Increasing Parent Involvement via the School, Family, and Community Partnership Model

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Introduction, Research, Local Impact, and Conclusion

Parent Involvement in their child's education contributes to achievement levels (USDE; Chadwick). Whether you work at a Title I school or not your students will benefit by a comprehensive parent involvement plan. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB Act) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), and is based on four principles that provide a framework through which families, educators, and communities can work together to improve teaching and learning. The parental involvement provisions in Title I, Part A of the ESEA reflects one of these principles. Specifically, these provisions stress shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement, and building parents' capacity for using effective practices to improve their own children's academic achievement .

Family involvement means children attend school more regularly, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, complete more homework, receive higher scores on standardized tests, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education. The research confirms the value of family involvement in improving student achievement, but the evidence also points to the important role that communities play in the education process (Chadwick).

Impact on School Resources
The impact on the school's resources is primarily providing release time for teacher training and to serve on the action team that will make the School, Family, and Community Partnership model a success. Funds will also be needed for printing materials, providing refreshments and childcare. A Title I school will have have a source of funds for parent involvement. A non-Title I school may choose to use school improvement funds, grant monies and in-kind contributions from businesses. Initially the greatest resource to account for will be the time needed for the action team to plan, execute meetings, reflect and improve upon the cycle of involvement.

Conclusion
By selecting the goal of increasing parent involvement via a comprehensive model such as described here student achievement and welfare will improve. The parent involvement must go deeper than attending one conference or one school play. It will go deeper if all six of the key involvement types are used – Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaboration with the Community. When parent groups, governing bodies, and action teams filter their goals and activities through these involvement types the quality of an informed community of caring adults rises as does mutual trust and social capital. Necessary parts of a productive environment for children.

References

Chadwick, Kathy G. (2004). Improving schools through community engagement: A practical guide for educators. Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hatch, Thomas (2009). Managing to change: how schools can survive (and sometimes thrive) in turbulent times. Teachers College Press, New York, NY.

Epstein, Joyce L. (et al.) (2002) School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action. Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

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School, Family, and Community Partnership

Overlapping Spheres of Influence (External Structure of Theoretical Model)

Imagine three sets of the cross arrow icon. One for each sphere -- the forces of school, community and family. Each force is comprised of varying degrees of experience, philosophy and practice.

School
Child
Community
Family
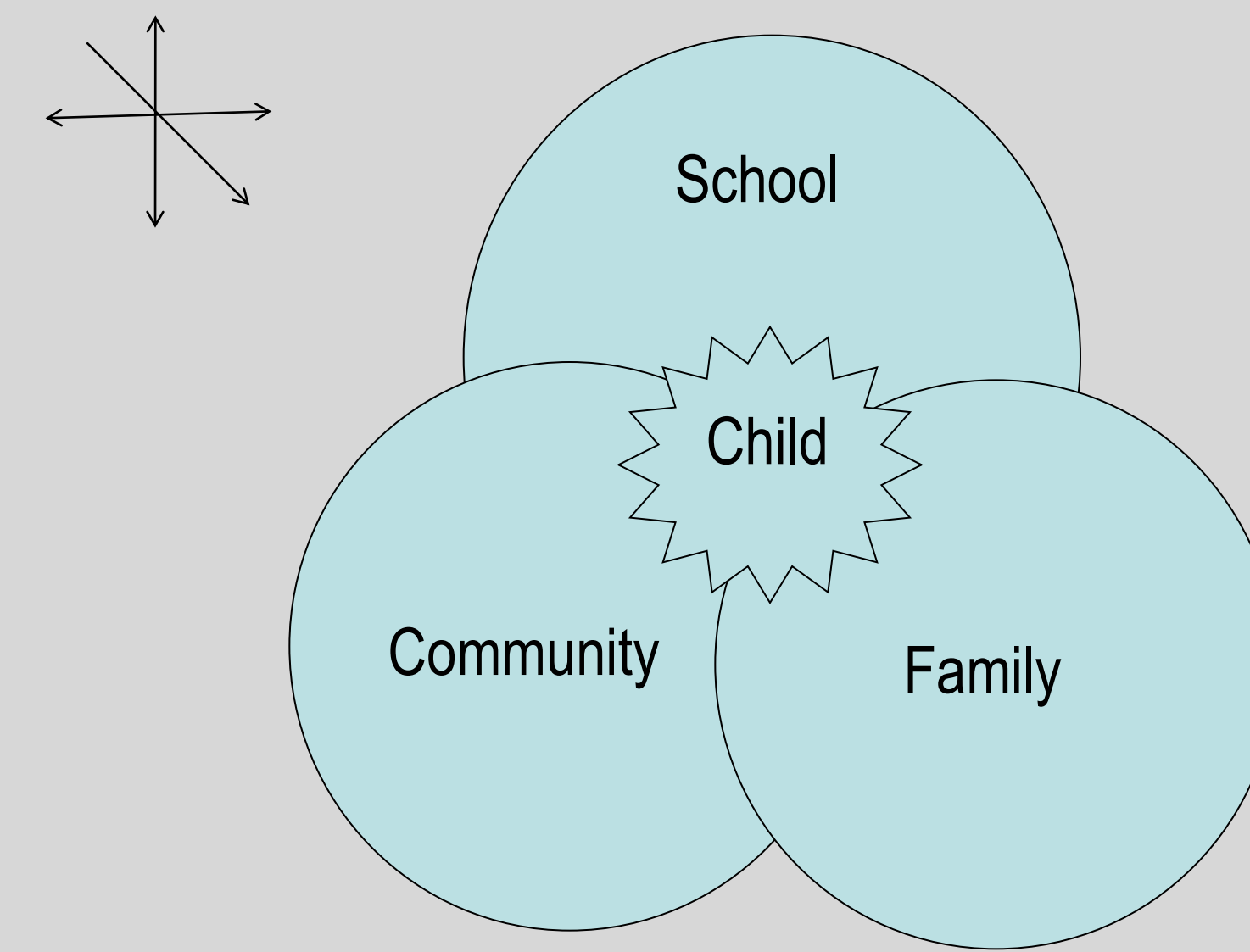
Time/Age/Grade Level is also a force
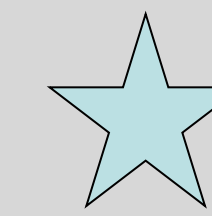
### POWERFUL SUMMARY OF WHY EPSTEIN'S MODEL WORKS

The child is the center of the model. The model is driven by using six key involvement types. Experience, philosophy and practices make up each of the school, community and family forces. When the forces are filtered through one or all of the involvement types it is likely to create conditions for enhanced student achievement and welfare.

Joyce Epstein's Theory of School, Family, and Community Partnerships involves overlapping spheres of influence. In the external view there are three major contexts in which students learn and grow – the family, the school and community – these three spheres may be drawn together or pushed apart.

In the internal model the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individual at home, at school and in the community. These social relationships may be enacted and studied at an institutional level and an individual level.

Caring communities can be built intentionally. Partnerships help students succeed across the grades.

Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Internal Structure of Theoretical Model)

FAMILY   SCHOOL

f   s
c   c
p   t
F S
C
P T
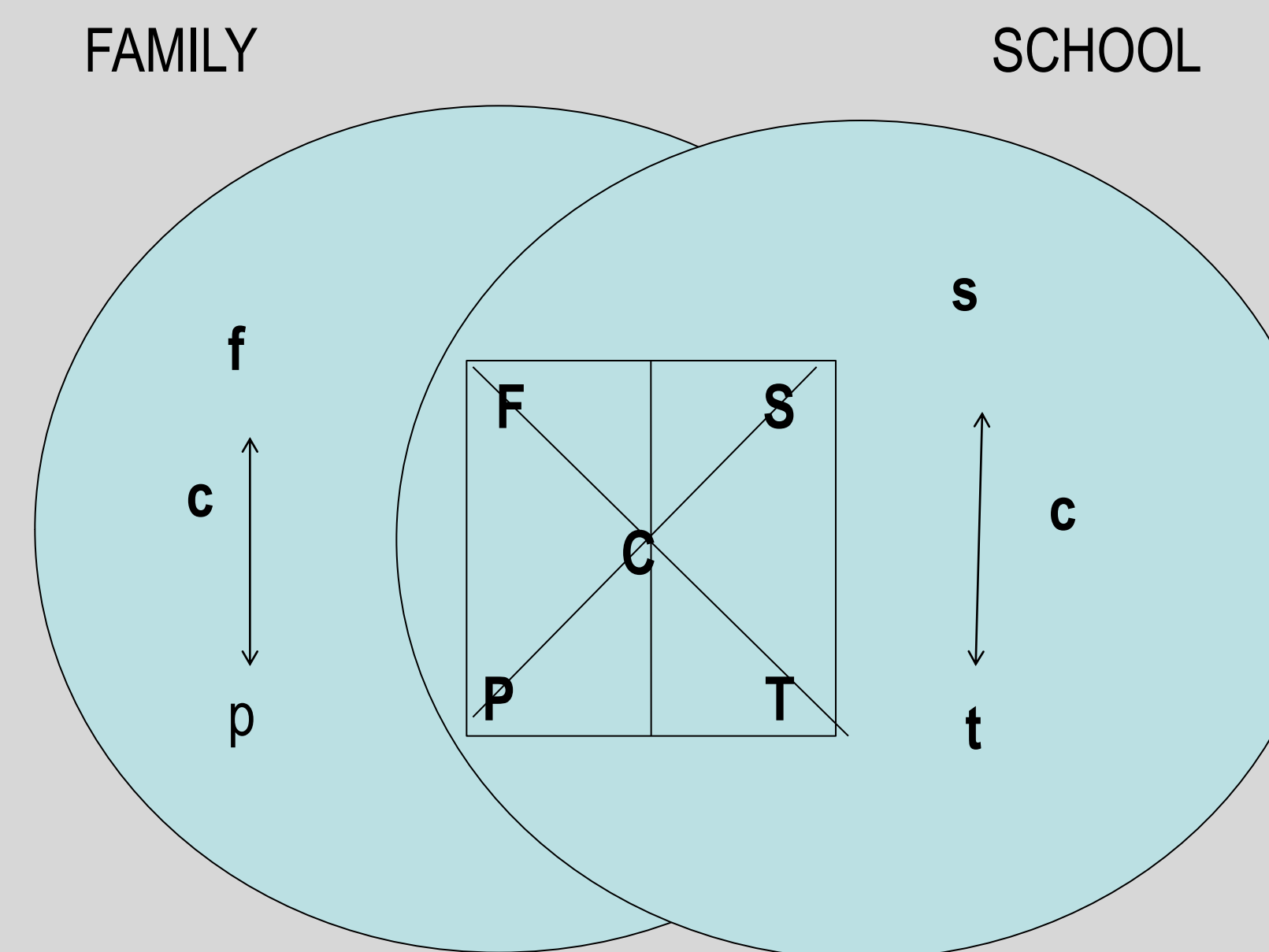
KEY: Intra-institutional interactions (lowercase)
Inter-institutional interactions (uppercase)
f/F = Family   s/S = School   c/C = Child   p/P = Parent   t/T = Teacher
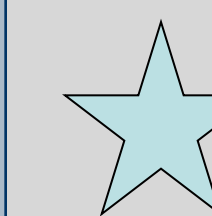
SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT THAT ARE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

PARENTING – Assist families with parenting skills, understanding child/adolescent development. Assist schools in understanding families.
COMMUNICATING – Use effective school-to-home and home-to-school systems to communicate about school programs and student progress.
VOLUNTEERING – Improve training and recruitment of families to be volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and programs.
LEARNING AT HOME – Involve families with their children in learning activities at home and at school
DECISION MAKING – Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, action teams and other parent organizations.
COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMUNITY – Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Alternative Models

Community Organizing Model as a Means of Developing Common Interests

Getting parents into schools can often run into problems when not enough parents come through the doors. An alternative approach focuses on connecting the school to life and work with the community around it. These efforts recognize that parents, teachers, and other members of the educational system have diverse needs and perspectives, but strive to help find the common interests that can serve as the basis for joint work on school improvement. Building on the community-organizing tradition of Saul Alinksy and work of the southwest Industrial Areas foundation, the Alliance Schools begin with efforts to build relationships through out the community by:

* Surveying the members of the community and school to find common interests
* Using that information to fuel conversations and identify critical issues that many members of the community and school care about
* Pursuing issues that can be addressed in a reasonable period of time

These efforts may focus on improving school facilities, repairing a playground establishing a health clinic, addressing traffic or safety concerns. The joint work builds relationships and establishes social capital that serve as a basis for further school improvement initiatives. Over time, the work together helps build a political constituency that can advocate for school in times of crises as well as apply pressure when schools or districts seem resistant or unresponsive to community concerns (Hatch, p 127)

Asset-Based Model of Community Development

The asset-based model is usually reserved for engaging the larger communities after school members are involved. Yet it is worth noting that this model could be massaged to launch parent involvement particularly if parents have grown weary of hearing about the negative aspects of their school community. Finding common interests to build social capital is key to the asset-based model. Leaders using this model believe that communities become stronger by leveraging the human assets found within a given community, rather than focusing on the needs and shortcoming of that community. Dwelling on the deficiencies often results in a fragmented approach driven by myriads real or perceived problems. An asset-based approach to community development builds on what is already working in the community. It encourages self-sufficiency and the development of leaders from within the community. In contrast leadership skills and a sense of self-sufficiency do not develop when the focus is on needs and shortcomings within the community. Preservations of the status quo and a "survival" mentality tend to be the outcomes of a deficiency-based view of the community (Chadwick, pp 39-40).

Community assets that could serve the school community are:
* Not-for-profits – churches, synagogues, cultural organizations
* Publicly funded institutions – hospitals, libraries, law enforcement
* Businesses
* Local Residents