

# Family & Community Engagement

# RtI

 **Boulder Valley** School District  
*Excellence and Equity*

## BVSD Response to Intervention

### *Family and Community Engagement*

#### *How to Use this Section:*

*This section contains some resources and information:*

- *Best Practices in Family Engagement*
- *Breaking Barriers Charts*
- *Family Engagement Strategies*
- *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement*
- *Excellent Articles:*
  - *Schools, Families and Response to Intervention*  
*By AmyL. Reschly*
  - *Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families*  
*By To be Determined*

## Best Practices in Family Engagement

When families, schools, and communities work together, children are more successful in schools. Effective partnerships include parents, families, students, community members and educators. Indicators of an effective partnership include:

1. Sharing information
2. Problem solving
3. Celebrating student successes
4. Engagement in the school process (TIES)

Central to effective partnerships is the recognition of shared responsibility and shared ownership of student challenges and successes. Real parent engagement happens when schools and teachers build trusting relationships with parents and create a welcoming climate that accepts people where they are.

What is expected in BVSD for students in the gap?

1. Welcome parents into the school and acknowledge their presence.
2. A positive initial contact with parents will be made within the first month of school.
3. In order to develop trust between home and school, five positive contacts will be made with families before a concern is brought up.
4. At least one face to face conference that is meaningful, in a language, and format that parents can understand is expected.

Other recommended school-based family engagement activities:

- Create a family engagement school plan.
- Extend personal invitations to parents; reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
- Share techniques and strategies for promoting and supporting the education of their child at home and at school.
- Include and Encourage parents to participate in school decision making teams, committees, and other school activities. Give equal representations to parents on SIT's.
- Provide differentiated kindergarten orientations and other meetings (i.e. small group vs. large group, language based, informal vs. formal, open ended agendas).

## **BVSD Response to Intervention**

- Provide assistance to parents in understanding state standards, report cards, and assessments.
- Ensure that communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.
- Eliminate language barriers.
- Collect evidence of parent participation which include celebrations, challenges, and barriers, in order to develop appropriate plans and goals.
- Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
- Consider alternative places to meet with parents such as neighborhood walks, neighborhood forums, home visits, meeting at a club house, faith facility, rec. center which may be welcoming for parents.
- Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
- Trust that parents want to be involved in positive ways.



## Breaking Barriers Charts Parent Involvement

### **Communication**

#### Areas to address:

- Level of language
- Level of accuracy of translation
- Mode: written, verbal, 1-way and 2-way
- Accessibility
- Amount
- Is there a communication 'system' in place?

#### Strategies to over come barriers:

- Monthly newsletters with invitations to parent activities
- Network of parents to communicate with each other
- Phone tree
- Use only qualified, approved translators
- Have a couple of parents to review translated material for accuracy and understandability-this is the kind of activity parents like to do
- Hand out flyers in person
- School website-each grade level team or individual has a web page with homework assignments and announcements for parents
- Encourage students to look at web page with parents often
- Add visuals to newsletters
- Billboards outside the school
- Extra copies
- Automated phone message line for incoming, outgoing or calls both ways
- Parent volunteer coordinator having face to face with other parents
- Home visits
- Local news and newspapers, including media for Latinos
- Highlight and bullet "important" information-Kiss Method: Keep it Sweet and Simple
- Don't use jargon, avoid acronyms

### **Systemic Barriers**

#### Areas to address:

- A single way of doing things, inflexible
- Parent Involvement not viewed as valuable by the administration
- Parent Involvement may be valued, but not to the extent of funding it
- Rules and policies prevent a smooth process to fund activities

#### Strategies to over come barriers:

- Meet with parent in neutral locations
- Be open to at changing rules and policies

## **BVSD Response to Intervention**

- Provide clear and concise rules and policies in writing and verbally if needed
- Getting to Know Parents family night-staff and family networking
- Meetings at different times and days, even weekends
- Make money from parent organization at school benefit all parents and staff
- Advocate for more time for conferences
- Use home visits
- Use parent handbooks that address parent involvement, not just rules and regulations
- Use parents as resources-when they feel needed, they are more likely to be involved
- Include staff and parent input to policies and plans
- Provide specific details of process
- Flexible expectations
- Acknowledge the values of others
- Schools should be student-oriented
- Allow parents to request personal meeting with the counselor, principal, and teachers, while helping parents know who to ask
- Advocate opportunities for parent/family involvement
- Meet parents where they are
- Make scheduled family nights and parent involvement opportunities available to parents on their schedule, not on staffs-or consider the schedules of both

### **Reaching the Hard to Reach Parent**

#### Areas to address:

- Parents who have tight time schedules
- Transportation issues
- Parents that are rarely seen in the school building

#### Strategies to over come barriers:

- Automatic messaging
- Home visits, work visits
- Emergency contact numbers
- Parent cell number
- Being available to parents at social events
- Provide food
- Parents sign-in by class-class gets a prize or incentive (Ex. popcorn party)
- Invitation to fun activities; have kids make invites
- Announcements in local and church newsletters
- Provide free child care with a variety of child activities
- Parent liaisons that speaks the languages of the parents, if possible
- Paid and valued positions for a full-time Parent Liaison that works closely with teaching staff and parents
- Build trust
- Greet parents as well as children
- Talk in person by phone after school hours if necessary

## **BVSD Response to Intervention**

- Give them a reason to be involved
- Encourage fathers to be involved
- Let them know their involvement is valued, thank them
- Welcome wagon to reach out
- Talk to them at non-school related events
- Being open minded about types of celebrations
- Flexible times
- Connections with local businesses and community agencies
- Provide transportation and car pools
- Let them be involved how ever they can
- Always link info to student achievement

### **Welcoming School**

#### **Areas to address:**

- Existing parent group makes it hard to feel welcomed
- Staff avoidance of parents, lack of communication
- Lack of recognition
- No follow-up
- Environment

#### **Strategies to over come barriers:**

- Eye contact
- Watch body language
- Keep inviting
- Find a way they can be involved-don't give up
- Provide Family Nights that are for socializing and learning
- Entry to school needs to really address the “cultures” within the school
- SMILE!! - greet people when you see them in the hallways
- Physical building and space
- Staff and office demeanor and attitudes
- Sensitivity/parent involvement training for staff
- Remembering and using parents names
- Provide translators that are fluent in both languages
- Recognize volunteers-Thank you notes
- Provide student related events-parents like to see their kids
- Ice breakers
- Student led tours
- Welcome packets/video
- Parent welcome teams
- “Parent buddy” for newcomers
- Computers available for parents' use/parent space

## **BVSD Response to Intervention**

- Parent resource center in school run by parent volunteers-dual language if possible
- Acknowledge parents
- Student council contact with parents
- On-site video to demonstrate classroom activities
- Encourage parent to parent networking

### **Culture**

#### **Areas to address:**

- Priorities
- Values differences
- How to create a team
- Sensitivity
- Parents' past educational experiences
- Time
- Role expectations
- Socio-economic issues

#### **Strategies to over come barriers:**

- Educate staff including staff development on Culture of Poverty
- Celebrate all cultures
- invite parents in to share culture: pot luck; fashion show
- invite students to share ancestors' culture
- international day/night to share cultural diversity
- flags of countries represented
- All staff greet and smile
- Be humble
- Make a genuine effort
- Home visits
- Gather information from families
- List of community resources
- Welcome signs in many languages
- Provide clear and concise information, especially about meeting times, agendas

### **Language**

#### **Areas to address:**

- Quality of translation
- Translation not available
- Comparable terms do not exist from language to language
- Jargon

Strategies to overcome barriers:

- Translation
- start with on-line translation, then have it reviewed by someone
- make connections with community members i.e. employees of Chinese restaurant who can help with translation
- develop a parent network that focuses on translating communication between school and families
- Marquis in English/Spanish
- ask PTO to assist
- have parents translate during meetings
- employ more translators
- ask 3 children to review translation: do they all understand what you are trying to communicate?
- Make a label – in minority language – that says the information is important and that parent should get help reading it
- Have students act as relay for information
- Provide “Parent Link”, “Auto-Dial”, etc auto email systems
- Use automatic reading level checker
- Hook up with university to find out who has information in alternative languages
- Plan language exchange sessions – practice both Spanish and English together
- Use more graphics/icons

**BVSD Response to Intervention**

**Family Engagement Strategies**

<b>Family Engagement Strategies:</b>			
Welcome parents into the school and acknowledge their presence			
Make a positive contact with parents within the first month of school			
Ensure positive and proactive communication			
Parent-teacher conferences that are meaningful, in a language, and format parents can understand			
Extend personal invitations to parents			
Share techniques and strategies for promoting and supporting learning at home			
Encourage parents to participate in school decision making teams, committees and other school activities			
Remove language barriers			
Provide differentiated meeting (coffees, informal settings, small groups, language groups, open-ended			

**BVSD Response to Intervention**

**Family Engagement Strategies**

agendas, Q&A)			
Provide assistance to parents in understanding standards, report cards, and assessments			
Consider alternative places to meet with parents			
Trust that parents want to be involved in positive ways			
Problem solve together			
Celebrate student successes			
Ensure that parents understand school systems and culture			
Differentiated communication			
Provide an environment that is safe and not intimidating for parents			
Relationships, relationships, relationships			
Ask parents what they need from us			

***Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement***  
**(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)**

<p><b>TYPE 1</b>  <b>PARENTING</b></p> <p>Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sample Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.</li> <li>• Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.</li> <li>• Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy.)</li> <li>• Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.</li> <li>• Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school. Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information to <i>all</i> families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.</li> <li>• Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.</li> <li>• Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read any where, any time, in varied forms.</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents.</li> <li>• Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family.</li> <li>• Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework.</li> <li>• Good or improved attendance.</li> <li>• Awareness of importance of school.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school.</li> <li>• Awareness of own and others' challenges in parents.</li> <li>• Feeling of support from school and other parents.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding families' background, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children.</li> <li>• Respect for families' strengths and efforts.</li> <li>• Understanding of student diversity.</li> <li>• Awareness of own skills to share information on child development.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>TYPE 2</b>  <b>COMMUNICATING</b></p>
<p>Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.</p>
<p><b>Sample Practices</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.</li> <li>• Language translators to assist families as needed.</li> <li>• Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.</li> <li>• Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences on improving grades.</li> <li>• Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.</li> <li>• Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.</li> <li>• Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications.</li> <li>• Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.</li> <li>• Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, and so on).</li> <li>• Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Results for Students</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades.</li> <li>• Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct.</li> <li>• Informed decisions about courses and programs.</li> <li>• Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Results for Parents</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding school programs and policies.</li> <li>• Monitoring and awareness of child's progress.</li> <li>• Responding effectively to students' problems.</li> <li>• Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Results for Teachers</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly</li> <li>• Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications.</li> <li>• Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress.</li> </ul>

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<b>TYPE 3</b> <b>VOLUNTEERING</b> Recruit and organize parent help and support.
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sample Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.</li> <li>• Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families.</li> <li>• Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.</li> <li>• Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.</li> <li>• Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit volunteers widely so that <i>all</i> families know that their time and talents are welcome.</li> <li>• Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate.</li> <li>• Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time -- not just during the school day and at the school building.</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill in communicating with adults.</li> <li>• Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers.</li> <li>• Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parent and other volunteers.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home.</li> <li>• Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education.</li> <li>• Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school.</li> <li>• Gains in specific skills of volunteer work.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school.</li> <li>• Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children.</li> <li>• Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>TYPE 4</b>  <b>LEARNING AT HOME</b></p> <p>Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sample Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.</li> <li>• Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.</li> <li>• Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.</li> <li>• Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.</li> <li>• Calendars with activities for parents and students at home.</li> <li>• Family math, science, and reading activities at school.</li> <li>• Summer learning packets or activities.</li> <li>• Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives <i>students</i> responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork.</li> <li>• Coordinate family linked homework activities, if students have several teachers.</li> <li>• Involve families and their children in all-important curriculum-related decisions.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.</i></li> <li>• <i>"Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing -- not "teaching" school subjects.</i></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork.</li> <li>• Homework completion.</li> <li>• Positive attitude toward schoolwork.</li> <li>• View of parents as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school.</li> <li>• Self-concept of ability as learner.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year.</li> <li>• Discussions of school, classwork, and homework.</li> <li>• Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject.</li> <li>• Appreciation of teaching skills.</li> <li>• Awareness of child as a learner.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Results for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better design of homework assignments.</li> <li>• Respect for family time.</li> <li>• Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning.</li> <li>• Satisfaction with family involvement and support.</li> </ul>

***Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement***  
**(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)**

<b>TYPE 5</b> <b>DECISION MAKING</b> Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
<b>Sample Practices</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.</li> <li>• Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.</li> <li>• District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement.</li> <li>• Information on school or local elections for school representatives.</li> <li>• Networks to link all families with parent representatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.</li> <li>• Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.</li> <li>• Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Redefinitions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.</i></li> <li>• <i>Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Results for Students</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of representation of families in school decisions.</li> <li>• Understanding that student rights are protected.</li> <li>• Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students.</li> </ul>
<b>Results for Parents</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input into policies that affect child's education.</li> <li>• Feeling of ownership of school.</li> <li>• Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions.</li> <li>• Shared experiences and connections with other families.</li> <li>• Awareness of school, district, and state policies.</li> </ul>
<b>Results for Teachers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions.</li> <li>• View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles.</li> </ul>

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<p><b>TYPE 6</b></p> <p><b>COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY</b></p> <p>Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.</p>
<p><b>Sample Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services</li> <li>• Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.</li> <li>• Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses.</li> <li>• Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others).</li> <li>• Participation of alumni in school programs for students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities.</li> <li>• Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships.</li> <li>• Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services.</li> <li>• Match community contributions with school goals, integrate child and family services with education.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Redefinitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development.</i></li> <li>• <i>"Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools.</i></li> <li>• <i>"Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Results for Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences.</li> <li>• Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work.</li> <li>• Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Results for Parents</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services</li> <li>• Interactions with other families in community activities.</li> <li>• Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Results for Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction.</li> <li>• Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practices.</li> <li>• Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services.</li> </ul>

## Schools, Families, and Response to Intervention

by [Amy L. Reschly](#), Ph.D., University of Georgia

A lot has been said and written about family involvement in schools. Definitions of family involvement are varied, ranging from participating in school-defined activities (e.g., fundraiser, volunteer) to the establishment of partnerships among families and educators (Christenson, 2004). It is not surprising that different types of involvement at school, or ways of supporting learning at home, are linked to different outcomes. However, it is clear a) that family processes and practices are strongly related to students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes while students are in school and beyond, and b) that when schools and families collaborate to support student learning, student outcomes are improved (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Given this link between families, family–school collaborations, and student outcomes, many educators desire greater family involvement and collaboration in supporting learning at school and in the home. Indeed, the increasing priority given to family access and involvement in student learning and schools is apparent in national initiatives, general and special education legislation, and the statements and goals of countless education-related professional organizations (Reschly & Christenson, in press). Further, a high level of family involvement is one of the common characteristics of high-performing schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and family involvement and collaboration are critical aspects of many comprehensive school reform efforts (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lewis & Henderson, 1997; Reschly & Christenson, in press). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the necessity and promise of including families and family–school partnerships in the comprehensive educational reform initiative Response to Intervention (RTI).

### Families and Schools are the Primary Contexts for Student Learning

Although schools are charged formally with the task of educating students, families clearly have a significant impact on student development, learning, and behavior—inside and outside of the school doors. Indeed, it is estimated that students spend as much as 90% of their time from birth through age 18 outside of schools (Walberg, 1984). Student learning cannot be described or assessed as a product of either schools or families in isolation (Christenson & Anderson, 2002). Further, there is commonality in the factors that promote student competence in homes and schools (Chall, 2000; Christenson & Peterson, 2006; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993), such as standards and expectations, structure, opportunity to learn, support, climate and relationships, and modeling (Christenson & Peterson, 2006). Student competence

#### Related Reading

[A Parent Leader's Perspective on Response to Intervention](#) by Debra Jennings

[Engaging Families in Early Childhood Education](#)

[Myths about Response to Intervention \(RTI\) Implementation](#) by Bill East

#### Other Resources

[NCLD's Parent Advocacy Brief, A Parent's Guide to Response-to-Intervention](#)

[Parent Information Center's A Family Guide to Response to Intervention](#)

is enhanced when there is congruence among the two primary contexts for learning—home and school (Reschly & Christenson, in press).

## Family-School Interventions and Partnerships

Recently, there have been attempts to examine the effectiveness of family interventions (e.g., parent tutoring interventions, parent training programs) and school–family collaborative interventions (e.g., consultation, family–school partnership programs) for improving students’ academic performance and/or behavior at school (Carlson & Christenson, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Nye, Turner, & Schwartz, 2007). Although empirical evaluation and synthesis of such programs is relatively recent and more work is needed, results of these initial examinations may serve to inform practice in schools and are relevant to educators as they endeavor to work with families to support student learning in RTI models.

One synthesis, undertaken by the Task Force on Empirically Supported Interventions in School Psychology, found moderate to large effect sizes across family intervention domains (i.e., parent education, parent involvement, family/parent consultation, family–school collaboration/partnerships, family systems therapy/family training, and early childhood family-focused interventions; Carlson & Christenson, 2005). Across these areas, certain intervention components stood out: those that stressed collaboration and dialogue between families and schools and joint monitoring of student progress; parent interventions that focused on specific, measurable outcomes; family involvement interventions that emphasized the role of parents as tutors in a defined subject area; and school–family consultation (Christenson & Carlson, 2005).

This information is useful to districts as they look to implement evidence-based practices to improve student achievement and other positive outcomes. Furthermore, some of these components—collaboration, shared monitoring, and dialogue—are directly applicable to educators as they seek to establish relationships and work with families to support student learning in general (Christenson & Carlson, 2005) and within RTI models (Reschly & Christenson, in press). In addition, there is even some evidence of poorer outcomes for students and family functioning when families are excluded from counseling and other therapeutic interventions (Szapocznik & Prado, 2007); and finally, working in either home or school, rather than across the two, misses an opportunity to pair the power of prevention and early intervention services inherent in RTI with the two primary socializing agents of our students—families and schools (Reschly, Coolong, Christenson, & Gutkin, 2007).

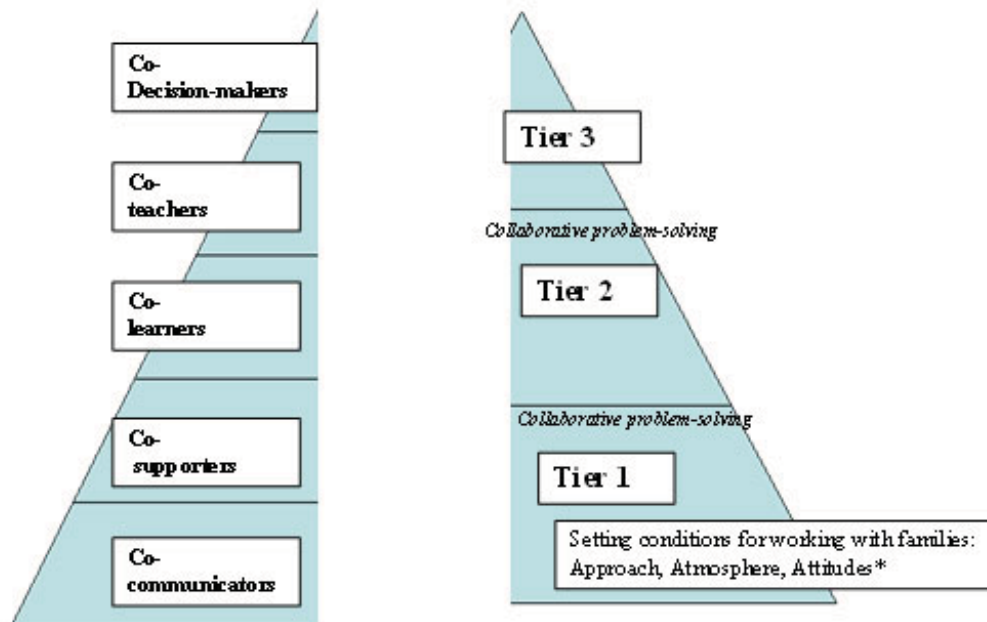
There are a number of ways schools and families may work together. There is a difference, however, in involving families to meet goals and activities defined by the school and working with families to support student learning. The latter requires positive, engaged relationships (Reschly & Christenson, in press) and collaboration among educators and families. Definitions of family–school partnerships highlight the need for shared accountability, goals/priorities, responsibility, and contributions (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; Jordan, Orzco, & Averett, 2001), as well as the need for student-focused problem solving (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Structured problem solving is the central to both RTI (Marston, Reschly, Lau, Canter, & Muyskens, 2007) and the creation of partnerships among families and educators. In other words, problem solving is the orientation and set of activities that brings families and educators together to support student learning and competence in RTI models.

## **Family-School Partnerships and RTI**

RTI represents a significant change in educational practices. Several of these changes, such as the focus on prevention, screening, and early intervention; frequent, systematic data collection; and the change in focus from “where to teach students” to questions of “how,” “what,” and “is this working” to produce optimal student learning (Reschly et al., 2007), segue to the creation of engaged, positive relationships and problem-solving efforts across families and schools—sharing information, goals, and responsibility.

Each tier of the RTI model represents a greater intensity of services and problem solving and more frequent data collection. When family–school partnerships are included as part of RTI, each subsequent tier also represents greater frequency of communication and joint problem solving among families and educators. The idea of leveled or tiered family–school collaboration and partnerships is not new. Moles (1993) described a series of roles for families and educators that represented shared responsibility and participation. These “co-roles” were represented in the form of a pyramid, much like the tiers of RTI (see Figure 1). In addition, just as in RTI, each subsequent level “co” role for families and schools required greater amounts of time, commitment, and contribution on the part of families and educators.

Figure 1. Family-School Co-Roles and Partnerships in RTI



Moles (1993) Co-Roles

\*Christenson &amp; Sheridan, 2001

In Tier 1 of a family–school RTI model, conditions for engaged, positive relationships among families and educators should be in place. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) described these conditions in terms of 4 A's. Three of the A's, Approach, Attitudes, and Atmosphere, refer to setting conditions for engaged relationships and problem solving between families and educators.

- Approach is the structure for family–school interactions and relationships. This condition revolves around shared goals, expectations for involvement, and valuing the diverse ways in which families support learning, and the recognition that relationships and congruence across families and schools enhance student competence.

- Attitudes are the values and perceptions held about relationships between families and educators (e.g., perspective taking, sharing of information, respect).

- Atmosphere is the climate in schools for families and educators.

The fourth A is collaborative Action or behavior across families and schools to promote student competence across academic, behavioral, and social domains (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). It is important for these conditions—or relationships—to be established prior to signs of student difficulty, as these relationships facilitate the intervention-oriented problem solving that is the basis of RTI.

In Tiers 2 and 3, the intensity of collaborative efforts and problem-solving activities between families and educators increases. What occurs with families in each stage of the model will vary depending on the family's strengths and needs, school personnel, and local context; however, there are a variety of family and family–school interventions that may be considered in addition to those schools already use across the tiers. Conjoint behavioral consultation (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007) is one example of an intensive family–school problem-solving intervention. Regardless of the role taken by family members, families and educators inform one another and share their expertise and knowledge about the student to support learning and promote competence. Enhancing student competence is the goal of family–school collaboration and relationships within and across the three tiers (Reschly & Christenson, in press).

## **Families, RTI, and Special Education**

For years, there have been calls for greater parent access and participation in special education. Although parents' rights have been spelled out from the point of referral, this is often late in the trajectory of students' difficulties at school. Further, all too often parents are passive in the special education process (Harry, 1992) or worse, by the time their student is referred or placed in special education, acrimonious relationships between families and schools have developed. RTI is an exciting reform for several reasons, including the opportunity to engage and work with families at the first sign of student difficulties. If the model is functioning well, by the time a student reaches the point of a comprehensive evaluation or is in need of Tier 3 interventions, families and educators have long-established, positive, engaged relationships that center around supporting student learning, sharing of data and decision making, interventions, and collaborative problem solving.

## **Conclusions**

The rationale for working with families to support student learning is clear: When families and schools work together, student outcomes are enhanced. Despite all that has been written about family involvement, however, partnerships among educators and families are still largely an unmet national

priority (Carlson & Christenson, 2005). RTI is an opportunity to bring about meaningful change in family–school relationships, allowing for the creation of engaged partnerships between educators and families through collaborative, structured problem-solving efforts.

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## Working With Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

Working with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds poses special challenges to early childhood educators. To meet the needs of all members of the school community, efforts should be made to ensure that the school system as a whole and each of its components (including individual classrooms) strives to achieve "cultural competence."

### What is Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence is a term that describes what happens when special knowledge about individuals and groups of people is incorporated into standards, policies, and practices. The process of achieving cultural competence is one that leads not only to an appreciation of families and their unique backgrounds, but also to an increase in the quality and effectiveness of services, producing better outcomes. For schools to be described as culturally competent, they need to:

- Have a set of values and principles that recognize diversity;
- Demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally and value diversity;
- Conduct self-assessment to ensure sensitivity to cultural characteristics;
- Be committed to manage the "dynamics of difference;"
- Learn about and incorporate cultural knowledge into their practices, and
- Adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.

### Why is cultural competence important?

Within an educational setting, cultural competence means finding ways to infuse knowledge and appreciation of other cultures into daily practice. Very often, early childhood classrooms

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are filled with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but the unique features of these different cultural communities is not well understood by educators and therefore not well integrated into classroom and school-wide practice. Establishing cultural competence is an ongoing and long-term process that demands enthusiasm and curiosity about other cultures and a willingness to adapt educational practices to mirror the values and special characteristics of children and their families.

A few examples of how cultural competence can impact learning:

- In some cultures, a certain facial expression may be sufficient to get students' attention and quiet down the noise level in the room; in others, shouting and verbal bantering is the norm.
- Gentle hands-on-hands guidance during play can be comforting and effective for some children and very disconcerting and upsetting to others. Levels of comfort with these types of interaction can also be affected by whether the nurturing adult is male or female.
- In some homes, children are encouraged to look down or away when being spoken to by adults. This culture-specific respectful behavior can easily be mistaken as a show of defiance if not understood in a culturally competent context.

## **Keys to Developing Effective and Collaborative Relationships Within Culturally Diverse Communities**

Establishing effective collaborative relationships is a process that involves sharing, flexibility, and a commitment to building and sustaining open lines of communication and understanding. As part of a Recognition and Response system, these relationships can be established through honest self-reflection and having an open mind about what factors might be contributing to a students' success and struggles in the classroom. The following steps can be helpful:

1. Reflect upon the specific cultural values that are embedded in your understanding of a student's behavior and different factors that might contribute to his or her performance in school.

- Ask yourself whether these characteristics are contributing to your understanding of what services and supports this student might need to succeed in school.
  - Explore any cultural characteristics that might be different from those of teachers and other students, and be sure that they complement (or at least, do not interfere with) the child's full participation in the learning community. Examples of issues to be considered might be: where and when children sleep, when and if children should have recommended or required immunizations, and discipline issues such as time-out and spanking.
2. Find out whether the families being served recognize and share your values and assumptions and, if not, how their views differ from yours. Be sure to listen carefully, have an open mind, and reserve judgment.
- For example, the family of a four-year-old allows her to stay awake well past what you might think to be a reasonable bed time (e.g., 8:00 p.m.) because her father does not get home from work until 10:00 p.m., and she is off to school before he wakes up in the morning.
  - Susan McBride (1999) reminds us that information should be provided in languages that are readily understood by the family members and that translators and interpreters should be on hand as needed to promote family participation in a child's education. Developing a "survival vocabulary list" in the native languages of the families in your classroom can also be a welcome offering, especially when it is tailored to and shared along with discussions of childrens' progress in the general curriculum.

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