Moving Forward: Building the Capacity for Effective Family and Community Engagement

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What is the definition of Family Engagement?

Family Engagement is any way that a child's adult caretaker (biological parents, foster parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.) effectively supports learning and healthy development.

When families are effectively engaged in their children's education and in the improvement of schools, what are the various roles they can play?

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Families are engaged as:

- *Supporters* of their children's learning
- *Encouragers of an achievement identity, a positive self image, and a "can do" spirit*
- *Monitors* of their children's time, behavior, boundaries and resources
- *Models* of lifelong learning and enthusiasm for education
- *Advocates* for improved learning opportunities for their children and at their schools
- *Decision-makers/choosers* of educational options for their child, the school, and community
- *Collaborators* with school staff and members of the community

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Why is Family Engagement Important?

Impact of Family Engagement:

- Faster literacy acquisition
- Earn higher grades and test scores
- Enroll in higher level programs
- Are promoted more and earn more credits
- Adapt better to school and attend more regularly
- Have better social skills and behavior
- Graduate and go on to higher education

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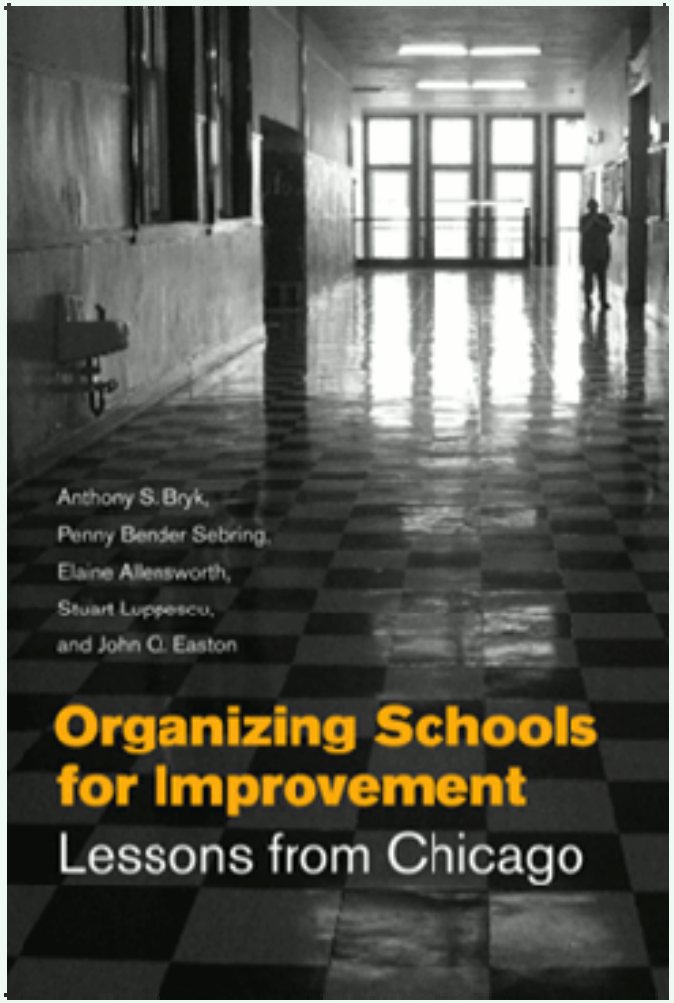
Why is Community Engagement Important?

Impact of School-Community Partnerships

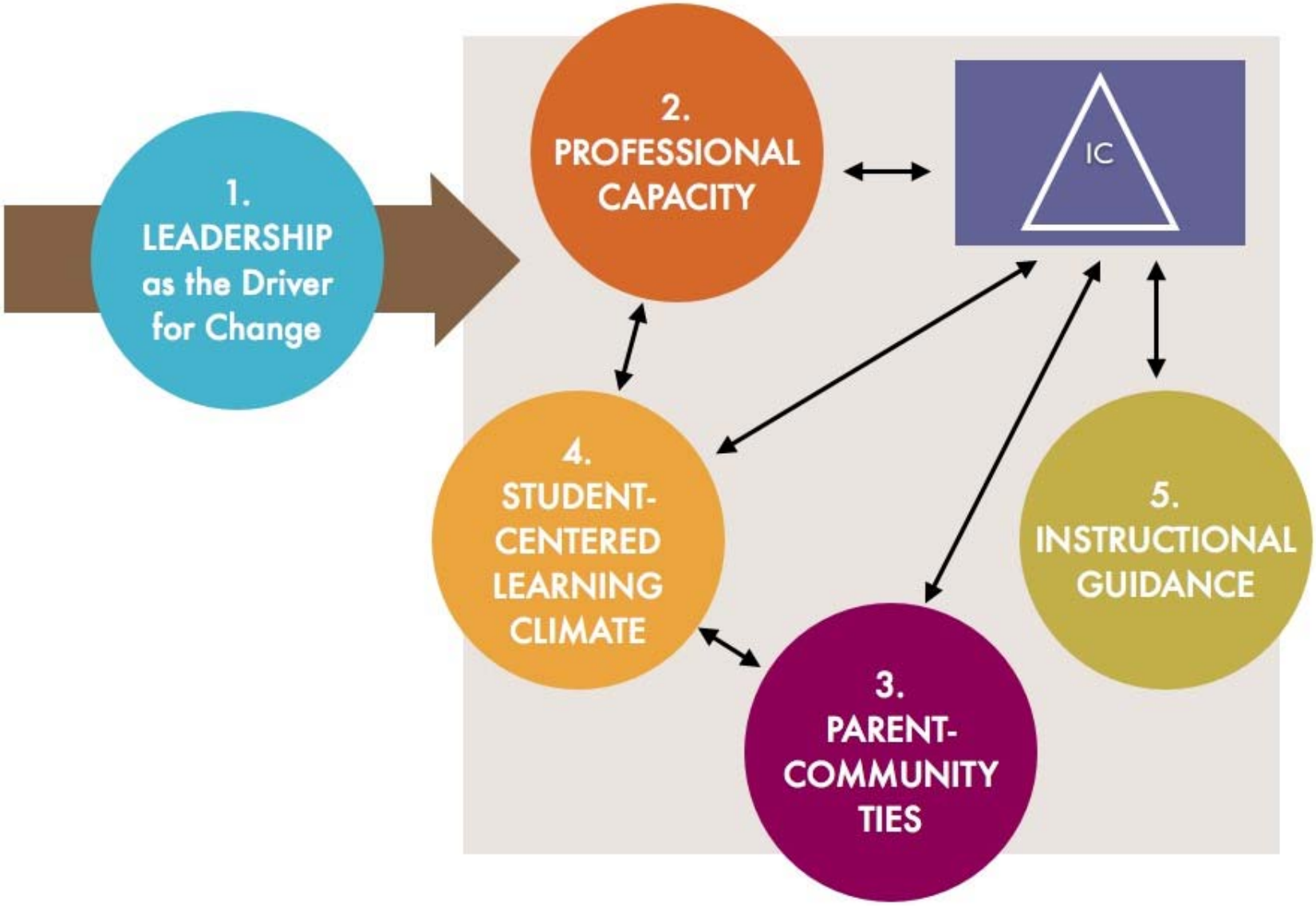
- Upgraded facilities
- Leadership development opportunities for families and staff
- Wraparound supports
- Afterschool programming
- Access to “funds of knowledge” from the community
- Opportunities for organizational transformation

Organizing Schools for Improvement (2010)



FIVE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research



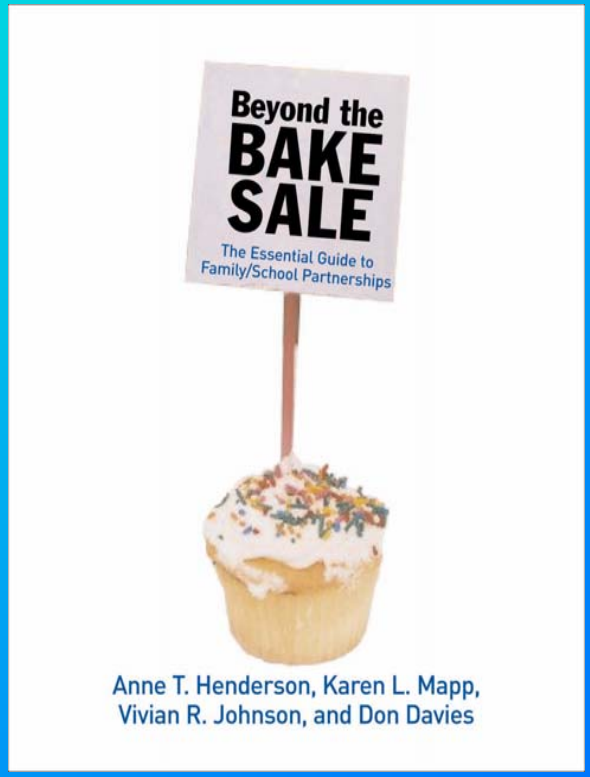
What does an Effective Partnership School Look Like?

Beyond the Bake Sale

The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships

Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson and Don Davies

The New Press, 2007



Fortress School (Below Basic)

- “Parents don’t care about their children’s education, and they are the main reason the kid’s are failing”

- “Parents don’t come to conferences, no matter what we do”
- Principal picks a small group of “cooperative parents” to help out
- “We’re teachers, not social workers”
- “Curriculum and standards are too advanced for these parents”

Come-if-we-call School (Basic)

- Parents are told what students will be learning at the fall open house

- Workshops are planned by staff
- Families can visit school on report card pickup day
- Parents call the office to get teacher-recorded messages about homework

Open-Door School (Proficient)

- Parent-teacher conferences are held at least twice a year
- There is an “Action Team” for family engagement

- School holds parent events three or four times a year
- Parents can raise issues at PTA meetings or see the principal
- Diversity of families is recognized through multicultural nights are held once a year

Partnership School (Advanced)

- Families are seen as partners in improving educational outcomes

- All family activities are connected to student learning
- There is a clear, open process for resolving problems
- Parent networks are valued and cultivated
- Families are actively involved in decisions on school improvement
- Staff conduct relationship-building home visits to families

Why has it been difficult to cultivate and sustain effective family-community-school partnerships that support student achievement and school improvement?

The various stakeholders (parents, community members, school leaders, and school staff) have not had the opportunity to develop the collective *capacity* to engage in effective partnerships.

What is *capacity*?

- Connections – social capital, the internal and external relationships and the strength and structure of those connections
- Capabilities – the specific types of human capital, skills knowledge and know-how
- Confidence – the types of individual self - efficacy
- Cognition – beliefs, assumptions and worldviews
  - Higgins (2005)

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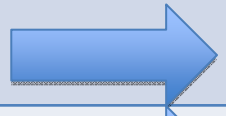
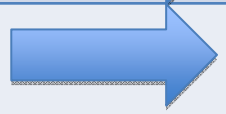
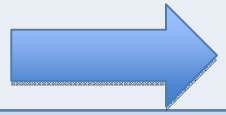
Example: Title One, section 1118 requirement for families to be engaged, with district/school staff, in the development of family engagement policy for districts and schools.

Where do we start?

Requires a paradigm shift:

From seeing parents and community members as a part of the problem to seeing them as a part of the solution.

Build the capacity to shift:

From		To
Focus on programs		Focus on relationships
Deficit-based and adversarial		Strengths-based and collaborative
Random acts		Systemic
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
Compliance driven		Learning and outcomes driven
Service		Developmental
One-time project		Sustained

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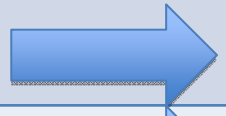
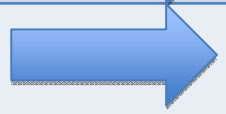
Random acts		Systemic
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
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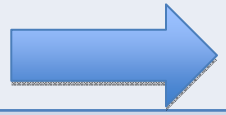
Service		Developmental
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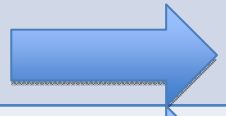
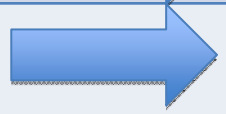
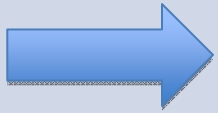
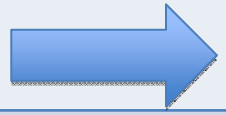
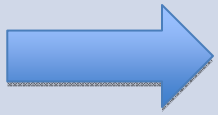
Random acts		Systemic
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
Compliance driven		Learning and outcomes driven
Service		Developmental
One-time project		Sustained

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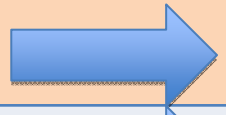
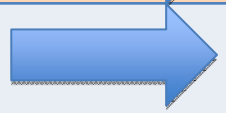
Random acts		Systemic
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
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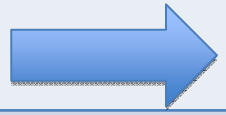
Service		Developmental
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Systemic Family Engagement

- Focused on improving the core enterprise and is linked to learning and development
- Aligned and coherent with the overall whole school improvement goals
- Inclusive of various stakeholders in the community
- Integrated across the system and not “stand alone” or “boutique” projects
- Attempting to shift school structures and cultures to share power and resources with stakeholders, especially families.

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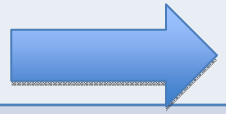
Deficit-based and adversarial		Strengths-based and collaborative
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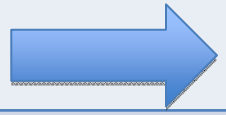
Service		Developmental
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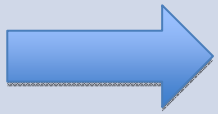
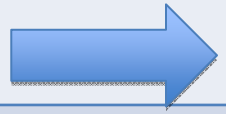
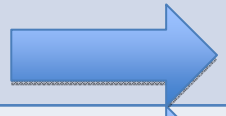
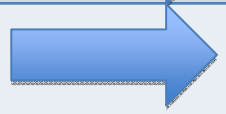
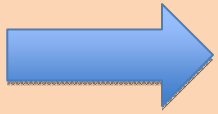
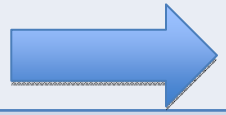
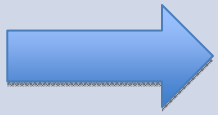
Focus on programs		Focus on relationships
Deficit-based and adversarial		Strengths-based and collaborative
Random acts		Systemic
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
Compliance driven		Learning and outcomes driven
Service		Developmental
One-time project		Sustained

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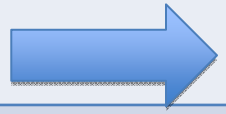
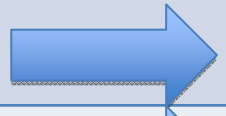
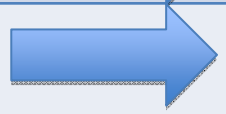
Deficit-based and adversarial		Strengths-based and collaborative
Random acts		Systemic
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
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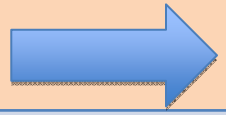
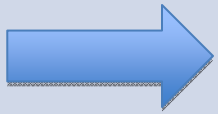
Service		Developmental
One-time project		Sustained

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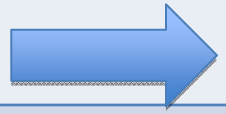
Deficit-based and adversarial		Strengths-based and collaborative
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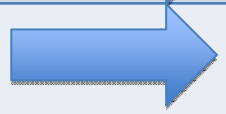
Individual		Collaborative/shared responsibility
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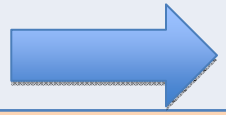
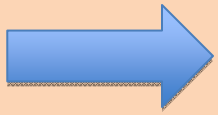
Service		Developmental
One-time project		Sustained

Example
Stanton Elementary School

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Q and A

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