

NASP Position Statement on Home-School Collaboration: Establishing Partnerships to Enhance Educational Outcomes

The National Association of School Psychologists is committed to increasing the academic, behavioral and social competence of all students through effective home-school collaboration. In essence, home-school collaboration refers to families and schools developing relationships as collaborative partners. Such partnerships involve families, educators and community members working together to support students' educational and mental health needs. Unlike traditional "parent involvement" activities that emphasize passive support roles for parents, home-school collaboration involves families and educators actively working together to develop shared goals and plans that support the success of all students.

Benefits of Collaboration

When families are involved in education, there are significant benefits for students, educators, and families. Students demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school and learning, higher achievement and test scores, improved behavior, increased homework completion, greater participation in academic activities, improved school attendance, and fewer placements in special education. Educators report greater job satisfaction, higher evaluation ratings from parents and administrators, and more positive associations with families. Parents experience enhanced self-efficacy, better understanding and more positive experiences with educators and schools, improved communication with their children, and better appreciation for their role in their children's education. These positive outcomes have been documented across families from diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Key Components for Collaboration

Key components for developing positive home-school collaboration include considering: (a) a framework for interaction with families; (b) the values and perceptions held about family-school relationships; (c) the climate in schools for families and educators; and (d) strategies for building shared responsibility.

Families and educators often differ in their expectations, goals, and communication patterns, sometimes leading to frustration and misunderstanding among students, families and educators. When these differences are not recognized and addressed, a lack of communication between home and school further divides and separates the two most vital support systems available to the student. Effective family-school collaboration needs to move beyond only addressing these barriers to include discussing and determining the rights, roles, responsibilities, and resources of families, school personnel, and students. Using a problem-solving approach to overcome barriers and build mutual trust is important. Open communication is essential in order for educators and families to understand and respect each other's perspectives.

Establishing Effective Partnerships

The role of schools

Parents and educators working together toward shared goals with shared power is the essential characteristic of effective home-school collaboration. The process requires ongoing planning, development, and evaluation. It also requires the allocation of adequate resources to assist families and educators in fulfilling their partnership roles. Schools must take the lead in providing opportunities for collaborative partnerships to be developed and sustained through:

Providing a positive environment: It is the school's responsibility to provide an environment and culture that is welcoming for all families. The school must send consistent messages to families that their contributions towards forming effective partnerships are valued. Efforts are made to work collaboratively with all families, including those whose primary language is not English and those with limited literacy skills.

Supporting the efforts of families and educators: Family participation increases when such participation is promoted by the school. Schools can encourage collaboration by eliciting and understanding families' perspectives and expectations. Multiple options for participation, as well as systematic forms of collaboration, should be made available, with the recognition that individual families and families from diverse backgrounds will support their children in different ways. Schools should foster an open dialogue between home and school and should provide opportunities for families to develop partnership roles in their children's education, including having decision-making roles in school governance. Resources must be provided by the school to support the collaborative efforts of families and educators (e.g., release time for teachers to meet with families in the community, development of a family support room in the school).

Working with families from diverse backgrounds: Effective home-school collaboration is also needed to support students from diverse populations. Families come in many shapes and sizes with multiple perspectives, expectations, and communication styles. Schools need to provide education to staff and families that encourages understanding and celebration of diverse family forms, cultures, ethnicities, linguistic backgrounds, and socio-economic status. Seeing diversity as a strength that provides multiple perspectives and information about a child becomes valued. When schools and families make the effort to understand and educate each other, they often find more similarities than differences. Collaboration is based in the assumption that families, children, and educators are doing the best they can; efforts are made to understand others' behavior and intentions rather than judge them as right or wrong.

Promoting a view of education as a shared responsibility: Home-school collaboration is not an activity; it is a process that guides the development of goals and plans. When collaboration is characterized by open communication, mutually agreed upon goals, and joint decision-making, education becomes a shared responsibility. Together, families and educators can discuss expectations for student achievement and their respective roles in helping students meet these expectations; they can develop programs to promote effective

home-school- community partnerships that support positive academic, behavioral and social competencies in all students; and they can engage in efforts to increase mutual respect, understanding, caring and flexibility among families and the school community. When problems arise, they are addressed jointly by families, students, and educators in a respectful, collaborative, solution-focused manner. In sum, the more continuity between home and school, the greater success children are likely to experience.

The role of families

Child-rearing is both complex and difficult. Individual families face multiple challenges with unique sets of resources, skills, and preferences. Therefore, it is unrealistic and potentially damaging to family-school relationships to take a "one size fits all" approach to collaboration. Roles for families should be broadly conceived, but individually applied. That is, educators and families should work together to develop an array of opportunities for families to participate meaningfully in their children's education. Such opportunities should be offered with the knowledge that families will differ in their choices; these differences must be understood to reflect individual families' needs and preferences. Potential avenues for family participation may include, but are not limited to:

- Active involvement in school decisions and governance
- Participation at school as volunteers and committee members
- Participation in leisure reading with their children
- Participation in school functions, athletics, and other extra-curricular activities
- Monitoring homework completion
- Regular communication with school personnel about their child's progress
- Frequent communication with their children about academic and behavioral expectations and progress
- Participation as fully informed, decision-making members of problem-solving teams (e.g., IEP teams)
- Participation in adult educational opportunities offered by the school
- Active support of the school through communication, sharing resources and seeking partnership with educators

The role of the school psychologist

NASP encourages school psychologists to take part in national, state and local efforts to define parent involvement in education as true collaborative partnerships among homes, schools and communities. School psychologists need to advocate for increased home-school collaboration and identify strategies to encourage family participation by:

- Recognizing and promoting the need to address concerns across the different contexts within which a child exists
- Implementing systematic, evidence-based models for home-school collaboration
- Establishing school-based teams consisting of parents, educators and community members that assess needs, develop priorities and plans, and implement joint efforts to improve educational outcomes for students

- Serving as a liaison to support communication among homes, schools and communities
- Ensuring the meaningful participation of families in special education processes by providing decision-making opportunities for families in assessment, intervention, and program planning activities
- Providing direct service to families regarding strategies that promote academic, behavioral and social success across environments
- Working with administrators to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to family-school collaboration efforts
- Pursuing and promoting continuing education on topics such as family interventions, multicultural issues, models of home-school collaboration and parent education

Summary

Home-school collaboration leads to improved student achievement, better behavior, better attendance, higher self-concept and more positive attitudes toward school and learning. Parents and educators also benefit when true partnerships are established. Successful home-school collaboration is dependent upon educators, families and community members working together to understand each others' perspectives and to develop shared goals. NASP is committed to supporting collaboration among families, educators and community members to promote positive educational, behavioral, and social outcomes for all children and youth.

Resources

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Note

"Parent" is defined as any adult who fulfills a parenting role for a child; it should not be interpreted to mean only birth parents. "Educators" is used to emphasize that collaboration involves the entire school community, not just teachers.

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