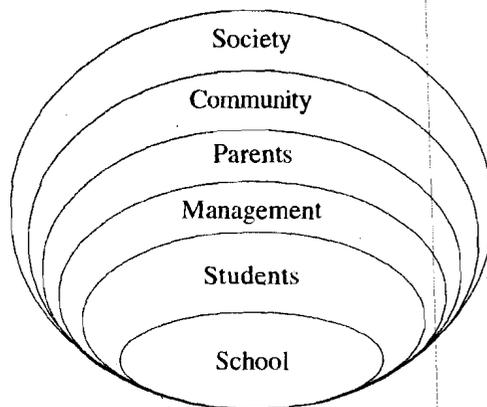

UNIT 9 SCHOOLS-PARENTS - COMMUNITY INTERFACE

Structure

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objectives
- 9.3 Defining 'Family', 'School' and 'Community'
- 9.4 Why School-Community Interface?
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9.1 INTRODUCTION

School is rooted in the society and is an agency for the first basic lessons in the process of socialization. It is a reflection of society; the society directly and indirectly determines the goals of education and controls and determines all that goes on within the four walls of the institution called the 'school'. The school is important for its role of socialization, on the other hand, for determining, foreseeing and preparing students and society for what lies ahead- for today's generation is tomorrow's future agents of social change. This relationship can best be understood in terms of the following representation:



9.2 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the "why" of school-family community interface;
- highlight the key factors of this interface and your role as a school leader in building and nurturing this interface;

- analyse how school and community relations may affect the quality of school management and effectiveness;
- discuss the steps in building, maintaining and sustaining fruitful school community partnerships.

9.3 DEFINING 'FAMILY', 'SCHOOL', AND 'COMMUNITY'

A school-community interface can best be understood in terms of a collaboration between all stakeholders wherein the resources of families and the community through collaboration with schools becomes essential for developing comprehensive, multifaceted programs and services. What do the terms family, school and communities entail?

Families: It is important to ensure that all who live in an area are represented including but not limited to, representatives of organized family groups with the aim to mobilize all the human and social capital represented by the family members. This gives strength to the concept of the neighborhood schools.

Schools: This includes all institutionalized entities that are responsible for formal education (e.g. Pre-primary, primary, elementary and secondary) the aim being to draw on the resources of these institutions.

Communities: This encompasses all the other resources (public and private money, facilities, human and social capital that can be brought to the table at each level (e.g. health and social service agencies, unions, businesses, recreation, cultural and youth development groups, libraries, justice and law enforcement, religious community institutions, service clubs, media, institutions, all stakeholders, parks, etc.)

What are school-community partnerships?

One recent resource defines a school-community partnership as :

"An intentional effort to create and sustain relationships among a school or school district and a variety of both formal and informal organizations and institutions in the community. (Melaville & Blank, 1998)

This partnership implies:

- a formal contractual relationship to pursue a common purpose with each partner's roles and obligations clearly defined. In the case of schools and communities, partnerships may be established to enhance programs by increasing availability and access and filling gaps.
- The partnership may involve use of school or neighborhood facilities and equipment, sharing resources, fund raising volunteer services, mentoring and training from professionals and others with special expertise, information sharing and dissemination, networking, recognition and public relations.
- Mutual support, shared responsibility for planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services, building and maintaining infrastructure, expanding opportunities for assistance, community service, jobs, internships, recreation, enrichment, enhancing safety, shared celebrations, building a sense of community.

School-community partnerships can weave together a critical mass of '*resources*' and '*strategies*' to enhance caring communities that support all youth and their families and enable success at school and beyond. Strong school-community connections are critical since they represent a promising direction for generating essential interventions to address barriers to learning, enhance healthy development and strengthen families and neighborhoods. This kind of partnership requires an enlightened vision, creative leadership and new multifaceted roles for the head teacher.

Let us start with an activity to find out how you perceive the role of the parents and the community in your school.

What do you feel about the community?

Activity

- *Instructions: Read each statement in the left column and check whether you feel this is correct or not. If it is correct then identify positive statements (as in the example in the first box on the right) that will dispel preconceived notions, change attitudes, and help facilitate partnerships.*

Commonly held assumptions about parents and community	Yes/No	What may be the reality?
Parents who don't attend school events don't care about their children's	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Example: Even when unable to attend school events, most parents success in school care a great deal about their child's success in school. Many parents find ways to support their child's education at home.
Parents who are illiterate or do not speak English can't help their children	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Parents from different ethnic and racial groups don't understand the role they play in their children's education	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
It is up to parents to find out what is going on at school	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Getting families involved takes a lot of time and energy, with the results not of ten corresponding to the effort	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Children who are troublemakers often come from families that do not value education	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
It is all right for school staff to contact families only when a child is in trouble	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
The problems of "hard-to-reach" families and "at-risk" students are the fault of the families themselves	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Teachers are expected to play the roles of parents too much in their jobs	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

Source: Partnerships by Design © Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon.

The main objective of this activity is to highlight the significance of the parents' role in the education of their children. This role needs to be nurtured sustained and sought from not only the parents but also the community at large.

9.4 WHY SCHOOL-COMMUNITY INTERFACE?

It is increasingly being felt that schools, families and communities should work, closely with each other to be *effective* and to *achieve their mutual goals*. Schools are located in communities and are not islands with no bridges to the mainland. Obviously schools have been more successful in accomplishing good things. The schools have contributed to moral understanding and socialization among students. Success in these

areas has been quite frequent and significant. School experiences are held to outweigh the influence of the home in the areas like reducing some types of group prejudices, negative beliefs and intolerance towards other religious and races. In view of the crumbling structure of the joint family system, socio-emotional-psychological problems arising out of the stresses of modern day living, single parenting, violence, increasing incidence of sexual, physical and emotional abuse amongst children, the state of transition and, at times, flux in society requires that all institutions and all stakeholders work in close connection. Each problem is linked with the other, posing barriers to teaching-learning, parenting and socialization. As a consequence of this, simplistic and single factor solutions cannot work. An interface between them becomes important and imperative for the following reasons

- to enable schools to improve
- to improve academic outcomes and achievement for students
- strengthening families and the neighborhood to reduce student's problems or at least ensure an effective handling of the problems
- to enhance effectiveness of schools
- to increase parental involvement in school projects and decision-making
- to provide a comprehensive ,multifaceted and integrated transition from school to society and a continuum of interventions
- designing intervention to reducing social problems e.g., drugs, school gang activities, violence, bullying, smoking, alcohol, etc.
- to help the school take decisions about the environment e.g. parks, garbage collection, disposal, recycling, community libraries, community halls and services, polluting units, commercialization of housing, industrial and educational areas, etc. Adequate social pressure in this regard can also result in effective legislation in these areas.

Schools are more effective and caring places when they are an integral part of the community. Reciprocally, families and other community entities can enhance parenting, socialization, and strengthen the fabric of the family and the community life by working in partnership with schools.

Families and communities are mutually dependent. The family and its institutional and personal fabric make up the community while at the same time community conditions affect the way families function. What strengthens one, strengthens the other. We will try to understand the dimensions of this relationship further in the discussion below.

Family-School-Community Partnership (based on the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein)

School help for families	<p>School providing assistance to families in relation to the families' basic obligations of child rearing.</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> workshops for parents, referrals to health and social services, assisting with information about food banks, clothing, housing, job training, child care.</p>
School-home communication	<p>The basic obligation of school to communicate to home about school programs and children's progress.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and newsletters, school handbook that explains expectations, methods of assessment, school schedule, homework hotline, translation of all communications into the language(s) that families speak at home.</p>
Family help for schools	<p>The involvement in school of parent and community volunteers and parents and others who come to the school to watch student performances and attend other events.</p>

	<p><i>Example:</i> attending open houses or parents' nights, helping to supervise field trips or chaperon functions, help with fund raising events, assisting teachers in the classroom, acting as family liaison or parent involvement coordinator.</p>
Involvement in learning activities at home	<p>Parent or child initiated requests for help from teachers learning activities at for parents to monitor or assist their own children at home in learning activities that can be coordinated with children's classroom instruction.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> family math and science nights, home reading program, resources or workshops on home learning <u>activities</u>.</p>
Involvement in governance, decision making and advocacy	<p>Parents and other community residents in advisory, decision making or advocacy roles in parent associations, advisory committees, or school councils, or in independent parent or community organizations monitoring the schools or working for school improvement.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> training for all stakeholders together in working collaboratively, informal advisory groups, open discussion groups, community focus groups.</p>
Collaboration exchanges with community	<p>Involvement of any of the institutions that share some of the the responsibility for children's development and success, including programs that coordinate and support services to children and their families.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> partnership between schools and businesses, community agencies, and universities, student service learning projects, community forums, school-linked services, internships, mentor programs</p>

Activity

Enlist atleast three ways in which you would be able to enlist the support of the following in meeting the goals of your school:

A. *Parent Teacher Association*

B. *Old Students Association*

C. *Grandparents of your students*

D. *Parents (one each) of your students who may be any of the following:*

1. *Doctor*
2. *Armed forces*
3. *Psychologist*
4. *Housewife*
5. *Astronomer*

E. *Fire fighting agency in your area (one)*

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The areas of collaboration can therefore be depicted as:



9.4.1 What Drives Schools to Collaborate?

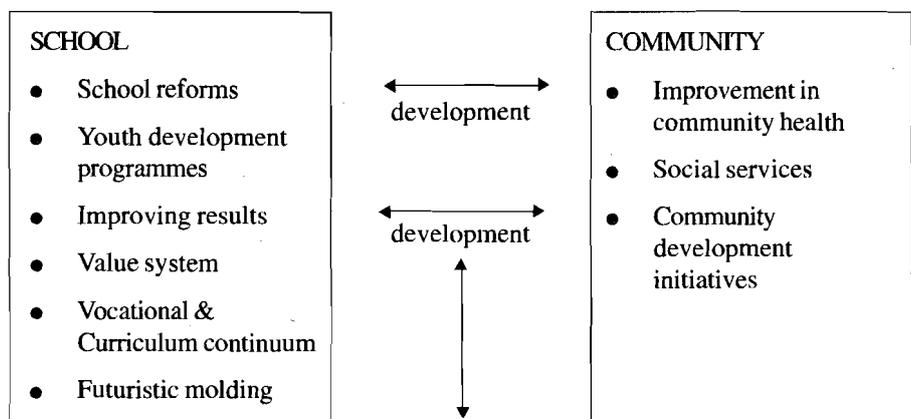
Researches have shown that wherever there have been attempts to connect schools and communities there has been an improvement of results for school, students, families and neighborhood. Research also indicates that family-community engagement shows positive effects on the following:

Attendance Improvement in teacher as well as student attendance has been reported in schools ensuring community involvement suggesting greater teacher and student accountability

Drop-out rates Schools reported lower drop-out rates significantly.

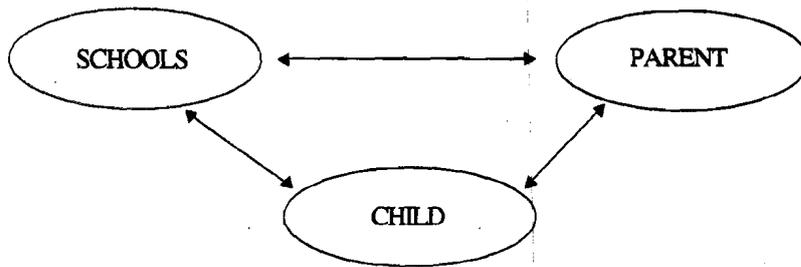
High risk behaviours Disruptive behaviour in the classroom substance abuse and an overall improvement in student behaviour in general has been reported.

Students felt and reported a higher sense of adult support both from parents and teachers resulting in less out of home placement, lower rate of child abuse, better child, development practices and improved social relationships.

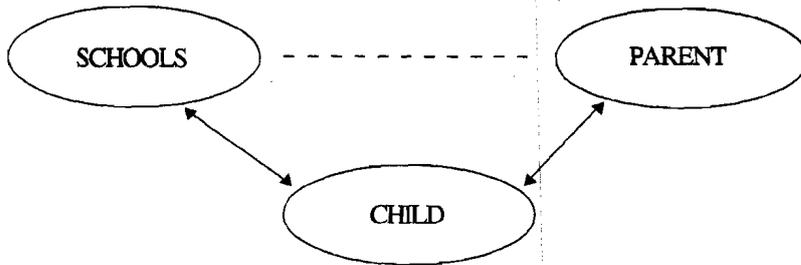


Having a positive impact mutually

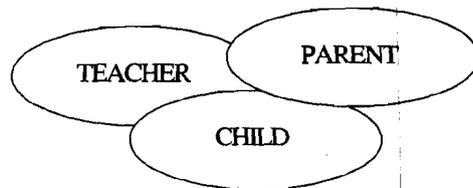
As things stand today, the relationship between the school and the family is as follows:



General perception of relationship between parent, child and school



Broken interrupted, incomplete



Ideal relationship

LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT	RESULT
Abdication	
School knows best	Confusion resulting in
We pay fees	pressure on the child
What are teachers for?	Teachers give up
Reluctant, limited participation	
Teachers are hopeless	Difficult conversation with teachers
Things were much better when I was at school	Some attention to problems
Grudging understanding	
The world is different today	Beginning of a partnership between parents
The teachers are doing a difficult job	Construction of communication with teachers
My child needs my time and help	Child begins contributing to the discussion
3-way handshake	
Spontaneous understanding of child and its place in school	High energy enabling alignment between schools and home
Willing contribution in schooling process	Continuity and development of school and child
Focus on the present and a vibrant vision of the future.	Better monitoring system

9.5 SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT — PLANNING PROCESS

1. *Mapping community assets.*: The first step in setting up the school-community family partnership is to engage in research of what resources exist in the community. Obtaining demographic details of employment, household income, educational status, number of school going children, their age, etc. of the neighbourhood population is important. Further information like the number of educational institutions, religious organizations and places, industry-houses, media, charitable and non profit organizations, hospitals, civic organizations etc. and their location can be obtained from municipalities, legislative representatives, etc.
2. *Compiling a directory*: The information collected above needs to be organized along the following titles:
 - Name, address and contact number, email, of the organization/person
 - A brief description of the function/activities of the organization/ institution
 - Name of the contact person

Activity

Ashok is a class XI student of Gyan Uday school, and off late has been showing a downslide in academics, disinterest, aggression and poor attendance. Upon investigation it has been found that there has been a breakdown of relations at home and an exposure to domestic violence.

As a Head of the school how would you garner family, school and community's help to rehabilitate Ashok.

Discussion:

i) *What is the issue involved?*

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ii) *Should the school take responsibility of Ashok whose problem is rooted in his family?*

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iii) *Is it the schools responsibility to intervene in his family life?*

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Activity

i) *Draw a list of agencies, institution, professional services outreaching to connect with your school.*

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ii) *Map the resources which will be used for strengthening school partnerships.*

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Activity

A school in your city has been setup by the Chinese community exclusively for the benefit of the children of their own community run in accordance with the needs and values of the community.

Highlight the possible advantages of a community run school.

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9.5.1 Assessment of Current Activities

Your school might be already engaged in meaningful partnerships with the community. It is possible that while some of these partnerships are moving towards the desired goals, there are others which need to be assessed for better results. Before moving on to create your new plan, it is good to look at what you have been doing and what results you are receiving from these activities. The following exercise will help you assess the impact of partnerships currently undertaken by your school.

Instructions: In the first row, list current family involvement or partnership activities that the school is doing. In the boxes below the activity, answer the questions on the left to show how the school has been affected by the identified activity (as in the example).

Impact Indicators	Current family involvement or partnership activities	Example: Families volunteering in the classrooms	1	2	3	4
	Does this activity connect to student learning goals or the school improvement goals/outcomes? How?	By itself, this activity does not, but it gives the teachers more time to work on school improvement goals.				
	How do you measure the success of this activity?	We count the number of volunteers and the hours volunteered				
	What have been the benefits and outcomes of this activity? How have you measured these?	We always have a few parents who do a lot of volunteering. They are very helpful				
	What have been challenges/weaknesses of this activity? What's not working? What would you change?	The same parents volunteer to do the work all the time. I would like as you would like? to see more and varied parents (dads, minority parents, single parents) in our school. Number of volunteer hours is decreasing.				

Source: NWREL (1998) *Partnerships by Design*. Portland: Oregon.

Creating a partnership plan

Creating a document is an important step in defining the partnership, the expected goals and outcomes, roles of the partners, anticipated barriers and identification of strategies to meet the planned goals.

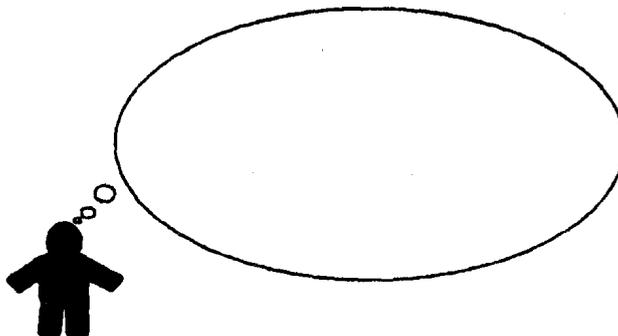
A document needs to take into account the following:

- an articulation of goals and outcomes and the means to attain the goals
- spelling out the role of each of the partners within the overall framework of the goals, objectives defined at the outset

- anticipation of possible problems, barriers and possible solutions
- evaluating strategies deployed and revising them as per feedback to enhance the effectiveness of partnerships.

Activity

In the space provided, draw or write your vision (a picture of success) of what you would like to accomplish in your school in the future.



Have all the other teachers and staff write and share their pictures of success with each other. One person should facilitate the discussion and help the others discuss what they mean and what they hope for. Look for areas of agreement, as well as different ideas that emerge. The goal is to find language and imagery that your team members can relate to as their vision for success.

Try to draft a vision statement based on the group's discussion and revise it until you have something that members can agree on and that everyone can share with enthusiasm.

(Example: We, the staff, students, parents, and community members of Gyan Bharati School join together to form a partnership committed to high standards and dedicated to continuous improvement. We act as one-planning and implementing a comprehensive school-family-community partnership aimed at improving the academic achievement and social success of all our children.)

Activity

● *Instructions: Answer the following questions based on the experiences and practices being followed in your own school.*

i) *What are your school's mission and goals?*

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ii) *Did your school engage family and community members in writing this mission and setting these goals? Yes No*

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iii) *What is your school-family-community partnership vision statement?*

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iv) *What are your school-family-community partnership goals?*

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v) *What is acceptable evidence of achieving these goals?*

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vi) *What activities will you plan to reach your goals?*

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.....

vii) *What role will partners play in helping meet this goal?*

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.....

viii) *Are all partners united on the school-family-community partnership vision and goals?* Yes No

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.....

9.5.2 Share the Plan with the School Community

It is important to do more than communicate facts. A variety of ways can be used to keep the school community informed starting with the planning stage. They use of a variety of communication media, depending upon the resources can be used.

Media for sharing the partnership plan with school community:

- School newsletters
- PTA meeting and newsletters
- Open forums
- Press releases
- Open presentations
- Postings on school bulletin boards
- School handbooks
- Special celebration events throughout year
- Letters and memos to parents
- Parent conferences
- End-of-year events to celebrate yearlong efforts
- E-mail updates
- District calendars
- Local radio program
- Web pages

Activity

Parents' Roles and Responsibilities

- *Parents play many roles in their children's education. Think about the parents of the students in your school or program and mark the answers that describe the roles that these parents play.*

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M	S	F	N	M=Most Parents, S=Some Parents (about Y2), F=Few Parents, N=Not, known
				<p>Parents as Nurturer</p> <p>Parents provide an appropriate environment where the child will flourish physically, psychologically, and emotionally. They maintain positive learning conditions at home and provide for the child's overall health, shelter, safety, and behavior. Parents encourage and reward satisfactory achievement, and show interest in the child's school day.</p>
				<p>Parents as Learners</p> <p>Parents obtain new skills and knowledge that will help directly and indirectly with the child's educational and social development as well as help the parents with their own development, growth, and life satisfaction.</p>
				<p>Parents as Supporters</p> <p>Parents enroll their children in school and ensure they are properly dressed, get to school on time, and attend each day. They purchase necessary supplies and equipment and obtain required vaccinations and medical exams. They enforce policies about bedtime, television viewing, and homework.</p>
				<p>Parents as Communicators</p> <p>Parents establish and maintain effective two-way communication flow with the child and the school.</p>
				<p>Parents as Audience</p> <p>Parents attend many activities designed to draw them into the school and provide them with direct, personal information about the school such as open houses, back-to-school nights, athletic events, concerts, and plays.</p> <p>Parents as Volunteers. Parents can help in their own child's classroom or in other classrooms, work in the library, tutor children, make attendance calls, chaperone school functions/events, or share their expertise in enrichment programs.</p>
				<p>Parents as Teachers</p> <p>As the child's first teachers, parents build the child's foundation for moral, intellectual, emotional, and social development. Parents can also provide enrichment activities that reinforce school learning, including reading to children, taking them on trips to the library and museums, and other home and community learning activities.</p>
				<p>Parents as Advisers/Advocates</p> <p>Parents wisely counsel and advise their child concerning his or her personal and educational situations. If needed, they effectively and actively mediate and negotiate for the child. By parent's modeling, children can learn to be successful advocates for themselves.</p>
				<p>Parents as Collaborators and Problem Solvers</p> <p>While working with the school and the community, parents can help study issues, solve problems, make decisions, and develop policy.</p>
				<p>Parents as Advisers and Decision makers</p> <p>Often through parent advisory groups or parent-educator organizations, parents and educators work together on solutions to various problems and issues facing the school. Real power-sharing opportunities include elected school governing boards and councils.</p>
				<p>Parents as Partners</p> <p>Parents move from the role of primary educators to a situation in which they share this role with the schools.</p>

9.5.3 Needs Assessment

Schools often ask parents to do activities that some parents feel are mundane and a poor use of their time and skills. Schools and educators still want and need these things because, with assistance on these items, it is possible for school staff to concentrate fully on the goals of meeting the students' educational needs. When you think only in terms of these activities being "parent involvement" activities and getting parents to perform them, you are limiting the number of individuals who can do these activities.

Here is where the potential of partnerships really opens things up. When you think of a school family community partnership as a collaborative relationship between the family, school, and community that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved, you have more people from which to draw, and a new way to draw them in!

For instance, if designing a hostel is a need of the school, ask family and community members who are architects/interior designers if they would donate some time and expertise for the activity. Similarly, for planting trees/shrubs in the lanes of the school, private nurseries/horticulture companies can be contacted. The private companies get to publicise their business. The following steps are important here

- think and formulate the need
- think of the potential partners and their ability to meet this need
- visualize the benefits that will accrue to the partners by providing the particular service to the community.

Since the nature of this partnership is reciprocal, the needs of the community and family members needs to be considered. The school has to find answers and solutions to the ways in which it can fulfill the needs of the community.

Activity		
In the column to the left, identify your need. (Include things that you want or hope to achieve as well). In the center column, identify who can help you meet this need. In the right column, identify the benefit for the partner who can help meet this need.		
<i>For the School...Need?</i>	<i>Who can you ask?</i>	<i>What is the benefit to them?</i>
<i>Lawn Care/Yard Maintenance</i>	<i>Companies that already do</i>	<i>Tax write-off this?</i>
<i>For the Teachers...Need?</i>	<i>Who can you ask?</i>	<i>What is the benefit to them?</i>
<i>Make copies, cut shapes, etc.</i>	<i>Students in high school business classes</i>	<i>Volunteer work on resume</i>
<i>For the students... Need?</i>	<i>Who can you ask?</i>	<i>What is the benefit to them?</i>
<i>Reading tutors</i>	<i>Retired teachers</i>	<i>Let them work with students again</i>

9.6 EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The following are indicators of effective school community partnerships and effective leadership:

1. School principals are committed to fostering increased integration between school and community.
2. School has in-depth knowledge of the community and resources available.
3. School actively seeks opportunities to involve all sectors of the community, including boundary crossers, and those who would not normally have contact with the school.
4. School has a high level of awareness of the value and importance to school-community partnerships of good public relations.
5. School Principals display a transformational leadership style which empowers others within the school and community and facilitates collective visioning.
6. School and community have access to and utilize extensive internal and external networks.
7. School and community share a vision for the future, centered on their youth.
8. School and community are open to new ideas, willing to take risks and willing to mould opportunities to match their vision.
9. School and community together play an active, meaningful and purposeful role in school decision making.
10. School and community value the skills of all in contributing to the learning of all.
11. Leadership for school-community partnerships is seen as the collective responsibility for school and community.
12. School and community both view the school as a learning centre for the whole community, which rings together physical, human and social capital resources.
13. The school-community partnership is not agenda driven but is driven by aspirations communities hold for their future.
14. The school community partnership allows for a sustained involvement by community stakeholders.

9.6.1 Hurdles to School-Family-Community Partnerships

Research has shown that the extent to which schools encourage and facilitate participation is a greater predictor of involvement than family characteristics such as the parent's education, socio-economic, and marital status. Research has also indicated that involvement is higher when schools welcome parents and make it easy for them to be involved.

Schools can take the initiative toward building enduring partnerships by creating a welcoming school environment, communicating and sharing information in the languages spoken by its families and taking suggestions, advice and comments seriously.

The following are however, some hurdles that are encountered in creating few action points to overcome these hurdles have also been suggested I:

1. Preoccupations and prior engagements

Educators have limited time both at school, and in their personal life where they may be parents themselves. Families often have scheduling difficulties

and conflicting demands on their time. Schools often organize events for staff convenience, with activities scheduled at times that may be inconvenient for working parents.

Actions

- Provide flexible hours to participate or schedule multiple performances.
- Make use of newsletters, minutes of meetings, emails, letters, press releases etc. of to communicate with families.

2. Lack of transport

Many parents have (no transport of their own, no access to public transportation, or public transportation is inconvenient) that results in their inability to attend school functions.

Actions

- Provide transportation on school bus, or provide access to public transportation
- Help parents set up car pools
- Meet at convenient locations for parents, such as community centres, apartment buildings, places of worship, or other sites off school grounds

3. Absence of Child Care facilities

Lack of appropriate, affordable child care prevents family and community members from participating in programmes held at school.

Actions

- Set aside a room in the school in which to provide child care during events
- Recruit staff and student volunteers for child care
- Allow younger children to come to school and provide supervised activities for them

4. Problems related to Language

Families who receive only English communications from the school but are not in a position to understand or speak the language may feel that the school does not respect or value their heritage. Written communications are not always appropriate for all families. When educators and family members do not speak the same language, communications will be hindered, and participation and understanding may be limited.

Actions

- Have printed materials translated into home languages
- Have interpreters available at all events
- Conduct family meetings in the home languages of the students enrolled in your school, with English translations available.

5. Cultural diversity

Families with non-majority cultural and linguistic backgrounds may feel alienated from schools that do not value diversity. Those who do speak English but have little education may have difficulty communicating with schools because their life experiences and perspectives are different from those of teachers.

Actions

- Work to increase everyone's awareness of and sensitivity to other cultures' values, attitudes, manners, and views of the school community
- Know the holidays and observances of all groups in the school

- Work with a knowledgeable, appropriate representative of the community to get to know the diverse cultures of the community.

6. Negative experiences with schools

Parents whose own school experiences were unsuccessful or stressful may be uncomfortable in interactions at their child's school, and may be reluctant to return to school as -parents. Some parents have a limited education and aren't sure they have anything of value to contribute. Other parents feel under utilized, especially in decisions affecting the academic life of the school.

Actions

- Extend a personal welcome to parents who appear to be withdrawn or uncomfortable
- Learn about their interests and abilities; and actively seek opportunities to use their experiences and talents for the benefit of the school

7. Parents are unsure about their role

Parents don't know what schools need, or don't understand how the system works. At times, educators fail to ask parents to help, and sometimes unintentionally discourage participation.

Actions

- Provide multiple opportunities for people to be involved in school and community activities, depending on their skills abilities an self confidence.
- Make needs known Make direct contact participation
- Keep community informed about what is happening and provide a variety of opportunities for all community members to participate Communicate activities and needs in varied ways (direct mail, nonprint media).

8. Lack of supportive environment

School public relations are about two way communication between school and community ensuring the school is in line with community concerns and aspirations. Many parents are simply overwhelmed in addressing their own food, clothing, and shelter needs. They do not have the inclination nor the time for other concerns.

Actions

- Provide information to help parents secure the services they need
- Develop a directory of services such as social service agencies, medical clinics, food pantries, substance abuse counseling, legal services, literacy courses, and tutoring in English as a second language (ESL) Allow organizations to use the school building during out of school hours as a hub for providing services and resources to the community.

9. Lack of effective communication and community skills

Many engagements although well-intentioned fail to take off because teachers do not have the requisite skills to either involve the community members or communicate with them.

¹This section is based on *Partnership by Design* @ Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon.

Actions

- Offer teachers formal training on collaborating with family members, recruiting and working with the community.
- Create inservice training opportunities on techniques for improving communication between home and school, and between school and the community; and ways schools and teachers can meet families' social, educational, and social service needs.
- Urge all school staff to attend inservice training on school-family-community partnerships

10. Schools are unresponsive or unwelcoming

- Provide tangible evidence that involvement is welcome
- Make sure parents know they are welcome to drop in at school during the day
- Post welcome signs in all languages spoken at the school.
- Show an interest and get involved in the community as well

11. Lack of involvement of key opinion makers

- Sometimes the lack of involvement of opinion leaders fails to convince the rest of the community about the significance of the partnership;

Actions

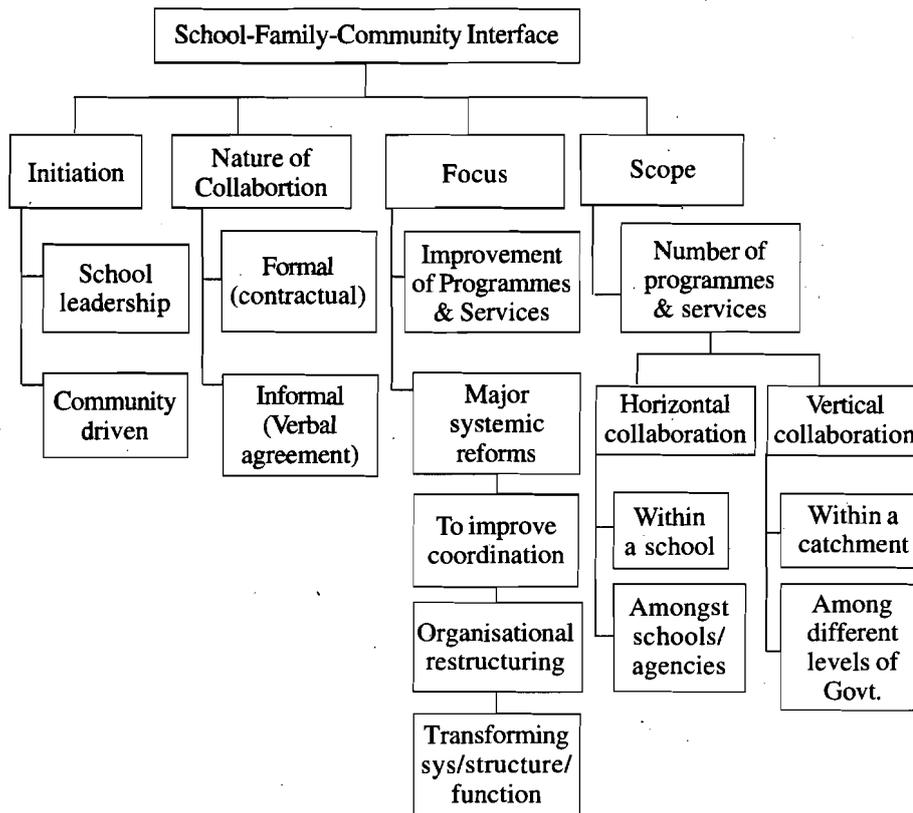
- Identify and develop relationships between school and key opinion leaders from all community sectors
- Ensure participation of those sectors that have had little previous involvement with the school
- Urge, in particular, members from business and industry, local government, service and other voluntary groups, churches, indigenous and ethnic groups.

Activity

Identify obstacles that may inhibit partnership development in your school community (or may keep it from becoming meaningful and effective) and define a plan of action that will help you navigate the hurdles in your way.

<i>What hurdles may be in your way? their role?</i>	<i>How will you navigate them?</i>	<i>Who will help you?</i>	<i>What will they do? What is</i>
e.g.: Transporation	Work with public transportation system to provide passes/ vouchers so parents can ride public transportation for free	Dev Kumar, Parent passes, etc.	Contact local transportation company to seek bus tickets, free

Let us try to recall the nature, focus and the scope of the school community interface with the help of the following diagram:



9.7 EVALUATING PARTNERSHIPS EFFORTS

Answers to the following questions can provide an assessment and help you to evaluate partnership efforts undertaken by the school.

- Are the goals objectives, in terms of involving families and community members in the school improvement goals, being met?
- How are parents and community members contributing to decisions about student learning?
- Are school events, workshops, or training sessions well attended by both school staff and families? Why or why not? (What are we going to do about the “why nots”?)
- In what ways have language and culture reflective of the community been integrated into the school, events, and curriculum?
- How are community resources used? How is a parent liaison with strong ties to the community engaged?
- Is the school warm and inviting? Is there a family center?
- Are written materials provided in the home languages of the students at the school? Are interpreters readily available?
- How are people reacting to communications efforts? Are family and members asked for ways to improve communication? How is some of their advice incorporated as the school-family-community partnership plan is refined? Are suggestions made by family and community members shared with school staff?
- How are successes and challenges shared with the school community?

9.8 LET US SUM UP

Effective family-community school interface requires a cohesive set of policies which moves existing governance towards shared decision making and appropriate degrees of local control and involvement. It needs to establish mechanisms to manage and enhance resources for family-school-community connections and provide sustainability to the partnerships.

Only a concerted effort will allow the stakeholders to build the continuum of interventions and ensure an effective strengthening of ties. The success of collaborations in enhancing school, family and community lies in the acceptance of the fact that the school needs to be embedded and totally in sync with society and all that it stands for. The bottom line is that nothing can be possible without the commitment of the school leader and the motivation of all the stakeholders. The willingness to open the gates of schools to the public has to come from the school leadership itself.

9.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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