



## Step One Research to Practice Brief: ENSURE SHARED MTSS AND FSCP KNOWLEDGE OF THE WHAT, WHY, WHO, WHEN, AND HOW

### **Law, Theory, and Research Every Student, Every Family, Every Educator**

*...parents take their child home after professionals complete their services and parents continue providing the care for the larger portion of the child's waking hours...No matter how skilled professionals are, nor how loving parents are, each cannot achieve alone what the two parties, working hand-in-hand can accomplish together.*

(Adapted from Peterson and Cooper as cited by the Futures in School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships, 2007)

Authentic, meaningful family-school partnerships are essential to ensure school success for all children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Neither schools nor families can do it alone (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). More than 50 years of research supports the importance of family and school collaboration (Weiss & Stephen, 2010), yet it is still a “puzzlement” (Nevin, 2008) as to why there continues to be significant challenges in genuinely and systematically integrating partnering practices into everyday school lives. One answer is that many educators receive very little information or skill development in working with families in their pre-service and professional development curricula (Chavkin, 2005). Relatedly, families are often unclear about their role and responsibilities in supporting their children’s school success. This review recognizes that many educators and families already engage in reciprocal and active partnering relationships, but that the practices are not as universal, strategic, and integrated as they potentially can be in Colorado. A shared understanding of the theory, research, and legal rationale for partnering can allow mutual conversations and collaborative action planning for all stakeholders and students, in both special and general education. There are four sections of the review for the online course.

### **Law, Theory, and Research**

*The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families and community resources have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life...when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.*

Henderson & Mapp, 2002

Knowing the actual language of our laws, the theoretical underpinnings, and the general accumulative findings from the research provide a three-pronged rationale for implementing ongoing family-school partnerships. Often an emotional topic, with long-standing personal values and existing practices, the nature of family involvement in children’s schooling has typically been individually determined and generally guided by historical tradition. A joint, universal knowledge base with shared current informational sources fosters strategic, intentional actions and a potential shift in practices.



## Law

**Federal.** In 2002 and 2004, for the first time in history, the two federal laws governing both general and special education were reauthorized and “positioned to work together”. Both laws clearly mandated full parent participation in their child’s education (Cortiella, 2006). In the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or No Child Left Behind (2002), there was a specific call for “local education agencies to assist school personnel to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners; implement and coordinate parent programs; and build ties between parents and the school” (No Child Left Behind, 2002, P.L. 107-111, 1118). This law also specified the need for scientifically-based research in regards to instructional methods, accountability for all students’ progress including those with disabilities, strategies to enhance parent involvement, and for parents to have full access to information about school- and child-related performance (Cortiella, 2006). A statutory definition of parental involvement was also included for the first time in the law’s 40-year history:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities; including insuring that parents (1) play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (2) are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; (3) are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and (4) the carrying out of other activities, such as those in Title I, Section 1118.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 2004, that guides educational policy for children with disabilities, also includes an increased focus on parental involvement (Cortiella, 2006). This law was strongly influenced by the findings put forth by a Presidential Commission on Excellence in Special Education published in 2002 and titled “*A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and their Families*”. In this report, there was a call for special education reform to reflect similar mandates required in the No Child Left Behind Act. The reauthorization of IDEA incorporated many of the ideas from this Commission ensuring that high academic standards, accountability, enhanced teacher quality, focus on student achievement versus process compliance, and reforms based on scientifically rigorous research were included as well as language requiring the participation and empowerment of families (President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). In this legislation, families were to be more explicitly included as evidenced by the following statement:

The education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004, 20 U.S.C. 1401(c)(5)(B)).

IDEA 2004 also strengthened the role of parents as full and equal members of multidisciplinary and IEP teams, making it clear how parents were to be involved and given explicit information when a child is referred for special education. Parents are to be included in all data analyses, decision-making, and intervention planning for any special education decision. Additional family participation standards are applied when determining eligibility for a specific learning disability - strategies for increasing the student’s rate of learning and results of



repeated assessments of student’s progress during the tiered interventions - during a process which can be determined by using a child’s “response to scientific, research-based intervention” as a criterion if adopted by a state (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Then in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) was passed as the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind/Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The components, originally seen in the 2002 version regarding including families as partners in the education of their children, were for the most part carried forward. In addition, there were some language changes and some stronger requirements for schools and districts to implement in their partnering efforts. The word *involvement* was changed to *engagement*, stressing a more active and committed partnership. Also, the word *family* was added to include not only parents, but also extended family and/or other adults who might be providing care to children. New ESSA requirements include: 1. Districts and schools must actively outreach to all parents and families ... reaching beyond barriers of culture, language, disabilities, and poverty. 2. The Parent and Family engagement policy will identify expectations and objectives for meaningful involvement, suggesting that activities are specific and measurable. 3. Districts must first build the capacity of the school personnel in how to plan and implement effective home-school activities to improve learning. 4. To the greatest extent feasible, strategies must be coordinated and integrated with other initiatives. 5. Evaluations must include specific components, including barriers, ability to assist learning, and successful interactions. 6. Findings from evaluations must be used to implement “evidence-based” strategies. (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

**Colorado.** Colorado has incorporated most of the Final Rule (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) into its Exceptional Children’s Educational Act (Colorado Department of Education, 2007), including the use of “response to scientific, research-based intervention” as a requirement in the identification of students with specific learning disabilities. In addition, Colorado has recently passed several laws focused on positive academic and behavioral outcomes, which include specific mandates for partnering with families. These are summarized in the chart below.

**Selected Colorado Education Reform Legislation (2009-2013) Which Includes Family Partnership Requirements**

Law	Year	Partnership Content	Student Outcome	Required Joint Family-School Plan
Increasing Parent Involvement in Education (State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education, SACPIE), SB 09-90	2009	To create a stakeholder council to recommend best practices for increasing parent involvement in education, thus increasing student achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Achievement</li> <li>• School Completion</li> <li>• Post-Secondary Success</li> <li>• Closing the Achievement and Growth Gap</li> </ul>	No, but cites involving families in Response to Intervention (RtI)
Individual Career and Academic Plans, SB 09-256	2009	To decrease dropout rates and increase graduation rates by each student and his/her parent working with the school to develop an ICAP	Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness	Yes
Ensuring Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness, SB 10-191	2010	To provide an effective professional evaluation system that includes recommendations about partnering with families	Academic Achievement	No
Colorado Reading to	2012	To support parents and	Reading Proficiency	Yes

Response to Intervention (RtI) is incorporated within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)



Ensure Academic Development or “The READ Act”, HB 12-1238		teachers working together in ensuring every student can demonstrate reading competency by third		
Discipline in Public Schools, HB 12-1238	2012	To include families in early notification and conferencing if concerns; early development of behavior plans	School and Class Behavior	No, but hopefully families and schools are teaming in developing behavior plans
Ensuring That Students Comply with Compulsory Attendance, HB-1201	2013	To include family in a team planning process to identify and address underlying truancy issues	School Attendance	Yes
Increasing Parent Engagement in Public Schools, SB 13-193	2013	To increase school and district accountability committees knowledge and responsibility; develop policies; support educator training; establish a point of contact in each district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness</li> <li>• Reading Proficiency</li> <li>• School Attendance</li> <li>• Student Achievement</li> </ul>	No, but specifically includes ICAP, READ Act, and Compulsory Attendance bill which all require jointly developed plans

(Adapted from Colorado Department of Education, 2014)

## Theory

One primary theory has guided the recent research and law development in family-school partnering. Uri Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) ideas are instrumental because of his focus on interrelated systems and the centrality of the family and school in a student’s development. Most important, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory provides a model to organize and understand the interrelated systems that can impact home and school settings and hinder or enable partnership efforts (Ysseldyke & Christenson, 2002). A child’s growth and development is hypothesized to be influenced by the reciprocal interplay of factors across the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro- systems.

Importantly, the student is always at the center of Bronfenbrenner’s model and the home and school are viewed as the two most critical contextual determinants of development, with neighborhoods, communities, and the larger socio-cultural and political context exerting important but more indirect influences. Framing partnerships through a systems lens honors the importance of context and recognizes the interrelated and reciprocal relationships that exist among students, families, schools and communities. Many researchers have substantiated Bronfenbrenner’s major claims by documenting the importance of family and school factors that mediate and moderate a child’s school success (Christenson & Reschly, 2010).

In a related theoretical model based on her research, Joyce Epstein conceptualizes family-school partnerships as overlapping spheres of interpersonal influence across school, family and community environments. Originally proposed in 1987 and further elaborated in recent years (Epstein, 2011), a major assumption of the framework is that children do best academically when there are collaboratively developed and shared goals (i.e., overlap) across the spheres. The more “overlap” between homes-schools-communities the greater likelihood the child will experience academic success. This model also provides a typology that organizes partnership activities into six areas viewed as critical to the development of successful partnerships. This categorizing types of activities into *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *learning at home*, *decision-making*, and *collaborating with community* has led researchers to



further conceptualize questions on effects of such partnerships and has helped educators and families to systematize their partnership practices. The National Parent Teacher Association adapted this typography as their national standards in 1998 (National PTA, 1998) and recently updated and re-titled these standards (National PTA, 2008), directing the standards more towards including all families/students and increasing positive student outcomes. PTA terms are *welcoming all families into the school community, communicating effectively, supporting student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with the community.*

## Research

Federal mandates and regulatory guidelines have, in part, been fostered by the results of prior research that overwhelmingly supported the major role families play in promoting children's academic achievement and other social and emotional outcomes. And alternately, the national legal mandates' focus on improving student outcomes has fueled more partnership research on effective interventions, which influence school success (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009). Prevalent in the professional literature is the practice that schools should not only be leaders in reaching out to families and incorporating family collaboration, but that it is also the school's responsibility to become highly skilled and committed to collaborative practices (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

Clark (1990) was one of the first to point out that in the United States, students spend over 90% of their waking hours from birth to age 18 outside of school and this percentage remains above 70% if calculated only for school-age students. This finding spurred much work on the role of families and learning outside of school. For over twenty years, the Harvard Family Research Project has been generating and summarizing research highlighting the importance of such issues and the need to align learning systems, such as home, school, after-school, and summer programs (Weiss & Lopez, 2015). The "C" words describe this research-based focus on supporting student systems – *coordinated, continuous, congruent, consistent, connected, and complementary learning*. Recently, the term "anywhere, anytime learning" has been applied to describe the importance of aligning student learning throughout multiple settings (Weiss & Lopez, 2015). Due to space limitations, only selected findings from this extensive evidence base can be presented. Summaries of this work can be found elsewhere (Christenson & Reschly, 2010).

Researchers have demonstrated positive outcomes when families and work together such as: (a) for students these have included higher achievement, homework completion, and school attendance and completion; (b) for families these have included more confidence in knowing about school and how to help their child learn; and (c) for teachers and schools, these have included improved morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, higher performance ratings of teachers by parents and administrators, and greater community support of school finance and bond issues (Christenson, 2004). Researchers also have demonstrated that generalization of school learning occurs more readily when there is collaboration among educators, families and community members (Sheridan, 1997) and when students perceive school and home as sending similar messages, they are more likely to display greater achievement (Epstein et al, 2002). Indeed, family involvement in education over time has been found to be a more significant predictor of such outcomes than a range of other factors (Weiss & Stephen, 2010). All parents, regardless of educational level, income status, or ethnic background, want their children to succeed in school and desire information as to their role (Christenson, 1995).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) drew the following conclusions, following an extensive research review: (a) programs and interventions that engaged families in supporting their



children’s learning at home were linked to higher student achievement; (b) the continuity of family support and encouragement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through the educational system; (c) families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan of for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework; (d) parent involvement that is linked to learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of participation - the focus should be on improving achievement and on developing specific skills; and (d) the more families supported their children’s learning and educational progress, the more their children tended to do well in school and to continue their education. Similar conclusions also have been drawn by other syntheses of this research (Jeynes, 2012; Marzano, 2003). Henderson and Mapp (2002) concluded that: “Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages” (p. 24). Such positive results also are more likely when school, family, and community partnership programs are well planned and carefully selected (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007) and are school-initiated and specific, such as shared reading and homework checking (Jeynes, 2012).

In Colorado, the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey has been administered across the state three times, measuring whether educators across the state report having the resources and support necessary to encourage effective teaching and establishing a research base that specifically links teaching conditions to student achievement. A consistent finding has been that community/parent involvement and support is the teaching condition, which most strongly impacts student performance and academic growth (New Teacher Center, 2014).

## Every Student, Family, and Educator

*The goal is that educators, family members, and community resources are on the team and at the table in supporting every student’s school success.*

Colorado Department of Education, 2009

The importance of every student’s school success is stressed in current legal mandates and empirical study. This focus implies partnering between every family and educator— a challenging, but necessary and important goal. By understanding the general theory and research applications, practitioners can successfully reach out to all and especially those who may be distant or hesitant. This knowledge can be found by identifying the general shift in practices, multi-tiered framework, partner processes, continuity, cultural sharing, and roles and responsibilities. All of this research is directly applicable to students with disabilities and their families.

## Practice Shift

An important shift has occurred in the last decade, coinciding with the laws, theoretical alignment, and research findings. The shift involves both terminology, which has moved from “parent involvement” towards “family partnering”, as well as a shift in ideas about the role of families in education and the way that schools and families work together. The shift in attitudes, beliefs, and practices expands upon previous parental involvement concepts by placing a greater emphasis on the need for families to share goals, contributions, and accountability with schools



through access, voice, and ownership in informed decision-making (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). Also, the shift focuses on reaching every family and recognizing the importance of learning in the home, in conjunction with multiple two-way communication venues. The following chart (adapted from Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011) summarizes this shift in family-school partnering practices.

**The Shift: Parent Involvement to Family Partnering**

PARENT INVOLVEMENT	FAMILY PARTNERING
"Parent" refers primarily to parents.	"Family" refers to all caregivers and the student.
School is the typical site of involvement, usually with participants engaging in structured volunteering, such as fund-raisers and organized events.	Home, school and community settings are all partnering sites, with a focus on a broad array of opportunities to increase student learning and school success
Education is viewed primarily as the school's responsibility with families often playing a limited or unclear role in supporting student school success, especially at the secondary level.	Education is explicitly viewed as a shared responsibility and opportunity between home and school with families playing a critical role in supporting student school success at each school level, including secondary.
School-parent meetings and conferences tend to be formally initiated by the school, with a primary focus on information, program eligibility, and school-developed/administered plans.	Family-school meetings can be initiated by the school or family members with a primary focus on student school success; much communication can occur outside of formal meetings; individual plan interventions and progress monitoring are mutually developed and implemented by home and school.
Homework is often given with the expectation of independent completion and with consequences for failure to comply.	Homework is seen as an important home-school "touch point" designed to expand learning for every student; successful completion is related to improving achievement; joint problem-solving occurs to ensure every student's success, which may also involve community or school support.
Communication is often only one-way from the school to the home, mostly through formal written formats.	Communication is two-way from school to home or home to school through various means.
A few parents tend to participate at school-based events and on school committees.	Every family is given opportunities to participate and to gain information, with options to support the school and learning from home or work.

**Multi-Tiered/Layered Partnering and Supports**

Family-school partnering has been conceptualized in a multi-tiered, layered continuum framework, aligning with the models seen in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS),

Response to Intervention (RtI) is incorporated within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)



Response-to-Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) (Colorado Department of Education, 2009). There are three levels or tiers of processes and practices: universal for all, targeted for some, and intensive for a few. This model recognizes that families and educators may need different levels of partnering to support a student's school success. Boundaries between the tiers are permeable and fluid which allows families and staff to obtain or request services across the tiers as circumstances change over time (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).

Family-school partnering processes at the universal tier are applicable to all students, families, and school staff and include such research-based processes as building relationships, creating a welcoming setting, using two-way communication, and educating partners. These processes become the "cushion" that also supports targeted and intensive interventions. Partnering processes at the upper level tiers (i.e., targeted and intensive), include all universal processes and add actions needed to team interventions when a student is struggling. When teaming is indicated, partnering processes focus on the development of evidenced-based interventions that can vary by degree of intensity, duration, or resource allocation. Teaming partnerships that occur in the upper tiers refers to shared efforts by family members, students, classroom teachers, school specialists and/or community resources if a student's learning or behavioral concerns at home or at school intensify. Upper tier focus may also be indicated when an educator or family member is struggling with partnering or needs support or education. In a tiered partnering framework, processes and practices differ based on resources and need.

Within a tiered model, 80%-90% of families, students, and staff typically benefit from universal partnering processes and shared practices. Focused/layered partnering processes and practices with smaller groups may be needed at the targeted tier for some partners (i.e., between 5-15%). At the intensive tier, highly individualized partnering may be needed for a few students, families and staff (i.e., 1-5%). Thus, in a classroom of 30 students, approximately 25 would flourish with universal partnering opportunities offered to all families and students, while another one to five students and their families might need more targeted or intensive partnering opportunities during the year in addition to the universal supports. The multitiered framework embraces the understanding that all students, families, and educators will engage in partnering behaviors with the belief that every student will succeed in school. Responding meaningfully to students with disabilities and diversity in culture, language, learning, and economic resources may be conceptualized within a tiered framework, as more resources and time may be needed by educators to accomplish this successfully.

## Partner Processes

**Build relationships.** Strong family-school relationships are fostered by showing respect, taking the time to partner, and recognizing partnering efforts. Student achievement and engagement is enhanced when family-school partnering is viewed as a beneficial relationship for all (Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2008). To promote such relationships, there must be an atmosphere of respectful collaboration so that families believe their voices will be heard (Christenson, 2004). Such conversations occur when educators and families listen to and share each other's hopes and dreams for their children so that each partner gains a better appreciation of the other's educational beliefs, role expectations and child management preferences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Indeed, the goal of these conversations is to ensure that all partners feel acknowledged for what they bring to the table to support a student's success. Families bring intimate knowledge of student needs and talents and an enduring



interest in their child's future. Educators bring intimate knowledge of curriculum content and an enduring interest in teaching and motivating students to ensure their long-term success.

**Create welcoming settings.** Families are more likely to participate in their child's education when they feel welcomed and connected to the school, staff, and their child's teachers (Ellis & Hughes, 2002). Welcoming settings depend on strong relationships, as well as the physical and structural environment. Schools are perceived as more inviting when there are school-wide and classroom displays that demonstrate acceptance of different family cultures and family structures (Ortiz, Flanagan, & Dynda, 2008). Establishing a designated place in the school where families can gather, network, and gain helpful educational information or community resources also has been found to lead to more frequent participation at school meetings and events (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Welcoming settings also recognize the variety of ways that families support a child's education. When visible rather than less visible family presence and contributions are stressed, many families will be unable to participate due to economic constraints, inflexible employment hours, or a lack of self-confidence (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). This can create a cycle that increases the likelihood of continued involvement in families who already feel more comfortable educationally, while lessening that of others who may not feel as comfortable in school settings (Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). Indeed, limited English language proficiency and prior educational experiences can lower parental confidence about how to impact their child's education (Delgado Gaitan, 2004). To enhance family-school partnering, there must be clear recognition of the many nontraditional or less visible home and community activities that support learning so that visible involvement is not be perceived as more important than the lived practices of the family (Seginer, 2006).

**Use two-way communication.** Successful family-school partnering thrives on timely, two-way communication where information is equally shared between home and school (Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel & Green, 2004). In a review of research on effective schools, Marzano (2003) found that schools with high student achievement levels also reported more frequent and positive interaction between home and school. Notably, the families at these schools also indicated more regular communication at home with their children about school. A consistent finding is that parents report they would like more frequent and varied forms of communication (Miller & Kraft, 2008). Such findings suggest that traditional unidirectional conferences and end of quarter written reports may need to be supplemented, reformatted or adapted to meet different family preferences, issues and avail Communication between home and school also is enhanced when family about their student's strengths and weaknesses that is jargon-free and easy to understand. More positive than negative school messages should be sent home since negative comments may make a more lasting and harmful impression. Overall, there is strong evidence that favorably perceived, open, two-way communication between parents and school staff is associated with greater family participation in student learning, more satisfaction with school, and higher achievement outcomes (Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2008).

**Educate partners.** Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies (2007) have studied what motivates parents to support a child's learning and what motivates teachers to engage with parents. These researchers suggest that such motivation is more likely when each partner: (a) has received a clear invitation to be engaged, (b) feels that his/her ideas will be welcomed and



respected, (c) is confident in his/her ability to help, and (d) knows how to support a child's learning or, in the case of teachers, how to engage parents. Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues have studied why parents become involved in their child's education (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005). Their findings point to the importance of understanding how parents view their roles, knowing how confident parents feel about helping their child learn, and acknowledging parents' perceptions of invitations about being involved. Building such personal efficacy is especially important when families have limited or negative prior educational experiences. Efforts that increase family members' competence and confidence about their ability to help their child in school have included, video demonstrations, teacher modeling and open conversations with other parents. Such efforts have been consistently linked to greater child outcomes (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). Teachers desire and benefit from education on how to communicate and collaborate with families, especially during family-teacher conferences and problem-solving situations (Stevens & Tollafeld, 2003). To enhance partnering, teachers need to recognize the contributions families already make and must learn how to ask families about what information and resources they need to further support their child at home. When parents receive ideas from teachers in the context of also getting recognition for how they already support their child, they are more confident about helping with learning at home and also rate teachers as more helpful and supportive and the school more favorably (Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2008).

**Team interventions.** When a child is struggling in school, an upper tier action is to align interventions. The definition of teamwork is "work done by several associates with each doing a part, but all subordinating personal prominence to the efficiency of the whole" (Webster, 2004). Student interventions at school are defined as a set of actions, focused on academic or social-emotional-behavioral concerns, which are "designed to help a student improve performance relative to a specific, realistic, and measurable goal. Interventions are based on valid information about current performance and are realistic for implementation" (Cherry Creek Schools, 2006, p. 14). Teams may often include school specialists and teachers, but may not regularly include families (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). Based on the body of evidence stressing the importance of families in improving student outcomes, teaming to intervene around struggles should become an automatic and natural practice (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). As Peacock and Collett (2010) state,

Parents should be viewed as integral to the solution of any school-based problems children may be exhibiting. However, often we look for solutions only within the schools, where teachers and other school personnel often have limited time and resources. Involving parents in the intervention process can increase the opportunities for positive outcomes. (p. 87)

The basic teaming process is typically seen in the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Response to Intervention (RtI) and behavioral models. In Colorado, these team problem-solving steps are *define, analyze, implement, and evaluate*. Approaches, which follow this basic process, have resulted in improved outcomes for students (Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow & Swank, 1999). In family-school teaming, it is important to apply the best communicative, invitational, educative, and relationship building practices as described above, while consistently sharing data and clarifying educator and family responsibilities (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).

## Continuity



Commonly shared partnering experiences across settings (home, school and community) and time (early childhood through high school, every month and year), can be helpful and important for families, students, and educators (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). Effective family-school partnerships are important throughout a student's school career and throughout the course of a school year, but may have different characteristics depending on the level (Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010). Relationship building is especially critical when a child first enters formal schooling and during transitions from year to year, to a new school or level (Christenson & Reschly, 2010). Some researchers also stress that relational factors may play an even larger role in predicting school success as a student transitions into middle and high school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008).

The importance of taking a family perspective, holding positive impressions of, empathizing with, and recognizing the enduring and central role of families in students' lives are critical characteristics of family-centered principles (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 2003) which are important throughout a student's schooling, but especially for young children and their families, as families play such large caretaking roles during that time. Reynolds and Shlafer (2010) summarize longitudinal data highlighting the persistent positive student effects of early family-school partnering on academic achievement, school completion, and social-emotional adjustment into young adulthood.

Personal outreach and invitations to partner must be intentional and well planned, especially during transition years (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). At the secondary level, there is a clear positive correlation between outreach, communication and family involvement, which also leads to higher student achievement and school completion. However, fostering strong partnering in high school is very challenging because there are many more students per teacher and more complex subject matter. Teachers also feel they have less time to devote to individual students and families and students are learning to balance independence with a continued need for adult guidance and support (Simon, 2001). Yet in middle and high school, families still need and desire information on how to further support their student's success. Specifically related to postsecondary success in college or career-readiness, family involvement has been found to be important and of two types –postsecondary planning and encouragement/support (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2010). Education and information were found to be important needs for families in supporting the transition from high school.

Family preferences regarding how to best communicate also may change over time. During elementary school, families prefer personal face-to-face contact with teachers and opportunities to network and communicate with other parents. While home-school communication is still desired during middle and high school, levels of face-to-face contact decrease and parents and students report that they prefer telephone calls, electronic mail, and personalized notices (Simon, 2001). Also, types and frequency of communication and partnering actions maybe shift or be different over the course of a school year, depending on circumstances. Nevertheless, across all age levels, parents who report that they feel included in child-focused school decisions and experience effective communication are more likely to rate the school more favorably and to be rated by teachers as more involved in their child's education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

## **Cultural Sharing**

Recognizing and including cultural/linguistic differences in partnering practices is crucial in our country, where, by 2050, 60% of the population will be multicultural or bilingual (United States Bureau of the Census, 2004). In effective family-school partnerships, school staff



must find ways to connect with each family and learn about each family's unique culture. Too often, families of diverse backgrounds have been unfairly perceived as being uncaring or uninvolved in their children's education when the definition of involvement is narrow and constrained to traditional forms of parent involvement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Poverty, also impacts family-school partnering since families and schools in poor communities tend to be more stressed due to limited resources. In general, families with fewer material resources report fewer feelings of outreach and engagement from schools and tend to be less involved in the cultures of the school (Vaden-Kiernan & McManus, 2005).

Boethel (2003) stated that there is much to learn about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families, but that the following points can be applied in schools: (a) no matter what their race/ethnicity, culture, or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children's success; (b) families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities are actively involved in their children's schooling - however, the types of involvement may differ somewhat from those of white, "mainstream" U.S. families; poverty and economic stressors may be linked to both the extent and types of involvement among low-income families; (3) barriers to family involvement, which can and should be explicitly addressed by schools, include contextual factors (particularly time constraints, child care needs, and transportation problems); language differences; cultural beliefs about the role of families in their children's schooling; families' lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of U.S. educational processes; and issues of exclusion and discrimination.

Broadly speaking, *culture* is a shared system of spoken and unspoken values, beliefs, and behaviors transmitted in a variety of ways and passed down from generation to generation within a family, school, or community (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 2001). Educators who are culturally competent and sensitive employ practices that are responsive to the culture, background, experiences, and beliefs of the families they serve (Leistyna, 2002).

Cultural sharing is a recommended practice (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011) and occurs when school professionals and families recognize and appreciate each other's cultural background (Garcia, Coll & Chatman, 2005). Cultural sharing allows for families to learn about each school's unique culture and school staff to learn about each family's unique culture. It involves exchanging information about context including routines and celebrations, as well as life paths. In order to truly partner with families from all different walks of life, it is important to begin with the goal of learning about each family and sharing about the specific classroom and school context (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). As a family is trying to understand the educational system, it is important to understand educators' underlying beliefs and values regarding the education of their students. It is important to "make the implicit explicit". Sometimes to initiate this process, families may need reminders and prompts that it is acceptable to ask questions and initiate dialogue. Other general suggestions for developing effective partnerships with diverse families include involving students, jointly working with community resources, taking time to build trust, reaching out and visiting homes, asking families about their worldviews and educational beliefs, freely providing information in multiple venues, and asking for feedback (Boethel, 2003).

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Everyone in a school community has a partnering role and related responsibilities. Clearly identified family-school partnering role expectations, when embedded into job descriptions, can often lead to more comprehensive, school-wide practices (Christenson, 2004). Family-school partnering roles and functions will be more readily embraced (a) when viewed as a natural part of existing job expectations versus if they are seen as "additional" unsupported



job responsibilities, and (b) when sufficient information and support is provided so that individuals feel competent in their ability to engage in these new responsibilities (Ervin & Schaugency, 2008). Additionally, new family-school partnering roles are more readily adopted when rationalized with empirical evidence that highlights the positive impact of family-school partnering on relevant educational outcomes (Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2008). Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, and Ice (2010) highlight that both families and educators' motivation, commitment, and willingness to partner are socially and mutually constructed. Both families and educators respond to invitations, interest, sense of efficacy, and role clarification.

In addition to specific job descriptions, it is important to note the importance of strong leadership in implementing and successfully sustaining family-school partnerships. Curtis, Castillo, and Cohen (2008) identify the need for a "gatekeeper" who has decision-making power, the ability to allocate resources, and authority within the system. Because the partnering focus is on schools, families, and students, tapping leaders from each of these groups is ideal (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). School principals and leadership teams must be familiar with the legal, evidence, and reform base of family-school partnering. They will need to learn, understand, and support action planning, resource reallocation, and everyday practice shifts. Focusing on the strong relationship of family-school partnering to academic achievement is often a motivating factor for school leadership. Diverse family representation will provide guidance and support families in partnering with teachers around their student's success. Again, knowledge of the rationale and specific information about their role is key for families. Tapping student organizations and student leaders to advocate for partnering, reach out to staff and family members, and support each other in school success can be powerful in enacting lasting changes in a school and in the future educational worlds (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).

### **Research to Practice Application: Doing What Works in Partnering for Every Student, Every Family, and Every Educator**

Key family-school partnership defining characteristics are based on legislative language, theory, and the research. The goal is that these "core" features, in some format, will serve as the shared practice base for collaboration between educators and families in every school and classroom. These are as follows:

- *Education is a shared responsibility between home and school.*
- *Schools must reach out to families and invite partnership.*
- *Families are active partners.*
- *Coordinating learning between home and school improves student outcomes.*
- *Student school success is the partnering shared focus.*
- *Communication is always bidirectional between home and school.*
- *Families and educators each bring expertise and cultures; there is mutual respect and sharing.*
- *Positive relationships are a priority and are based on mutual trust, respect, and acceptance.*
- *All families have access to relevant and useful information through multiple options and formats.*

(Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011; Sheridan, 2004).

Please Note: The information in this research brief for the Colorado Department of Education *MTSS FSCP Implementation Guide* is from an unpublished CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit document, *Effective*



*Family-School Partnering for Students with Disabilities: Research Review*, July 30, 2011. Sections of this review were taken from Lines, C., Miller, G.L., & Arthur-Stanley, A. (2011). *The power of family-school partnering (FSP): A practical guide for school mental health professionals and educators*. New York: Routledge.

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