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From Periphery to Center:

A New Vision for Family, School, and Community Partnerships

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Chapter 21

From Periphery to Center:

A New Vision and Strategy for Family, School, and Community Partnerships

Heather B. Weiss and Naomi C. Stephen

Research about the determinants of children's school success has pointed to the importance of the family in children's development and academic achievement for over forty years. The Equality of Educational Opportunity report, more commonly known as the Coleman report (Coleman et al., 1966), and subsequent reanalysis of the Coleman data (Jencks et al., 1972), both found that family factors matter more than school characteristics in predicting the educational outcomes of economically disadvantaged children. Recent results for fifth-graders from the national longitudinal NICHD Study of Early Care and Youth Development (Belsky et al., 2007) showed that parenting practices are more significant predictors of cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes than a range of other factors, including participation in early care and education. Yet efforts to include family involvement in children's learning and development at home and at school have always been, at best, on the distant margins of educational policy and reform efforts.

Overview

Political scientist John Kingdon suggested three elements that are critical in getting issues onto the public policy agenda so that government officials pay serious attention to them: "A problem is recognized, a solution is available, the political climate makes the time right for change" (Kingdon, 2003, p.88). When these strands converge, as is now the case in the ongoing debate about the reauthorization of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, there is a real possibility of significant policy change: "The

separate streams of problems, policies, and politics come together at certain critical times. Solutions become joined to problems, and both of them are joined to favorable political forces. This coupling is most likely when a policy window – an opportunity to push pet proposals or one's conceptions of problems – is open" (Kingdon, 2003, p. 194). Family, school, and community partnerships focused on children's development and school success are poised to take advantage of just such a policy window, given the increasing recognition that NCLB-shaped education reform confined to schools alone is not sufficient. Family, school, and community partnerships are about to move closer to the center of national school reform efforts, and will be seen as increasingly important in reducing socio-economic achievement gaps.

There is growing consensus about the problem: the NCLB strategy – with its emphasis on K-12 within-school reform driven by standards and assessment, aligned instructional improvement, high-stakes accountability requirements and consequences, and school choice – has not led to improved educational outcomes for many children, especially poor, minority and otherwise disadvantaged children. Yet the large socioeconomic achievement gap, as well as concerns about college and workforce preparation, have been brought to the forefront of education reform discussion by NCLB's requirement of disaggregated socioeconomic data on the numbers of students who fail to reach proficiency. As a result, many influential organizations and individuals are calling not just for tinkering with NCLB, but for fundamentally rethinking what it will take to insure that all children can learn, realize their potential, and succeed as workers, citizens and parents (Blank & Berg, 2006; Economic Policy Institute, 2008; Forum for Education and Democracy, 2008; Rothman, 2007; Rothstein, 2004). Many,

including some of the staunchest previous advocates of within-school reform strategies, are joining a growing chorus of voices singing that K-12 schools, even good schools, cannot do it alone. So the big emerging policy question is: If schools cannot do it alone, what can?

Many of the specific proposed solutions to reformulating NCLB, as well as current thinking about education reform more broadly, emphasize that the solution includes opening school doors to welcome the broader family and community partnerships that, research and experience increasingly indicate, are major contributors to children's academic achievement (Blank, Melaville & Shah, 2003; Caspe, Lopez & Wolos, 2006/07; Forum for Youth investment, n.d; Gordon, Bridglall & Meroe, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy & Weiss, 2007; Weiss, Caspe & Lopez, 2006). So the problem is recognized, family and community partnerships are widely advocated as part of the solution, and the political climate is right for change. The policy window is open: it is likely that the result will be steadily increased attention to and resources for family, school, and community partnerships.

If this prediction proves right, there is now an unprecedented opportunity to use collective knowledge and experience over the next few years to move from what one of the field's leaders called "random acts of parent involvement" (Gil Kressley, 2008) to realize a vision for a strategic, comprehensive, and continuous system of family, school, and community partnerships that demonstrably contribute to children's development and school success. Developing and implementing such a vision is necessary to support the learning and development of all children, but it is especially important for economically and otherwise disadvantaged and immigrant children. These community-based

partnerships have the potential to level the playing field for these children by insuring that they have access to the same non-school learning supports that their more-advantaged peers do.

Realizing this vision is going to require major policy and practice changes as well as new ways of conducting, using, and communicating research and evaluation. It will also require and benefit from ongoing discussion and debate among stakeholders about the vision itself, about strategies to accomplish it, and about how to acquire and use information to track and share progress and make the inevitable necessary course corrections along the way. This chapter is an effort to contribute to this needed broader discussion and debate.

The chapter begins with a brief description of past and present policy, starting with the provocative proposition that it has been quite possible to implement this vision, or at least make progress toward it, in the past, but that by and large this has not happened. Following are some answers to the inescapable question of why there hasn't been more progress. Barriers are described, and also progress toward addressing them that can inform future efforts. Next comes analysis of developmental research on how families contribute to children's education, as well as evidence from evaluations of intervention efforts. Both are presented in order to make a strong research-based case for intervention, and to assert that the research can inform the development of a framework to guide the design of demonstrably effective family, school, and community partnerships. The chapter's final section draws on the previous analyses to lay out suggestions for the key elements of a national strategy to make real the vision for a

comprehensive, continuous, and demonstrably effective system of family, school, and community partnerships in communities around the country.

A Note on Terms

The term "family, school, and community partnerships," subsequently shortened to "partnerships," is used in this chapter for several reasons. Research confirms that not only parents, but family members including grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, and other kith and kin, are involved in children's learning. Community is included because not only schools, but an array of community learning and support services, need to partner with families and schools in order to insure school success, especially for economically and otherwise disadvantaged children. One term for this set of supports is a *complementary learning* system (Harvard Family Research Project, 2005); family, school, and community partnerships are leverage for and components of such complementary learning systems. Community is included also because these partnerships should both help build and be accountable to the broader civic community of which they are a part (see the PEN Civic Index http://civicindex4education.org/main/index.cfm). In some instances the term "family involvement" appears alone in reference to the results of studies examining involvement without intentional partnerships.

A Brief Overview of Past and Current Policy

Federal leadership and policy are very important drivers of family involvement and partnerships, and the federal government plays a major role in defining, focusing, and positioning the concept of family involvement in school reform efforts. Much of the money for family involvement programs comes from the federal government: legislation, regulations, and monitoring define what involvement is and how high a priority it will be,

and legislative funding and earmarks determine what will be available for federal, state, and local capacity-building, monitoring, and infrastructure development. The passage of the landmark 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – bringing the federal government into state and local educational policy for the first time to address the educational achievement of disadvantaged children – initiated the modern era of family involvement and partnerships, calling attention to the importance of family and community involvement. As D'Agostino, Hedges, Wong, and Borman (2001) noted in their legislative history of Title 1 parent involvement, the role of parents, at least in educational policy, has changed many times since 1965.

Title 1 of ESEA, where the family involvement provisions are laid out, initially had no parent involvement regulations, but it did specify a place for families in parental advisory councils (PACs) and it included guidelines suggesting that schools encourage parents to volunteer in classrooms as parent aides. The emphasis shifted in 1988 to a broader home- and school-based learning collaboration model that emphasized parental support for learning activities in the home as well as involvement at school.

By the mid-1990's and Chapter 1 (Title 1) reauthorization, the definition of partnerships had evolved to an even more comprehensive model, in which schools were required to develop school-parent compacts laying out how schools, parents, and students would partner to help children achieve state standards. Schools were required to spend no less than 1% of their Title 1 budget on this more comprehensive model of parent involvement. Evaluations of these Title 1 efforts showed that the more comprehensive model, with parent-school compacts and multiple forms of home and school involvement,

including school support for learning at home, were associated with higher student achievement (D'Agostino et al., 2001).

Title 1 and then the 2002 NCLB legislation specify a broad definition of family, school, and community partnerships but NCLB also has a particular focus on parents in the role of consumers, centering its accountability provisions on the parental option to transfer a child from a failing school, as well as on access to tutoring in the form of Supplemental Education Services (SES). The most recent report from the U.S. Department of Education on the effects of NCLB, which examines data from a sample of nine large urban school districts, found no evidence that the school choice provisions are effective, but students who participated in SES experienced statistically significant gains in achievement (US Department of Education, 2007). Evaluations of the effects of this consumer model of parent involvement model suggest its limits and the consequent need to emphasize a broader, more comprehensive partnership model of family involvement in the next round of NCLB reauthorization.

While different federal administrations have emphasized different models of involvement since the 1990's and including NCLB, legislation has permitted and sometimes encouraged schools and districts to employ a more comprehensive definition of family involvement and partnerships if they so choose. The comprehensive definition specifies: a) Parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; b) Parents should be encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at home and at school; c) Parents are full partners in their child's education and should be included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and d) A series of institutional and infrastructure supports should be available

at the state education agency (SEA), local education authority or district (LEA), and school levels to enable the above. This includes SEA, LEA, and school parent involvement plans, reports to parents on their child's performance, collection and dissemination of effective parent involvement practices, use of Title 1 funds to support involvement, school-parent compacts, provisions for capacity-building and professional development, evaluation, monitoring of compliance with the legislative mandates, and even coordination with other federal programs such as Head Start, Even Start, and Reading First.

So, arguably, for many years districts and schools have had considerable opportunity to define comprehensive family involvement plans and strategies, and at least some resources that would allow them to do so in Title 1 schools, if not in all schools. However, the reality in many states and communities is very different: much of the legislation is not being implemented, or when it is, the effort is spotty, not sustained, and often fails to achieve the goal of actively involving families, especially disadvantaged ones, in ways that would benefit their children's development, learning, and school success. Given resources and legislative latitude, why haven't we made more progress? What are the barriers to more family involvement and to comprehensive family, school, and community partnerships – and is there any progress in addressing them?

The Barriers and Lessons for the Future

Barrier 1: Legislative and Governmental Fragmentation

First, the structural separation of parent involvement efforts within and across education and other legislation, and within and across federal departments, has siloed funding streams, programs, and advocacy efforts, making it difficult to develop

coordinated, comprehensive, and continuous – never mind sustained – family involvement efforts. NCLB uses the word "parent" or some variation over 650 times (US Department of Education, 2002) and it includes many scattered provisions for parent involvement. (Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Student programs, Title 1, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers are but three of several such provisions, all listed in separate sections of the Act.) The key word here is not "parent," but "scattered." As many recent analyses of efforts to develop more coordinated education and family policies and programs point out, fragmentation is a function of the way the House of Representatives and the Senate develop legislation and of the ways in which the Executive Branch and various federal departments, including the United States Department of Education, divide the resulting responsibilities. Family involvement mandates, programs, and funding streams run across NCLB, and across many federal departments: the Department of Education, Health and Human Services, the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, etc. This patchwork process results in many small and poorly resourced programs, and raises serious difficulties with respect to monitoring and accountability (Cross, 2004; Dunkle, 1997; Lovell, 2008; Palanki & Burch, 1992).

Siloed funding (e.g., for Head Start, IDEA, and Title 1) has often led to siloed parent groups, and then siloed – and often competing – parent advocacy efforts, rather than advocacy for broader systems of family involvement as part of a collective agenda (Fege, 2006, 2008). Not only does this make it difficult to employ a united national voice on behalf of family involvement and partnerships, it also has local consequences. When local school leaders do want to build an overarching and comprehensive family

involvement partnership strategy, they sometimes find it difficult to do so due to competition amongst parent advocacy groups (Weiss & Westmoreland, 2006).

While there have been periodic federal efforts to integrate various funding streams and programs, most of these efforts have been small, have not been sustained, or do not get beyond the pilot stage to any scale (Dunkle, 1997). In his recent analysis of the history of federal involvement in education, Christopher Cross, a former Assistant Secretary of Education, pointed out the problems this fragmentation creates within education and called for a congressional task force to recommend changes to Congress and the President – but he was not optimistic about the prospects for change (Cross, 2004).

The result of the fragmentation in our area of concern is that it creates incentives to silo rather than integrate partnership efforts. Many schools, driven by siloed federal compliance and reporting requirements, then silo family involvement programs by funding stream: one program for Title 1 parents, one for special education parents, one for all parents, etc. It is easier to do this than to make the extraordinary efforts necessary to create a comprehensive school or district plan, including the necessary blending of funding streams and enlisting the collaboration and budgetary support of diverse groups within the school as well as the broader community. Schools, districts, and communities may make these efforts, but they are very difficult to sustain due to changes in leadership or funding, or in other areas. How to adjust federal policy, funding, regulations, and related state and local policies so as to create incentives rather than disincentives to the creation of comprehensive family, school, and community partnerships is a question that must be addressed.

Barrier 2: Limited Investments in and Use of Monitoring and Capacity-Building

The second barrier also requires rethinking the federal role and allocation of resources in the areas of family involvement and partnerships. Tools of compliance monitoring and evaluation, or of capacity-building and technical assistance, have been little used over the past several decades by the federal government to support the development of family involvement and family, school, and community partnerships. While Title 1 and NCLB mandate a range of types of family-school partnerships, and increasingly focus them directly on specific things that families can do to support children's learning (D'Agostino et al., 2001), there has been relatively little effort to monitor states and districts for accountability and compliance with these parent involvement mandates, signaling that family involvement and partnerships are not a high priority. Many districts are out of compliance or narrowly comply with the letter but not the intent of the legislation. In compliance mode, many adopt boilerplate parent involvement policies with little parent input, which do not require the types of higher-maintenance family involvement activities and partnerships that, research suggests, enhance students' academic achievement. However, even if there were more federal monitoring, decades of research on school reform implementation suggest that the stick of compliance is unlikely to result in effective local family involvement efforts (McLaughlin, 2006; McLaughlin & Shields, 1987).

Also lacking is substantial investment in the carrots of capacity-building, training, technical assistance, and other resources that may enable families, schools, and communities to build more comprehensive partnerships on behalf of better student outcomes. The Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) – created by federal

legislation in the 1990's and maintained in NCLB to provide training, technical assistance, and capacity-building at the state and local levels – are a promising but underfunded effort to support states' and districts' efforts to build systemic and comprehensive family involvement strategies. The low level of investment is a serious barrier because, as McLaughlin and Shields (1987) noted over twenty years ago, systemic, comprehensive, and sustained involvement is dependent on educators' and families' core beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Sheldon, 2002). Changing those beliefs will require substantial and long-running capacity-building, training, and technical assistance, as well practitioners' access to the latest research and evaluation results, at each of the layers responsible for policy implementation, from the federal level down through the state, the community, the district, and the school.

Barrier 3: Lack of Prioritization of Investments in Pre- and In-Service Professional Development

This third barrier grows out of a related capacity-building issue: helping educators to recognize the importance of partnering with families and communities, and providing them the necessary skills and means. There has been and continues to be little leadership from any source demanding or providing pre- or in-service training of teachers and administrators in this area (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein & Sanders, 2000, 2002; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider & Lopez, 1997). Surveys indicate that teachers feel working with families is their biggest challenge, and they feel at a disadvantage because they do not have the necessary training (Markow & Martin, 2005).[1] There are some exemplary

[1]"Communicating with and engaging parents is the most frequently cited challenge among new teachers and the area they feel least prepared to take on in their first teaching position. One-quarter of secondary

pre-service training programs (Shartrand et al., 1997; for more recent examples, see www.hfrp.org/FINE or www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources?topic=3) and in many states, standards and requirements for teacher certification specify preparation in family involvement, especially at the early childhood and elementary levels. However, none of this has moved many colleges of education, or teacher or administrator training programs, to offer or require courses related to working with families and communities. As a result, most new teachers and administrators have had little if any preparation for creating family-school partnerships. Such in-service training as exists often is simply a one-shot workshop for individuals, rather than the intensive, continuing, and organization-wide professional development experience that evaluations suggest are necessary to change practice in ways that contribute to better student outcomes (HFRP, 2007; Killion 2005/06).

While it is clear that pre- and in-service training are crucial to building educators' interest in and capacity to partner with families and communities, it is unclear what mandates or incentives or other means will move trainers to provide it. It is noteworthy in this regard that teachers' unions and school administrators are beginning to call for change. The National Education Association (NEA) is recommending required parental involvement training for teachers (NEA, 2006) and some superintendents, by including progress on family, school, and community partnerships in their performance reviews for principals and teachers, may stimulate colleges, universities and others to provide the necessary training (Crew & Dyja, 2007). These changes may help redefine professional

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school students reports that their parents are not very or at all involved in their education. Students with involved parents are more likely than others to . . . go to their parents for advice about what classes to take at school. They are also more likely to report being interested in their classes, to value higher education and to feel safe at school." (Markow & Martin, 2005, p. 4)

competency to include demonstrated ability to partner with families and communities in order to increase children's school learning and development.

Barrier 4: Definitions of learning and Expectations of Schools Do Not Address the Ways Poverty Limits Learning

The fourth barrier – which may ultimately become an incentive to support partnerships – is a curious interaction of expectations about the role of schools in reducing inequality, and assumptions about their means to do so. On one hand is the complex set of issues and limitations that stem from American attitudes about education as a dominant force in efforts to reduce social and economic inequality. On the other hand are the until-recently dominant assumptions about where, how, when, and what it takes for children to learn. These attitudes and assumptions have always been deeply embedded in educational policy and reform efforts. In her paper tracing the history of the federal role in education, entitled "'Our Children's Burden': A History of Federal Policies that Ask (now Require) Our Public Schools to Solve Societal Inequity," Wells (2006) points out that in contrast to other industrialized countries, which have built comprehensive social welfare systems to promote socioeconomic equality, the United States regards education as the dominant anti-poverty measure. The question before us going into NCLB reauthorization, Wells argued, is "how much we can continue to require the public schools to accomplish absent broader efforts to make children's overall lives more equal" (p. 2).

Educational policy as written now creates what Ladson-Billings (2006) has called the "educational debt." The debt is compounding because current educational policy narrowly defines K-12 schools as the setting where learning occurs and fails to recognize

how the capacity of poor children to learn is constricted by circumstances external to the school building. The educational debt compounds because not only do poor and minority children often attend poorer schools with fewer resources, they also have no complementary learning network that their more-advantaged peers can take for granted. They have less access to enriching learning experiences outside of school, less access to health and other social and human services, and other financial, logistical, and social barriers to extra-school activities that promote learning (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

A growing body of research confirms poor children's lack of access to complementary learning supports and indicates how this lack then predicts and contributes to an achievement gap across a child's school career (Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995; Murnane, Willett, Bub & McCartney, 2006; Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov & Crane, 1998). Families with lower incomes and less education are, on average, less likely to be involved in learning at home and at school (Baker & Stevenson, 1987; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Keith et al., 1998; Kohl, Lengua, McMahon & The Conduct Problems Prevention Group, 2000). A recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics (Enyeart, Diehl, Hampden-Thompson & Scotchmer, 2006) found less involvement of poor families; further, while educators report equal outreach to all families, disadvantaged families report receiving less outreach from schools than more-advantaged ones do (Marschall, 2006; Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005). Studies also suggest that disadvantaged children are less likely to participate in out-of-school and youth programs and activities, or to have enriching summer learning opportunities (Bouffard, et al., 2006; Kreider, 2005; Pedersen & Seidman, 2005; Wimer et al., 2005). Despite evidence about the ways in which the lack

of basic safety net services affects children's development and school success, education policy and reform strategies have rarely included access to health, mental health, or social services in their formulations of elements necessary to improve the academic achievement of poor and immigrant children (Rebell & Wolff, in press; Rothstein, 2004).

But as argued at the start of this chapter, there are indications that educational policy may be changing in favor of a broader definition of where and how children learn, and that opportunities and resources for a more strategic, comprehensive and continuous system of family, school, and community partnerships are being created as a result. More policymakers and educators understand – as evidenced by new state and federal legislation – that learning begins at birth and occurs in many contexts, and that disadvantaged children lack and need access to the range of complementary learning non-school supports and services that their middle-class peers have. Promising new state and national legislation indicates that more policy makers see the value of family involvement and of partnerships (variously labeled) to leverage and connect families to school and non-school supports, and these supports to each other, in ways that improve children's learning in school.

The inclusion of Family Resource Centers as part of the historic 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act is one example of a statewide partnership policy effort to increase family involvement in learning at home and at school, and to link families to safety-net services (Kalafat, 2008). Many other states have similar efforts in a pilot program status. The Full Service Community Schools Act passed by Congress in 2007 is an example of a new national pilot partnership effort. It provides funding for districts and states to create full-service community schools, which integrate educational, family, out-of-school time,

health, and other services through partnerships with families and community-based organizations. If the response to the first US Department of Education competition for full service school resources in 2008 is an indication, interest in partnerships is growing, as is demand for resources to create them. The competition drew nearly 500 applications for about twelve pilot grants.

There are other examples of proposed legislation that will fund partnership efforts to get children the complementary learning supports they need, and to link those supports with schools. The Keeping Pace Act, a proposed amendment to NCLB introduced in the US Senate in 2007, mandates that schools use Title 1 funds to hire Parent and Community Outreach Coordinators to improve family and community involvement in failing schools. The Education Begins At Home Act (EBAH), to be reintroduced in 2008, provides funding to states for community-based home visiting programs providing information and support to parents, reinforcing their roles as the child's first and most important teacher, connecting them to other early childhood and to safety net services, and reinforcing the importance of continued family involvement when the child enters school.

This kind of new legislation will provide resources and opportunities that serve as incentives for schools and communities to build partnerships. It will also raise the challenges of siloed funding, discussed earlier, that hamper efforts to create more comprehensive and continuous partnerships that create supportive developmental pathways for children from birth through high school. As just one example, EBAH would enable states to create birth-through-pre-kindergarten home visitation services – but, as proposed, EBAH provides no policy- or program-level incentives or mandates for home

visit programs to work with other early childhood providers or schools to make sure that both child and parent transition successfully to kindergarten and thereby increase the chances of continued parent involvement (Weiss, 2008). As the chapter's next section suggests, in policy settings such as EBAH, frameworks to guide the development of strategic, comprehensive, and continuous family, school, and community partnerships may aid state and community planning.

Barrier 5: The Challenge of Power Sharing

Policy makers' understanding of what disadvantaged children need to increase their academic achievement may be changing, as reflected in new and pending legislation. However, policy change enables but does not automatically create changes in practice. The changes necessary for partnerships are often blocked by beliefs and attitudes about responsibilities as well as by issues of power and control. Many educators do not think that low-income and otherwise disadvantaged parents want to be, or can be, involved in ways that support their children's education and feel that parents' failure to do their job makes it difficult for them to do theirs (Langdon & Vesper, 2000; Rose & Gallup, 2006). Many parents do not understand that their involvement matters or do not know how to get involved, or their children attend schools that do not value involvement sufficiently to do the outreach necessary to engage families in meaningful ways. As a result, many communities are stuck in finger-pointing – "parents don't want to be involved" and "schools don't want us involved" – and do not have a sense of shared responsibility for children's education (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007).

Long-time urban superintendent Rudy Crew offered a powerful way to describe this sense of shared responsibility (Crew & Dyja, 2007). Convinced that family and

community partnerships are crucial to both school and student success, he argued that partnerships are a two-way street and that that schools must take the first step. In Crew's formulation, the many parents, especially poor ones, who may desire but do not know how to be effectively involved, are "Supply Parents" who "often feel like outsiders in the very schools that are supposed to be serving them." Crew urged schools themselves to create instead "Demand Parents" who "demand things from their schools because they understand that they are indeed owed something and it is their responsibility to get it for their children" (p. 155). As superintendent, Crew attempted to create and respond to "Demand Parents" in order to improve student outcomes with Parent Academies designed in response to parents' requests for information on how to help their children succeed in school, partnership agreements with private and non-profit organizations, and inclusion of family involvement in principal and teacher performance reviews.

Crew and a number of other superintendents around the country are exceptional in their willingness to share power with family and community partners. Research on school change, interviews with educators and those who train them, and discussions with innovative practitioners, all suggest that issues of power, control, and accountability form a major barrier to partnerships (HFRP, 2008; Lightfoot, 1978, 2003). In their typology of family, school, and community relationships, Henderson et al. (2007) described "fortress schools" which exemplify this control, and contrasted them with "partnership schools" where parents and community organizations are seen individually and collectively as partners who share responsibility in the effort to help children succeed in school. Arguably, the fortress mentality has been exacerbated by the high-stakes accountability provisions of NCLB, which have resulted in narrowing schools' missions and the

services they provide, as well as an unwillingness to be accountable for things schools cannot directly control. Moving from a fortress to a partnership school entails risks and costs – relinquishing some control and making the effort to sustain partnerships – and it requires a belief that increased student and school success will make the change worth while. There is a strong research-based case supporting partnerships as a risk worth taking to improve the educational achievement of disadvantaged children.

The Empirical Basis for Family, School and Community Partnerships

Since the passage of the 1993 Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) underscoring the importance of setting and being accountable for outcomes, and the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) of 2002 emphasizing research-based policy and programs, it has been necessary to make an evidence-based case for new public – and, inceasingly, private – investments, or to sustain existing ones. Those who advocate for family involvement and partnerships are in a good position to do so vis à vis GPRA and ESRA, for several reasons.

First, as other chapters in this volume indicate, there is a strong case based in developmental research: many studies on the determinants of children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, and of the factors influencing children's school trajectories, point to the importance of the family in children's development and academic success. The research makes it clear that parents' or caregivers' behaviors, practices, and attitudes at home – as well as their involvement with school and other institutions – strongly influence children's learning.

Second, this research base provides an increasingly nuanced understanding of how specific types of parenting practices and aspects of partnerships, as well as economic

and other disadvantages, influence development. Such detailed information can inform and strengthen specific policy and practice. There are many ways to categorize aspects of parenting that are associated with higher levels of motivation, skills, effort, and achievement in children from birth through high school; for the purposes of this chapter, the following are most useful: a) parental responsiveness and emotional support; b) cognitive stimulation in the home; c) academic socialization; d) provision of structure, reinforcement, and support for learning; and e) home-school communication and connections.[2]

As research moves from a deficit-based to a strengths-based approach, the ways in which economic disadvantage, class, and the socio-economic and policy context (e.g., racism, segregation, poverty) affect these five aspects of parenting and partnerships are becoming clearer, as are ways the ways in which families adapt, manage stress, and engage with schools and other organizations on behalf of their children's education (Baca-Zinn & Wells, 2000; Crosnoe, Mistry & Elder, 2002; Ishii-Kuntz, 2000; Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang & Glassman, 2000; Jarret 1995, 1997; Taylor, 2000). Economically disadvantaged and immigrant families often do not have the financial, social, or cultural capital necessary to navigate educational institutions (Bourdieu, 1987; Gordon et al., 2005). These are Crew's (2007) "supply parents," who often have less experience with and access to information about school policies, structures, and staff, and are therefore less likely to communicate with teachers, to volunteer, or to act collectively in the face of problems. They are also less likely to know how to make education decisions and support

[2] Much of the research on the ways in which specific parenting practices affect children's development and learning has been covered in other chapters in this volume. For detailed reviews of the research, please see the following: Bouffard, Bridglall, Gordon & Weiss, in press; Caspe, Lopez & Wolos, 2006/07; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy & Weiss, 2007; Weiss, Caspe & Lopez, 2006;.

their children's learning at home (Gordon et al., 2005; Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 1987; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, l994).

Accumulating evaluation evidence provides the third reason for investment: it shows that partnerships can effectively engage families, schools, and communities in ways that demonstrably increase children's academic achievement. While investments in the rigorous evaluation of family involvement and partnerships have been limited, and many programs and partnerships are developed at the community level where evaluation funding is scarce, the number of high-quality evaluations is increasing. A number of programs that are designed to support families and promote family involvement at home and at school have demonstrated small but significant effects on children's development in early childhood and in elementary and middle school. Parenting interventions are most common in early childhood; one of the most common is home visitation. Meta-analyses of home visit evaluations have found small but statistically significant effects on family processes and child outcomes, including cognitive and academic development (Layzer, Goodson, Bernstein & Price 2001; Sweet & Applebaum, 2004; Weiss & Klein, 2007). The overall effect sizes of these studies are similar in magnitude (approximately .20) to effect sizes for class size reduction and other interventions widely considered to be successful (Lipsey & Wilson, 1993; McCartney & Dearing, 2002).

Recent evaluations of more comprehensive interventions employing complex research designs and methods, such as the evaluation of Early Head Start, are beginning to tease out how parent involvement adds value above and beyond other program components, and mediates or explains the effect size of the program on children's outcomes. The evaluations indicate, for example, that home visit programs in conjunction

with early childhood programs can increase school readiness, parents' understanding of their role in child development, and children's language and literacy skills (Administration for Children and Families, 2002; Love et al., 2005). There are few longitudinal evaluations of early childhood family involvement programs, but the longitudinal assessment of the Chicago Parent-Child Centers demonstrated long-term effects in terms of higher achievement, less need for remedial and special education, lower rates of grade retention, and increased high school completion rates (Temple & Reynolds, 2007). Underscoring the importance of continuous family involvement, there is also increasing evidence that family involvement across key developmental transitions has academic benefits for children. Efforts to prepare families as well as children during the preschool-to-kindergarten transition can build long-term patterns of parent involvement (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000) and kindergarten transition practices emphasizing family involvement are associated with higher academic achievement at the end of the kindergarten year (Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005).

Interventions that have been evaluated for families with elementary and middle school-aged children have focused on family involvement in education, particularly learning at home and the prevention of behavioral problems. While recent reviews have pointed out the methodological problems with many evaluations (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriquez & Kayzar, 2002), several meta-analyses and narrative reviews of methodologically rigorous evaluations find that a range of programs have small but significant effects on both parent involvement and student achievement (Caspe & Lopez, 2006; Erion, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Nye, Turner & Schwartz, 2006; Walker-James & Partee, 2003). Programs that teach parents how to help

children with learning activities at home (e.g., shared reading, supplemental math activities, parental academic instruction) have significant effects on achievement as high as .60 (Erion, 2006; D'Agostino et al., 2001; Nye et al., 2006). Programs that train parents in how to be appropriately and effectively involved in their children's homework have found positive effects on parents' supportive involvement, increases in the time children spend on homework, higher homework accuracy, and higher grades (Bailey, 2006; Balli, Demo & Wedman, 1998; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Van Voorhis, 2003).

While the evaluations mirror the current fragmented state of programming, they also suggest the substantial added value of well-designed interventions for children and families, for schools, and for communities. They clearly indicate the benefits that might be achieved, particularly for disadvantaged children, if families are seen not as the problem, but as a crucial part of the solution to the complex issue of children's school learning. They also hint at the many developmental and learning benefits that could accrue if family, school, and community partnerships were more systemic and comprehensive. The developmental research and the promising evaluation evidence together make a strong case for investing in partnerships, and they indicate important aspects of partnerships to guide future interventions.

A Research-Informed Framework to Guide Community Planning and Investments

Analysis of the challenges facing efforts to build more strategic, comprehensive, and continuous partnerships, as well as of the research and evaluation base, together lead to the development of a research-informed framework to guide future planning of partnerships. The framework emphasizes key elements that increase the likelihood that these partnerships will contribute to children's readiness to enter and graduate from

school with the skills needed for success. To be effective, the framework must be individualized to accord with local needs and resources; it is a work in progress that will constantly be modified based on new research, community experience, and evaluation results, and new needs and opportunities.

The framework underscores the importance of provisions for continuous family involvement and support across the developmental span from birth through high school, and it includes support for involvement and partnerships across an array of complementary learning contexts, including early childhood and home visitation programs, pre-kindergarten, school, afterschool, summer learning and youth programs, libraries, arts, recreation and cultural organizations, and faith-based institutions. The argument that partnerships should begin at birth and continue through high school grows out of evidence of the continuous importance of family involvement and of partnerships that enable it. Therefore, the framework emphasizes the importance of support for nurturant parenting, defined in age-appropriate ways, of family-school partnerships focused on the child's education, and of linkages to community services, particularly for low-income and otherwise disadvantaged families. Some evidence suggests that attention to family involvement at one stage in a child's education can set involvement up for the next stage; involvement in one context can leverage it in others. For example, as children enter school, families scaffold and support out of school learning experiences (Gordon et al., 2005) by helping children and youth make choices about how to use their time. Recent cross-context research on afterschool and summer learning programs suggests that family involvement both predicts children's participation in these learning opportunities and is stimulated by them (Little, Wimer & Weiss, 2008), and a national multi-site

evaluation of afterschool programs found that they increased family involvement in school (James-Burdumy et al., 2005). The framework also underscores the importance of attention to key transition points such as pre-kindergarten to school entry and middle school to high school.

The framework is firmly grounded in the importance of shared responsibility for learning outcomes and of co-constructed policy and interventions. Developmental research makes it clear that parents who share responsibility for their children's education, who are involved and stay involved with support from schools and other community institutions and organizations, have children who are more likely to enter school ready to succeed and graduate with the skills they need to succeed as citizens, as workers, and as family members. Intervention research and practice experience make it clear that schools and other organizations that practice shared responsibility are more likely to engage families and other partners. As Crew's formulation of "supply parents" and "demand parents" noted, one of the most important elements of partnerships is to articulate this message and practice this shared responsibility. Real shared responsibility is more likely if the partnership stakeholders co-construct their plans and activities.

Co-constructing means building relationships among multiple stakeholders that are characterized by trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), shared values, (Dauber & Epstein, 1993), ongoing bi-directional communication (Hill, 2001; Henderson et al., 2007; Lopez, Kreider & Caspe, 2004/05), and opportunities for both input and feedback on programs and policies. Without shared responsibility and co-constructed plans and activities embedded at all levels, from the family relationship with teachers to governance of the larger family, school, and community partnerships, these efforts are unlikely to succeed

in engaging diverse families, or in demonstrably benefiting children. Nor are such efforts likely to be sustained. Shared responsibility and co-construction extends from parent, school, and student compacts to meaningful participation of all stakeholders on school councils and other governance and advisory boards. Communities implementing the research-informed framework would co-construct a strategic, comprehensive, and continuous system of partnerships that begin at birth, provide comprehensive and linked complementary learning opportunities, and share responsibility for children's education.

While the work of developing family, school and community partnerships must be done at the community level in accord with local needs and resources, there are common design principles that increase a partnership's chances for success and sustainability. These include shared leadership and governance; a commitment to access and equity across the board from the leadership level to the service level; transparent accountability; attention to service continuity; linkages across contexts and transitions; commitment and capacity for evaluation to support learning, continuous improvement, and accountability; and ongoing professional development and organizational capacity-building. Moving from "random acts of parent involvement" to the more strategic, comprehensive, and continuous systems of partnerships envisioned here will also require the development of a national strategy. Key elements for such a strategy are outlined below.

Moving Ahead On A National Strategy

As suggested by assessment of the barriers and challenges that have prevented progress in the past, as well as by examples of successful field-building in other service areas, an effective national strategy would include a combination of governmental and non-governmental pressures to develop more comprehensive and continuous family,

school, and community partnership efforts. Also necessary are supports and incentives for doing so. As McLaughlin and Shields (1987) argued and subsequent experience has shown, federal legislative mandates rarely change local educators' and parents' attitudes and behavior. However, national bully pulpit leadership, legislation, and regulations can set the priorities, fund the key infrastructure supports and incentives, and offer the specific guidance (rules and regulations) that do enable change.

Strategic and Coherent advocacy

Research about "policy entrepreneurs" who successfully get new ideas onto the public policy agenda for legislative funding underscores the importance of communication and advocacy in getting policymakers' attention and support, as well as successful demonstration efforts and evidence of effectiveness (Mintrom, 2000). The various elements of the family involvement and partnership arena are at best loosely coupled; they do not have national strategic planning, communication, and advocacy capacity. Philanthropic support for the creation of a broad national leadership coalition of organizations and individuals would increase the likelihood of the sustained legislative and public support that will be necessary to enable widespread local change. Such broad leadership would advocate more effectively for family involvement and partnerships, and continue to communicate their demonstrated contributions to learning and school success to policymakers

Integrated Infrastructure Supports

The continued development of national and state legislation, policies, and funding with earmarks for key infrastructure supports is another critical element in a national strategy. An integrated set of infrastructure supports includes training, technical assistance,

organizational capacity-building, performance monitoring and evaluation, materials and tools development, and knowledge dissemination. The federally-supported national network of state-based PIRCs – in cooperation with Title 1, state departments of education, the National PTA, and others – are emerging as leaders in building these supports in service of more integrated, comprehensive and continuous family involvement and partnerships. Many PIRCs are working with states, districts, and schools to build continuous family involvement from birth through high school and to link across key transitions and contexts, including afterschool and summer learning. The PIRCs have developed a quality framework (see Figure 1; see also www.hfrp.org/PIRC) to guide their leadership and technical assistance to local communities. Undergirded by a commitment to conducting research and evaluation in support of learning and continuous improvement, the framework emphasizes capacity-building for continuous and systemic services for families that are aligned with Title 1 parent involvement requirements. While the PIRCs need more funding for this leadership and capacity-building work, many are partnering with researchers and evaluators as well as private funders to support local communities in implementing the vision for more strategic, comprehensive, and continuous partnerships (Caspe, 2008; Cassady & Garvey, 2008; Kirner & Storeygard, 2008; Westmoreland & Bouffard, 2008).

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Practitioner – Private Sector Partnerships

Practitioner partnerships with private sector organizations are another important new resource for training, innovative tool development, and other infrastructure supports. For-profit companies, seeing a new market in family and community involvement, are providing training and testing some innovative and research-informed tools that support comprehensive home-school partnerships. Some companies that provide NCLB student assessments – for example, McGraw Hill's GROW Network – are working with school districts to make regular individual student assessment information available not only to teachers but to parents. Teachers are also provided with materials, keyed to a student's assessment results, to give to families so they can support learning at home. Importantly, evaluating whether or not such processes contribute to greater family involvement, and ultimately to children's school success, is built into GROW Network's work with schools and families.

Professional Development

Training frameworks and other supports for effective pre- and in-service professional development so that, ultimately, the ability to work with families and communities is a core professional competency for both teachers and administrators is another key element in the development of a national strategy. There is little such training now but this is changing rapidly, driven partly by the inclusion of family and community involvement standards and assessments in educators' yearly performance reviews. A national report designed to call attention to the need for more preparation of educators for involvement proposed one such training framework in accord with the broader partnership vision (Shartrand et al., 1997). Experiential and interactive training

approaches, such as role playing, school and community internships and field experiences, research with families, and the case method (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez & Chatman, 1997), would be most effective in equipping educators with the problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills necessary to enable the interactions with families, that research suggests, improve academic outcomes. Again, evaluation for learning and continuous improvement is essential to determine the specific types of training effective in improving teacher-family involvement practices.

Professional development, like all other elements in a strategic family involvement policy vision, must be conceived broadly, comprising federal legislative incentives for demonstration grant programs to increase pre- and in- service preparation; on-the-ground evaluation of the programs to find out what works; the creation of networks to share innovative and effective practices; state efforts to strengthen teacher certification guidelines with clear and comprehensive definitions of family involvement and partnerships; and course content in training institutions that aligns with those guidelines.

Research and Evaluation

A national strategy must also include discussion and planning of new approaches to knowledge development and use at a time when conceptions of the role of research and evaluation are shifting in major ways. Often viewed fearfully as an axe with which to chop down programs, evaluation, especially in the policy arena, is actually a far more constructive tool. There should be little argument about the fact that we simply need more evaluations, including some random control trials when possible, to determine what works to guide policy and practice and to test the value-added of partnerships for

children's learning and development. The family involvement and partnership field has relatively few rigorous evaluations and they are mostly of discrete and time-limited programs. There are very few longitudinal evaluations or evaluations to assess systemic changes or examine how family involvement in one context leverages involvement in others; also few evaluations of the benefits of involvement at key transition points in a child's school career. The few that exist do illuminate the benefits of involvement (James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Reynolds et al., 2007; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005). While there is a strong developmental research case for partnerships, there is much less evidence that practical interventions are effective and that they return on investment. This relative lack of evaluation makes it difficult for policymakers and practitioners to prioritize partnerships over other resource claimants, particularly when resources are scarce and other claimants can make a strong case for the effectiveness of other interventions such as pre-kindergarten programs (Heckman, 2008). So independent external evaluation – and funding for it – should be a high priority.

Knowledge Development and Innovation

At the same time, recent discussions about the success of federal efforts to use research and evaluation to inform educational policy and practice are causing many to rethink the relationships amongst innovation, knowledge development, and use. This has implications for the family involvement and partnership field as well. In a recent work, Bryk and Gomez argued that the research and development infrastructure for school improvement is weak and constitutes a case of "market failure for educational innovation" (Bryk & Gomez, 2008, p. 182). Congressional hearings on the federal role in educational research reached a similar conclusion: randomized control trials will never

address every important question teachers and administrators face. It is necessary to support ongoing innovation and learning by enabling practitioners to get and use data to improve their own practices in a process of continuous improvement and accountability (Joftus, 2008). Bryk and Gomez also argued that productive innovations should be co-developed by researchers and practitioners and tried out and refined in a continuous improvement process (see also Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008; Patton, 2006). They proposed a new R & D model based in partnerships amongst school practitioners, interdisciplinary university researchers, and social entrepreneurs.

Conclusion and Next Steps

NCLB as implemented has proved that schools cannot, indeed, do it alone – that they require additional thrust from complementary learning supports to close achievement gaps. There is a strong case that partnerships are a promising investment and indications that past barriers to more strategic, comprehensive, and continuous approaches can be minimized or overcome. New models for R & D and evaluation offer chances to test partnerships as a core innovation for education reform together with practitioners, families, researchers, and social entrepreneurs. Strategic partnerships can be – will have to be – as complex and multiform as the communities they serve. Above all, any partnership framework must stay open to new information, discussion, debate, implementation, and evaluation in the spirit of continuous improvement. We expect that much from our children throughout their years of education. We can expect no less from ourselves.

The next few years present an unprecedented opportunity to expand family, school and community partnerships. So it is time to think strategically and think big.

While the fortunes of family involvement policy and practice in k-12 education have waxed and waned over the past forty years, the policy success of early childhood programs, particularly the prekindergarten movement, holds some important lessons for the family involvement field as it moves forward, especially with respect to the need for coherent leadership and champions for family, school and community partnerships, as well as for research, evaluation, and advocacy.

First, the early childhood and then the prekindergarten movement have had the benefit of a sustained core of leaders who met in various groups over time and built an evolving national strategy to scale early childhood programs. This strategy included many of the components we have noted previously, plus a deliberate and ongoing advocacy and strategic communications effort, and the recruitment of a series of champions from the corporate as well as the political and research arenas. Second, the field's leaders publicized the results of growing number of high-quality studies, including longitudinal studies, showing short-term school readiness benefits as well as longer-term, policy-relevant benefits of early childhood programs through and beyond a child's school career. Third, leaders could draw on well-executed cost-benefit studies that clearly indicated substantial return on investments in early childhood. This strong evaluation research base then attracted large philanthropic investments because foundations saw that the necessary elements for scaling up prekindergarten programs were in place. The research base also brought in an influential new set of champions, including Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman (2008).

These lessons from early childhood programs and the prekindergarten movement demonstrate the importance of building strong, sustained, and cross-organizational

national leadership for family and community involvement in order to move the field forward. This fluid but sustained leadership group should include representatives from parent groups; national policy and professional organizations; philanthropy; training and technical assistance groups; higher education and other research organizations; and private sector groups developing involvement tools. The group should actively recruit upcoming leaders and champions; develop a comprehensive ten-year strategy for the field; and seek public, private, and philanthropic support for the strategy. The participation of higher education and other research representatives is particularly important, not only to support pre- and in-service professional development, but also to help shape a research and evaluation agenda, including new R & D efforts to test partnerships as a core element of education reform strategies, and conduct longitudinal evaluations and cost-benefit analyses. Researchers will also be important in addressing the arguments against investments in family involvement and partnerships by those who maintain that it is not possible or not cost-effective to try to work with families so that they more effectively support children's learning and development (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Finally, the group should recruit champions from diverse domains, so that more and more high-profile opinion leaders such as Heckman beat the drum for the importance of family involvement in children's education. We believe coherent, strategic leadership, which brings high visibility and strong supporting data to the construction of family, school, and community partnerships, is crucial to opening our current policy window wide enough to offer all children an equal chance at success.

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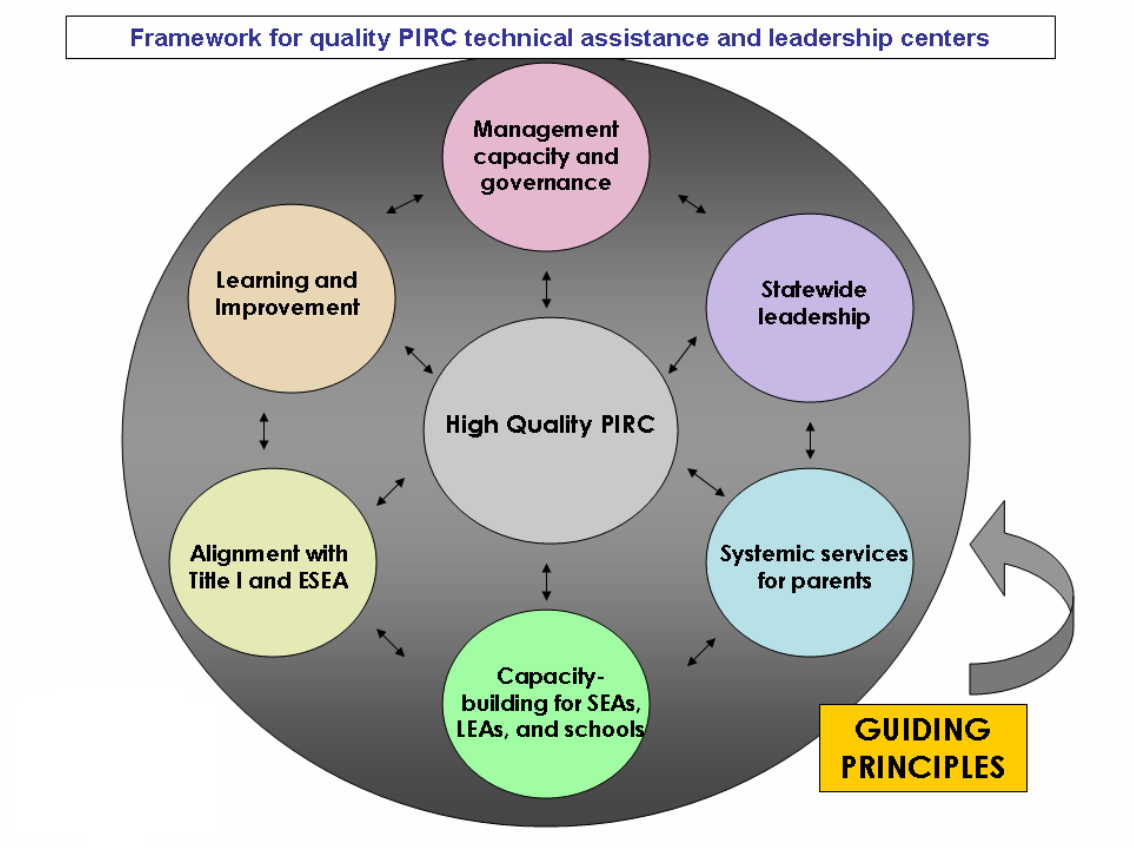
Figure 1:


Framework for quality PIRC technical assistance and leadership centers
Management capacity and governance
Learning and Improvement
Statewide leadership
High Quality PIRC
Alignment with Title I and ESEA
Systemic services for parents
Capacity-building for SEAs, LEAs, and schools
GUIDING PRINCIPLES