Self-Efficacy: Up to the Challenge
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Bandura's (1986, 1997) considerable theoretical work and research has suggested that two personal beliefs are central to individuals' self-efficacy beliefs, and thus to their decisions about the activities they will undertake in varied domains of responsibility and functioning. The first is the belief that one has some reasonable personal control over decisions about the activities he or she will undertake. The other is the belief that one will be successful to at least some extent in those activities. The first belief incorporates the idea that individuals generally want some voice or "say" in the activities they undertake. The second suggests that individuals generally choose to engage in activities if and as they believe that their actions will indeed contribute to important outcomes. Applied specifically to the issue of parents' decision-making about active engagement in students' school learning, these two principles suggest that parents are most likely to be motivated for involvement when they believe that they have some degree of control and influence over their children's learning, as well as the kinds of activities they may choose in supporting that learning. They suggest further that parents will engage in these activities when they believe that the activities will indeed "make a difference" in their students' learning.

These two conditions are generally best met when parents' voices, ideas, and questions are sought and heard in the context of collaborative interactions between family and school regarding individual, interactive, and mutual contributions to students' successful learning. Because notable power differentials often pertain between schools and families—especially in schools serving families whose education, income, and other resources are "less" than those of the schools' teachers and administrators—it is often critically important that schools reach out to parents proactively and work to develop consistent, respectful, and effective patterns of interaction and partnerships (e.g., Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007).

The power of self-efficacy to motivate parents' active engagement in their students' schooling has been underscored by several researchers (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1991; Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For example, parents with relatively strong self-efficacy for involvement are more likely than their lower efficacy counterparts to support their students' learning at home (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Grolnick et al., 1997; Sheldon, 2002), to support students' self-management skills related to learning activities (Bandura et al., 1996), and to monitor and guide their students' school progress (Grolnick et al., 1997; Shumow & Lomax, 2002). Parents' self-efficacy for involvement has also been related to other domains of parental functioning linked to stronger student learning, including parents' aspirations and expectations for their students' school success, parents' commitment to their goals for students' learning, and the levels of motivation and perseverance parents bring to involvement when difficulties emerge (Bandura et al., 1996). Bandura emphasized further that parents' self-efficacy

beliefs also influence the quality of their thinking about problems in their children's schooling, as well as their attributions about the causes of their children's school successes and failures. Overall, the stronger and more positive parents' self-efficacy beliefs are for helping their students learn, the stronger and more effective their involvement activities and their ability to engage in effective problem-solving efforts with teachers and others will be.

Because self-efficacy beliefs are often so central to parents' involvement and success in supporting multiple aspects of their students' learning, it is very important that schools and communities understand the actions they may engage in to: (a) support the development of strong self-efficacy beliefs among students' parents, and (b) gain the student learning benefits of parents' active involvement. Bandura's (e.g., 1997) and others' (e.g., Schunk, 1989) research has underscored the critical roles of four specific factors in the development of positive self-efficacy beliefs. The first and most important is *personal experience of success in the given domain*. When parents experience such success in helping their students learn, they receive support for believing that they are capable of influencing their students' learning. As they gain more experience and success, they become increasingly likely to believe that their continued and ongoing efforts will help their students succeed. The second factor is *parents' vicarious experience of success related to involvement.* This factor functions when parents observe others (especially those who are similar to themselves in some important ways) behaving and succeeding in involvement activities. When parents observe similar others' involvement and success, they are more likely to believe that they, too, may be able to engage in such actions with similar success. The third factor supporting self-efficacy development is *verbal encouragement and persuasion from important others*. This is often most effective when the others offering encouragement and persuasion are perceived by the parent as similar to oneself and when the behaviors and activities being encouraged are perceived by the parent as personally manageable in the context of his or her own life. When such conditions pertain, parents become more likely to believe—and act on the belief—that they, too, can successfully engage in the behaviors being encouraged. The fourth and final factor motivating the development of self-efficacy is *personal emotional arousal*. In the context of family support for student learning, this emotional arousal is most often grounded in parents' concerns, hopes, and expectations for their students' educational success. When these emotions are aroused and active—especially when important others are present to encourage parents' actions grounded in those emotions—the parent is more likely to become and continue to be actively engaged in supporting students' learning.

What does this considerable body of theory and research suggest about ways in which school systems—those in State Education Agencies (SEAs), Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and local schools—might use the information to support increasingly effective parental and family engagement in students' school learning? Action principles grounded in this work are suggested below.

Action Principles
State Education Agency
1. Make and act on a public commitment—of intellect, time, and resources—to equip school administrators, teachers, and support staff for effective collaborative work with students' families. If schools across a state are to realize

the many student learning benefits associated with effective parental involvement, knowledgeable statewide leadership in the effort—and clear articulation of its importance—are likely to be critical elements of its success.

2. Take steps to ensure that basic knowledge of families' roles in students' learning—and schools' roles in supporting parents' self-efficacy for involvement—is an essential component of all educators' professional preparation in the state. Target areas should include pre-service teacher education, school administrators' pre-service education, and ongoing in-service and professional training opportunities for all school personnel. These opportunities should focus on: (a) the importance of parental involvement and its contributions to students' school success; (b) the role of self-efficacy in parents' decisions about involvement in their students' education; (c) the role of teachers' self-efficacy for supporting parental involvement; and (d) the critical role of effective family–school relationships in supporting parents' self-efficacy and their involvement in students' learning. Particularly when working to develop principal leadership in this area, draw on the skills and experiences of principals who have already developed commitment and expertise in family involvement. Engage these principal leaders—at the SEA and LEA levels—in building principals' self-efficacy for leading their schools' work with students' families.

3. Build SEA, LEA, and school principals' understanding that schools and teachers can best offer effective support for families' involvement roles and activities when schools develop effective, mutually respectful, "two-way" interactive relationships with families. Address this goal in part through well-informed and thoughtful discussion among SEA, LEA, and school leaders focused on relevant theory, research, and practice, working toward common understanding of the value of school support for parents' self-efficacy as a means to enhancing effective family support for student learning. (Note that participants' discussion of and agreement on plans, goals, roles, and responsibilities in support of parents' self-efficacy for involvement is often related to the success of those efforts [e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Wheelan, 1994]).

4. Request regular information (from school personnel and school families) regarding specific steps LEAs and individual schools within districts are taking to support parents' self-efficacy for involvement and their involvement efforts. Monitor and respond to ideas and issues noted in the reports as submitted, offering: (a) specific commendations for (and sharing of) successes, as well as (b) responses and suggestions pertinent to specific issues noted in LEA and individual school reports.

Local Education Agency

1. LEAs should offer strong explicit support for the development of school administrators', teachers', and other school staff members' knowledge of: parental involvement's role in supporting student learning; teachers' roles in supporting parents' self-efficacy for involvement; and participants' skills in and commitment to supporting parents' self-efficacy for involvement. Across these efforts, attention should be paid to the essential roles of participants': (a) beliefs about personal control and choice regarding what they do (and how they do it) in supporting parents' self-efficacy and (b) beliefs about the likely effectiveness of their efforts (e.g., "Will my efforts in fact influence teachers' self-efficacy for involving parents—and thus parents' self-efficacy for supporting student learning?").

2. Focus LEA discussions on strategies for developing administrators' and teachers' self-efficacy for building: (a) interactive and respectful relationships with students' parents, and (b) parents' self-efficacy for involvement. This principle applies much of the theory and research noted earlier to a task often overlooked in practice (the development of principal and teacher self-efficacy for involving parents). Discussions incorporating key LEA personnel and principal leaders should include meaningful engagement with specific sources of information on self-efficacy, as well as opportunities to share experiences of success in school–family interactions and support for parental involvement. This sharing should be used as foundation in brainstorming effective approaches for increasing principals' and teachers' self-efficacy for supporting parents' involvement.

3. Develop strong LEA and strong school-level (principal, teachers, other staff) understanding of four principles central to school members' effectiveness in supporting parents' self-efficacy for involvement: (a) parents' self-efficacy for involvement supports parents' decisions to become involved; (b) school and teacher support for parents' self-efficacy enhances parents' involvement and effectiveness; (c) effective parental involvement supports students' learning; and (d) there are many different ways in which families may be effectively involved in supporting their students' school success. Developing these understandings is often best served when principals and teachers commit to reading, discussing, and applying relevant information from a sample of strong, focused, and readily informative sources related to the principles.

4. School-based efforts (supported by the LEA) to enhance parents' self-efficacy for involvement are most likely to be effective when: (a) the efforts are well-led (e.g., the leader—the principal or other source familiar with the school and respected by school personnel—is knowledgeable, draws out, and values individual responses and group discussion); and (b) leaders use individual contributions and group discussion to guide group development of goals and plans for subsequent

implementation. The development of broad agreement among participants (regarding plans and responsibilities for supporting parents' self-efficacy) is often key to group and individual success in working to achieve identified goals.

School

1. Teachers play a critical role in building parents' sense of self-efficacy for support of students' learning. Teachers' active engagement in this effort is often essential to a school's ability to gain the benefits of parents' effective involvement. While parental involvement is often given a positive nod during discussion of student learning, support for parental involvement is not always a central tenet of schools' commitment to students' learning success. (This may be especially true when schools serve families where parents did not experience success during their own schooling, or where parents have had very little or no schooling, as is often the case for many immigrant and refugee families.) Effective school leadership in developing teachers' capacities for supporting parental self-efficacy is often critical to schools' collective efforts to increase student learning and achievement.

2. Active principal support is often very important to teachers' development of personal self-efficacy for involving parents. It is also often essential to teachers' commitment to gaining the knowledge necessary for supporting parents' self-efficacy. Principals—and a school's teacher-leaders— often play critical roles in collective school efforts: to examine why and how parents' involvement supports student learning; to identify teachers' skills for working effectively with parents; and to develop needed additional supports for teachers' self-efficacy in involving parents.

3. Principal and teacher leadership is also often central to the success of group work to develop strategies for engaging parents in effective support of student learning. When a principal and respected teacher-colleagues lead these efforts, participants receive notable information about the importance of the effort for the school as a whole. Meeting in group sessions can offer notable support for participants' knowledge and understanding of parental involvement as well as its importance for student learning. Such group sessions are often most valuable when participants share prior experiences of success in supporting parents' involvement and when leaders engage the group in problem-solving regarding the difficult issues that may emerge in working with students' families. Keys to the success of such sessions often include: (a) helping all participants understand that they have options in the specific approaches they take to work effectively in support of parents' sense of efficacy for involvement (control beliefs), and (b) sharing individual experiences and developing collective knowledge as well as individual belief that the actions group members take to support parents' involvement can—and often will—be effective in supporting parents' sense of

efficacy for helping their students learn (i.e., teacher efforts can and often will "make a difference"; see, for example, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

4. School principals are also well advised to include family involvement—and schoolwide efforts to support parents' sense of efficacy for involvement—as a regular item for discussion in schoolwide as well as departmental or area meetings for faculty. Treating parental involvement and teachers' efforts to support parents' efficacy for involvement as a normal topic for regular faculty discussion has two major consequences: it enhances the schoolwide salience of the effort, and it offers participants regular opportunities to access the four sources of personal efficacy. Thus, participants are likely to have and observe opportunities for sharing personal experiences of success in the area: observing and receiving the benefits of vicarious experience reported by others; hearing and receiving verbal persuasion regarding the importance of efforts in the area; and experience emotional arousal in relation to the school's goal of enhanced student learning.

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