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Improving schools starts with the leaders and teachers

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School improvement expert Daniel Duke says the focus of school improvement has to be on the people rather than the structure of a school.

Joyce Epstein discusses her work at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

A South Carolina elementary school spearheads a parental-involvement initiative to increase student learning and achievement.

Charter schools are gaining popularity and building a solid reputation for turning out highly successful and motivated students.

Educators and teenagers discuss the role parental involvement plays in high school students’ academic success.

How one South Carolina principal’s leadership transformed a struggling high school.

Two College of Charleston professors design a special writing program just for girls to help develop their sense of self-esteem.
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Marion Brown, a teacher at Baptist Hill High School, looks forward to a winning academic season.

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Partnerships in Education is published annually by the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education at the College of Charleston.

Visit our website:
http://partnerships.cofc.edu/
Welcome to the second issue of our Partnerships in Education magazine that is published yearly by the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education. Housed in the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance at the College of Charleston, the Center works collaboratively with schools to improve student outcomes. It includes three strands: Teaching and Learning, Community Outreach, and Research. Besides working with low-performing schools and publishing a magazine, the Center sponsors community-wide educational events and a yearly school improvement conference.

Partnerships are expanding nationally and in our own backyard. We are pleased to be connecting with other partnerships like Johns Hopkins, University of Pennsylvania, and Foundations, Inc. that are improving the educational opportunities of children throughout the United States. Involvement in our partnership is campus-wide. Departments like Mathematics, English, and Theatre have provided support, resources, and expertise at our school sites.

Partnering to improve education in South Carolina is particularly important since our state is one of the lowest in high school completion and SAT scores. We have seen positive results at our school partnership sites over the past year. For example, Burke High School has reduced its drop-out rate and increased its state report card rating. Memminger Elementary School has added a parent educator based on the Center’s parent survey results. The Acceleration Program at James Island Middle School had 34 out of 37 overage students complete two grades in one last year. In addition, Baptist Hill High School, our new partnership site, has already made great gains under the leadership of principal James Winbush.

Enjoy reading this issue of our magazine, and please be sure to contact us with your comments about this issue and future ideas. I can be reached at welchf@cofc.edu.

FRANCES C. WELCH

The focus for this issue of Partnerships in Education is school improvement. Within this broad theme we have developed eight articles that center on educators who have made a difference in improving schools, students who have participated and benefited from the school improvement activities, and models that support school improvement.

College of Charleston professors Virginia Bartel, Faye Hicks-Townes, and Mutindi Ndunda are highlighted in this issue. Their areas of expertise are early childhood education, English education, and mathematics and technology education, respectively. Derrick Chau, principal of a charter school in Los Angeles, California, describes the development of a charter math and science high school located on a college campus. Nationally known education researchers and reformers Joyce Epstein (school and family partnerships) and Daniel Duke (school improvement, personnel evaluation) are featured in separate articles. Nathaniel Bryan, a local Charleston school administrator, writes about involving parents in high school, certainly a challenging task! Finally, James Winbush, principal of Baptist Hill High School, describes how he is transforming a low-performing high school into an institution where the students are learning that through hard work and dedication, they can achieve success.

We welcome your information about partnerships across the United States and your school improvement success stories. Remember that school improvement is a collaborative venture and that we learn from one another. My e-mail address is egelsonp@cofc.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

PAULA E. EGELSON
GOALS OF THE CENTER FOR PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

The Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE) is a consortium of educators, school districts, business and civic leaders, and communities collaborating to strengthen the educational outcomes of students in South Carolina. Located in the College of Charleston’s School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, it was established in 2005 to address improvement of PreK–12 education in South Carolina. There are three strands associated with the partnership—Teaching and Learning (staffed by College of Charleston professors), Research, and Community Outreach.

The Center for Partnerships’ goals are to:

- Improve performance and reduce the drop-out rates of students
- Increase enrollment of minority and low-income students in institutions of higher learning
- Prepare youth for employment in the 21st century workforce
- Re-engage disaffected students in education
- Educate teacher candidates to work effectively in low-performing schools and to seek employment in such schools
- Establish expectations, incentives, and professional development for teachers to make a long-term commitment to work in low-performing schools
- Improve understanding in higher education and businesses of the issues limiting urban and rural students’ futures and identify ways to address these issues

The Center for Partnerships’ model is being implemented in the Charleston County School District and will eventually be disseminated for use in low-performing rural and urban schools across South Carolina.

We welcome your inquiries. For more information on the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education, call us or visit our website.

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COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY:
Improving schools starts with the leaders and teachers

BY PAULA EGELSON

The path to becoming a national expert in the area of school improvement has been a fascinating and rewarding one for Daniel Duke, currently a professor and the Research Director for the Darden-Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia. When pursuing his undergraduate degree at Yale in the 1960s, Duke had planned to become an African-American historian. Duke was set to travel to Uganda to study when a coup took place. So, instead, he went to Philadelphia to develop an African-American studies program. While there he worked as a ninth- and tenth-grade teacher in the Teacher Corps program. He then studied to become a school administrator at State University of New York-Albany and, subsequently, worked as a high school administrator. At Stanford and Lewis and Clark College he worked as a professor in educational leadership programs, getting his first taste of school-improvement work.

Duke eventually made his way back to the east coast, and now he works as an educational leadership professor and research director for a unique partnership between the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration and the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. He has published widely in the areas of accountability, leadership, school improvement, and personnel evaluation.

“School improvement work is an exciting venture,” states Duke. The center in which he is currently involved prepares school turnaround specialists and works to improve alignment between state departments of education and school systems. The Partnership for Leaders in Education provides advanced training in best business and best education practices for educators committed to improving low-performing schools. In recent years, Duke’s research has focused on the conditions that need to be changed to raise student achievement.

In thinking about his school improvement work, Duke remarks that he used to focus on structurally changing schools because it was safer. Today he realizes that the focus of school improvement has to be on people, starting with the leaders and including all faculty and staff members.

“The focus of school improvement has to be on people, starting with the leaders and including all faculty and staff members. There is no substitute for people changing their practice,” notes Duke. “People must be able to honestly examine their own practice and make changes accordingly, or be prepared to leave the profession.”
Collaboration among educators is an integral part of school improvement. Duke says that educators can participate regularly in various types of collaboration, including curriculum alignment, vertical and horizontal curriculum collaboration, and student-progress evaluation. Collaboration requires effort, and collaborative meetings have to be both efficient and effective and include a targeted course of action. Duke says he’s not willing to invest a great deal of effort in teachers who are unenthusiastic or disengaged.

“Schools do not exist for the purpose of motivating educators to improve,” insists Duke. “They exist to prepare the next generation of citizens.” School decline is Duke’s latest research interest. He maintains that very little is known about the process by which effective schools decline. He speculates that decline is a function of failure to respond adequately to various challenges, including demographic changes, budget problems, personnel turnover, and leadership succession. When it comes to turning around a school in decline, Duke asserts that the actions required to reverse a pattern of low performance are likely to be different from the actions needed to sustain school improvement over time.

Given that public education today revolves around the No Child Left Behind Act and the corresponding state accountability systems, it is necessary for educators to move from accountability based solely on individual performance to systems of collective accountability. Educators must adjust to working together in ways that they rarely have worked in the past. Looking to the future, Duke wonders what will happen in 2014, when all students presumably will be proficient in all subjects, at least according to No Child Left Behind. Though he doubts this lofty goal will be achieved, even if it is, he is certain that inequities won’t have been eliminated. Parents don’t send their children to school to do “just as well” as other children, he notes. Duke hopes that educators will be prepared to offer an alternative to No Child Left Behind by 2014. His preference would be a more “customized” education for every child, one that recognizes the values of diversity and creativity.

Duke believes that school leaders of the future will need to be less of the problem solver and more of a designer of learning environments. Becoming a designer of learning environments, however, requires that school leaders know much more about how people learn than currently is the case.

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RESEARCH-BASED CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPROVING LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

- **ASSISTANCE.** Students who experienced problems with learning content that was required promptly received assistance.
- **COLLABORATION.** Teachers were expected to work together at various levels to plan how to cover required curriculum content, monitor student progress, and provide assistance to struggling students.
- **DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING.** Data on student achievement were used on a regular basis to make decisions regarding resource allocation, student needs, teacher effectiveness, and other matters.
- **LEADERSHIP.** The actions of principals and teacher leaders set the tone for the school-improvement process.
- **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.** Aspects of school organization—including roles, teams, and planning processes—were adjusted to support efforts to raise student achievement.
- **STAFF DEVELOPMENT.** Teachers received training on a continuing basis to support and sustain school-improvement efforts.
- **ALIGNMENT.** Tests were aligned with curriculum content, and curriculum content was aligned with instruction.
- **ASSESSMENT.** Students were assessed on a regular basis to determine their progress in learning required content.
- **HIGH EXPECTATIONS.** Teachers insisted that students were capable of doing high-quality academic work.
- **PARENT INVOLVEMENT.** School personnel reached out to parents to keep them apprised of their children’s progress and to enlist them in supporting school improvement efforts.
- **SCHEDULING.** Adjustments were made in the daily schedule to increase time for academic work, especially in reading and mathematics.

Families, students, and teachers all seem to agree on one thing: they need one another. They realize that collaboration and communication are essential elements to a student’s academic success. Despite this realization, very often collaboration and communication among all parties stall, or, perhaps, never get started in the first place because no one is sure where to begin or how to sustain partnerships.

Thanks to years of research, coupled with a great deal passion for helping students succeed, Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, has learned what it takes to build and maintain school, family, and community partnerships.

THE FAMILY/SCHOOL CONTEXT
Epstein received her Master’s Degree in Human Development from Harvard and then launched her career as a teacher of elementary and middle grades. After six years in the classroom and with a better understanding of schools, teaching, and learning, Epstein went to Johns Hopkins University to earn her Ph.D. in sociology.

At first, her graduate work involved studying children’s attitudes toward school and peer-group formation and effects in elementary, middle, and high schools. But later her focus shifted to family/school partnerships. Epstein wanted to build on the existing research to understand better how family contexts and school contexts could work together to improve student success. She also wanted to know how best to create more equitable family and community involvement as students progressed from the elementary to the secondary level, as well as how to involve families from diverse educational, racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS
Based on years of research and work with educators and families, Epstein developed a framework outlining six types of involvement that can guide the development of comprehensive programs of partnerships (see sidebar on page 10).

Epstein and her colleagues found that there are key structures for developing effective partnership programs, starting with an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at each school. The ATP includes at least one administrator, three teachers from different grade levels, and three parents with children in different grades. Others, including community partners, may be added. The ATP is critical in writing plans, implementing activities, evaluating progress, and sustaining a comprehensive program of partnerships that includes all six types of involvement.

In 1996 Epstein created the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. NNPS provides state, district, and school leaders with research-based tools and ongoing guidance to help implement and sustain comprehensive school, family, and community partnerships. NNPS also enables educators, families, and researchers to learn from one another to improve and enhance school, family, and community involvement.

Any school, district, or state department of education interested in learning how to frame comprehensive and goal-oriented partnership programs is invited to join the network. For the 2007–2008 school year, more than 1,000 schools, 140 districts, 21 states, and 50 organizations are active members of NNPS. (Check out the interactive website at www.partnershipschools.org.)
THE TEAM APPROACH IN ACTION
In recent years, five districts in South Carolina, along with 40 of their schools, joined NNPS to develop or strengthen their partnership programs using the NNPS approaches. One organization that joined is the Francis Marion University Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty (COE), located in Florence, South Carolina.

“We act as kind of a mega-district to provide financial resources, training, and support to the 11 partner districts we work with,” explains Markey Bee, project manager at COE. “Our role is to facilitate the six types of involvement that Epstein outlines.”

COE joined the NNPS because one of the center’s five major goals is to “equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with parents and community resources.” NNPS has helped successfully guide the districts toward their goals. Since joining NNPS, Bee has witnessed an increase in the degree to which the community is willing to be a part of the school—not just by giving financially but also by serving on action teams and in decision-making roles.

“I think attitudes are changing,” says Bee. “People are starting to really view this as a partnership as opposed to feeling forced to do something alone.”

“The following are a few other unique activities South Carolina schools in NNPS have tried in an effort to involve families.

- **Delmae Elementary School, Florence, South Carolina**—SMART (Science, Math, and Relevant Technology) Night involved having parents move through various stations around the school building in order to participate in math and science activities with their children.
- **Rains Centenary Elementary School, Mullins, South Carolina**—Celebrity Reading Night included local news anchors, college basketball and football players, disc jockeys, pastors, and cheerleaders, among others. While the celebrities read their favorite children’s books to the students, parents attended workshops on helping their children read at home.
- **Wallace Gregg Elementary School, Florence, South Carolina**—Teachers and administrators surprised parents with a Drive-Through Breakfast of muffins and juice as parents dropped their children at school; a bookmark with tips on how to help students with their homework; and other information on strategies for parental involvement.
- **Ballentine Elementary School, Irmo, South Carolina**—During the Caring Hands for the Caring Tree project, the school invited parents to describe their children’s acts of kindness by recording them on a form shaped like a handprint, which read, “My child, (name)_____, showed caring when (example)______.” Then each handprint was hung on the Caring Tree at school.

“These examples indicate that the schools are using teamwork to involve families and the community in ways that focus on several school goals for student success,” says Epstein. (See Promising Partnership Practices disseminated by NNPS each year and on the website in the Success Stories section.)

GETTING ORGANIZED
What makes Epstein’s approach to the school, family, and community partnership different can be summed up in one word: organization. Without having an organized program in place, schools often conduct sporadic activities to engage parents here and there without a clue of what’s next. Practices are rarely evaluated or improved from year to year. As a result, continuity and momentum are lost.

To further complicate matters, as students graduate and move on to the next grade level, new parents join the mix. Without defining how to organize activities, schedules, plans, programs, and outreach in feasible ways, educators in busy school systems will feel overwhelmed by the need for parental involvement. However, having a structured team or committee linked to the school council and written plans that
connect directly with the school-improvement plan ensures an ongoing program and a seamless transition from one group of parents to the next. With a districtwide approach to partnerships, families have the information they need as their children move from one school to the next. As Epstein notes, “Typically, when educators and parents see that these connections can be defined and planned as an official part of the school program, they get on board 100 percent.”

**EVALUATING THE WORK**

Many family-involvement programs also lack an evaluative component. The fact is that in partnerships, as in all school reform, the only way to make progress is to evaluate the year’s work and then figure out how to improve the next year. Epstein says, “This component is crucial in creating—and sustaining—a successful school, family, and community partnership.”

**EPSTEIN’S FRAMEWORK OF SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT FOR COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMS OF PARTNERSHIP**

ALL SCHOOLS CAN USE THE RESEARCH-GENERATED FRAMEWORK OF SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS.

- **TYPE 1. PARENTING:** Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families’ backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.

- **TYPE 2. COMMUNICATING:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress in varied, clear, and productive ways. Create two-way communication channels from school-to-home and from home-to-schools so that families can easily communicate with teachers, administrators, counselors, and other families.

- **TYPE 3. VOLUNTEERING:** Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with regular and occasional volunteers who assist and support students and the school.

- **TYPE 4. LEARNING AT HOME:** Involve families with their children in academic learning activities at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities and decisions. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting work and ideas with family members.

- **TYPE 5. DECISION MAKING:** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, PTA/PTO, and other parent organizations. Assist family and teacher representatives to obtain information from and give information to those they represent.

- **TYPE 6. COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY:** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, colleges or universities, and other community groups. Enable students, staff members, and families to contribute their service to the community.

Schools may choose from hundreds of practices to represent the six types of involvement and to meet specific school improvement goals. Each type of involvement has explicit challenges that must be met to turn an ordinary program into an excellent one. For more information, see www.partnershipschools.org for the NNPS Model and Success Stories from members of NNPS.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR CHILD’S EDUCATION:
How one inner city school promotes parental involvement

BY PAULA EGELSON

LOCATED NEAR THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON IN Charleston, South Carolina’s downtown peninsula, Memminger Elementary School is a PreK–6th grade school with a fascinating history. Memminger Normal School opened in 1857 as an all-girls school; its mission was to train teachers. It became Memminger High School for girls in 1934. By 1954 a new building had been constructed and it was transformed into Memminger Elementary School.

Before integration in the 1960s, the Memminger enrollment was entirely white. Immediately after integration, the student population was 50% white and 50% African-American. Today Memminger serves 325 students and is 97% African-American with 91% of its students on free and reduced lunch. It draws its students from across the peninsula with a third of its students coming from the housing project across the street. A lack of parental involvement is an issue that the school has struggled with for years.

In the 1970s Memminger and the College of Charleston developed a partnership, which has been sustained ever since. Current College of Charleston-Memminger partnership activities include a schoolwide family community history project, the opportunity to participate in career mentoring projects, and the formation of teaching-learning teams that support classroom instruction.

PARENTAL-INFORMATION INITIATIVE

Virginia Bartel, a professor at the College of Charleston, has been actively engaged at Memminger since the 1970s, first as a teacher, then as a graduate student, and finally as a college professor. Bartel, in consultation with Memminger principal Diane Ross and its teachers, spearheaded a parental-involvement initiative in the spring of 2007 as a vehicle for increasing student learning and achievement. Funding was provided by the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE) in conjunction with its school-improvement grants program.

The first step of the initiative involved individually interviewing Memminger parents about their involvement in their children’s education. (The interview questions were adapted from Joyce Epstein’s parent survey connected to school and community partnership work at Johns Hopkins.) The interviews revealed that parents would like for the school to work harder at scheduling activities such as PTA meetings and parent conferences at more flexible times and locations. Parents also said they would like for teachers to ask them to get involved at school more often.

Memminger’s staff members also completed a survey that focused on the degree to which they supported parent involvement at Memminger. Eighty percent of the staff members surveyed reported they make parents aware of the importance of reading at home and that they ask parents to listen to their child read or read aloud with them. One change they’d like to see, however, is an increased interest in parents reviewing the folders that are sent home weekly since only 36% of the staff members felt that this happened regularly.

CHANGES THAT WERE MADE

In response to the interviews and surveys, in the summer of 2007, Memminger staff members hired student-support specialist Leah Hambright and parent educator Maurice Johnson. Throughout the summer Bartel worked closely with Johnson in an effort to create substantive, meaningful relationships between parents and their children. One such effort included the implementation of a summer camp program for students and their parents in June 2007. The summer program included an adult-education component, a community education component, and a parental education component. Events for parents included family reading activities, exercising, cooking, dancing, and learning computer applications. These parent education and computer classes have continued to be offered at the school throughout the year.

In addition, to help build relationships between home and school, every Friday morning Memminger staff members invite parents to breakfast meetings where open communication and helpful information regarding child development and discipline are freely shared.

“When families know that the school staff members truly care about their child, and when we can see the family as an integral whole, home-school relationships become much healthier and productive,” says Johnson.

Also, in the fall of 2007 the school introduced an interactive homework component. Using the Johns Hopkins model, students receive homework assignments on a bimonthly basis that they jointly work on with their parents. “Parents have begun to see that their influence on their children’s education is powerful,” says Hambright. “They know that together we can help their children achieve greater success.”

Virginia Bartel

Virginia Bartel, Program Director, M.A.T. in Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education and Professor; Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Middle Grades Education

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ONCE THOUGHT OF AS NOTHING more than tiny start-up schools that struggled to stay afloat, charter schools are now gaining popularity and building a solid reputation for turning out highly successful and motivated students (see sidebar on page 13). Charter schools are also one approach for addressing school improvement.

Marc and Eva Math and Science School, is located in Los Angeles, California. Named after Marc and Eva Stern, a couple with an interest in supporting public schools, the school was started to help relieve overcrowded traditional public schools in East Los Angeles. In addition, the Sterns hoped to prepare students to major in math, science, and engineering in college.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS
The Marc and Eva Math and Science School is a collaboration between the Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools—a non-profit education management organization (EMO)—and California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA). The collaboration with Cal State LA is very beneficial. Not only is the university’s faculty highly involved with the charter school, but their facilities are also open to the students. In addition, students are able to enroll in college courses while still in high school.

Even though the school just opened in the fall of 2006, staff members have already reached many of the school’s three-year goals, which are based on student achievement, student attendance, parent participation, and graduation rates. For instance, they have achieved an Academic Performance Index (API) of greater than 700 and have greater than 95% student attendance. In addition, the school is ranked 16th out of 100 high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

BIGGER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER
The school’s population comes primarily from East Los Angeles, which is 99% Latino. About 90% of the students receive free/reduced lunches. There are no entrance requirements because California charter school law requires that all charters be open enrollment.

Typically charter schools are built up grade by grade, starting with one grade and then adding the next level the following year. For instance, principal Derrick Chau’s school opened its doors to 180 ninth-graders. This year (2007–2008) they have a total of 300 ninth- and tenth-graders. Next year they’ll add grade 11 and so on until, ultimately, the school will reach a maximum capacity of 500–600 students, spanning grades 9–12.

“We’re not the huge high school with the football team and giant stadium,” says Chau. “But we offer unique opportunities that large schools can’t.”

For one thing, students are able to take

“Teachers, administrators, and parents alike all appreciate the reduced bureaucracy, the increased flexibility, and the innovative, progressive nature of instruction that charter schools typically offer.”
unique field trips. For instance, last year biology students went to Santa Cruz Island to conduct research, and English classes attended the Hollywood Bowl to enjoy classical music concerts.

Chau’s school is also set up and run differently than public schools. For example, each student takes an advisory class that focuses on improving study skills, college readiness, test preparation, community service, and collegiate and career research. By making this a separate class all its own, teachers are free to focus solely on curriculum, thereby maximizing student learning time.

“The advisory teacher is a crucial role. He or she really gets to know their students and can conference with them regularly and individually,” says Chau. “This person is what a guidance counselor should be if there were enough of them in the public schools.”

Teachers at Chau’s school are hired through a screening process involving interviews with multiple stakeholders, a sample lesson, and a final approval from the school advisory council that consists of parents, teachers, students, and Cal State LA representatives and administrators. Currently, the school employs 16 full-time teachers and three part-time teachers.

APPEALING ON MANY LEVELS TO MANY PEOPLE
Another difference in Chau’s school is simply the amount of time students spend there. Both the school day and the school year are longer than average. Students are in class 190 instructional days (rather than the national average of 175) and attend from 7:45 a.m.–3:30 p.m. (nearly eight hours) rather than the typical 8 a.m.–2:30 p.m. schedule (6.5 hours). Students get to snooze a little longer on Wednesdays, however, as classes begin at 9:45 a.m. so that teachers can benefit from two hours of professional development each week.

“This time is spent doing interdisciplinary work and giving teachers the chance to share both effective and noneffective practices in their classes,” says Chau.

Besides the professional development opportunities, teachers are also attracted to the smaller class sizes that exist in charter schools. In addition, some charter schools, like Chau’s, offer teachers performance-based incentive programs and signing bonuses. These figures don’t typically amount to big bucks, but even so, teachers seem to recognize the gestures.

“Educators appreciate the little things that they get in charter schools that aren’t available in a regular district,” says Chau.

Teachers, administrators, and parents alike all appreciate the reduced bureaucracy, the increased flexibility, and the innovative, progressive nature of instruction that charter schools typically offer.

As a general rule, charter schools require that parents take an active role in their son’s or daughter’s education. At Chau’s school, parents are required to volunteer at least 40 hours per year, doing things like attending parent workshops, accompanying their child to an education function, chaperoning a field trip, etc.

“With a charter school, you’re basically given a blank sheet of paper and you get to make a list of how you want to improve education for children,” says Chau. “What’s better than that?”

Note: For general information about charter schools, read Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education by Joe Nathan, an expert on charter public schools. Or visit the following website: http://www.hhh.umn.edu/people/jnathan/
Mom and Dad...Whatever You Do, Don’t Wave at Me!

How to involve yourself in your high school student’s education

BY NATHANIEL BRYAN AND CHRISTY HEITGER

WHY IS IT THAT PARENTS SEEM TO participate less in the high school academic experience than in grade school? Could the answer simply be that high school students worry that their parents’ involvement could embarrass them? What can be done to bridge the gap between parents who long to step up and get involved and their children who beg mom and dad to step back and get lost?

Parental involvement is such a critical component in this current age of school reform. Much research has been written about parental involvement in the lower grades, but not much research exists at the high school level. Nathaniel Bryan, Assistant Principal of Buist Academy for Advanced Studies, located in Charleston, South Carolina, sat down with ten tenth-grade students at Burke High School, a Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE) school, to ask them for their input on the absence and/or presence of parental involvement in education.

PLEASE DON’T EMBARRASS ME!
The students, all from various academic backgrounds, spoke candidly with Bryan about their feelings on parental involvement at school. Several students said that they believed parental involvement can help boost a student’s academic success. Their comments include:

- “When parents are involved in schools, students tend to perform better in the classroom.”
- “Parental involvement provides emotional support and stability.”
- “Parental involvement is important because students need to know that someone cares.”
- “When my parents are involved in the educational process, it lets me know that I can depend on them.”

However, although students acknowledge the benefits of parental involvement, many of them still resist it. Most interviewees felt that too much parental involvement is “embarrassing” and shows very little independence on the part of the student. Students said:

- “When parents are too involved, it is embarrassing because it shows that a student still needs his parents’ guidance. It also shows that the parents are being overly protective of their child.”
• “Having parents involved in high school is a sign of immaturity. High school is the time to show your parents that you have grown up and you do not need them as much.”
• “I do not mind my parents attending a game but I never want to see them on campus. That is really embarrassing.”

LEAVE THE CUPCAKES (AND YOURSELF) AT HOME
High school students may hear the term “parental involvement” and flash back to grade school when mom brought cupcakes to class—something that was wonderful in first grade; in high school, however, when a student is desperately trying to carve out some independence, a parent’s presence in the school building can be mortifying.

During middle school and high school, parents often feel this changing sentiment from their children and instinctively back off. Students are usually busier as well. Statistical data collected from a study prepared by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2000) revealed that in fourth grade, over 90% of parents showed active participation in their child’s educational process. However, by eighth grade only 57% of parents were actively involved.

The good news—both for students and parents—is that parental involvement goes way beyond showing up at school with baked goods. In fact, much to a teenager’s delight, parents can be very involved in their child’s education without ever stepping foot on school grounds. According to the No Child Left Behind statutes, parental involvement is “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (Parental Involvement, Title I). The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement notes that parental involvement is the “active, ongoing participation of a parent or primary caregiver in the education of his or her child” (p. 1).

SURE, I’LL TALK TO YOU…IN PRIVATE
According to Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, it’s the middle school years when students start to pull away and recognize that they no longer want their parents involved at school in the same way.

Epstein’s center administered a survey to middle-school students that revealed that students didn’t mind their parents being involved at the school in a “behind the scenes” sort of way. So parents, don’t take it personally, but at this age and stage of a child’s life, you’re the last person in the world your son or daughter wants to see on campus.

“For middle school and beyond, the basic rule is, ‘Whenever you’re at your child’s school, don’t, under any circumstances, call out to or try to engage with your child,’” says Epstein with a chuckle. “No waving and absolutely no hugging!”

Epstein’s group also surveyed high schoolers, listing a series of scenarios and asking if students would mind their parents’ involvement in them. Examples included “interviewing a parent for homework, sharing something good you did at school with your family, and bringing home a ‘good news’ postcard from a teacher.” Most students agreed that none of these things bothered them. Even information regarding grades weren’t automatically “off-limit” issues for students.

“High school students say that if they’re performing poorly in a class, they would like their teacher to tell them first,” says Epstein. “But they also added, ‘Don’t let it go so far that I fail a whole class before my parents know.’”

OK, SO MAYBE I STILL NEED A LITTLE HELP…
Parents want to be involved in their high schooler’s education; the challenge is figuring out how—and to what degree—to get involved.

First and foremost, parents must enable their child to have a sense of independence, but that doesn’t mean stepping out of the child’s life. It is still mom and dad’s responsibility to monitor their child by keeping the lines of communication open. Because despite every teenager’s fervent desire to make all of his or her own choices, studies have shown that their brains are not quite capable of doing so yet. Though scientists once believed that the brain was nearly formed by age 12, new brain scans show that the parts of the brain responsible for making sound decisions and rational judgment are not fully mature until age 25. Therefore, teenagers most definitely benefit from parental guidance and support throughout their high school career.

Second, the parents should develop discrete methods to keep in contact with their child’s teachers—whether that’s by phone, e-mail, or...
some other form of communication, such as interactive voicemail messaging systems or blogging. Often, teachers prefer these technological methods of staying in touch with families because they are simpler and less time consuming but still a very effective means of keeping parents “in the loop.”

Third, parents should allow their child to invite them to be a part of the educational process. Parents could encourage such invitations by asking their child if they could help with homework, special projects, or book reports.

SPECIFIC WAYS TO GET INVOLVED
The National Education Association (2007) suggests that parents become involved in their child’s education in the following ways: (a) voting in school board elections, (b) helping the school to set challenging academic standards, and (c) becoming an advocate for better education in the community.

Parent University is one method by which high schools have involved parents discretely. Parent University is a six-week school-district initiative parent-training program, which takes place after school and teaches parents meaningful ways to become involved at the high school level. This parent-training course provides parents with information about how to assist high school students with homework and planning for postsecondary education. It also offers a myriad of ways parents can volunteer in their local school and community. Normally, this parent-training program takes place on local high school campuses and is managed and funded by local high schools. Many high schools have adopted Parent University as a way to meet NCLB requirements for parental involvement.

In addition, many high schools have started to bridge the gap between parents and high schools through family outreach workers called “parent advocates” or “parent liaisons.” The primary responsibilities of these professionally trained (and often bilingual) social workers are to create better school-home relationships, work closely with parents to become more actively but discretely involved in their child’s educational process, and establish open communication between parents and schools.

Ann Rollins, a Parent Liaison in the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) in Cary, North Carolina, says that parent liaisons can also help (a) communicate with families who speak other languages, (b) explain school processes, forms, programs, and community resources to families, and (c) arrange or attend conferences and appointments.

Rollins, who also works as a WCPSS Partnership for Educational Success (PES) Manager, says that faculty at Needham B. Broughton High School in Raleigh, North Carolina, has done a great deal to collaborate with parents on a regular basis. For instance, the school formed a committee that consists of parents, students, department chairs, and the dean of students to discuss both academic and social issues within the school.

“Every year this group comes up with powerful awareness demonstrations that resonate with the students,” says Rollins. For example, last year right before spring break they put on an elaborate demonstration to show the devastating—and fatal—effects of drinking and driving. The student body and their parents gathered in the football stadium to watch the fiery car wreck, the helicopter landing, the police on the scene, and the “dead” bodies. “It was extremely powerful,” recalls Rollins.

The committee also organizes collaborative projects that bring faculty, parents, and students together. For instance, last semester the group built a house for Habitat for Humanity.

“Parents hugely impact a student’s success,” says Rollins. “So the more we can get parents involved, the better off their children will be.”

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References


Choosing to Succeed:
Change your outlook, change your life

BY CHRISTY HEITGER
“Success happens by choice, not by chance. We are all responsible for our successes in life, which we achieve through hard work and dedication.”

After serving the Army for 25 years, Winbush taught leadership at Temple University for four years before assuming his position at Baptist Hill, a school that has been revitalized due in large part to Winbush’s efforts.

CHANGING THE SCHOOL CULTURE

Bassin Hill is a rural working-class community located about 22 miles south of Charleston. The school had a low graduation rate. Half the students didn’t even attend class; instead, they hung out in the hallway. “Both the students and the teachers had been doing wrong for so long that they couldn’t distinguish wrong from right,” says Winbush.

Winbush was intent on correcting the problem by outlining a three-step action plan. The first order of business was getting a handle on student discipline. Winbush observed that about 35 students were extreme discipline problems. He made it clear that these students needed to shape up and fast.

At first Winbush’s words fell on deaf ears. But soon the students knew their leader meant business. Ultimately, a handful of students were expelled or transferred to the district’s discipline school. And the other students shaped up and started behaving. Over time students’ respect for authority has increased—and that’s not all that has improved. In the past five years, the percentage of teachers and students satisfied with learning and the school climate has jumped from 27.2% to 84.3%.

ENCOURAGING TEACHER BUY-IN AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The second phase of Winbush’s action plan involved working individually with each one of his teachers to develop mandatory goals that include that each teacher must be punctual at the start of the school day, develop a course syllabus and lesson plans, maintain regular contact with parents, become involved in school activities, and attend all required meetings.

Winbush also helped encourage and reward teachers by offering them several categories of incentives (see page 20 for specifics).
INCREASING EXPECTATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL
Finally, Winbush committed to changing the culture and expectations of the school as a whole. This step involved the collaboration of faculty and students working together to create, sustain, and promote outstanding school programs, including

- **The Advisor/Advisee Program**—A class of students and a teacher meet once a month to discuss study skills, grades, and report cards. Teachers also use this time to encourage students to stay in school and graduate. The program is an opportunity for teachers to get to know their students better, and students love the mentoring aspect.

- **Single-Gender Classrooms in the 9th Grade Academy**—This program is new this year, and so far feedback from both teachers and students has been positive. In the absence of pressure to show off for the opposite sex, the students seem to feel more comfortable in class and less worried about how they look, what they wear, and whom they’re dating. As a result, students are more focused on their studies.

- **Operation Success**—Students receive early-morning tutorial support to help them with general testing strategies and, specifically, to help them prepare for the SAT and High School Assessment Program (HSAP).

- **Renaissance 2008**—Students get pumped up as they compete for trophies and prizes. This program involves both a talent show for the high schoolers, as well as a spelling bee for fifth- through eighth-graders from the community.

ENJOYING SUCCESS
Since Winbush joined the faculty five years ago, enrollment numbers, student performance, and graduation ratings have all improved. For instance, enrollment was 422 in 2002–2003 and 456 in 2006–2007. In addition, HSAP Passage Rate – English Language Arts (ELA) has risen from 65.5% in 2003–2004 to 83% in 2006–2007, and HSAP Passage Rate – Math shot from 56.9% in 2003–2004 to 77.3% in 2006–2007.

Certainly the students, staff members, and faculty at Baptist Hill have achieved a great deal of success in recent few years, but the accomplishment in which Winbush takes the most pride is the change in student attitude.

“I’ve always believed that every child can succeed. The challenge was getting the children to believe in themselves,” says Winbush. “Now the students have seen what they can do. They know that they can achieve. And as a result, they are tasting success.”
Winbush offers his faculty members several categories of incentives with points and money (the money comes from donations from local organizations). The categories of incentives include

**OUTSTANDING BOBCAT PROFESSIONALS.** Every semester, each teacher earning 100 points receives a dinner for two at an outstanding restaurant. Examples of ways teachers can earn points include the following (10 points each):

- Take a graduate course
- Attend two Parent Teacher Student Association meetings
- Share a professional article, bulletin-board idea, or instructional activity at a faculty meeting
- Sponsor a student teacher or practicum student
- Have a perfect attendance for the semester
- Miss no Mondays or Fridays
- Submit an article for the monthly parent newsletter
- Join a professional organization
- Each week mail one positive note to the parents of a student

- Be able to account for all textbooks at the end of the year (or semester for semester courses)
- Attend four Baptist Hill sporting events
- Submit lesson plans on time each week

**PERFECT ATTENDANCE.** Any teacher who has no absences during the course of the school year will receive a $300 stipend.

**BOBCAT MERIT.** Those teachers who directly affect the school report card (i.e., HSAP Mathematics and English/Language Arts teachers or End of Course Mathematics, English/Language Arts, and US History teachers) will be eligible to receive a Bobcat Merit stipend.

**PROPOSED MERIT PAY.** Any End of Course teacher who achieves an overall pass rate of 72% in all classes will receive an $800 stipend. In addition, any HSAP teacher who achieves an overall average of 90% pass rate will receive a $500 stipend. In addition, if that same teacher receives an overall average of 68% or better for proficient and advanced students, he or she will receive an additional $500 stipend.
WRITE ON!
Burke students discover the joy of writing
BY CHRISTY HEITGER

WRITING IS A WONDERFUL WAY TO EXPRESS EMOTION,” says Faye Hicks-Townes, a College of Charleston (CoC) professor and member of the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE). “But it takes practice to learn how wonderful writing can be.”

Until recently, many Burke High School students hadn’t written frequently enough to be able to improve at or enjoy the process of writing. But that all changed last year when CPIE faculty members partnered with Burke High School students in an effort to encourage and develop their writing skills.

Hicks-Townes earned her undergraduate degree in English and speech (with a minor in education); her master’s in curriculum and instruction with a focus in English education; and her doctorate in education with a major in curriculum and education. Hicks-Townes now teaches “Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education” at CoC though she has taught writing at the high school level as well.

Throughout her career, Hicks-Townes has worked with a number of students who freeze up when they are asked to write.

“Writing is very personal,” says Hicks-Townes. “So if a student feels that their writing is attacked, they tend to take it personally.”

Nevertheless, Hicks-Townes says that she has seen even the most tentative student eventually embrace the process of writing when given ample praise and practice.

“MY LIFE AS A GIRL” WRITING PROJECT
In the fall of 2006, Hicks-Townes paired with Conseula Francis, an assistant professor in the English Department at CoC, to design a special writing program just for girls. CoC’s “My Life as a Girl” program was a partnership between the “Women’s and Gender Studies” program and CPIE. Their mission was to build feminist community in Charleston and improve students’ level of educational achievement.

“We wanted to provide young women with the opportunity for self-expression as well as the chance to further develop their self-esteem,” says Hicks-Townes.

The program was implemented in the spring of 2007. The main activity was an essay contest open to all female students at Burke High (CoC professors acted as judges). The girls were asked to respond to any or all of the following questions: What is it like being a young wom-


The project culminated with the publication of the girls’ essays in a booklet. The top two winners received monetary prizes and were featured in Skirt! magazine, a local women’s publication. All of the girls who participated in the program received a tote bag, notebooks, and pens to encourage them to continue writing.

NEW YEAR, NEW PROJECT
As a continuation and expansion of the original “My Life as a Girl” program, Hicks-Townes and Francis brought together two different segments of the high school population for another writing project—this one a bit more collaborative in nature. Twenty-eight Charleston ninth-graders from both Burke High School (a public low-income school) and Ashley Hall (a private, elite, high-performing girls’ school) were divided into five separate groups based on their individual interests. The groups
met throughout the fall semester to produce a “zine” (a self-published “mini-magazine”).

The girls were told that the theme of the zine was “Journeys.” Beyond that, they got to let their imaginations run wild. Using short stories, poems, essays, and pictures, each group created their own personal, distinctive zine that represented their “journey as girls.” The zines were unveiled publicly in December 2007 at the Charleston County Library where the girls received travel journals and a CD of “girl power” songs to encourage them to continue writing as a form of self-expression.

“We wanted to provide young women with the opportunity for self-expression as well as the chance to further develop their self-esteem.”

OTHER WRITING PROJECTS
In addition to these writing projects, in the fall of 2006 Hicks-Townes invited graduate English students from the CofC to work with Burke students on their creative short stories. The graduate students offered Burke students feedback on how to build character development, add description, and improve plot development.

“The papers weren’t red-marked all over the place because the focus wasn’t on being corrective,” notes Hicks-Townes. “The most important part of this collaboration was to ignite a passion for writing.”

Hicks-Townes says that in the future she’d like to develop a writing project designed specifically for males. In the meantime, other projects have been launched. For instance, in the spring and fall of 2007 Burke High School offered a poetry workshop for ninth- and tenth-grade students of both genders. During their “English and Reading Essentials” classes, students worked with professional poets Jonathan Sanchez, Richard Garcia, and Jonathan Brown to write poems. They then compiled their poetry into a self-published magazine called Nine Times (a reference to the fact that ninth-graders wrote the material).

Besides Burke, two other CPIE partnership schools (Baptist Hill High School and Memminger Elementary School) have also developed student writing projects that have incorporated poetry, personal family accounts, and historical information about school alumni. In addition, last fall CPIE hosted a community-wide event that focused on the book Freedom Writers in which the author delivered a motivational speech encouraging students to write regularly.

The students in Hicks-Townes’ classes certainly have been writing regularly—and it shows!

“I’ve seen a big change in students’ attitude, confidence, and enthusiasm as a result of daily writing,” says Hicks-Townes. “It’s a beautiful thing to witness.”
STUDENTS DISH ON WHY THEY LOVED THE “MY LIFE AS A GIRL” PROJECT

“I learned a lot about the other girls and myself.”
–Alexandria Cooper

“It helped me build my confidence and meet new people.”
–Kimberly Bowman

“What I liked about being in this program is that it changed my life as a girl.”
–Shanevia Minus

“It was a big opportunity for me. It really motivated me to do what I believed I could do. It helped me to understand what being a young lady is all about.”
–Jessica Young

“It helped me become more mature.”
–Desiree McNair

“It was a good opportunity to go to the college and work with college students.”
–Keyona Grant

“It helped me become more ladylike.”
–Jalesa Green

“It was a wonderful opportunity that we took a lot from. I learned to express myself to the fullest extent.”
–Ariana Moten
mutindi received her undergraduate degree in mathematics and science (honors) before earning her master’s in Curriculum Studies with an emphasis on math and science. The research for her thesis “Because I Am a Woman: Girls’ Experiences of Math and Science in Kenya” was funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC). mutindi earned her Ph.D. in Educational Policy from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, with an emphasis on issues in math and science. Then she taught math at grades 12 and 13 (equivalent to first-year college) in Kenya and Canada. In 1997 she began teaching “Foundations,” ESOL, and “Technology for Teachers” courses at the College of Charleston.

mutindi ndunda didn’t set out to be an educator. Originally from Nairobi, Kenya, mutindi shied away from education because she felt that teachers weren’t properly respected. But because her country lacked math and science teachers, the government offered to pay for her college schooling, room and board, and a stipend for living expenses. It was an opportunity she felt she couldn’t turn down.

mutindi is a member of the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education (CPIE) and works regularly with Burke High School students in mathematics classrooms.

Tell me about your research project and work at Burke High School, a traditionally low-performing school.

My research focuses on how teachers organize classrooms so that their students are engaged in thinking and doing mathematics that is meaningful. Once a week I observe classrooms at Burke to see how teachers are engaging their students in thoughtful learning experiences. I want to know if students are able to articulate problems in complex ways.

Of course, the first step is motivating students who aren’t excited about math because for whatever reason they have gaps in their education. Students who miss math concepts along the way are at a huge disadvantage because without the basics they can’t build on something concrete and move on to higher-order thinking skills. Once kids get “up to speed” on the basics and they start to make connections in class, that’s when you see a huge change in motivation. Suddenly, they want to see how many problems they can solve and how many objectives they can achieve.

What keeps you motivated professionally?

Knowing that I’m making an impact on the students I’m teaching. Caring teachers can greatly impact students’ views and perceptions about the subject they teach and about life in general. I love working with the students at Burke because I like to listen to their stories and struggles. And I’m very encouraged by the spirit I see among the group of teachers that I work with at Burke.

I also enjoy the collaboration between the K–12 school and the university. Teachers and administrators—we all carry the burden and share the responsibility of making things work for the children.

What advice do you have for educators?

There is no magic formula. It’s just being present—mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually—as a teacher and never giving up hope that your students will succeed. So I advise teachers to stay put and offer support. If the teacher leaves the school, then the kids have to start all over again with someone new, building new rapport and trust. And that takes time away from the learning experience.

I encourage teachers to always hold high expectations for their students. Some of these students don’t have anybody but you—the teacher—to dream for them. I can’t think of a more important job than that.