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Challenges in Creating Effective Home-School Partnerships in Adolescence: Promising Paths for Collaboration

Maurice J. Elias, Keli Bryan, Evanthia N. Patrikakou, and Roger P. Weissberg

Abstract

Home-school partnerships for adolescents should extend beyond a focus on school performance issues to a broader set of common concerns for parents and teachers, including helping students forge a positive, constructive identity. After providing an overview of key elements in adolescent identity development, we highlight five critical development needs that comprise essential aspects of positive identities: *appreciation*, *belonging*, *confidence*, *competencies*, and *contribution*. Then we describe four co-occurring processes—*love and caring, laughter, limits*, and *linkages*—that must be kept in balance in order for these outcomes to be achieved. Families and school personnel can keep these processes in balance when both sets of partners work together, each from their own vantage points and strengths. Specific examples of contexts that lend themselves to home-school partnerships include: academics, routine parent-school interactions, everyday parent-child interactions at home, and lifestyle habits. We offer recommendations about ways educators and parents can collaborate with each other in these contexts to benefit young people. As each group reaches out effectively to the other, new

contexts for partnership are likely to be forged, and the challenge to find new and lasting pathways for home-school partnership is likely to be met.

Key Words: school family partnerships, home school relations, parent involvement, adolescents, adolescence, identity formation

Introduction

In a thoughtful compendium, Christenson and Conoley (1992) compiled advice and information about home-school collaboration that is as relevant today as when it was published. Among the findings were some that are relevant to understanding what happens as children move into adolescence, a critical developmental period. Christenson, Rounds, and Franklin (1992) reaffirmed the long-standing observation that parents' involvement falls off dramatically when students enter secondary school; the decline actually seems to begin around fourth grade. This occurs in spite of the fact that students are moving toward coursework and school-linked experiences that are relevant to their career paths, future educational plans, and health risk behaviors such as smoking, substance use, dangerous driving, and poor eating, sleeping, and other lifestyle patterns.

Although parents are less involved in their adolescents' education, they remain generally positive about the job secondary schools are doing. While many parents would like to have better and more frequent communication, and more personalized, less "business-oriented" contact with teachers and other educators, they also recognize that, especially in middle and high schools, the numbers work against that. Most parents trust that schools are doing a good job and that teachers know what they are doing. Thus, one reading of the data would be that reduced parent involvement is not necessarily a cause for concern.

Christenson and Conoley (1992) provided chapters that addressed numerous areas with which schools need to be concerned. These included improvements in the following: problem behaviors; homework completion; overall school discipline; divorce and bereavement; child sexual abuse; parents' relationships with school professionals; and the adaptations necessary as schools address various mixtures and changes in culture, race, ethnicity, diverse family structures, and socioeconomic levels. This list was created before the recent focus on school violence and the complex sequel of September 11, 2001, including continuing concerns and actions related to national security and anti-terrorism abroad. In a concluding chapter, Epstein (1992) pointed out that studies of how parents and schools might work better together in each of these challenging areas, while helpful, are misleading. Programs and efforts may be directed at any one of them, but they

occur in multiples in schools. Epstein issued a call for reconceptualization of how schools are organized, especially with regard to school services, communications, contacts, and relationships with parents.

Epstein's challenges have not been met in a widespread and comprehensive manner in the ensuing decade (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). One reason for this may be that an underlying assumption of many efforts toward school-parent partnership is a focus on making the task of education more successful. As indicated earlier, this does not seem to be an overriding concern for most parents. It seems to be least so at the secondary level. In a survey of 2,000 parents living in low SES neighborhoods, parents indicated they were most interested in workshops about "how to help my child develop his/her special talents" and less interested in workshops on helping children take tests or on disciplining their children (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Under these circumstances, efforts at partnership may reside at a surface level, not really touching deeply the relationships among teachers, students, and parents. While exceptions can always be noted and are easily highlighted in convention presentations, journal articles, books, and news media stories, the prevailing situation is not one of true school-parent partnership. This article attempts to examine what is necessary for restructuring the roles and relationships among parents and school personnel in order to achieve more meaningful partnerships. In this case, the focus must be on how schools and parents relate to one another, particularly in a sustained way, as children reach the teen years. An emphasis is placed on the common interests of both partners and the further need for these partners to be co-conspirators against societal forces that undermine their individual and collective efforts.

Finding a Positive, Constructive Identity: The Foremost Task of Adolescence

Virtually every teenager is walking around looking for answers to these questions about him- or herself:
- How can I understand who I am now and who I will be in the future?
- How can I nurture and build positive relationships?
- How can I develop skills to handle everyday challenges, problems, decisions, and choices?
- How can I develop to be a moral, ethical, active, committed human being?
- How can I develop a positive, constructive identity?

The development of an identity is the product of teens' ongoing interactions within the social ecological environment, as well as the history of those interactions. Belsky (1984), adopting Bronfenbrenner's (1979) basic model of the ecology of

development, recognizes that the role of parents, though important, is embedded within an array of forces influencing who teenagers want to become and what identities they will adopt seriously. From this perspective, parents are losing ground as primary sources of influence over their children and thus actually need greater partnership with schools, which are also suffering from increased competition for the minds and hearts of students.

Whatever difficulties befall home and school with regard to teen influence is amplified in contexts of disadvantage. Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, and Coll (2001) undertook an important study of the contributions of home environments of children to various aspects of their behavioral development. Using five samples from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth over 10 years, they found that conditions varied quite a bit as a function of ethnicity and poverty but that what mattered to children did not show the same degree of variability. What mattered most for children's language, academic, and social development, including prevention of problem behaviors, was the extent to which learning was stimulated in the home. Another important factor was maternal teaching. As the authors noted, "the amount that mothers teach their children reflects their own educational level" (Bradley et al., p. 1880). There are many other findings in this comprehensive study and the authors are clear to note that "parental influence is not simple and straightforward. Rather, it appears to be highly complex and differentiated" (Bradley et al., p. 1882). They also comment that children's experiences across multiple ecologies must be understood in dynamic interaction. Their sophisticated work belies simple notions of school-parent partnership. But more to the point, their work makes clear that in the absence of coherent influence from school and parents, many children, especially those living in poverty, will be open to the "siren song" of consumer culture. They will find their achievements and life accomplishments attenuated in ways that no number of bake sales or ski trips is likely to make up.

Against this backdrop of competition and divergence, home-school partnerships require redefinition and strengthening. The word "partner" has many meanings. One that seems apt in the current context is "co-conspirator." The school and home are co-conspirators in the development of a healthy adolescent identity. That identity involves ensuring that our children are prepared for positive and constructive roles as family members, students, members of peer groups, members of workplaces, involved community residents, and citizens of our democracy. Neither home nor school has the capacity or knowledge to independently and singly carry out the task. The influences on youth today are powerful and complex and generate a corresponding imperative for home-school partnerships to be founded on enduring issues of common ground.

It is necessary to reconceptualize the basis upon which home-school partnerships can be forged. Approaches that look at partnerships too one-sidedly and

outside of their social-ecological and developmental context are likely to be mis-directed and limited in their accomplishments. From an ecological point of view, home and school share important common ground: the goal of helping children develop constructive identities that will prepare them for the various roles they will assume as adults. Partnerships based on this common ground draw upon enduring concerns on the part of all involved—including the youth.

The following section outlines five critical development needs that comprise essential aspects of positive identities: *appreciation*, *belonging*, *confidence*, *competencies*, and *contribution*.

What Teens Need On the Road Through Adolescence

If adolescence is viewed as a journey or a passage between childhood and adulthood, then all along the journey, teens are considering their experiences against a backdrop of questions related to their emerging sense of identity: "Who Am I?" and "What Can I Become?" The road is quite congested, the routes are not clearly marked, and there are dead ends and detours galore. To the extent that home and school are working together to guide teenagers on this journey, teens are more likely to be successful in navigating the complex ecological terrain they face.

In the absence of the dual controls that driving instructors have, parents and educators need a common roadmap with a set of guideposts they can use to help teens find their way when their journeys seem overwhelming. These guideposts represent enduring, basic elements of positive identity, drawn from work in social-emotional learning, reclaiming at-risk youth, and adolescent development: appreciation, belonging, confidence and competencies, and contributions (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 2002; Kessler, 2000).

Appreciation

Parents and educators need to be aware of teenagers' cherished talents. Often these can be seen in their hobbies, although sometimes they are hard to discern because these talents are displayed mainly in the privacy of their rooms or with trusted friends. Interestingly, either the home or the school usually knows about teens' talents and is surprised when informed about them by the other. It might be math, science, languages, writing, computers, creating media, art, music, getting along with other people, sports, dance, outdoor activities . . . the list is endless. Howard Gardner's (1993) concept of "multiple intelligences" refers to the range of talents that children have; their future identities are strengthened when they have positive outlets to express and develop these talents. Giving teens a chance to

discover and develop their talents sometimes leads to dead ends, but other times such efforts can make a life-changing difference.

These talents become centerpieces for helping teenagers feel appreciated. Certainly, this is one outcome when adults show them love and share laughter. The sense of appreciation, of celebration, is an essential part of our teens' lives. It is something they need in order to venture out into the world and try out identities with confidence. Homes that are characterized by frequent expressions of appreciation to teens are places where strong family ties are found (Greeff & Le Roux, 1999). Importantly, parents and educators need to also show appreciation for both significant accomplishments and for smaller efforts on the part of teens, including "doing what they are supposed to do" (Fuligni, 2002). They, like the adults who work with and care about them, are not immune to the power of routine recognition. As a result, adolescents develop their talents best when they can depend on parents for support and as a foundation to test new skills (Chikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993).

Belonging

Teens need groups to belong to (Blai, 1989). Cottrell (1976) was among the first to show clearly that this serves as their motivation to join gangs. Teens are looking for places where they have a role or a purpose, somewhere to find positive peer relationships and be with others who have similar interests or abilities, can learn things, have inspiring leadership, and feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. This is what Sarason (1977) and others refer to as a "sense of community," and as one of the transcendent needs of human beings. It is what in the past was associated with positive, proximal extended families and close, caring neighborhoods (Dalton, Wandersman, & Elias, 2000). These needs do not have to be met only by families and neighborhoods. There are other organizations that can serve well, such as clubs, teams, youth groups, and community organizations. Through building bridges, creating linkages, and providing positive guidance, parents and educators can help teens have that sense of belonging that tells them, in part, who they are and perhaps who they want to become.

Competencies and Confidence

The common notion that adolescence is about independence and autonomy is at best simplistic and anachronistic. Teens live in a complex and interdependent world. In any practical sense, there is no true independence and autonomy; realizing this paves the way for greater common action by parents and educators on behalf of teens (Elias et al., 2002).

Given that teens must be prepared to live lives of synergy and interdependence,

they will need competencies to allow them to deal with a range of possible opportunities. These include the skills of social-emotional learning and emotional intelligence, in order to have the balance of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that are needed to manage effectively and sensitively in the world (Ciarrochi, Forgas, & Mayer, 2001; Elias et al., 1997; Elias et al., 2002). Parents and educators need to look for opportunities to build the following skills among children, and especially teens:

- how to recognize and label their feelings and those of others;
- how to manage their own strong feelings, often so that they can carry out essential responsibilities;
- how to set goals and plan, both long and short term;
- how to work in groups as team players and as leaders;
- how to build positive relationships with many different kinds of people;
- how to be a thoughtful problem solver and decision maker; and
- how to bounce back from the roadblocks that one faces.

Teenagers develop these competencies from a combination of formal instruction; supportive services in schools; modeling of parents and educators; constructive interactional contexts with peers and adults in formal and informal groups; community service opportunities; spiritual contexts; intensive, positively guided youth group experiences; inspiring, memorable, and enjoyable interaction with extended family; and other ecological influences. As *competencies* develop, *confidence* follows. And confidence allows teenagers to try new areas of possible identity, to take positive risks, to stretch themselves, and to expand their competencies. When these efforts are surrounded by a stable set of supportive relationships, setbacks are not devastating. Catastrophizing can be limited when teens' strengths are continuously held up for them to see.

Contribution

For teens, the area of contribution is perhaps the most crucial to their pathway to identity. It is the counterpoise to the self-oriented, hectic, consumption-focused values of the larger society. Feeling a sense of contribution, selflessness, and generosity is essential for healthy identity development in teenagers (Brendtro et al., 1990; Kessler, 2000; Whyte, 2000). Teens' tendency toward being self-centered is better framed by understanding that the teen years are so much about self-discovery. Teens thrive on helping and making contributions to causes: saving the environment, helping senior citizens, teaching what they know to younger children, being mentors to needier kids, working in soup kitchens, helping in political campaigns, raising funds for people who are suffering, and helping their religious institutions reach their charitable goals. Making contributions and feeling like a contributing

member of groups to which one belongs and cares about are key parts of being a well-balanced, caring person (Muscott, 2000). Further, teenagers are motivated to develop their competencies in the service of making contributions.

Because contributions are so important to adolescents as an arena for home and school partnerships, several areas are explicated below. It is in the best interest of both parents and educators to promote each of the following:

Contributions to the Household. Teens may not seem to have enough time for their schoolwork, special projects, and sleep, but parents do them no favors when they shield them from their responsibilities. Part of their responsibility is to make contributions to their household. Everyone must, and teenagers are not exceptions. Contributions—which can be a positive way of reframing chores—help teens feel good about what they are doing and about themselves. Contributions are a way of giving and showing love. Without opportunities to make contributions to the family, teens are being denied chances to grow both in that area and in learning responsibility (Fuligni, 2002; Taylor et al., 1997).

Contributions to One's School and Community. Marian Wright Edelman, child advocate and educator, has been known to say that "Service is the rent each of us pays for living." There is much to contemplate in these wise words. How does this get put into action? In *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Elias et al., 1997), members of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (www.CASEL.org) reported on a visit to a high school in Rhode Island. At that school, any student who wanted to be a member of a sports team, varsity or intramural, had to develop and sign a contract that stated 3 goals in each of 3 areas: How will you improve yourself in your sport? How will you improve your team? How will you improve your school or community?

CASEL has found that schools can play an important role in fostering a sense of contribution through service (e.g., Muscott, 2000). Preparing our children for roles in a civic society, educating them about the supports that undergird our more visible social institutions, and providing them with the skills needed for socially responsible participation in community life and the engines of our democracy are great and important gifts. There is a growing body of literature on the benefits that accrue to children from well-designed service-learning experiences, as well as an orientation toward being contributing members of their classrooms, schools, families, and communities (McLaughlin, 2000). A further likely benefit from efforts in this regard is better preparation of teenagers for the nature of workplace life, for the give and take involved, the social-emotional learning skills they will need, the importance of being team players and leaders, and other areas that are often overlooked when careers are considered (Cherniss & Golman, 2001; Pasi, 2001).

But families also have a role to play because of the power of parental modeling. Many families do take seriously their responsibilities for charitable giving. But

too often, parents write and mail checks with little or no comment, and in other ways shield their teenagers from the details of their philanthropic and service lives. Adults need to take advantage of opportunities to help teens (as well as younger children) develop a sense of contribution.

A report put out in 1997 by the Council of Chief State School Officers, on behalf of themselves and several other groups, gives a clear perspective on the reason why *contributions* are essential for adolescents:

> If we are honest, the deepest reason we educate our children is not just to equip them with the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve economic success and personal satisfaction. We do it to get them in touch with their own humanity. We want them to see themselves in others' eyes, and to feel others as a part of themselves. We want them to stand for something, and to be able to act on the basis of the kind of person they understand themselves to be. We want them to understand that the ills of the world belong to the whole community and that the problems that may be someone else's fault are not always someone else's job. We want them to understand that we all belong to one another (p. 15).

The following section presents four co-occurring processes that must be kept in balance in order for the five critical development needs described above to be fulfilled and for positive outcomes to be achieved. Keeping these processes in balance is a great challenge faced by both parents and schools. Indeed, a key aspect of the partnership is not that each partner keeps the processes in balance but that the processes are kept in balance by both partners working together, each from their own vantage points and strengths.

Common Processes for Home-School Identity Building

In order to build teens' sense of appreciation, belonging, confidence and competence, and contribution, parents and educators can draw on a common set of principles to guide their interactions with adolescents. Keeping these processes in balance is a great challenge faced by both parents and schools. The processes are *love and caring*, *laughter*, *limits*, and *linkages* (Elias et al., 2002).

Love and Caring

Parents and educators need to convey their love and caring in ways that are clear to teenagers. Teaching and parenting that occur outside of the context of a caring relationship will be a source of stress and frustration, and very little effective, last-

ing, positive learning will result. Indeed, advances in emotional intelligence theory make it clear that in the absence of caring relationships, learning is not effective. Teenagers are motivated by their relationship with coaches, teachers, employers, and mentors at least as much as they are by their intrinsic interest in the subject area being conveyed. Caring in the context of relationships is the fuel that drives learning (Wood, 1999). When teens feel the school does not care about them, learning is curtailed and problem behaviors are far more likely.

That being said, families are often the source of teens' most intense caring relationships. The caring of parents, and, hopefully, grandparents, is special when it is accompanied by love. It almost feels odd to have to "make a case" for the importance of love, but what is necessary in parenting now is for parents to reflect very carefully on how they show their love and how they can be sure that their message is getting through.

Key questions for parents and educators to ask are these:

- In what ways is affection and caring shown to teens?
- What happens when teenagers do something special?
- What about participating in an event or competition and doing well, though not winning?
- How are smaller acts of kindness celebrated and recognized within families and schools?
- How are milestone events, special birthdays, holiday gatherings, and participation acknowledged?

How teens feel about themselves is influenced to a large degree by how they perceive parents and educators feel about them (Rosenthal, Peng, & McMilan, 1980). If key adults are perceived as critical and rejecting, children are primed, though not condemned, to grow up thinking they are not good enough and that people will not love them as a result (Dubois, Eitel, & Felner, 2001). This makes perfect sense. If primary socializers and "guides" are treating an adolescent in such a negative way, he or she can reach one of two conclusions: these adults are unreasonable, unfair, or awful; or they are correct. Teens need not be put in such positions.

Teens who have loving and trusting relationships with parents and educators feel more secure. From that feeling of security comes a greater sense of venturesomeness. Venturesomeness is a way of expressing teens' feelings that they are able to go forth and explore, make their mark in the world, find their own path, but still be connected. Why are they connected? Because love and caring are like a lifeline; they strengthen teens' accomplishments and give greater meaning to what they are doing.

Through caring and loving relationships with adults in their lives, teens are more likely to internalize values about how to participate in caring and loving relationships. Teens' relationships with parents and educators help establish their

own sense of identity as worthwhile human beings, give them values by which to guide their lives, and help them to learn how to be with others and form positive attachments. Any teacher who has had a positive return visit from a former student understands well the lifeline that has been created.

Laughter

Laughter is parents' and educators' indispensable tool for coping with all the things that teenagers throw at them. As teenagers try to find themselves, laughter is an alternative to tears or more extreme expressions of adult frustration. "Vintage" garments from the Salvation Army reject pile, jeans worn 14 inches below the waist, purple or orange hair, black nails and all black clothes, hair styles that one is unlikely to find in Vogue or GQ, unauthorized piercings and body art, these and more will challenge adult caregivers and move them to the brink of despair unless a sense of humor is kept at the ready. To the extent to which educators and parents are able to derive pride and joy from things that teens do, they are better able to position themselves for a socially and emotionally healthy relationship with teens.

Limits

A great deal has been written about discipline and limit setting. However, from a broader ecological and developmental perspective, limits are not about restriction as much as they are about focus and direction and boundary setting. The skills that parents, educators, and teens possess in goal setting and problem solving help keep teens on course and turn good ideas into constructive actions. Home and school have shared goals in ensuring that teens have the skills needed for sound problem solving and decision making (Elias & Tobias, 1996).

Linkages

Teenagers need to be contributors more than consumers, and belong more than buy. In a world of increasing complexity and sophistication, parents cannot expect to "do all" and "be all" for their teens. Adults' ability to help teens make healthy connections will be at least as important as things adults do for and with them directly.

Linkages are an important way that parents and educators help teens make the kinds of connections that allow them to develop their talents, make contributions, have a sense of belonging, and build life skills. Parents and educators still serve as primary gatekeepers to a larger world of positive possibility. When parents and schools take a visible and sustained role in creating linkages with opportunities external to themselves and outside the narrow sphere of teen interest as defined by

the mass culture, the vast majority of adolescents respond in positive and enthusiastic ways (Amerikaner, Monks, Wolfe, & Thomas, 1992; Margolin, 2001).

Berreth and Berman (1997) indicate that teenagers have social responsibility and must be prepared to engage the world around them. Love, laughter, limits, and the linkages that provide them with opportunities combine to fuel teens with a sense of appreciation, belonging, competencies and confidence that will enable them to go forth and make contributions to their family, school, neighborhood, and society. Schools thus become essential partners with parents in building healthy, constructive adolescent identities.

Promising Contexts for Home-School Partnerships

Different life tasks and developmental periods provide opportunities for schools and parents to establish common ground and develop new relationships and role definitions. During these circumstances, needs and opportunities are aligned in ways that afford excellent opportunities for genuine partnership. Among the contexts that provide the most promising common ground around which to build positive teen identities are *academic enablers*, *routine parent-school interactions*, *everyday parent-child interactions at home*, *and lifestyle habits*. These are presented next, with specific examples of how parents and schools can work together meaningfully.

Academic Enablers

Mroch, Lang, Elliott, and DiPerna (2002) examined the presence of what they refer to as behaviors that enable academic achievement in samples of general education, learning disabled, and non-handicapped "at risk" populations. Factors such as interpersonal skills, motivation, and study habits all were non-school factors that differentiated general education students from the other groups and are arenas in which parents and schools can work together more closely than is currently the case. While the sample represented 80 districts across 30 states, no breakdown was reported as a function of socioeconomic status. However, such status is clearly linked to issues of motivation, study environment, resources, and context, and skills such as nonviolent conflict resolution.

Partnership implications. Schools and parents have a shared interest in building the skills that will enable better academic performance. These are becoming increasingly identified under the rubric of social-emotional learning skills (Elias et al., 1997). Research has shown how they play an important role in teacher satisfaction and avoidance of attrition and burnout (Arnold, 2002) and the way in which they both influence the social ecology of the classroom and direct learning pro-

cesses (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2003). Similarly, children cannot learn effectively in contexts in which parents have difficulty, there are inadequate outlets for physical release and creativity, teachers are not of high quality, and children do not feel safe (Comer, 2003). These are matters of basic human developmental rights and educators and parents have common ground in advocating for them. As will be noted later, communities also have great interest in these skills, as they form the backbone of effective community service, civic participation, and workplace functioning (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Elias et al., 1997).

Routine Parent-School Interactions

There are a number of naturally occurring opportunities for parents to interact with the schools, and it would seem that partnerships must build on the effectiveness of these. But the data do not give much encouragement about the strength of these potential building blocks. Minke and Anderson (2002; see also Minke, 2000) examined one of the most venerable vehicles for home-school interaction, that is, parent-teacher conferences. What they found was a procedure fraught with stress and inequity, as teachers dominated, parents were passive, and children were absent. To effect improvement, they attempted to redesign these encounters using perspectives derived from home-school collaboration around common goals. They labeled these goals as "CORE," or Connection, Optimism, Respect, and Empowerment. The conference was restructured to begin with written preparation by all participants: teachers, parents, and students list strengths, areas needing improvement, other goals, and questions. At the meeting, the child introduces all participants and then begins the discussion of strengths, moving into other areas. The group makes decisions about priorities for further work, plans are made, a follow-up time is set, and then an evaluation process is outlined so that all parties will know the extent to which progress is made. Following such a process made teachers' perceptions of parents more positive, which certainly fosters more outreach and communication.

Partnership implications. Events that do bring parents and teachers together, such as academic conferences, and also back to school night, performance assemblies, and sporting events, need to be rethought so that needs are met despite the challenge of large numbers of people being together for limited amounts of time. Minke's work suggests that greater satisfaction and willingness to work together follows from personal connection. This is a finding validated in the growing literature on social and emotional learning (Zins et al., 2003). Mass-market meeting opportunities become sources of mutual frustration that leave all parties involved longing for the ending moment and not relishing a reprise.

Everyday Parent-Child Interactions at Home

Galinsky (2001) has provided important insights into the concept of parental involvement with her review of the literature and her study of what children want from parents. Among her findings is that parents overestimate children's desire for more time with them. In fact, while only 10% of children wished to spend more time with their mothers and 15.5% wanted more time with their fathers, more wished that their mothers (34%) and fathers (27.5%) would be less stressed and tired when they interacted with them. Across various questions and indicators, Galinsky (2001) found that children want a balance of quality time and quantity of time. They don't want their parents to be rushed or distracted when they are together. She also found that family traditions and routines and the small moments they engender can often be sources of lasting fond memories and comfort to children. One might say that the link of quantity and quality of time is that quantity of time gives more opportunity for focused moments of genuine connection to take place. However, the latter appear to be of greatest value to children. Older children reported that parents often do not know what they are doing after school. As implied by the concept of linkages, schools partnered with parents can play an important role in keeping track of what children are doing between the end of school and the start of parental supervision. Is this overstepping boundaries? In a caring community of learners, where children are brought together in schools to develop their minds, hearts, and character (Novick, Kress, & Elias, 2002), concern for children does not end when the bell sounds at the end of the day. Recent data on adolescent problem behaviors continues to show that difficulties are greatest between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m., the time of least supervision and diffused responsibility (Newman, Fox, Flynn, & Christeson, 2000). Communities also have a role to play in addressing the collaborations needed to overcome these difficulties.

Partnership implications. Exhausted parents showing up to meetings are not a catalyst for a sound partnership. This is compounded when exhausted educators must give up time with their own families to be at these meetings and find them unproductive. Yet, Galinsky's research also provides a powerful pathway for the home and school agenda to come together: improving the moments of connection when parents and children are together at home. Educators can learn more about the nature of parental work and how that affects routines. This information can be part of meetings that take place early in the school year and can provide insights as to how families will be able to manage homework, study time, and participation in school events. Special services personnel may be able to give parents insights about the importance of transitions in the life of the family. How do parents arrive home from work? What happens during these moments? How are children spoken to, greeted, valued? What and how should parents be informing the school with

regard to significant changes in their households?

Galinsky's (2001) data also reveal an important insight not only for how parents come home from work but how they enter the house after other volunteer activities and even trips to the school. Her point to parents: don't bad mouth where you have just been! When parents do this, children wonder why they are being placed "second" to such awful circumstances. They can come to resent work, evening school meetings, community organizations, and functions when parents come home and blast these settings. Parents need guidance as to how to share their feelings in developmentally appropriate ways. A conversation with a high school student about the problems with the high school parent-teacher meeting must be quite different from a similar talk with a third grader. Yet, in either case, effort must be given to be constructive, clear, and informative, and not simply emotive. Few school or parent groups provide forums in which to share ideas about such discussions.

In the home, other critical transitional moments occur around bedtimes and morning routines. These are periods of the day with tremendous implications for how children will function in school. Parents who are guilty about not spending enough time with children often extend bedtimes, sometimes to the point of conflict as kids' interpretation of when "enough is enough" clashes with their caregivers'. Similarly, getting ready for school can set a positive or negative emotional tone that educators have become skilled at recognizing at children's first appearance before them. How much instructional time is lost trying to get children emotionally attuned to be receptive to classroom instruction (Elias et al., 1997; Salovey & Sluyter, 1998)? How much learning time is lost when instruction proceeds before children are emotionally attuned?

Lifestyle Habits

A related recurring situation where home, school, and community can work together to do better is around children's lifestyle habits and patterns (Hechinger, 1992). These include such areas as smoking, alcohol and steroid use, drug-taking, and eating and nutritional preferences. The latter area, interestingly, is the one that comes up most frequently and contributes greatly to setting a tone of health, self-discipline, and delay of gratification for the teen years. Stressed parents may not have the energy or willingness to battle what might come from trying to direct or restrict children's food consumption. This is especially true late at night and in the hectic moments of morning departure. But the result is no different from taking one's car to be fueled by gasoline that has been ruined with sugar placed in the station's tanks; the car will not work well and eventually will break down. The same happens with children. Poor fueling leads to poor performance.

Partnership implications. Parents need help in managing these situations, but schools also need help in improving things under their control. For example, when considering the problem of adolescent obesity, schools might help by improving their lunch offerings and physical education programs and offering nutrition education for families. Community health and youth agencies might also help in a variety of ways, for instance providing health screenings, nutrition information, and diverse exercise opportunities. Pediatricians also need to place an emphasis on nutrition, offer suggestions, and monitor children who need to improve their eating habits. Many such problems in our society seem to be no one's responsibility; these are ideal arenas for collaboration, as they are clearly not solvable by any one socializing agent. Vehicles to better coordinate all concerned are also needed.

These points can be extrapolated to the other areas as well. Adults often implicitly condone teen smoking and alcohol use, not in the least through selling substances to them inappropriately. But this often happens because the communities of caregivers inside and outside the school are not in sufficiently close partnership around ensuring adolescent health and positive lifestyles. Medical professionals play an important gate-keeping role as allies to parents. Dentists and doctors need to be alert to signs of smoking, other tobacco use, and steroid and other substance use. Screenings can and should be considered part of routine health assessments, especially in adolescence but also in the early teen years as a preventive measure. Finally, we must recognize that the issues become more complicated when there is only one parent in the home, or when the primary caregiver is not the parent, or when grandparents or other older relatives are deeply involved in childrearing. In the final section that follows, we present conclusions and a summary of recommendations of first steps parents and teachers can take toward establishing new forms of partnership.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Mutual Home-School Engagement

Home-school partnerships need to focus on the common goal of building positive adolescent identity. This can be accomplished by attending to the ways in which teens are shown appreciation, helped to find belonging and a sense of community in their school, family, and other constructive settings, given explicit opportunities to learn social-emotional competencies, the chance to develop confidence through enacting those competencies successfully, and encouraged to make contributions to the life of home, school, and community. These common tasks must be accomplished with a balance of love and caring, laughter, limit setting, and provision of linkages so that lack of immediate resources is never an excuse for

curtailing teen accomplishment.

From these basic premises, new forms of home-school partnership will emerge that are likely to be energized and effective. For them to be effective, they must be tailored creatively to respect particular circumstances such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geography. They will represent second order change in that the relationships of parents and educators will change, as will their roles toward one another and toward teens. Interdependence will be recognized as necessary, not optional. Reclaiming positive influence on teenagers is especially likely to occur during times in which they experience particular distress and will find media suggestions least specific and comforting. During such times, learning cannot occur effectively. Yet, it is not the responsibility of home or school to solve or address these problems. It is the genuine arena of home-school partnership. Recognizing that the first steps along the path of new partnerships can be tentative, we present below ways in which either educators or parents can reach out to initiate new forms of mutual school-home engagement.

How Educators Can Engage Parents for Genuine Partnerships

- Change middle and high school handbooks so that they emphasize the positive, identity-building opportunities awaiting students when they enter. Feature interviews and stories with graduates. Place less emphasis on disciplinary infractions, but do present school rules that contribute to the positive identity of the school.
- Develop positive feedback systems to show appreciation of social-emotional intelligence, small amounts of progress, and academic success. Make progress reports about progress of all kinds, and change report cards to include indicators of life skills that parents will understand and appreciate.
- Provide parents with multimedia-formatted guidance with regard to how parents should support at home the work of the school.
- Create forums for dialogue about cultural and ethnic differences; create networks of parent liaisons comprised of educators, parents, and community residents who can help new families of different ethnic groups adapt to the neighborhood.
- Set up opportunities for community service and more meaningful, widely participatory student government. Publicize what happens in these contexts so parents can see what the school is doing in these regards and also gain a better understanding of the interests and competencies of their teenagers.
- Provide forums for parent discussion and mutual support around the various developmental issues, familial stressors, and parent-child communication concerns that can be expected during the adolescent years.

How Parents Can Engage Educators for Genuine Partnerships

Similarly, there are ways that parents can signal, and be helped to signal, a willingness to change the way they relate to the schools in the interest of their teens' positive identity development:

- Indicate an interest in changing the format of back to school night and parent-teacher conferences into events with more meaningful opportunities to build relationships and gain a genuine understanding of how the school functions.
- Change the focus of parent-teacher or home-school association meetings to provide more forums for parent support around issues of adolescent identity development and meeting teens' needs as noted above.
- Ask the guidance department to work with parents more proactively around issues of colleges and careers, to help teens better appreciate the linkage of their present academic and extracurricular opportunities to their future options and dreams.
- Work to develop feasible systems of communication that do not overload educators yet allow for responsiveness to parental concerns on a non-emergency basis.

With coordinated and consistent adult support, the strong emotions, negative influences, and many challenges of the teen years will neither hold adolescents back nor misdirect them. Teen learning, aspirations, and identities can then be more likely to soar into adult accomplishments.

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