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# The Link

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*Linking the knowledge from research  
with the wisdom from practice  
to improve teaching and learning*

## Hand in Hand: Parents, Schools, and Communities Enter New Era

### Benefits of Parent and Community Involvement

Research confirms that when families become partners in their children's education the results include improved student achievement, better school attendance, reduced drop-out rates, and decreased delinquency. This is true regardless of economic, racial, or cultural background.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years of research also show that when families are involved in education, their children complete more homework, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less family involvement.<sup>2</sup>

Joyce Epstein, a researcher specializing in family and community involvement in schools, says there are many other reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. These partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide families with services and support, increase

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### SCHOOLS, PARENTS, COMMUNITY

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parents' leadership and other skills, and help teachers with their work. But the main reason to create partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students, and their chances for success increase.<sup>3</sup>

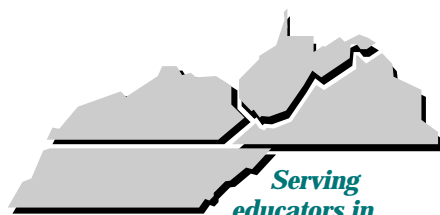
School board members and school administrators agree that the main benefit of stronger ties with families and communities is increased academic achievement by students. Parent and community partnerships can help to boost achievement from preschool through high school. When involved, parents and the community will be more likely to support school reform efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Hatch writes that "beyond changes in curriculum or improvements in self-esteem, meaningful community engagement sets in motion a chain of events that transforms the culture of the school and, often, the community that the school serves."<sup>5</sup>

### Challenges Facing Parents and Schools

In this era of limited resources and rising expectations, public schools may find themselves competing for allocations from a shrinking pool of resources.

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*Serving  
educators in  
Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia,  
and West Virginia since 1966*

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**[In our] rapidly changing society, few areas are as essential to a successful future as education, both as a means of learning basic and advanced skills and as a process for helping to develop responsible, compassionate citizens who are ready to make valuable contributions to their family, community, state, and nation.**

—*Strong Families, Strong Schools*, U.S. Department of Education

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When only 30 percent of the adult population in a typical community has school-age children, 70 percent of the potential voters may question cost-benefit ratios at tax time and refuse to bear an additional financial burden for the schools.<sup>6</sup>

David Mathews says a breakdown of the contract between the public and the public school may be one reason for such problems as dissatisfaction with the performance of the school, difficulties in communication between administrators and the public, and a lack of citizen participation.<sup>7</sup>

Today's families face an ongoing struggle to balance the demands of personal life with their jobs.<sup>8</sup> Long work hours, long commutes, and daily chores leave families little time—energy—to participate in local schools. At the same time, there is a great need for that involvement.

## Characteristics of Engagement Initiatives

According to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, community engagement means building a collaborative constituency for change and improvement. American communities are beginning to define and shape new understandings about public engagement. Some hallmarks of healthy engagement include

- an inclusive and dialogue-driven process
- a dedication to making real improvements in schools
- a commitment to creating dynamic partnerships
- sincere efforts to find common ground
- a base of candor and mutual trust

Achieving high levels of public participation, approval, and support is not easy. When a community can

create a safe space for dialogue, it can move forward into concern-driven activity. Reaching out beyond the core group builds new structures, develops and sustains leadership, and maintains momentum. This cycle supports initiatives that help the community assess and improve student achievement.<sup>9</sup>

## Notes.

1. U.S. Department of Education, *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning* (Washington, DC: Author, 1994).

2. See note 1 above.

3. J. L. Epstein, "School/Family Community Partnerships, Caring for the Children We Share." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77: 701-12 (1995).

4. Center on Families, Communities, and Schools & Children, *Partners in Action: A Resource Guide* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University, 1996).

5. T. Hatch, "How Community Action Contributes to Achievement." *Educational Leadership*, 55(8): 16-19 (1998).

6. D. M. Schmitt, & J. C. Tracy, *Gaining Support for Your School: Strategies for Community Involvement*. Road Maps to Success: The Practicing Administrator's Leadership Series. 1996 ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 396 382.

7. D. Mathews, *Is There a Public for Public Schools?* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 1996).

8. See note 1 above.

9. Annenberg Institute for School Reform, *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*. Providence, RI, 1998. <http://www.aisr.brown.edu/html/pe/report.html> (18 November 1999).

10. A. T. Henderson, & N. Berla, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement* (Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994).

11. See note 3 above.

12. J. Chrispeels, B. Fernandez, & J. Preston, *Home and School Partners in Student Success: A Handbook for Principals and Staff*. (San Diego, CA: San Diego City Schools Community Relations and Integration Services Division, 1991).

## Some Practical, Research-based Considerations for Community Involvement

- Thirty-five studies found that the form of parent or community involvement does not seem to be critical, so long as it is reasonably well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting.<sup>10</sup>
- Partnerships tend to decline unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate partnership practices at each grade level.
- Almost all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful of trying.<sup>11</sup>
- Through policies and actions, schools can reach out to help parents become involved in the education of their children.
- While all forms of parent involvement are desirable, home-based parent involvement (doing home-learning activities coordinated with children's class work and providing enrichment activities) appears to be the most valuable in regard to student achievement.
- Socioeconomic status and lack of education have no effect on the willingness of parents to help their own children.<sup>12</sup>

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# Stories from School Frontiers

*AEL's Quest project works to identify practices that support continuous school improvement. Two networks of schools—an elementary and a secondary—meet and communicate to share successes and to learn from research and one another. A Quest team within each school community provides local leadership, and each team includes parents and students as well as school staff.*

*The Quest journey of continuous learning and improvement is guided by a framework that begins with the articulation of core values and the creation of a shared vision. Support for the journey comes as participants engage in activities designed to broaden the learning community, share leadership, and strengthen the learning culture of the school. These activities both invite and demand the participation of parents.*

*Parents, teachers, and principals who have been involved in the Quest journey for three years recently put some of their reflections on paper. These true stories demonstrate how new relationships between schools and communities can be forged.*

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## Speaking in Cursive

By Connie Allen

Principal, Natcher Elementary School, Bowling Green, KY

One spring, children's author Paul Brett Johnson gave a presentation to the Natcher Elementary student body. He detailed the entire process of producing an illustrated book for children, explaining such things as how four ink colors are layered to create the many colors in the illustrations.

Following the assembly, a teacher asked one of the kindergarten girls if she had enjoyed Mr. Johnson's talk. She replied with an enthusiastic "Oh, yes!" then went on to say, "but part of the time, you know, he was speaking in cursive."

Several times since then I've thought how often we educators "speak in cursive" to our students *and* to our parents. At Natcher, we now make special efforts to communicate in words and ways that everyone can understand.

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## Interview Design Process Gets Everyone Talking

By DeDe DuBose

Parent, Sewanee Elementary School, Sewanee, TN

As a person who seems always to end up on the boards of volunteer organizations, I have many times been confronted with the dilemma of representing large groups of people without knowing how they truly feel. I have been on the boards of preschools, community action groups, and, most recently, the elementary school PTO. I have been in charge of setting up meetings, discussion groups, and receptions, all in hopes of prodding parent or community involvement. My task has often been getting people to talk about things that are important to them and directions in which they want these groups to go.

Well, I have had many frustrating experiences in these situations. No matter how I arranged the room, how I posed the questions, how I encouraged participation, I have

never felt that I really knew the feelings, opinions, and wisdom of those present.

Plenty of times I have been on the other side of the fence—the person sitting in the audience listening but not really speaking my thoughts—too shy, lazy, or intimidated to initiate or join a discussion.

Last fall, someone from AEL came to our school and conducted an interview design session. I was speechless! Here was something that solved every problem I had encountered with communication in groups.

Everybody contributed and everybody was comfortable. Talking in pairs allowed us to really present our thoughts, but maintained anonymity at the analysis stage. The setup gave a very casual atmosphere to the meeting, and people seemed willing to be honest. The process forced people to think about each individual question without assuming that someone else would come up with that answer. As the meeting went on, I could feel the energy level in the room rise, adding to the feelings of connectedness, power, and excitement.

I am very excited about this process as a way to achieve greater communication between parents and administrators, board members, committees, and others. It empowers the group to be heard and enables leadership to effectively progress to a desired goal. It is a powerful tool.

*For a description of the Interview Design process, visit AEL's Web site at <http://www.ael.org/rel/quest/process.htm>.*

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## Student-Led Conferences Attract Parents

By Earl Wiman

Principal, Alexander Elementary School, Jackson, TN

One Tuesday evening last October, seven students sat with their parents in a classroom while the teacher watched. It was time for parent-teacher conferences, and we had turned the leadership over to the students.

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As part of our schoolwide effort to make students more autonomous and responsible learners, they prepared individual portfolios and improvement plans. Each child focused on what he or she might do to improve, and assessed how much progress had already been made.

When the children talked about their work, the parents really listened—sometimes they had no choice. One third-grade student refused to let her mother even hold the portfolio. “If I give it to you, you’ll look at it instead of listening to me,” she said.

What brought 521 out of 556 families to school that evening? Their children. One parent asked me for a note to take to work because “I hadn’t planned on coming, but my child worried the devil out of me. So here I am.”

I think it was more work than a traditional parent-teacher conference, but my teachers liked it. They saw the students become more reflective and think more about their work because they knew they were going to be sharing it with their parents. Many parents went away saying it was the best parent-teacher conference they’d ever had.

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## Familiarizing New Staff to the Community

By Pam Brown

Principal, Woodbridge Senior High School, Woodbridge, VA

Woodbridge Senior High School is located in the center of thousands of homes that have perfectly manicured lawns, beautiful landscaping, and luxury cars parked in the driveways. Based on the location, it’s not surprising that new staff members often share a common misperception about the demographics of our student body.

As the largest 9-12 high school in the state, we have students from 54 countries. Three people—two teachers and a teacher assistant—staff our English Speakers of Other Languages center. A large segment of our population is educationally and economically disadvantaged. It is important that our staff be aware of this diversity and recognize it as an asset to our school.

Three years ago I learned of a school system that takes new teachers on a tour to familiarize them with the city. What a great idea, I thought, to take our teachers on a tour to familiarize them with the broad range of situations in which our students live and the travel situations they face coming to school each day.

Now, each August, usually on a very warm day, the assistant principal who works with our at-risk students and I board an unairconditioned school bus with our new staff members. We leave the affluent area surrounding the

school and go where our students live—government subsidized housing, Navy housing, low-income housing, homeless shelters, high-crime apartment and townhouse subdivisions, and poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

We try to ensure that the academic and behavioral expectations for these students are the same as for all others. However, some students come to school each day with baggage difficult for their teachers to imagine. For them, school is a safe haven and the only stabilizing force in their lives. As adults in the building, it is our responsibility to be aware of the situations our students face and to be sensitive to their needs.

At the end of last year’s new teacher tour, an individual who recently retired from the military and whose children had attended our school said in amazement, “Thank you so much. I never realized some of these areas existed in our town, much less that these students attended Woodbridge. I have worked only with the privileged through my coaching and my own children’s activities. This [the tour] will be very helpful to me as I begin my teaching career.”

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## Homework Handbook and Summer Survival Tips

By Vickie Luchuck

Teacher, Lumberport Elementary School, Lumberport, WV

I prepared a handbook of homework helps for the parents of our kindergarten to fifth-grade children. The opening section included the homework policy. I put in articles on how to help with homework and lists of materials students would need, as well as copies of correct handwriting styles, multiplication tables, maps, creative writing information, and word lists. I asked each classroom teacher to write specific suggestions for the grade levels.

The booklet gave parents what they needed to be more helpful—no longer was homework something they knew little about. Comments from parents expressed their appreciation. One mother told me she was glad that her child would no longer be able to say she had no homework. Another parent was pleased to know what his son would be expected to learn during the year.

As a follow-up to a parent’s comment, I decided to offer parents a workshop on summer survival tips for their children. Since parents liked the homework handbook, I decided to use that approach with the summer handbook.

I asked teachers to give me a list of things they wanted their students to work on over the summer, both to maintain skills and to be better prepared for their new class.

I gathered some neat door prizes so that each parent received something when they attended the workshop. Their written comments told me they were glad to have both the information and the opportunity to become more involved in their children’s education. ■

# Resources for Schools, Parents, and Communities

## Promising Initiatives to Improve Education in Your Community

U.S. Department of Education  
P.O. Box 1398  
Jessup, MD 20794-1398  
Phone toll-free 877-4ED-Pubs  
E-mail: [edpubs@inet.ed.gov](mailto:edpubs@inet.ed.gov)  
Web: [www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html)

This minicatalog includes information about resources that schools, parents, and communities can use to build partnerships to improve education. Free publications from the Department are listed in 10 sections, including helping children read well, improving teacher quality, and creating quality after-school programs. Partnerships in each area are supported by new funding programs. Single copies of all publications listed in the minicatalog are free; use contact information above to get a copy.

## National School Safety Training for School and Community Personnel

NEA-EchoStar Safe Schools Network  
1201 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036-3290  
Phone: 202-822-7746  
E-mail: [echostar@nea.org](mailto:echostar@nea.org)  
Web: <http://www.nea.org/issues/safescho/echostar>

This national program was launched by the National Education Association (NEA), the satellite company EchoStar, and other public and private partners. The effort will include a network of satellite dishes and a comprehensive year-long instructional series for teachers, schools, and communities, including how to identify and help troubled children and other important safety issues.

In order to make sure school districts have the technology to receive the new materials, EchoStar, which is based in Littleton, Colorado, is donating satellite dishes to at least 1,000 school districts. Its partner, Future

View, is donating free time for programming.

The U.S. Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services will participate in this public-private partnership by providing funding and other resources.

Beginning in January 2000, the NEA will broadcast 10 video programs, each with its own electronic discussion guide. In creating the lesson plans, the NEA has reached out to members of the Learning First Alliance as well as the Fraternal Order of Police, the American Psychological Association, and the Harvard School of Public Health. The partnership plans to transmit the training to school districts, which will then be able to distribute the material by videotape to local schools and hold hands-on training sessions with teachers, educational personnel, and community participants, including law enforcement officers.

## Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Brown University, Box 19885  
Providence, RI 02912  
E-mail: [AISR\\_Info@brown.edu](mailto:AISR_Info@brown.edu)  
Web: <http://www.aisr.brown.edu>

The institute works for school reform and offers several resources to those interested in public engagement.

**The Public Engagement Resource Center.** This section of the institute's Web site offers visitors access to a wealth of information, including publications, research, links to other sites, and a bibliography on the emerging process of public engagement around public education. Visit this site to order or download the Institute's recent report, *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*.

**Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change** (available in print or on-line as a pdf document). For 18 months, the Annenberg Institute studied ways in which schools, parents, and the

public organize to revitalize public education. This report incorporates information from 174 initiatives across the country and contributes to building an understanding of how American schools and communities are communicating and working together.

The print version of the report is free for one copy, \$10 each for additional copies.

**Public Engagement Today** (available in print or on-line as a pdf document). Each issue of this newsletter focuses on one particular trend in public education that has implications for public engagement. Articles and stories from school communities present examples of promising engagement efforts.

## SCHOOLS, PARENTS, COMMUNITY

### The Panasonic Foundation

Web: <http://www.panasonic.com/MECA/foundation/foundation.html>

Its mission statement says the foundation is dedicated to the enhancement and improvement of public education in the United States. To this aim, it forms long-term partnerships with school districts to help them restructure their systems. "The foundation forms a partnership with the district as a whole, including not only the superintendent, central office staff, and school board, but also unions and associations, teachers and administrators, parents, and other community partners."

The foundation newsletter, *P<sup>3</sup>* ("P-Cubed"), focuses on school-level reform issues in the Panasonic Partnership Program and other districts. Current and back issues of the newsletter are available on-line and discuss such topics as collaboration with the wider community in order to achieve equity, and a look at the Quality Improvement Process, which involves

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external reviews conducted by parents, businesspeople, and other community members.

### A Forum on the Public Schools: Manual of Instructions

Phi Delta Kappa International  
P.O. Box 789  
Bloomington, IN 47402-0789  
Phone: 800-766-1156  
E-mail: cpds@pdkintl.org

What should be the purposes of public education? How can we know if these purposes are being achieved? What changes need to be made to achieve these purposes?

Those fundamental questions guide discussion during a public forum on strengthening public schools. This manual presents a model for planning, conducting, and following up on such a forum, and includes masters of transparencies, handouts, and other materials needed during the meeting.

## SCHOOLS, PARENTS, COMMUNITY

### Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence  
P.O. Box 1658, Lexington, KY 40588  
Phone: 800-928-2111  
E-mail: cipl@prichardcommittee.org

Sponsored by the Prichard Committee in collaboration with the Kentucky Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA) and the Association of Older Kentuckians, the institute seeks to create a new level of parent engagement in Kentucky schools. Each year the Institute trains 200 parents who commit to design and carry out projects that involve other parents and have a lasting impact on student achievement.

### National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement

National PTA  
330 N. Wabash Ave., Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611-3690  
Phone: 312-670-6782  
E-mail: info@pta.org  
Web: <http://www.pta.org/programs/pfistand.htm>

In keeping with the establishment of standards in other areas of education, the PTA has developed national standards for family involvement. Its staff members teamed with education and parent involvement professionals through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education to develop this set of standards.

The publication includes a research summary, the six standards with quality indicators for each, and sample applications for putting ideas into action. The guide is available in print and online.

#### National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

##### **Standard I: Communicating**

Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

##### **Standard II: Parenting**

Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

##### **Standard III: Student Learning**

Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

##### **Standard IV: Volunteering**

Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

##### **Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy**

Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

##### **Standard VI: Collaborating with Community**

Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

### The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Phone: 800-LET-ERIC (800-538-3742)  
Web: <http://www.accesseric.org>

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, ERIC makes print and electronic resources available to educators, researchers, students, parents, and the general public. This national network of education clearinghouses compiles and maintains databases and publishes a variety of print products. Among the latter are digests, full-length books, and several newsletters.

The most recent issue of *The ERIC Review* (Volume 6, Issue 2, Fall 1999) focuses on K-8 science and mathematics education through articles on many topics. Titles include

- How Can I Help My Child Become More Interested in Science?
- Calculators in the Classroom: Is the Jury Still Out?
- A Parent's Guide to Student Performance in Science and Mathematics
- Best Practices in Science Education
- Math and Science Resource Organizations

The concluding article, "Putting It All Together: An Action Plan," suggests steps that parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members can take to help students master science and mathematics.

### Parent Information and Resource Centers

The U.S. Department of Education uses competitive grants to fund parent information and resource centers as part of a network that helps families and schools together support children's learning.

Nonprofit organizations collaborate with schools, institutions of higher education, social service agencies, and other nonprofits to (1) increase parents' knowledge of and confidence in child-rearing activities, (2) strengthen partnerships between parents and professionals in meeting the educational needs of preschool and school-

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aged children, and (3) enhance the developmental progress of children.

The centers share a common objective to initiate or expand opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's learning, but they have designed their outreach strategies and services to emphasize local priorities and conditions.

All centers provide information and training through either the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPHY) or the Parents As

Teachers (PAT) program. Both are widely replicated, home-based models that have proven to be highly effective in helping parents prepare their children for school success.

### AEL Region Parent Information and Resource Centers

Tennessee Parents First Information and Resource Center

Tracy Patton

Phone: 615-460-9810 or toll-free at 877-TN-READS

E-mail: parent1@aol.com

Kentucky Parent Information and Resource Center

Ann Hendrix

Phone: 800-327-5196

E-mail: ahendrix@kih.net

Virginia Parental Information and Resource Center

Lorraine Flood

Phone: 757-441-2045

E-mail: lflood@vpirc.net

West Virginia Family Connections

James Shaffer

Phone: 304-296-1655 or 800-814-5534

E-mail: info@wvfamilyconnections.org

## INFORMAL SCIENCE

### Shhh! Don't Tell Kids It's Good for Them!

By Carla Thomas McClure

On a cool spring morning, several yellow buses pull up in front of the Good Zoo in Wheeling, West Virginia. Eager children press their faces against the windows. When the doors swing open, each child emerges with a parent, grandparent, or another family member. All wear name tags with animal drawings on them. The day's activities will look and feel much like an ordinary field trip to the zoo—but watch closely and you'll see evidence that more planning and preparation than usual have gone into the visit. Teachers and zoo staff have been collaborating to make this informal science experience both fun and educational.

*Informal science* is a term some educators use to describe science learning that takes place outside the classroom. Zoos, museums, and national parks are examples of informal science sites. For the past three years, the

Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at AEL has been helping informal science site staff and local teachers work together to develop innovative activities that build on students' natural curiosity.

"A guide for teachers was something we had been thinking about for a long time," said Gretchen Henrich at the Good Zoo. "So when AEL offered to help us connect with teachers to do that, we seized the day. Together, we've cre-

ated activities for kids to do before, during, and after their visit here. They're trying out the habitats activity today."

Lewis hurries downstairs to one of two indoor classrooms where the visitors are seated. "I want you to meet Sweetness," she tells her audience as she pulls a skunk from a carrier box. Small hands reach out to pet the animals Lewis shows the children as she talks about the places where animals naturally live. "Look at the animal drawing you've colored on your name tag," she instructs them as they leave the room. "Look for that animal during your visit today and notice what kind of habitat the animal is in."

A zoo scavenger hunt keeps minds and feet active after lunch. The adult family member accompanying each child is kept busy with questions and listens as the child explains what he or she already knows about zoo animals. "She's been coming home from school every day talking about animals," a parent comments. "She got her stuff all packed last night." Later, back in the classroom, each student will get a

set of animal drawings to color, cut out, and place in suitable "habitats" (decorated folders).

Those collaborating to develop informal science activities for young zoo visitors intentionally designed pre-visit and post-visit activities to make

the experience more meaningful. Including family members in the zoo visit was the teachers' idea. There are several advantages to including them, according to AEL's Monica Mitchell Ulewicz. "When family members are involved, kids get individual attention. The learning activities give parents a chance to observe special interests or abilities in a child that they might not have observed otherwise. Adults

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### Project Sites

Kentucky Caverns, Horse Cave, Kentucky  
Challenger Learning Center, Hazard, Kentucky

Memphis Botanic Garden, Tennessee  
Nashville Zoo, Tennessee

Virginia Marine Science Museum, Virginia Beach, Virginia  
Oglebay's Good Zoo, Wheeling, West Virginia

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who spend time doing learning activities with kids send messages that the child is important, that education is important, and that learning can be fun. Involving parents in field trips or class activities is only one way to accomplish this. Post-visit activities can be designed to involve parents, too.”

“Sometimes parents and even school systems look at field trips as expensive play times. What we tend to forget is that children learn through play,” says Ulewicz. “The best informal science activities often look like play but are designed with a learning goal in mind.”

One way to keep learning goals in the forefront is to correlate activities with national and state science and math standards.

Activities are also designed to appeal to various learning styles. A teacher who brought her students to the Memphis Botanic Gardens commented that even the students with attention deficit disorder paid attention and participated. Informal science experiences often capture student interest by taking them out of traditional classroom roles and settings, engaging the five senses, and attending to social and individual needs. Follow-up activities provide the time and structure for students to reflect on their experiences—an essential part of the learning process. Students might discuss the experience, write about it, look at or draw pictures, create something with their hands, or play a game.

“Another thing informal science does is to make students and their families aware of community resources,” says Ulewicz. Of course, not every school has a nearby zoo, aquarium, nature park, or museum. But most communities do have people with personal or professional interests in areas related to science. Many of these people would be pleased to act as resident experts and tour guides during field trips to local farms, orchards, greenhouses, rivers, or other sites. This approach offers the added advantage of introducing students to veterinarians, pharmacists, researchers, farmers, and others involved in science-related careers in their own community.

If no local science center exists, students might design an informal community science center (either temporary or permanent) as a class project. “Students can come up with some wonderful ideas,” says Ulewicz. “A few years ago, I was involved in a small museum that asked community members for ideas about exhibits. Believe it or not, the group expressed interest in seeing a display showing what happened to sewage after it was flushed. They did some research, then met to brainstorm ideas that would appeal to young people. A student popped up with, ‘I know! I want to be flushed down a giant toilet!’ The 3-D display they created was the most popular one at the museum. The kids

entered one end of this big tube structure (after “flushing” the toilet and hearing the sound effect) and walked through the system. The planners would never have thought of something like that if they hadn’t had a student involved.”

Success stories like this motivate informal science site staff and local teachers to involve students as they design meaningful learning experiences. “The Consortium invites all the sites we work with to send staff and teachers to a yearly regional conference to share ideas,” Ulewicz explains. “This year, we’ll also do focus groups with students to get their ideas for making activities even better.”

“Making students more aware of the real world, having them interact with real animals, places, people, and artifacts, and using that interaction to spark curiosity and a love for learning—that’s what informal science is all about,” says Ulewicz. “Dedicated teachers and site staff around the region are working together to make it happen.” ■

*For more about informal science and the Consortium’s project, visit <http://www.ael.org/eisen/fyi/informal.htm>.*

### Informal Science Resources for Educators and Parents

#### “Informal Mathematics and Science Education”

This theme issue of *ENC Focus* from the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education includes articles and ideas for conducting informal science activities at national parks, zoos, aquariums, amusement parks, museums, and science centers. Available at <http://www.enc.org/classroom/focus/133280/index.htm> or call 614-292-7784.

#### *Helping Your Child Learn Science*

This booklet from the U.S. Department of Education contains instructions for simple science activities children can do at home (make a soap-powered paper boat) and in the community (play guessing games at the zoo). Available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Science/index.html>.

#### *Museums and Learning: A Guide for Family Visits*

This booklet suggests things families can do before, during, and after a museum visit to help children get the most out of it. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Museum/>.

#### *Just Beyond the Classroom*

Educator Clifford E. Knapp offers outdoor activities, reflection questions, and assessment ideas for teachers in urban and rural communities. Available for \$12 from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, phone 800-624-9120.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION

## Plan Now for Equity Conference 2000

Educators, administrators, and parents are invited to attend this conference sponsored by the Eisenhower Math and Science Consortium and The Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL. Dates are May 17-19; the location is Lexington, Kentucky; and more information will be available after January 3, 2000, at <http://www.ael.org>. Many sessions will be of interest to parents, and some will be created specifically for an outside-school audience.

For more information, contact Janis Augustine at AEL. Phone 800-624-9120 or e-mail [augustij@ael.org](mailto:augustij@ael.org).

## National Awards for Model Professional Development

The National Awards Program of the U.S. Department of Education recognizes schools and school districts with model professional development activities in the pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade levels that have led to increases in student achievement.

**Application Deadline:** January 18, 2000

**Funds Available:** None, but the Department intends to pay the costs of having successful applicants make presentations on their professional development activities at regional and national conferences.

This program began in 1996, in coordination with a wide range of national education organizations, to highlight and recognize schools and school districts whose professional development activities are well aligned with the Department's statement of the Mission and Principles of Professional Development.

In the first three years of the program, the Secretary has recognized 20 schools and school districts in 12 states. Moreover, the program has helped educators learn how teachers and others in these sites have succeeded in implementing high-quality professional development activities, and what educators in other locations can do to better evaluate the effectiveness of their own professional development efforts.

Complete information on this competition can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/inits/TeachersWeb>. You may also contact Sharon Horn, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Room 506E, Washington, DC 20208; phone 202-219-2203; e-mail [sharon\\_horn@ed.gov](mailto:sharon_horn@ed.gov).

## 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants

When Congress established the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers program, it envisioned rural and inner-city schools collaborating with community members, public and non-profit agencies and organizations, local businesses, other educational entities, and community recreational, cultural, and human service groups. By focusing some part of their energies and resources on joint projects to benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural, and recreational needs of local families, they might power a new sense of community to support lifelong learning for children and adults alike.

To be funded, a Community Learning Center must operate within a public elementary, middle, or secondary school building, and it must provide programs for residents of all ages. Its priority must be to offer activities that

expand learning opportunities for the children and youth of the community.

Many components may be included in a proposal; among them are tutoring and homework assistance, nutrition and health programs, expanded library service hours, parenting skills education, recreational and cultural programs, employment counseling, and technology education programs for individuals of all ages.

Although funding for the next round of grants has yet to be appropriated, deadlines will likely be similar to those for last year. Approximate time frame:

**Applications available:** early December 1999

**Application deadline:** March 1

**Estimated award date:** May 30

For more information on the program, visit the U.S. Department of Education Web site (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC>). You'll find grant application forms and advice on preparing a strong proposal (see the Frequently Asked Questions section). AEL will be happy to provide review and support to school districts preparing proposals. Contact Jane Hange by e-mail at [hangej@ael.org](mailto:hangej@ael.org) or by phone at 800-624-9120. (For examples of successful programs, see the Fall 1999 issue of *The Link* at <http://www.ael.org>.)

## New Book on Education Reform in Kentucky

In 1986, 66 mostly rural Kentucky school districts filed a lawsuit against the state in hopes of gaining more equitable and adequate funding for public schools. In 1989, the Kentucky Supreme Court decided that the entire system of public education should be replaced. The court gave the legislature until the end of its next session to complete legislation creating an entirely new system.

What we now know as KERA, the

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## Kentucky Book

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Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990, began life as House Bill 940. The story of writing, enacting, and implementing KERA fills the pages of Jack D. Foster's book, *Redesigning Public Education: The Kentucky Experience*. Foster was Kentucky's Secretary of the Education and Humanities Cabinet from 1988-91 and played a major role in KERA's creation.

Following his service at the state level, Foster helped more than 50

Kentucky schools implement KERA. He gained insights and experience at the school level that also contributed to his observations in this book.

For nearly a decade educators have been watching and learning from Kentucky's experiences with school reform, hoping for guidance on their own research-based improvements. Jack Foster provides invaluable help with his authoritative descriptions of the policy assumptions on which KERA was based and his critique of what went right—and wrong—during implementation.

*Redesigning Public Education* can be ordered from Diversified Services, Inc., 2265 Harrodsburg Road, Suite 200, Lexington, KY 40504-3517; phone 606-278-5700; fax 606-278-6182. ISBN 0-9631007-1-8; 273 pp.; paperback, \$22; hardback, \$28; shipping and handling, \$3 plus \$0.95 per book.

Look also this year for reports from AEL's 10-year study of KERA implementation in four school districts. As reports become available, they will be announced in *The Link* and on AEL's Web site.

# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

## One Parent's Viewpoint

By Barbara McFall

Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community leaders share a common goal in education: All want to fit future citizens for the life that they are growing into. Motivations differ, however.

Students and their parents want the best possible life for themselves and for their loved ones. Their concern is with the individual growth and development of a unique and wonderful learner. That learner is on a singular quest to realize personal hopes, dreams, visions, goals, and objectives. Education succeeds if the learner is joyfully engaged and achieving or expanding his or her full potential.

Community leaders and policymakers have a somewhat different motivation. Their task is to maintain a well functioning society for all. In America, this has traditionally meant providing a homogeneous educational experience in order to create common ground in a country of immigrants. The intent has been to raise the average level of performance and to identify skills to be applied in community efforts.

Teachers and administrators are called to work the middle ground, to mediate the needs both of individuals and society, then facilitate a solution that benefits both.

Some policies, such as the standards-based reform movement, present dilemmas for everyone.

Virginia recently implemented Standards of Learning (SOLs) and standardized testing of SOLs. While such standards go a long way to ensure that all students have equal access to educational excellence, they also command a significant portion of student and teacher attention.

As a parent, I see educators' concerns for the welfare and progress of my children, their students. I also recognize

their mandate to achieve certain community goals, which may not be negotiable.

However, I am concerned that the very talents that make my son unique and wonderful will be crowded out by other demands. I feel that creativity and a strong work ethic will serve him better in the long run than specific recall of historic facts or figures. It's not that I don't want him exposed to a broad range of excellent educational opportunities. It's just that I want to leave room for other growth and development. I want him to learn to lead as well as follow, to create as well as understand, to value where we have been as a community and push the boundaries when change is necessary. I want him to be the best that he can possibly be, and to be joyful in his contribution to society.

So I pressure my son's school and teachers. If I seem strident and demanding, if my presence complicates your day, please remember that my job is to be an advocate and mentor. We have the same goals. Our vision and our values may differ. Our task is to learn to share, for me to understand your path and expectations, and for you to understand mine. Together we can help this learner find his place in society and achieve a happy and productive life. ■

*Barbara McFall is the parent of a high school student and lives in Roanoke, Virginia. She can be reached at [barbmcfall@aol.com](mailto:barbmcfall@aol.com).*

Voices from the Field presents an opportunity to become acquainted with the views of education-minded persons in the AEL region. If you have thoughts on issues that concern our readers, please send queries by mail to Link Editor, AEL, Inc., P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348 or send e-mail to [link@ael.org](mailto:link@ael.org). Contributions may be edited for length and clarity of focus.

# RESEARCH NOTES

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement funds research through regional laboratories, national centers, and field studies. The following are summaries of recent reports. Information on finding the complete text includes a Web address (for downloading) as well as contact information for obtaining print copies.

## Restructuring Diverse Schools

From the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE)

Two of the most rapidly developing fields in education research are diversity education and school restructuring/school reform. In order to answer the question *Are some of the current school restructuring models better suited to multilingual, multicultural contexts than others?* CREDE has been studying 13 diverse schools that are in the process of implementing an externally developed school restructuring design.

Based on preliminary findings, researchers have identified some characteristics that may make for successful restructuring in multilingual, multicultural school contexts:

- If a model is going to work, the process needs to include ample opportunity for staff to make educated selection and implementation choices.
- Multidimensional support and leadership are required from design teams, district and state personnel, and school site educators to ensure success. For example, state department of education policies regarding student assessment and curriculum standards need to be aligned to support school restructuring plans.
- Educators must ensure that all students receive the benefits of the adopted reform designs and that high standards are universally maintained. This is especially the case for districtwide reforms.
- Successful implementation of school restructuring designs requires sensitivity and adaptability on the part of the design developers, local policymakers, and educators in schools.

In sum, every effort should be made by school districts and design teams to assist school educators in choosing the right design for their school, in adapting the design to their local context, and in implementing that design.

Stringfield, S.; Datnow, A.; and Ross, S.M. (1998). "Scaling Up School Restructuring in Multicultural, Multilingual Contexts: Early Observations From Sunland County." Research Report #2, CREDE. Visit <http://www.crede.ucsc.edu>, e-mail [crede@cats.ucsc.edu](mailto:crede@cats.ucsc.edu), or phone 831-459-3500.

## Talent Development High Schools

From the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR)

The Talent Development High School model focuses on turning comprehensive high schools into places that address needs that research has shown to be common to all students. For example, students need to know the relevance of their schoolwork, and to experience a caring and supportive environment, including having help with personal problems and opportunities for academic success.

The Talent Development model includes a self-contained academy for 9th graders, and separate career-oriented academies for 10th-12th graders. A common core curriculum with high standards and a college-bound orientation apply throughout. Instruction is in 90-minute periods. Intensive ongoing professional development is provided.

Currently in its fourth year of development, the flagship site is Patterson High School in Baltimore, a comprehensive high school formerly on the Maryland Reconstitution list. The model is also being implemented in Southwestern High School, and leaders in the Baltimore system asked that the model be introduced in all Baltimore high schools.

Analyses of third-year data for Patterson High School continue to show positive effects from the reforms.

Attendance has increased by 10% for the entire school and 15% for the 9th grade over the 3-year period, compared to a decline of 3% for the rest of the district in both the 9th grade and overall for the same period.

Promotion rates increased significantly and dropouts decreased to produce nearly double the number of students reaching the junior year compared to before the reforms. If these students persist through the senior year as the first graduating class from the Talent Development Model, the dropout rate will have been reduced by half.

The percentage of 9th graders who passed the Maryland State Functional Exams increased from 28% to 56% in math and from 44% to 57% in writing, placing Patterson near the top of the district's non-selective high schools.

McPartland, James; Balfanz, Robert; Jordan, Will; and Lettgers, Nettie. "Improving Climate and Achievement in a Troubled Urban High School Through the Talent Development Model." *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, 3(4), 337-361 (1998). Visit <http://crespar.law.howard.edu> or phone 410-516-8800.

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# RESEARCH NOTES

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## Making the Transition to School

*From the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL)*

The Center developed a paper based on a national survey of kindergarten teachers. It reveals four key points that are vital for teacher practices and transitions to school.

Use of some form of practice to help children make the transition to kindergarten is nearly universal; 95% of the nation's kindergarten teachers endorsed the most frequently reported practice—talking with the child's parent after school starts.

Practices that involve school personnel in direct contacts with children or families are the least frequently reported, as are practices that involve contact with children or families before the start of school and/or involve low-intensity generic contact (e.g., flyers, brochures, group open houses).

As schools (or districts) become increasingly urban and have higher percentages of minority and/or students from

low socioeconomic backgrounds, personal contacts with children and families before the start of school become less frequent (except for home visits), and low intensity, after-the-start-of-school contacts (such as flyers) are more common. Thus, children and families who may need the best form of transition practices are least likely to receive them.

Teachers identify a number of barriers to implementing practices. The most common are that class lists are generated too late to make contacts with families before school starts, summer work is not supported, and no plan for the transition to kindergarten is available in the school district. Teachers' perceptions that family characteristics are barriers occur with increasing frequency as schools become more urban, have a higher minority population, or are located in high poverty districts.

Pianta, Robert C.; Cox, Martha J.; Taylor, Lorraine; and Early, Diane. "Transition Practices, Spotlight No. 1A Jan 1999," excerpts from paper, "Kindergarten Teachers' Practices Related to Transition to School: Results of a National Survey," published in *Elementary School Journal*. National Center for Early Development & Learning: January 1999. Visit <http://www.ncedl.org>, e-mail [loyd\\_little@unc.edu](mailto:loyd_little@unc.edu), or phone 919-966-0867.



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