents and community members become involved in education at the decision-making level.

The preceding is an example of minimal involvement of parent and teacher collaborating, and most readers will recognize and recall similar events from their own childhood. Such minimal involvement is commonplace; it serves a definite purpose, and it is a good foundation from which to start working for more complete community participation.

**ASSOCIATIVE LEVEL** Many teachers request that parents and community members become classroom volunteers on a regular basis. These volunteers assist teachers in various ways—from copying materials to reading with children and assisting them in activities. Still others become room mothers (or fathers), organizing other community members, helping supervise children on school trips, or making calls to solicit classroom support. Some volunteers become involved in enrichment programs, offering their special expertise to children in a classroom. Another example is the advocacy work of parents of children with disabilities. These parents frequently become knowledgeable about their child's special needs and about school processes so they can go on to become local leaders and advocates for teachers working with children with disabilities. Note how Mrs. Awad moves to associative-level participation in the following vignette.

*— Mrs. Awad's son began attending a local elementary school. Eager to be involved in her son's education, she volunteered to be the class parent for the first grade.*

*As Mrs. Awad's son got older, she became more involved. Soon she was volunteering for the small but active PTA. Teachers knew they could come to her for help with a class project, especially involving sewing or crafting. Once, she contacted her local representative on the school's behalf as enrollment continued to go up but no new teachers were assigned to the school. Other parents often called Mrs. Awad with questions about school events.*

*When Mrs. Awad's son moved on to middle school, she stayed at the elementary school. Due to her likable nature and obvious commitment to the school, she had been asked to tutor in the new math program the school was implementing.*

At the associative level, community members also participate in local organizations that support schools. Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) chapters traditionally have supported schools, and through them, parents and teachers cooperate in school improvement ventures. At times, PTAs center on fund-raising events; at other times, they may become political forces in their communities to improve conditions for children.

Children benefit from adult involvement at the associative level; because of their school experience and intensified role, the school's expectations are much clearer to these parents, and all communication is facilitated. Stronger ties mean stronger programs, and divisiveness is far less likely when schools and communities enjoy this level of interaction. A recent national survey showed that 45% of mothers and 36% of fathers with children under age 18 reported volunteering at a school or youth service activity (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). This is certainly positive news, even if much of the

volunteering is minimal. We can claim a collaborative status if 5% to 10% of parents are committed to an associative level.

**DECISION-MAKING LEVEL** The third level of parent and community involvement in schools is the decision-making level. At this level, individual parents, businesspersons, professionals, and community leaders participate actively in decision making for the education of children. Note how Mr. Frank takes an active part in school decisions in the following vignette.

*— Mr. Frank was on his lunch break when his phone indicated he had received a new e-mail. His son's child-care center had sent out its annual survey. After quickly clicking the link provided, Mr. Frank started answering the questions. As he was completing the survey, one question stuck in his head: "How satisfied are you with the snacks served?" Mr. Frank hesitantly clicked on the "somewhat dissatisfied" choice. Last Friday, the center had an activity during which the children got to assemble their own mini-pizzas. Mr. Frank was surprised to see that his son had clearly drawn pepperoni pizza, and it was posted on a class bulletin board. Although the Franks were not strictly kosher, the thought of his young son eating pork made him feel uncomfortable.*

*At pick-up time, Mr. Frank stopped in the director's office. He explained how the question on the survey had gotten him thinking. The director thanked him for his feedback. Then she got out the menu for the next month and asked Mr. Frank to look over the choices the center had made. Mr. Frank took the menu and promised to look over it at home that evening and follow-up with an e-mail that would help the program make future food service decisions. He left the office feeling relieved.*

Parent participation produces little controversy at the minimum and associative levels of involvement. Teachers and school administrators are still in charge of all educational decision making, and parents and community members assist and support the decisions. However, parents and schools can have differing perspectives, agendas, and priorities that need to be reconciled for decision making to be effective.

Parents at the decision-making level move beyond being committed advocates for their children to sharing responsibility for providing quality (school) education for their own and other children. These parents are citizen-leaders who understand strategies for accomplishing goals and solving problems within the school structure (Price-Mitchell, 2015). They serve on curriculum committees, identifying goals and objectives and deciding how to achieve them. At this level, parents are expected to serve on committees that hire school staff. They also may assist in forming advocacy groups to secure necessary local, state, or federal funding. Like associate-level parents, the parents at the decision-making level who have children with special needs often are able to take leadership roles because of their prior experience working with school personnel, making decisions for appropriate placement of their children, and developing their children's individualized education programs (IEPs).

Figure 11-1 illustrates the collaborative relations of each level of involvement.

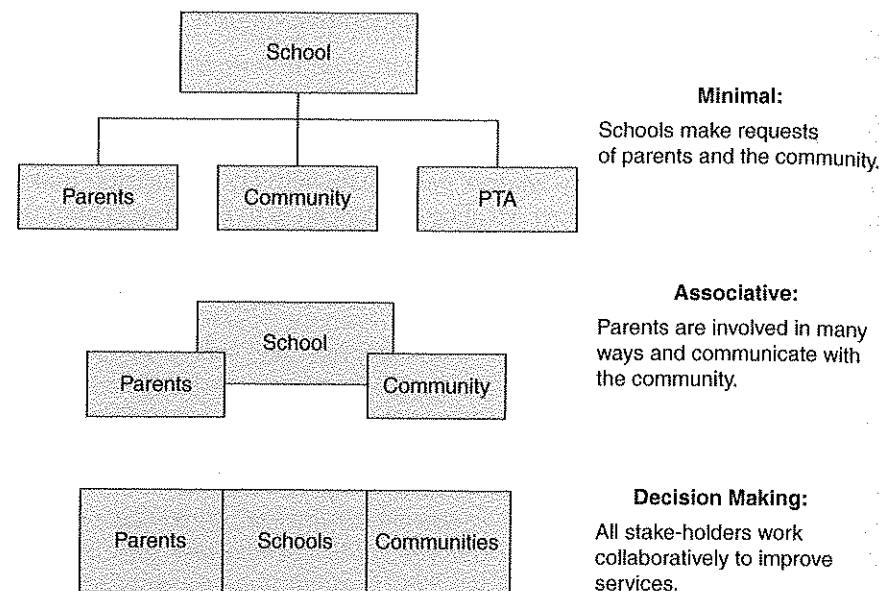
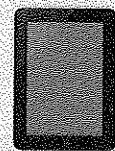


FIGURE 11-1 Three Levels of Involvement

Having the community's adults functioning at the decision-making level marks a true collaborative venture—and that is the goal. To get there, let's follow the ideas in the following section, then look at some exemplary programs in the United States today.

### MEDIA MATTERS



Social media is a great tool for building online community involvement. Although many college students have been familiar with online educational platforms for a while, this is a newer phenomenon for early childhood education. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are popular and easily available. However, these popular platforms can be cluttered with content that is not related to, or even directly contradicts, the mission of school involvement. Also, the privacy policies of these media may not be compatible with the expectations of parents and school administrators.

If your school does not already use a specific platform for communication, consider researching sites such as Edmodo. This site offers a secure social network that is specifically designed for educational and school use with collaborative and instructional applications. Especially in a day and age where photos and videos are often used to communicate, it is essential to remember that safety and privacy are of paramount importance when working with young children.



#### Check Your Understanding 11.1

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

### COMPONENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Children improve academically when schools work for better family and community involvement. Because of this finding, and because of extensive federal interest in partnerships, a number of school districts are caught up in the rhetoric of collaboration. Some have taken serious steps to establish links with other agencies to become full-service schools where municipal services and social agency support are available at the school site. Others have struggled and had little success beyond goal statements and committee assignments.

As more businesses and community agencies become involved with schools, there always exists the danger that leaders in these agencies will start to usurp the rights and responsibilities that classroom teachers owe to their students. In any collaboration, parents and teachers must assume the ethical responsibility for ensuring that everyone involved understands children's developmental levels and vulnerability. Most school personnel want parents and community members to share in the responsibility of educating children, and they seek outside support for solving nonacademic problems. In academic matters, however, educators are more hesitant to involve parents and community members. Nonetheless, successful partnerships mean shared responsibilities, and successful schools mean that parents, school personnel, and community groups share responsibilities for educational decision making.

We find that successful partnerships have different strategies for achieving collaboration, but all have certain elements in common. Collaboration will include three common elements: a planning process, an implementation process, and an accountability process. Equally important is that in each process, all involved pay constant attention to establishing good communication and nurturing trust.

### Planning Process

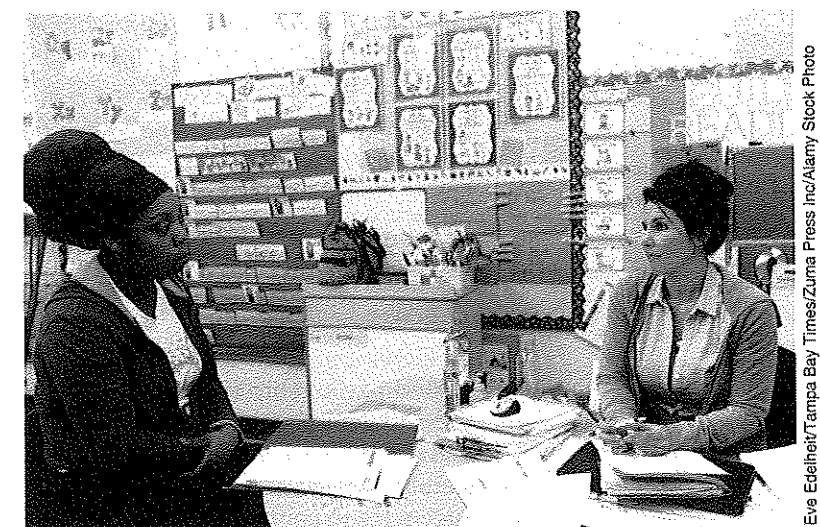
The most effective collaboration draws strength from a community-wide team. Members of social agencies, businesses, and government agencies—plus teachers, administrators, and parents—come together, and all make a commitment to work for the benefit of the community's children. The community team needs a strong leader, and key people in the community are crucial for the project. All participants must be willing to work out differences when necessary, and trust and respect for other viewpoints are even more vital.

During planning, the team determines the needs of children in the community, develops goals, and designs procedures for accomplishing these goals. Communication, collaboration, and cooperation among the various team members mean that all agencies surrender some autonomy in seeking solutions, but in so doing, all recognize their mutual benefits.

### Implementation Process

As the collaboration team develops procedures for implementing strategies, members ascertain which agencies can provide personnel and financial resources. Implementation is guaranteed greater success when a team provides orientation and training sessions, thus ensuring that parents, teachers, and community members have some basic collaborative skills (Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

A major step in beginning collaboration is providing workshops that reduce the social distance among participants and improve relationships among parents, community workers, school staff, and students. Another step involves understanding the interests and expertise of teachers, parents, and other volunteers so that all can contribute their best. Ideally,



Good partnership teams provide many avenues for parents and the community to get information on school activities.

all participants gain an understanding of how their service contributes to the goals and objectives.

After the team sets the priorities for the community's needs, it begins to plan and collaborate on activities. These include providing families with needed services, improving school and home discipline, adapting curriculum to particular community needs, establishing appropriate social activities, and developing program evaluation strategies.

### Assessment Process

People working with collaborative programs must have ways to determine how well their goals are being met. Most projects review students' classroom work, and many programs develop questionnaires to get feedback from the community about the success of their activities. Data are collected and interpreted regularly; then strategies used in the school programs are altered or continued accordingly. At least once a year, parents, school staff, and community members will be informed about progress and the changes being made to improve conditions.

### Communication

The success of all collaborative programs depends on good communication and careful monitoring of activities. You may want to check out the strategies listed in Chapter 9 for more specifics. Parents must feel welcome to visit schools and participate. The power of communication is demonstrated in this vignette.

*Mrs. Gonzales did not say much during her scheduled conference time to discuss the progress of her daughter Mayra in her prekindergarten program. The teacher showed Mrs. Gonzales samples of Mayra's work, including a video clip of Mayra correctly counting to 15 during a recent math lesson. The interpreter provided by the school district translated the teacher's comments to Spanish for Mrs. Gonzales, and Mrs. Gonzales nodded to show that she understood. At the end of the conference, the teacher asked if Mayra's mother had any questions. Mrs. Gonzales pulled a crumpled-up piece of paper from her purse and spoke quickly to the translator. The translator smiled at both the teacher and the mother before she spoke.*

*"Mrs. Gonzales asked you to please be patient with her. She does not know what questions to ask a teacher. You see, her son is in high school now, but she has never been invited to school for a conference before." Then the translator showed the teacher the crumpled paper; it was the Spanish translation of the conference form that the teacher had sent home last week. "This is Mrs. Gonzales' first parent-teacher conference."*

*Throughout the rest of the year, Mrs. Gonzales communicated with the teacher several times. She finally felt welcome in her child's school.*

Good partnership teams will provide many avenues for parents and community members to get information about school activities and the status of the collaboration. Routine notices, social media alerts, text messages, telephone messages, personal notes, newsletters, articles in local papers, a website, and the direct visiting approach in which volunteers try to contact hard-to-reach parents are all used. Parents are encouraged to

write notes, use e-mail, or call teachers when concerns arise; they are also encouraged to express appreciation.

## IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

### Starting Your Involvement with Parents

*We trust we have persuaded you that family and community involvement in school life is a big benefit in achieving the goals of education. Now comes the task of starting this process when you become involved in a school.*

1. Invite the parents to school for conferences and events. Generic invitations are less effective than personalized invitations. Invitations in the home language of the family are even more effective.
2. Celebrate the strengths of families before you address the weaknesses.
3. Survey the parents. What do they want? What do they like? What changes would make them happy?
4. Active events are popular with families! Indoor and outdoor games are popular ways to get parents to come to school. Non-competitive activities will draw even more families.
5. Host an art show, a science fair, or a sing-along. One teacher hosts a "coffee house" at drop-off time. Parents bring their own reading material, and are offered a hot beverage in the classroom. Then parents, teachers, and students sit together and read silently for 15 minutes to start the school day. What a simple yet powerful opportunity for adults to model literacy for youngsters.



### Check Your Understanding 11.2

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

## PROGRAM MODELS

In this section, we examine the characteristics and arrangements exhibited in two influential program models and five specific programs. Although changes have been made in each, the underlying concepts remain the same as they were when they started. As you read about and compare these models, you should gain an understanding of how the partnership process unfolds.

Many schools and school systems use the guiding research of two important pioneers in the field of collaboration among families, schools, and communities: James Comer of Yale University and Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University.

### Comer School Development Program

Comer's School Development Program has a long history of helping schools by promoting the collaboration of parents, educators, and community. The thesis is that improving the social, emotional, and academic development of children contributes to the overall success of the school. There are many varied strategies that support a school using this program. At the heart of the program is a system of principles, teams, and operations:

FIGURE 11-2 Comer's Three Principles, Teams, and Operations

|                  |                                                                                                                 |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Three Principles | Consensus: planning requires that all parties come to agreement on the plans.                                   |
|                  | Collaboration: all work in tandem with each other.                                                              |
|                  | No-fault: no one party is at fault for any lack of success, but all share in the responsibility to improve.     |
| Three Teams      | School planning and management teams: plans and coordinates all school activities.                              |
|                  | Student and Staff Support Team (SSST): addresses student and staff problems, and manages individual situations. |
|                  | Parent Team (PT): involves parents at all levels.                                                               |
| Three Operations | Comprehensive School Plan: developed to meet academic and social goals.                                         |
|                  | Assessment and Modification: necessary for periodic assessments and provision for change when necessary.        |
|                  | Staff Development: planned to support goals.                                                                    |

EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

One of the important parts of Comer's model is a "no-fault" approach to problem solving. The focus of this approach is on "why" the problem exists, not "who" caused the problem. How can the concept of assigning fault impede problem solving?

The Comer School Development Program has been remarkably influential since its inception in 1968. James Comer's model of intentional and coordinated teamwork has improved the educational environment in hundreds of schools throughout the United States. A recent commendation also shows its potency. "Like the operating system of a computer that allows the software to do its specialized work, the Comer Process provides the organizational, management, and communication framework for planning and managing all the activities of the school based on the developmental needs of its students." (medicine.yale.edu/childstudy/comer/about/works.aspx; Yale School of Medicine, 2017)

National Network of Partnership Schools

With her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University, Joyce Epstein has worked for decades conducting studies and establishing programs to enhance educational opportunities for children and demonstrate the values of partnerships. The National Network of Partnership Schools builds its approach upon the important intersections of research, policy, and practice.

As in other partnership models, the framework of Epstein's program centers on the idea of the shared responsibilities of parents, schools, and communities for children's learning and development. "Caring for the children we share" is an important guiding principle in Partnership Schools. Ultimately, the goal is to use a collaborative approach to enhance and support student well-being and achievement. Partnership schools recognize the primary role of families in a child's life and the vital role of community. This approach includes specific and focused descriptions of school involvement to encourage a variety of participation.

FIGURE 11-3 Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

Keys to Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships

- **Focus on Parenting.** Work with families on child-rearing skills and understanding child development. Assist schools to understand families.
- **Focus on Communicating.** Devise strategies for school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and student progress.
- **Focus on Volunteering.** Strengthen the recruitment and training of family members as volunteers and audiences at school and other locations.
- **Focus on Home Learning.** Produce helpful and interesting tactics to involve families in learning activities at home and in the community.
- **Focus on Decision Making.** Include families in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through action teams and parent organizations.
- **Focus on Community Collaboration.** Work with businesses and other groups to coordinate community resources and services to benefit students, families, schools, and the community itself.

Source: Based on Epstein et al. (2016).

Action Teams are also essential to this model. Every year, each Action Team updates its three-year outline and develops a detailed one-year action plan. In other words, the team continues to find out how it can improve its structure and practices to increase the role of families as partners. More than 1,000 schools across the United States have been involved to some degree in this network.

Head Start and Early Head Start

"Perhaps the most significant factor in the success of Head Start has been the involvement of parents, volunteers, and the community. Their commitment and the services provided by dedicated Head Start staff have been instrumental in creating a quality program that truly provides young children with a 'head start' in life."

Ronald Reagan

Presidential Proclamation 4990—October 22, 1982

Head Start is one of the best-known educational programs in the United States; it serves more than one million at-risk preschool children and pregnant mothers each year (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). **Early Head Start** is a related program of early intervention that specifically serves at-risk children between the ages of birth and 3. Both programs are committed to enhancing a child's physical, social, and cognitive development while helping parents become better caregivers and teachers.

Partnerships are essential to effective Head Start programs. When Project Head Start was conceived in 1965, authorities acknowledged that children were not only family members but also community members. Thus, Head Start began to provide, in holistic rather than fragmented ways, comprehensive services in health, nutrition, and economic counseling for individuals, as well as information on school readiness for children and their low-income families. Early developers of Head Start knew that the program's success would rely on parents and their communities to reinforce the learning and support healthy lifestyles. Programs encourage parents to act as partners, support learning at home, and gain skills for participating at different social levels and thereby



Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock

Long-term studies reveal that Head Start programs have been cost effective and beneficial to society.

on a parent policy committee or council. Council parents are involved in improving programs, recruiting volunteers, and planning and developing a budget for the parent activity fund.

gain greater confidence and self-esteem. Longitudinal research confirms that Head Start contributes to lasting academic, social, and economic advantages for children and the families who support them (Bauer & Shanzenbach, 2016; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

In the thousands of Head Start programs, teachers carefully assess students for key readiness indicators, and plan lessons to develop these skills. Exposure to academic content and routines, a centralized source for health services, and social services for the families all contribute to the successes of children who participate in Early Head Start and Head Start programs. At the informal level, parents work with center staff in determining program content and how their children will participate. At the formal level, parents serve

Head Start and Early Head Start programs tailor their programs to respond to diverse needs of communities. Head Start serves families in all US states and territories, in farmworker camps, and in tribal communities. It also serves children who are dual-language learners. Each program is especially designed to be responsive to the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage of families and communities served.

Certainly, Head Start has not fulfilled the dream of diminishing poverty in the United States or in eliminating all learning gaps. Its impact has been positive, however, and its benefits for helping poor and minority parents become partners in their children's education outweigh its costs. As the future of Head Start funding is a matter of national discussion, consider the words of the executive director of the National Head Start Association: "...we remain grateful for the strong bipartisan Congressional support for Head Start and will continue working with our many champions on Capitol Hill to ensure that our national commitment to the success of all children and families, regardless of their circumstances, does not diminish." (Vinci, 2017)

### Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia program was developed in northern Italy by a group of parents soon after World War II. The first school was staffed by parents and community members who held to a profound belief in and respect for children's natural learning. Under the leadership of Loris Malaguzzi, and with the parents' strong commitment to be decision makers for their children's education, the Reggio Emilia approach to education was born.



Tudor Photography/Pearson Education Ltd

Children in Reggio Emilia programs are viewed as informants to adults on their interests and learning styles.

As a school philosophy, Reggio Emilia has drawn the attention of educators outside of its namesake region of Italy. Now we find that American educators are attempting to emulate the practices of the Reggio Emilia approach, as it epitomizes a significant success for parent-school-community collaborations. Children are active participants in their own learning, and schooling should reflect community values and beliefs.

The purpose of Reggio Emilia is to develop a school where children are at the center of the curriculum, where they develop a sense of belonging by participating in the school community. From the beginning, the founders recognized that parents, teachers, and community members were partners in planning and executing any curriculum, and they felt that a curriculum should reflect the community's values and distinct qualities, including all of nature. Young children in Reggio Emilia programs are viewed as informants to adults on their interests, unique learning styles, and prior knowledge. Therefore, the children are active participants and decision makers in what, when, and how to study. It is up to adults to follow and plan accordingly. Artistic expression is at the heart of the Reggio approach. A child's art is considered valuable communication that is studied with care.

We do not find a set of procedures in Reggio Emilia schools, because situation and context are considered first. Readers will find *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation* (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011) to be the most useful reference on all aspects of Reggio Emilia and *In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia* (Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2015) to be a helpful companion piece. We do find, however, common practices and modes that help describe the everyday school endeavors.

The classrooms are organized so that projects or themes are pursued according to children's and adults' interests. Teachers consider that collaborative problem solving among children and between children and adults is important. Spaces for individual study (*ateliers*, "att'l yáy"), as well as small-group and total-group activities, are provided. Teachers and other adults are considered guides for children in exploring and investigating.

Because the philosophy of Reggio Emilia is that children learn by continual active involvement in their environments and by doing projects, the daily routine is related more to scheduling the staff's time than the children's time. Teachers spend most of their classroom time observing children's activities, talking with them about what they are doing, and planning for children's additional study. Each week, staff members spend several hours in meetings, planning, and in-service training, plus a few hours in documenting and analyzing children's work. They keep records (*diarios*) of the children's work, communications, and their own analyses for parental and administrator preview.

Parents and community members are also very important parts of the network. They serve on the community advisory councils, attend various school meetings for planning, and work in classrooms on specific tasks and projects. Because of such involvement, families learn that fully educating a child requires many supportive partnerships.

Much of the commentary available on the Reggio Emilia approach is conceptual (Alkhundhair, 2014; Santin & Torruella, 2017). In this program, you will often find that children's learning is viewed as spiral, and that the mode of evaluation used in Reggio Emilia programs is similar to that of qualitative research in the United States. The components of evaluation in Reggio Emilia schools are the same for the children and for a program. The "researchers" are the teachers and other adults who record children's dialogs or monologues, and reflect on children's other modes of expression, such as art. Children's work is collected, stored, and filed in *ateliers*, to which everyone has access. Adults working in the school often record anecdotes and reflections on children's activity in a notebook for "two voices" (the child's and the adult's). In some programs, children receive a personal calendar that contains a record of each child's activities. From these materials, a diary reflecting the child's development from beginning to end is developed. These two sets of materials form the basis of information for any action-based qualitative research.

**Video Example 11.1**

The Reggio Emilia philosophy is famous for calling careful attention to the environments of children. Watch this video on a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool in Kansas City, and pay attention to how the environment could be used to facilitate collaboration between the school, family, and community. Ask yourself whether there are any ideas you could replicate.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQdAU7Dm9A0>

**Community Schools**

The community school concept dates to 1912, when Marie Turner Harvey, with help from John Dewey, established the Porter Rural School in Kirksville, Missouri. Dewey's work reenvisioned the basic role of education in our society. Harvey's focus was on a school curriculum that drew from the community and worked to improve living conditions in the district served. Newer examples of community schools (often called *full-service schools*) have a mission similar to that of the Porter School. The community school concept is based on the written belief that children's education is best advanced when families, schools, and communities are involved in the day-to-day decisions concerning curriculum and instructional practice.

A community school differs from other public schools in several ways. It offers a full-schedule school curriculum, but it also attempts to offer an array of health and social services typically handled by a city health department, welfare agencies, and adult education offices, as well as child-care and after-school programs (Coalition for Community Schools, 2013). By sharing facilities, and by overlapping and integrating the concerns of educators and community case workers, the objective of improving the whole community is served. Typical objectives include the following:

1. To have programs operating day and evening to serve the total community. This means that in addition to regular school hours, the community school will have before- and after-school programs, plus evening programs for parents and other community members.
2. To enrich life in the immediate community by using the community as a laboratory and a focus of study, and to tap resources for school projects.
3. To eliminate logistical problems for families that need health and social services while they are involved with the school activities (a one-stop shopping feature that minimizes transportation problems).
4. To facilitate the delivery of appropriate services to children and their families.
5. To focus on educational improvement by bringing additional services to the school while building connections to the outside world for work opportunities and career planning.
6. To improve the life chances for a community's children by mobilizing community resources to head off social problems of delinquency, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse.

Community schools have been touted as an efficient and effective strategy to deliver services to children, their families, and communities (Daniel & Snyder, 2015). It means thinking of a school as a campus containing not just regular and special classrooms but also health clinics, sports and recreation clubs, social support facilities, adult education facilities, and care programs that become the domain of community members and organizations in addition to teachers. Providing all services under one roof minimizes communication and travel problems. The following is an outline of the features of a typical community school.

**EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES** The community school offers engaging instruction, services when traditional schools are closed, youth development, and exposure to opportunities to build careers and develop citizenship. Before-school hours and after-school hours are arranged for child-care service, and these are linked to homework help, academic enrichment, and other school-related projects. Sports and adult education programs are features associated with the extended school day.

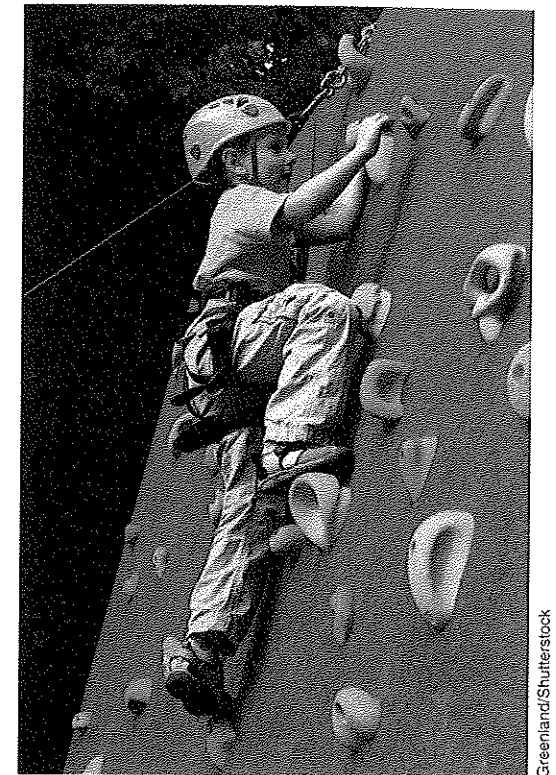
**HEALTH AND SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES** One valuable feature of community schools is their commitment to family health. School nurses and social workers, pediatricians, dentists, and mental health workers work closely with the school.

**FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** Community schools develop a large and potent workforce. Community projects such as development of parks, securing additional facilities for the campus, cleaning up the neighborhood, and improving transportation around the area are all projects that one of these schools has tried. Field trips into the larger community that enable children and adults to experience museums, nature preserves, and musical and dramatic productions, are frequent and common.

A community school becomes successful only when it brings in a large number of parents to work and advocate for the total school campus. Some parents work as classroom, cafeteria, or recreational aides. Others volunteer to mentor children or do clerical work. Many link the volunteer work with their own educational enhancement through the day and evening classes in adult education. The intense involvement of numbers of parents stimulates school pride and the desire to bring about total neighborhood improvement. In this fashion, children also see that the community works as a unit; they understand the relationship between community services and what they do as students.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT** Community schools build vital bridges between the K-8 programs housed in the facility and the early childhood programs in the community. These partnerships support families, ensure strong communication amongst educators, and contribute to cohesive communities.

Anecdotal and more rigorous evidence supports the hypothesis that academic achievement, attendance, student health, and school climate is improved in community schools (Jacobson, 2016). New efforts seek to synchronize how community schools collect



The extended school day in community schools features sports, recreation, and adult education.

Greenland/Shutterstock

data and maintain funding to provide comprehensive data on their effect. Community schools are growing in many areas in the United States with their place-based approach to educational improvement and community change. The notions of parent education, parent involvement in a child's work, and enhanced communication show all personnel that they are partners in efforts to help youths succeed.

### Freedom Schools

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools program is an endeavor by the CDF to connect children and families to their cultural heritage and communities. A key idea of Freedom Schools is that literacy is empowering and can lead to social change on local, national, and even global levels. It is primarily a summer program echoing the thrust of the 1964 Freedom Schools that were organized in the South to support civil rights initiatives. Although open to all applicants, the summer programs are aimed at African American children and focus on literacy enhancement, cultural heritage, parent involvement, and neighborhood social action.

A leading advocate for poor and minority children, the CDF has been one of America's strongest voices in educating our nation about the needs of children. It established Freedom Schools in 1992, and has set a course of objectives and schedules that individual sites in various states carry out with local leadership and sponsorship.

The overall aim of a Freedom School summer session is to enhance the educational and social capabilities of young children while nurturing a group of **servant-leader interns** to advocate on behalf of children. The following objectives can be found in the five- and six-week summer programs (Children's Defense Fund, 2017):

1. Focus on high-quality educational enrichment for children and the promotion of cultural awareness.
2. Parents and caregivers are involved in children's daily activities and participation in workshops on child development, child advocacy, and child welfare.
3. Social action and civic engagement are a cornerstone of problem solving. Children, parents, and community partners assess community needs, then address those needs through rallies, town meetings, letter writing, voter registration, health projects, and other activities.
4. Servant-leader development: The college-age interns staffing the summer activities receive training on leadership and community-building skills.
5. Nutritious meals, therapeutic interventions, mental health services, and the training in healthy choices and responsibility are an essential component of Freedom School programs.

Freedom School programs are generally six-week curricula set up to develop literacy skills, conflict resolution skills, and critical thinking skills, plus artistic and athletic competence. The central academic curriculum is contained in the Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC). In addition to promoting literacy development, the program focuses on cooperative learning, critical thinking, social action, and conflict resolution. Thus, the IRC becomes an activity-oriented phase intended to motivate, inspire, and rejuvenate young participants each day. The program uses a core of selected books with which interns and volunteers work in creative ways to stimulate reading, presentation, discussion, and interpretation by all participants.

Most of the recommended books have lesson plans that guide the use of these works, and serve as anchors for the work of the site coordinator and the interns. Field trips, presentations on the books' themes, and social activities also are worked into the daily schedule (see Figure 11-4).

FIGURE 11-4 Sample Daily Schedule for a Freedom School Group

|                |                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8:00–8:30 A.M. | Breakfast with children and staff                                                                                                    |
| 8:30–9:00      | <i>Harambee</i> (Swahili for "pulling together," informal sharing and celebration)                                                   |
| 9:00–10:30     | Integrated Reading Curriculum, conflict resolution, and social action                                                                |
| 10:30–10:45    | Morning break                                                                                                                        |
| 10:45–11:45    | Integrated Reading Curriculum, continued                                                                                             |
| 11:45–Noon     | Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time                                                                                                 |
| Noon–1:00 P.M. | Lunch with children and staff                                                                                                        |
| 1:00–3:00      | Afternoon activities: arts and crafts, dance, music, sports, computer lab, field trips, social action projects, and finale rehearsal |
| 3:00           | Dismissal                                                                                                                            |
| 3:30           | Daily staff debriefing                                                                                                               |

Source: Based on the CDF Freedom Schools program description.

Individual sites for the program are under local sponsorship and leadership. The national CDF office acts as coordinator, and supplies materials and trainers to work with others who want to sponsor a program. The responsibility for operating a program is in the hands of a local sponsoring agency and its project director.

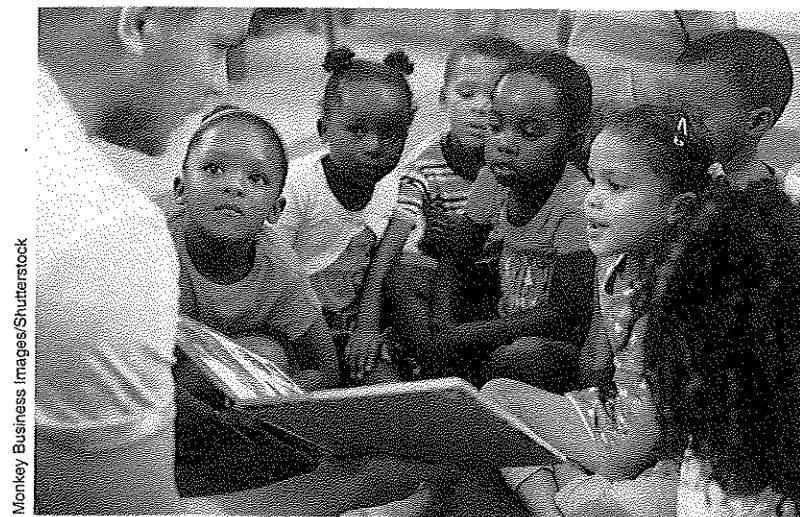
The sponsoring agency can be a school district, college, community agency, or church. This agency has legal and fiscal responsibility for operating the individual Freedom School, and sponsors ensure that the program is in compliance with local, state, and federal regulations, including fire, health, safety, and civil rights laws.

### Video Example 11.2

Watch this video to listen to chants and songs from the professional development conference for Freedom Schools teachers. How can motivating and engaging students in this way increase participation in schools and programs?

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_1ffOIRJB9U&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1ffOIRJB9U&feature=youtu.be)

In 2015, the Children's Defense Fund operated 189 Freedom School programs in 96 cities in the United States. End-of-program evaluations for summer Freedom Schools are collected by site directors, but these are informal, and focus on local priorities. The evaluations show enthusiasm for and satisfaction with the individual programs, with notations about increased literacy skills for children, plus positive changes in social adjustment and the increased involvement of parents and community agents in the program.



Servant-leader interns in Freedom Schools are responsible for caring for and nurturing the learners.

### Charter Schools

Featuring charter schools as a positive model for family-school-community cooperation is risky, because in the two decades of their existence, the philosophy of these programs has moved in many directions. For example, there are charter schools with traditional and highly directive programs that come nowhere close to the cooperative models espoused by the authors. At the same time, there are other schools with a structure so relaxed that they resemble an alternative school of the 1970s. In the mix, however, there are some charter schools that truly reflect the best practices of the partnerships highlighted in this text. In Figure 11-5, we refer to

### EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

*Think about the models described in this chapter, and assess your reactions to being part of a team in partnership with homes and communities. Can you see yourself as a contributing member promoting the features of partnerships in one or more of these models? Do you have any hesitations? List some items that you feel confident about now.*

several exemplary charter schools that are functioning in a collaborative manner, along with their websites.

The charter school movement began in the early 1990s and grew rapidly. Current statistics count more than 6,750 charter schools scattered over 41 states and serving 2.7 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). As noted before, though, the expectations for charter schools vary widely, and the proponents of these schools make strange bedfellows. For example, current legislation proposed in several states is supported by traditionalists seeking a return to classic study, by parents' rights advocates annoyed by school bureaucracy, and by progressives seeking a **project-oriented curriculum**.

Charter schools are a growing yet controversial phenomenon. They are supported by the current presidential administration and many officials, which is likely to result in many more experiments for this type of school organization. Below are some of the very successful charter school programs that follow a truly collaborative approach.

In drawing your attention to these program models, we have demonstrated that true collaboration emerges when properly nurtured. These model collaborations take time to build, and as each continues, even more time is required to monitor and fine-tune it to ensure that it stays healthy. In addition to the examples on which we have focused, you will find successful collaborative programs in alternative schools, systems with schools of choice, charter schools (as noted above), and even in particular individual public/private schools where staff become interested in the benefits of collaborations with their parent group and with their community.

As such models show, the effort is worthwhile, and the reported educational benefits to children and communities often are inspirational. Anyone interested in achieving

FIGURE 11-5 Examples of Charter Schools with a focus on home-school-community collaboration

| Charter School Model                                 | Geographic Areas of Service             | Collaborative Elements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Green Dot Public Schools                             | California, Tennessee, Washington state | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community engagement teams seek to empower parents</li> <li>Strong emphasis on family-school partnerships</li> <li>Teachers are included by administration in decision making</li> </ul>                                                                                                       |
| KIPP                                                 | Nationwide                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasis on a high-level of parent-teacher communication</li> <li>Regional organization allows each network of schools to respond to and work with communities.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                     |
| RCMA Charter Schools                                 | Rural Florida                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responds specifically to the physical, social, and educational needs of children of migrant and low-income farm workers</li> <li>Actively seeks strong relationships with families</li> <li>Policies support hiring school staff from the community to forge powerful relationships</li> </ul> |
| Greater New Orleans Collaborative of Charter Schools | New Orleans, Louisiana                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools were organized specifically in response to the devastation of the community after Hurricane Katrina.</li> <li>Some schools have a special focus to support the community (i.e., schools that use a "trauma informed" approach to discipline).</li> </ul>                               |
| Alaska Native Cultural Charter School                | Anchorage, Alaska                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum is tied to Alaskan Native community's value on experiential learning</li> <li>Elders and family members are vital members of the school</li> <li>Traditional ways of knowing are honored</li> </ul>                                                                                 |

partnerships for their schools should carefully examine the literature on established programs. Information about the sustainability of these programs is helpful for beginners developing their own plans.

### Features of Successful Collaborations

New partnerships are emerging across the United States. The stimulus varies, but projects often begin in response to educational problems at the local and state levels. Frequently, each successful partnership is unique, but quality collaborations still include the following of features that helped guide this movement (Comer, Haynes, & Joyner, 1996):

- Programs integrate educational and social services for all children, especially for needy families.

- Parents, school personnel, and community members are empowered to make decisions about, plan for, and implement changes for the community's children.
- School bureaucracy is reduced, and involvement of families and community members in school management increases.
- Schools become family centers to promote better interactions among teachers, children, parents, and community members.
- Programs include strong volunteer programs, with parents, grandparents, and community members contributing expertise to support children's learning and to assist in school operations.
- The community and the home are viewed as important child learning environments, and are integrated into school learning.
- Programs have strong leadership and committed partners who are able to gain the support of **power brokers** in their settings.
- School faculty and staff develop skills needed to build and maintain relationships of trust and respect with children and families.
- Researchers, teachers, and parents work together in assessing the successes of school programs.

Collaborative efforts result in greater opportunities for students when the "whole child, whole community" concept is adopted. When educators begin with respect for families and intend to enhance the community for all stakeholders, we all benefit from these long-lasting and successful partnerships.



### Check Your Understanding 11.3

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

## Summary and Review

When schools are brokers for new learning communities, and when school personnel invest time and energy in forming links with parents and communities, exciting and productive results can materialize. Much evidence proves that this is true. The work of James Comer in New Haven, Connecticut, and the expansion of Joyce Epstein's National Network of Schools, to name two successes, show that we have both a reason and a compelling need for communities to reach out further to achieve better-functioning school operations.

Realizing the dream of partnerships requires more than the effort exhibited in most US school districts today. A spirit for undertaking change has germinated in many areas, but it seems slow to blossom fully. We all know that change takes time. The recent surge of interest at the state and federal levels for partnerships must be viewed positively, and publications, funding, and legislation all provide a fertile base for more collaboration.

## How Does Learning About this Topic Help You Become a Better Teacher?

Partnerships can begin with a single teacher and a parent collaborating in a classroom. Then many possibilities exist for enthusiastic colleagues and parents to launch all sorts of desirable partnership programs in any school. When your team considers collaboration, first define your objectives and agree on what changes are necessary. It is also wise to find out how collaboration has worked for others. Your team will need to locate resources and decide how to

assess the progress it makes. Bringing in new helpers and involving them in collaborative ventures always requires finesse. Communication often is a problem as more people become involved in collaborations. You and your teammates must be alert to how you are communicating and how your messages are being interpreted. Finally, you should first try out ideas on a small scale and then expand the experiment.

## Suggested Activities and Questions

1. View the video "Power Up Your Parent Communication" (Common Sense Media, 2016; [youtube.com/watch?v=S3zQcA\\_s3jM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3zQcA_s3jM)), then discuss in small groups ways that teachers can manage digital communication with parents to promote parent involvement at multiple levels.
2. Geoff Canada is the visionary responsible for the famous partnership called the Harlem Children's Zone. Watch his TEDtalk (on the TEDtalk website) entitled

"Our Failing Schools: Enough Is Enough!" (2013) to hear his explanation of how research and data collection can lead to positive school partnerships that better serve children.

3. Download *Promising Practices* (Thomas et al., 2016) from the National Network of Partnership Schools John Hopkins University website. Review, discuss and evaluate the lesson plans written specifically to foster parent and community involvement.

## Resources and Websites

Center for Education Reform

National Head Start Association

Coalition for Community Schools

Council of Great City Schools presents information on the nation's large public school systems and their interschool projects.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education features a database for partnerships for family involvement in education, and gives examples of successful collaborations.

Parent Teacher Home Visits posits that home visits are the key to family engagement. Especially of note is a document on building effective relationships with diverse families.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/communityschools>  
Coalition for Community Schools has a channel on YouTube with many helpful talks, presentations, and resources about issues in community schools.