

Indicator: Parent (Family) representatives advise the School Leadership Team on matters related to family–school relations. (5188)

Explanation: Cooperative learning refers to teaching methods in which students work together in small groups to help each other learn academic content (Slavin, 2015). Cooperative learning has positive effects on student achievement and helps students learn to work together and encourage each other. Teachers can best advance cooperative learning by supporting student questions and positive interdependence between students.

Questions: What is cooperative learning? How should teachers approach cooperative learning?

Partnership requires sharing power. The starting point for teachers and administrators is to see families as partners and not simply as clients or guests. All partners must have a voice in school affairs, including decisions about budgets, school programs and personnel, changes in curriculum and instruction, and student behavior. (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 188)

The current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also referred to as No Child Left Behind) requires in Section 1118 that schools receiving Title I funds have a written Parent Involvement Policy, that the policy is written with the assistance of parents, and that it establish expectations for parental involvement, coordinates with early childhood program’s parent involvement strategies, and identifies and attempts to eliminate barriers to greater participation and more effective involvement. Research and best practices from exemplary districts exhibit the need for *all* schools to develop a shared vision of family engagement (Henderson et al., 2007; Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez & Weiss, 2009). It is necessary to go beyond a compliance-driven approach; schools that lack a systematic approach to design and implementation of parent involvement efforts will be ineffective in improving student outcomes (Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Paredes, O’Malley, & Amarillas, 2012).

Research has established the important role of the family in student learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). The figure below depicts relationships among student, family, and school variables and their effects on student learning outcomes (from Redding et al., 2004):

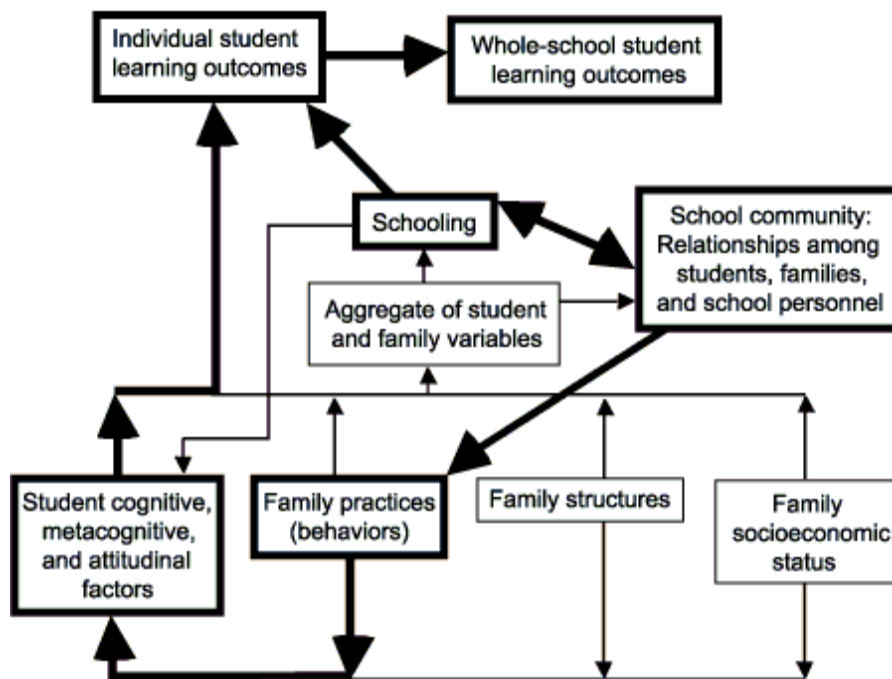


Figure 1. Note: Bold lines show path of malleable variables the school can affect to improve student learning outcomes.

Comprehensive engagement of students' families, including seeking parental input for the School Leadership Team/School Improvement Team, exerts influences in two directions (see the box titled "School community: Relationships among students, families, and school personnel" in the above figure): on the individual families of students, and on the operation of the school itself. "The cumulative effects of more frequent and higher quality interactions among teachers and parents are a greater reservoir of trust and respect, increased social capital for children, and a school community more supportive of each child's school success. Community-based organizations and schools will be most effective in engaging families in their children's education if their efforts are comprehensive, focused, and coherent," resulting in significant learning gains (Redding et al., 2004, p. 6).

Representation before the School Leadership Team may be individual parents/family members of currently enrolled students (not employees of the school district) or may be representatives of a School Community Council or similar school-based team with a majority of members being parents, along with teacher, administrator, and community representatives. The National Network of Partnership Schools calls their version an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and recommends that:

At least one member of the ATP should also be a member of the School Improvement Team (SIT) so that partnership efforts are in concert with other school improvement efforts. The ATP chair should communicate with the school principal and attend SIT meetings. A primary responsibility of the ATP is to construct an annual action plan in the spring that will coordinate, guide, and document the family and community engagement efforts the following school year. (Sheldon, 2011, p. 100)

The School Community Council can look at the connections between the school and the families it serves and make recommendations for strengthening the School Improvement Plan's emphasis on family-school connections (ADI, 2011).

This council works in cooperation with

other groups and organizations in the school, and the work is typically behind the scenes, planning activities and maintaining a focus on the mutual roles of the family and the school in promoting school community goals such as reading, studying, and responsible behavior (ADI, 2011). Henderson et al. (2007) offer the following suggestions to begin to involve parents in leadership and to engage a greater number of families:

One way for your action team to start is to hold a town meeting or a series of discussion groups to plan workable ways for teachers and other staff, parents, and students to express concerns and take part in decision making....Ask all participants for their ideas about how to strengthen the school's links to families and community members. Offer other opportunities to invite suggestions such as homeroom discussions, parent association meetings, or surveys that older students or parents could design and administer. (p. 188)

Shared or distributed leadership is a common element in school improvement research and practice (Walberg, 2007). Unfortunately, too often this merely means distributing decision-making among various administrators and perhaps a few lead teachers.

Sharing leadership with parents breaks new ground in many schools, but where it is prevalent, research dem-

onstrates its power in boosting school improvement (Moore, 1998; Redding & Sheley, 2005). (Henderson & Redding, 2011, pp. 105)

Henderson & Redding (2011) go on to describe how parents or other family members may be nurtured as leaders for a variety of purposes:

Deciding

1. Providing input to critical school decisions about curriculum, instruction, schedules, resource allocation, student services, school leadership, and co-curricular programs.
2. Making decisions, setting guidelines, developing plans, and implementing activities related to areas where the responsibility of the school and the home overlap.

Organizing

3. Planning and administering open houses, family-school nights, transition nights, college and career fairs, and other school events.
4. Building a strong, broad-based parent organization that can serve to create an inclusive school community, formulate positions, build consensus, develop proposals, and select leaders to serve on decision-making groups such as a school council or school improvement team.

Engaging

5. Providing outreach to engage other parents in support of their children's learning and in assisting with the school's functions.
6. Convening groups of parents in homes to meet with teachers in "home gatherings."
7. Organizing and conducting home visits, community walks, and other opportunities to build collaborative relationships between families and school staff.

Educating

8. Serving as leaders to facilitate workshops and courses for parents.
9. Participating in professional development for teachers related to teachers' work with families.
10. Planning and providing training for school personnel to make the school a more welcoming place.
11. Planning and providing training for volunteers who work in the school.

Advocating and Connecting

12. Advocating on behalf of the school and families with community and political leaders and groups.
13. Connecting school staff, students, and families to community resources for the benefit of the school and its families.

The personal benefits derived by parents in leadership roles also flow to their children and to the school itself. Parents and families acquire skills, confidence, and a sense of self-efficacy. Researchers Lee Shumow and Richard Lomax, in *Parental Efficacy: Predictor of Parenting Behavior and Adolescent Outcomes* (2001), show the connection between parents' sense of efficacy and their children's higher achievement in school. (Henderson & Redding, 2011, pp. 105–106)

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