

Then and Now: New Directions for Programs of Family and Community Engagement for Student Success

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PRESENTATION NOTES

**for Introductory PowerPoint
Awareness Session
on CD in English and Spanish**

There are “old ways” and “new ways” of organizing programs of school, family, and community partnerships. Research and fieldwork over the past thirty years have contributed to the development of tools and strategies that, now, help any school or district take new paths to productive partnerships. Evidence from hundreds of studies confirms that a well-planned partnership program is needed to engage all parents, other family members, and community partners to help more students—indeed, all students—succeed in school.

It is time to think in new ways about family and community engagement as an essential component of strong leadership and good school organization. With proven structures and processes, all schools can plan programs and practices that ensure that educators, parents, and others in the community communicate and collaborate in ways that help all students do their best in school at each grade level and graduate from high school with plans for the future.

PowerPoint Presentation on CD

Then and Now: New Directions for Programs of Family and Community Engagement for Student Success

In this introductory or awareness session, we discuss the essential components for effective and equitable programs of family and community engagement. The presentation may be used at different stages of partnership program development, including the following:

- (a) Planning stage: Provide information and obtain input and approval for plans to proceed with partnership program development.
- (b) Implementation and scale-up stages: Provide information and obtain input to increase collegial support for ongoing efforts to improve the quality of programs of family and community engagement at the district level and in all schools.

Notes for Leaders for Partnerships

The slides and comments for the awareness session will enable you to

- Summarize essential elements of effective partnership programs to strengthen family and community engagement for student success in school.
- Encourage all stakeholders (educators, school board members, community groups, parent associations, and others) to learn about, discuss, develop, and support this agenda.

- Prepare educators and stakeholders at the school, district, and state levels to adopt the new approaches for their own partnership programs.

The information and tools in this *Handbook* aim to help you become an expert on partnership program development in your location. You may use, adapt, and personalize the awareness session. Here are some suggestions.

- The awareness session is designed as a presentation to last about one hour. There is one built-in activity for attendees: On Slide 29 there is a pair-share activity in which they are asked to talk with a partner about their reactions to the information and to “report out” a few ideas.
- Time may be limited. Prepare and practice your presentation to see where adaptations are needed for the time you are allotted.
- Select the slides that will help your audience understand the main components of a research-based program of family and community engagement.
- Check the notes for each slide so that you are comfortable making the presentation. Use your own words, local terms, local examples, and your experiences to present information to your audience.
- See how the animation works with each slide to help you with your presentation.
- Omit and save slides that do not fit your situation. Focus on the basics for your audience. You may be able to add information in response to questions at the end of the session.
- Add your own slides to explain your program and services. In many cases, school principals want to hear how district leaders will help them reduce their work load by providing useful services.
- Adjust the content for your audience. For example, if you are speaking only to middle or high school educators and parents, change Slide 22 to one from the PowerPoint on the CD for the One-Day Team Training Workshop (Bonus Slides) that presents examples of goal-linked practices for student success in middle or high school. If your audience has representatives from all grade levels, use Slide 22 and add one pertaining to the secondary grades.
- For sessions longer than one hour, include one or more hands-on activities from the One-Day Team Training Workshop on the CD. The activities provide examples of the basic training that Action Teams for Partnerships will experience at a full training workshop.

Title Slide 1. *Then and Now: New Directions for Programs of Family and Community Engagement for Student Success*

Over the past 30 years, countless studies and extensive fieldwork have changed how educators think about organizing programs of school, family, and community partnerships. The new approaches are important, because they enable every school to engage all families—not just a few—in ways that contribute to student success in school. Today, we will explore these new directions and discuss how they may help us improve our approaches to family and community engagement.

Slide 2. A Safe and Nurturing School

We start by thinking about the goals we set for a healthy, excellent school. We want every school to be a safe and nurturing place for students. We want a school that is a welcoming place for all partners.

Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University calls this a *Partnership School*. She described a *family-like school* as one where each teacher values each child for his or her efforts and unique abilities—just as a parent would. A *school-like family* is one where each parent helps the child value education, get to school on time, do homework, and share ideas—just as a teacher would.

Good partnerships grow when children hear the same messages about the importance of education at school and at home. We are talking about an *excellent school* that everyone wants to attend and support.

Slide 3. A School That Produces Results

You know that a welcoming school is not enough. Every school also must produce results for student learning and development. What results are we working on? Academic results. Physical health and well-being. Emotional growth and positive attitudes. And more.

Teachers at every grade level work very hard to help students reach academic, behavioral, and emotional goals. The question is, Should teachers do this work alone? Or, will more students reach important goals if teachers, parents, and others in the community work together to support learning and development?

That is supposed to be a rhetorical question—easy to answer. Parents, teachers, and others share responsibility for children’s education. We can do more for more students when we work together.

Slide 4. Theoretical Model

Everyone wants excellent schools for all children, but excellent schools require strong families and healthy communities. The three contexts—home, school, and community—frame Epstein’s theory of *overlapping spheres of influence* and its assumptions about effective partnership programs.

We ask: Where do children learn and grow? The answer? At home, at school, and in the community. This is a social fact. It is our starting place for understanding school, family, and community partnerships. The spheres of influence can be drawn together to show the overlap or interconnections of these important contexts in children’s lives. The assumption is that when the spheres of influence overlap in positive, goal-linked ways, more children do better in school. Many studies have shown that this is true—the theory is supported by data.

There still are some who say, “If the family would just do its job, then, we—at school—could do our job.” This is a sentence of *separate* spheres of influence—“You do your job; I’ll do mine.” This leaves children confused about the messages they hear from home, school, and community about the importance of school and their roles as students.

Hundreds of studies confirm that children do better in school if they know that their teachers and parents are communicating and working together to encourage their learning and success in school.

Slide 5. Reason for This Awareness Session

What are we going to discuss today? I know that you know *that* partnerships are important for student success. And, you have many ideas about *what* kinds of activities bring educators, parents, and others together to support student learning. The real question is *how* to organize partnership programs to involve all families in ways that help students do better in school. We also want to know *how* to customize plans and practices to meet our goals for students and local conditions.

The good news is that research and field work show how any school can have a well-organized, feasible, and thrifty program of family and community engagement to help students reach academic and behavioral goals for success in school. Today, we are going to examine the components of an effective and sustainable partnership program.

Slide 6. New Definition

The definition of this work has changed over the years. We used to call this topic *parent involvement*. Although this remains easy to say, we mean *school, family, and community partnerships*. We need to use the new and better term to reflect our belief that children’s education is a shared responsibility of home, school, and community.

Why is this important? The term *parent involvement* often put the burden of involvement on parents’ shoulders. If they were involved, they were “good” parents. If they were not involved, well—it was not the school’s fault. Now we know that schools have roles to play, families have roles to play, and communities have roles to play in designing and implementing partnership plans and practices that support student success.

Slide 7. New Responsibilities

Expectations for parent and community engagement have changed. In the old days, it was up to a parent to figure out whether and how to get involved. Often, only a few parents were engaged. Activities were often “accidental”—hastily planned, not inclusive of all families, and not evaluated. Some have called these practices “random” because they were not related to school goals for student success.

Now we know that family and community involvement is an essential component of good school organization. Partnership programs must be planned, linked to a school’s goals, evaluated, and improved from year to

year to engage all families and produce positive results for students. Partnerships are front and center for student success—not off to the side.

Studies show that teamwork—in the form of an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) or partnership committee—is at the heart of a strong and sustainable program.

Slide 8. Action Team Structure

Here is one tested team structure. The Action Team for Partnerships, or ATP—a committee whose name “speaks” partnerships—includes teachers, parents, the principal, students (for ATPs at the high school level), and other school and community partners. The ATP is charged with planning family and community connections that ensure a welcoming climate, engage all families, and are linked to the school’s goals for student learning and development.

Some schools like to give the ATP its own name. A local title is fine as long as the team includes all partners as members and the name conveys the goal of good partnerships.

Slide 9. Team Responsibilities

The ATP has four major responsibilities:

- **Identify goals for family and community engagement.** From its own School Improvement Plan, the team selects **two academic goals** (e.g., improve reading, math, science, writing skills), **one nonacademic (behavioral) goal** (e.g., improve attendance, behavior, health, postsecondary planning), and **one overarching goal for a welcoming partnership climate**. The selected goals will be the focus of family and community engagement activities over the school year. The selected goals are developed in a clear action plan.
- **Outline a clear action plan.** The team writes a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships that outlines and schedules activities that will be conducted to engage family and community partners with students and the school on the four selected goals. Some schools make this Appendix A of the School Improvement Plan to show that actions to improve family and community engagement are aligned with school policy and the goals that teachers and students have set for success.
- **Implement the action plan.** The team implements the planned activities and will recruit and invite other educators, all parents, and community partners to lead, support, and/or attend activities through the school year.
- **Evaluate and continue to improve.** The team evaluates the results of each activity during the year, reflecting on strengths and needed improvements. With this inquiry process, the team works to improve its plans and practices throughout the year and over time. It documents changes in outreach to and the engagement of families and community partners, and results for students. (Note: If the school is a member of the National Network of Partnership Schools—NNPS—at Johns Hopkins University, the researchers conduct an annual end-of-year evaluation for and with all members.)

Slide 10. Team Structure

This diagram shows one possible relationship of an ATP with a School Improvement Team. Usually, a School Improvement Team advises the principal on all aspects of the school program. By contrast, an ATP is charged only with developing and conducting practices that ensure a welcoming climate and that engage *all* students’ families in ways that support students’ education. The ATP focuses on family and community engagement activities that address the four goals it selects for its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships—two academic goals, one behavioral goal, and an overarching goal for a climate of partnerships.

Slide 11. Program Design

In the past, family engagement was incidental—off to the side and, often, a matter of “luck.” Parents felt lucky if their child’s teacher actively communicated and engaged them in productive ways. Now we know that a

program of school, family, and community partnerships is part of every good school organization, is goal linked, and can be strengthened by using the framework of six types of involvement.

Slides 12 and 13. Framework of Six Types of Involvement

The framework of six types of involvement grew from studies conducted over many years to create a useful typology that would help schools understand and organize a comprehensive partnership program. The framework is a typology—not a hierarchy. Type 1 is just as important as Type 6 and vice versa.

A high-quality, goal-linked program includes activities for all six types of involvement to enable parents and community partners to become engaged in different ways and in different places—not only in meetings at the school building.

The framework is *not* about the school or teachers telling parents what to do. Rather, each type of involvement requires two-way interactions and exchanges between teachers and parents (and with community partners) about how to support and advance student learning and development. There is a lot of information available on the six types, but today we are just going to review them quickly.

Type 1—Parenting is about educators and families talking with each other about child and adolescent development. Parents want information to help them understand the stages of children’s development as they progress through the grades. Some families also may want help with basic needs of food, clothing, and safety. Educators need to understand the backgrounds of families and their dreams and goals for their children.

The first rule in using the framework is to *know your families*. For example, if most students’ moms work full or part time, they will not be able to attend many workshops, meetings, or events at the school building during the school day. More parents—moms and dads—may participate in the evening or may “attend” using various communication platforms (e.g., streaming video on the school website or YouTube). We need to know our families to have a successful partnership program.

Type 2—Communicating is about sharing information about school programs and children’s progress—a top priority of most parents. All schools “do” Type 2 activities as they communicate with families. Usually, improvements are needed to engage all families, regardless of language spoken at home, grade level of students, and other characteristics and constraints. With responsive high-tech and low-tech communications, more parents will participate in meaningful parent-teacher (or parent-teacher-student) conferences, open house nights, grade-level meetings, and student activities. With good two-way connections, more teachers will understand that parents are essential partners in guiding students to do their best in school.

Type 3—Volunteering refers to how the ATP, teachers, and administrators identify and prepare volunteers to help at school, at home, and in the community. Strong programs survey all parents to see how and when they are available to volunteer. In addition to traditional volunteers who come to the school building, parents may volunteer to use their talents at home to assist with school projects. Parents also may volunteer to present talks and demonstrate skills, talents, hobbies, and histories in class to match topics that students are studying.

Studies revealed that schools may stretch the definition of volunteers to include audience members. If parents attend a band or choral concert, sports activity, award assembly, drama production, or other events, they are volunteering their time to support the school and children’s activities. In a comprehensive partnership program, schools recognize audience members as volunteers.

Type 4—Learning at Home activities address parents’ requests for good and timely information about how to help their child at home at each grade level. Most parents want to know how to help with homework. Type 4 activities also engage parents with students in selecting courses, making postsecondary plans, and sharing their ideas, work, and progress. Whereas Type 1 focuses on child and adolescent development, Type 4 focuses on the connections of parents with the *child as a student* to advance student learning and to keep students on the path to on-time graduation from high school.

Type 5—Decision Making is about ensuring that parents’ voices are accounted for in school decisions. Parents may take leadership roles in the PTA, PTO, School Improvement Team, Action Team for Partnerships, and other

committees. Parent leaders also obtain opinions and ideas from the other parents whom they represent. This may include gathering parents' input to decisions, reporting results about decisions back to all parents, and using many different communication tools and strategies to engage all parents in the decision making process.

Type 6—Collaborating With the Community refers to connections of schools with businesses, agencies, organizations, and individuals in the community. Type 6 activities may enrich the school curriculum and teachers' classes; extend student learning with community experiences, internships, and projects; provide services to families; and offer other resources. Type 6 also includes opportunities for students and families to assist or give back to the community, as in-service learning, philanthropy, and problem-solving activities. Some schools add community partners to the ATP, whereas others make strategic connections with the community on specific projects.

Summary. Clearly, there are many ways to put the six types of involvement to work to help students at all grade levels attain specific learning goals. There are hundreds of practices that activate the six types of involvement for positive school, family, and community partnerships. Researchers report that no school is at "ground zero" on partnerships. Most schools already conduct some activities for some or all types of involvement that engage at least some parents as partners. With research-based structures and processes, an ATP can organize activities to engage *all* families in ways that improve the school, strengthen families, and increase student success.

Slides 14 and 15. Solve Challenges to Engage ALL Families

Studies have identified common challenges to engage all students' families—not just the easiest to reach. In the old days, many families were excluded from or felt wary of the school. People talked about the *barriers* to parent involvement. They were referring to conditions that made it difficult for teachers and parents to communicate with each other and work together. Often, the barriers focused on diversity among families, referring to family members who did not speak English, employed moms and dads and others who were busy during the school day, families without transportation, mobile families who enrolled at school in the middle of the year, and so on. Some educators followed a "deficit model," thinking that some families would not or could not become good partners in their children's education.

Now we know that there are no absolute barriers to family engagement. Schools—somewhere—have solved just about all of the common challenges in creative ways. Action teams, teachers, district leaders, parents, and other partners have designed, implemented, and reported on new processes and practices that engage previously uninvolved parents at all grade levels. Solutions include alternative schedules, electronic communications, home or neighborhood visits, community partnerships with foreign language media and organizations, and many other strategies.

The solutions to challenges follow a "strengths model" in which educators, families, and community partners recognize their strengths, available resources, and common goals for student success. By sharing best practices and creative solutions to challenges to family and community engagement, we can strengthen our partnership programs and increase student success.

[NOTE: The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University enables schools and leaders to share activities in an annual book of Promising Partnership Practices at www.partnershipschools.org in the section Success Stories.]

Slide 16. Implementation

In developing strong and sustainable partnership programs, schools build a sense of community to welcome all families and students who are part of the school.

All grade levels. In earlier times, family and community involvement activities were, mainly, conducted in preschools and the primary grades. Now we know that age-appropriate practices of family and community engagement are important at all grade levels. For example, at the high school level, targeted family and community engagement activities help ninth grade students and their families adjust to the transition to high school.

Other activities can be designed to help all students improve attendance, complete homework, earn required credits, graduate from high school on time, and make plans for postsecondary education.

All family members. Previously, involvement was mainly mothers' work. On average, this still is true, but schools are working to engage fathers, father figures, grandparents, and other partners in the community.

All groups at school. Often, meetings and family involvement activities were conducted by or for separate groups of parents (e.g., parents of children with special needs, parents of children receiving Title I services). Now we know that schools must establish a *sense of community* among all students, families, and the community to celebrate a welcoming school environment.

A strong partnership program reinforces the feeling that “we are family” at this school—we meet each other, care about each other, identify challenges, support those with special needs, and praise successes. There still may be some meetings for separate groups with unique interests, but the emphasis is on strengthening the school community.

Slide 17. Multilevel Leadership

In the old days, decisions about school, family, and community partnerships were made school by school. Now we know that this topic requires multilevel leadership. Studies show, for example, that district-level leadership for partnerships is particularly important. When a district names a facilitator for family and community engagement to guide school-based ATPs, more parents become good partners in their children's education across the grades. By reinforcing a *culture of partnerships*, district leaders ensure that all schools—preschools and elementary, middle, and high schools—enact the district's policy for family and community engagement to support student success.

There also are roles for state leaders, organizations, and federal policy in encouraging all schools to implement high-quality, fully inclusive partnership programs. At all leadership levels, policies that are on the books are meant to be implemented to produce the intended results.

Slide 18. District Responsibilities

Field studies indicate that district leaders for partnerships have two main responsibilities. They (1) take the lead for district-level plans for school, family, and community partnerships, and (2) directly facilitate school-based ATPs to build their capacities to work well with their own students' families.

Strong district leadership ensures that schools learn from each other and from the district facilitator about research-based approaches, solutions to challenges, and best practices for their own programs. In turn, district leaders learn from their schools about successful activities, challenges that arise, and potential solutions.

Organization and state leaders also have multiple responsibilities to lead their offices and the press for partnerships, and to encourage all schools to develop their capacities to work with their students' families.

Slides 19 and 20. Reach Results for Students

The most important new direction for programs of school, family, and community partnerships is to focus on results for students. Schools need to be welcoming places for all partners, but schools are about teaching children to value education, attain learning goals, graduate from high school, and move on to college or career. All components of good school organization—including excellent teachers, challenging curricula, quality instruction, appropriate assessments, *and* family and community engagement—must combine to help students succeed to their full potential.

In the old days, programs of parental involvement focused on the parent and measured how many parents attended a meeting or volunteered. These still are valid *intermediate* outcomes, but they are not the reason for doing this work. The *ultimate* outcomes focus on the student and helping all students do their best in school.

This starts by designing or selecting goal-linked activities that engage parents and community partners in ways that support student attendance, achievements, attitudes, behaviors, health, aspirations, on-time graduation from high school, plans for postsecondary education, or other goals in the School Improvement Plan.

Studies show that students whose families were engaged on goal-linked activities improved their skills and scores in language arts, math, science, and other subjects, and on attitudes and behavioral outcomes compared to students whose families were not guided in this way.

Slides 21 and 22. One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships

How can schools organize meaningful family and community engagement focused on results for students? The ATP selects four goals from their school's School Improvement Plan that will benefit from family and community engagement (i.e., two academic goals, one behavioral goal, and one goal for ensuring a welcoming climate of partnerships).

The ATP writes a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships—which is, in effect, Appendix A to the School Improvement Plan. The four-page plan (one page for each selected goal) identifies and schedules activities for the six types of involvement. The activities reach out to engage all parents in ways that create a welcoming school environment and that support their child's attainment of the selected goals through actions at home, at school, and in the community.

For example, here (Slide 22) is an outline for one elementary school whose teachers had goals to improve students' reading skills and attitudes by engaging families and community partners in various reading activities for the six types of involvement. The ATP and teachers wanted to let parents know: "We are all about reading at this school and YOU are partners on this agenda for student success."

- You can see that for Type 1–Parenting, the ATP and reading teachers planned to conduct a workshop to enable parents to read aloud in new ways with kindergarteners and first graders.
- For Type 2–Communicating, teachers planned parent-teacher-student conferences (with the student present) to discuss the child's reading program, work, progress, and how to support reading at home.
- The school planned to initiate reading buddies for Type 3–Volunteering to assist children who needed extra help on reading skills.
- For Type 4–Learning at Home, teachers at each grade level assigned weekly interactive homework for students to talk with a parent at home about what they were reading or writing in class. Parents love to hear what a child writes even if it is a sentence or short poem. The student conducted the conversation with a parent to share ideas in an enjoyable way.
- In this school, the parent organization collaborated on Type 5–Decision Making by supporting a Family Reading Night and by reaching out to many groups of parents to encourage them to attend.
- An activity for Type 6–Collaborating With the Community invited community partners to donate books for children to take home. Some parents do not have funds to buy books for children to read for pleasure, but community partners are eager to contribute to a successful reading program.

Slides 23 and 24. Evaluate Quality, Progress, and Results

Previously, evaluations were optional or focused on compliance with Title I regulations. Some schools counted the number of parents who attended a meeting, or used an exit survey to see if parents enjoyed a workshop. Some conducted annual surveys of parents' satisfaction. These still are useful measures, but they do not assess the quality and progress of a school's partnership program. Now we know that it is essential to measure whether and how an ATP is organized, is supported by the principal, and evaluates its activities to continually improve outreach to all families in ways that contribute to student learning and success in school.

Annual evaluations have been missing from programs of school, family, and community partnerships, but they are essential for ensuring that family and community engagement improves from year to year. Fortunately, now there are templates, tools, and thrifty services that will help us evaluate the quality and progress of our programs in new ways.

Slide 25. Networking

In the past, successful activities conducted by one school were rarely shared with others. Typically, a school did not know what the school down the street was doing to engage families or community partners. Now we know

that sharing best practices among schools in a district or across the country helps everyone think in new ways, recognize good work, spread good ideas, and enliven this agenda.

Slide 26. Equity

All aspects of strong partnership programs are about equity. In many places, parental involvement is still inequitable—often exclusionary or unfair. It is well known that children with involved parents do better than similar students whose parents are not engaged in their education. But, it has been taken for granted that some parents will be involved, but not others. The “blame game” was played. Teachers blamed uninvolved parents for their children’s failures. Parents blamed teachers for not communicating with good and timely information about how they could help at home.

Now we know that a team of teachers, parents, administrators, and others can work together to ensure greater equity in family and community engagement. With plans, evaluations, and continual improvements, all parents can be engaged in their children’s education and feel part of the school community.

Slide 27. Budgets

In the old days, budgets for parental involvement were not well allocated, often resulting in fragmented funding for poorly defined purposes. Now we know that funds are designated for family and community engagement in Title I and other federal, state, and local programs. These funds should be used to support the work of school-based ATPs in implementing the goal-linked partnership activities that are in their annual partnership plans. In this way, funds help increase the capacity of each school to work with its students’ parents and with community partners on goals for student achievement, behavior, and success in school.

Budgets should support the enactment of policies—including policies of family and community engagement—that help students do their best in school.

Slide 28. Summary

Today, I shared with you many changes from the “old way” of thinking about parental involvement to the “new way” of organizing effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

In this short time, we noted changes to the definition of partnerships, engagement at all grade levels, the importance of teamwork, a framework of six types of involvement to engage parents in different ways and places, the need for a written plan of action with activities that focus on results for students, the importance of evaluating progress from year to year, an adequate budget for activities, networking across schools and districts, and equity to engage all parents as partners in education.

These essential elements emerged from years of research and field studies as key components for effective partnership programs that have measurable results for student learning and development. With these changes, more and different families become partners with teachers and engaged in their children’s education.

That’s a lot of changes! Let’s take a few minutes to think about this information.

Slide 29. Pair-Share Activity

Talk with your “elbow partner.” Discuss which change from *then* to *now*—from the old way of thinking to the new way—you think is most important for improving your school’s program of family and community engagement and why.

[Ask for two or three people to share their ideas with the full group.]

Slide 30. Conclusion

It is true that all of the structures and processes we discussed in this awareness session are important for systematizing, strengthening, and sustaining programs of partnership that promote family and community engagement *and* student success in school.

You can see how all of the components can be put into action at the school level. This starts by understanding the importance of a team—a committee—of teachers, parents, administrators, and others to create a welcoming school for all partners in education. Each ATP writes a goal-linked plan using the six types of involvement to engage parents and community partners in different ways and different places. The school provides an adequate budget to support the team’s plan. The team meets at least monthly, implements planned activities, evaluates the quality and progress of its work, and continually improves the school’s partnership program. And, you can see how a district leader for partnerships can guide and assist many ATPs in fulfilling this important agenda.

Slide 31. Q & A

[Save at least 10 minutes for questions and discussion.]

Let’s discuss your questions about school, family, and community partnerships.

Slide 32. Contact information

[Include a final slide here with YOUR contact information.]

Selected References

The presentation notes draw from many sources. Here are a few useful studies and summaries of studies of school improvement and family and community engagement. The extensive bibliographies in these references show the depth and breadth of studies on partnerships.

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