SCALING UP:
School-Family-Community Partnerships

CRESPAR researchers in the School-Family-Community Partnerships program are dedicated to helping schools nationwide to establish programs of partnerships and use effective processes and practices to involve families and communities. The researchers are engaged in carrying out and studying the results of two scaling up operations: (1) the scaling up of the use of effective programs of partnership from a few schools in a large district to all schools in the district; and (2) the scaling up of the use of effective programs of partnership in schools throughout the nation.

The researchers have developed, over the past decade, a school, family, and community partnership program that schools can use to develop comprehensive programs and effective practices. The approach includes:

- a theoretical base that describes overlapping spheres of influence. There are responsibilities for promoting children’s learning and development that are shared by schools, families, and communities, and they need to be working together on them;

- a framework of six types of involvement derived from the theory that grew from research and that helps explain the theory. Educators, families, and community members participate in helping families with parenting and child-rearing skills (Type 1); communicating about school programs and children’s progress (Type 2); promoting family involvement as volunteers (Type 3); involving families with children in academic activities at home (Type 4); promoting family involvement in school decision-making processes (Type 5); and obtaining resources and services from the community (Type 6).

- in each school, an Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships that guides the development and implementation of a program of activities addressing the six major types of involvement. The Action Team consists of at least six members including teachers, parents, and administrators, and may also include counselors, students (in high schools), and community members. In each school, the Action Team inventories the school’s present practices of involvement, identifies what’s worth continuing and what isn’t, creates a three-year outline of goals, objectives, and (based on their inventory) ways to maintain, improve, or add partnership practices, and then writes a detailed one-year action plan describing activities for the first year and how they will be carried out and evaluated.

A basic premise is that all schools will implement these components, but the partnership activities actually carried out under the six types will vary, depending on each school’s needs, interests, and goals.

Implementations of this approach for school-family-community partnerships in many elementary, middle, and high schools have produced a number of outcomes: improved student attendance and achievements; increased communications with high-poverty urban parents; increased parental participation in school activities; more parents working with their children at home on schoolwork (with beneficial effects on student learning and attitudes); and others. The research shows that this is an effective approach. Can it be scaled up so that eventually a critical mass of schools throughout the nation are not only using the framework but also producing the intended benefits?

Districtwide Scaling Up: School-Family-Community Partnerships

A districtwide scaling up of this program in the Baltimore City Public Schools is occurring incrementally but purposefully, adding a significant number of schools in the district each year until all schools in the district are using the program.

CRESPAR school-family-community partnership researchers and staff (Joyce Epstein, Mavis Sanders, Karen Clark Salinas, Beth Simon) are engaged in carrying out this incremental approach with Baltimore City administrators, teachers, parents, and facilitators. Baltimore’s participation began in 1987 with a pilot project in eight elementary and middle schools. In 1992, the more fully developed program was replicated in fifteen schools. In 1994, twenty-four elementary and middle schools in Baltimore’s southern region began implementation; in 1995, twenty-five elementary and middle schools in the northwest region also began using the program; now, in the 1996-97 school year, a total of 80 schools in three geographic areas of Baltimore City are developing and carrying out school-family-community partnerships using the program. The researchers estimate scaling up to 150-175 schools for the
Schools receive or get basic funding to conduct their activities. The work of the action team and the implementation of activities requires some expenditures that need to be available in a specified budget for partnerships. In Baltimore in 1996-97, the State of Maryland (also a partner in this program) provided many schools with a small amount of funding to support their partnership activities. Schools also carve out a budget from Title I, Title VI, PTA, or other sources.

Support networks provide interaction, communication, and support among schools and geographic areas, and link local efforts to national efforts. School action teams from each geographic area share best practices, problems and solutions, and plans for further progress at quarterly cluster meetings for groups of schools and at end-of-year celebration workshops for all schools in the region. In addition, the Baltimore City Public Schools district and each individual school are members of the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools.

Nationwide Scaling Up: School-Family-Community Partnerships
The nationwide scaling up of the school-family-community partnerships program is being conducted through the formation of the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, which invites membership by state departments of education, districts, and individual schools, and provides them with the guidance, materials, and professional development needed to develop the program at state, district, and school levels.

NATIONWIDE SCALE-UP OF PARTNERSHIP-2000 SCHOOLS
— AT A GLANCE —

The CRESPAR research team finds that major advances have been made by some state members, some districts, and many individual schools as implementation of the model becomes national in scope. Examples include:

State Level. The state leaders of the Maryland Partnership-2000 Initiative conducted an RFP that gives $5000 to each of the eight districts and $1000 to over 50 schools’ Action Teams for School, Family, and Community Partnerships to conduct the activities planned as members of the Network. Ohio has initiated a large RFP process to award planning grants and to provide training for over 200 schools that join the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools for 1997-98 and start their work on comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships. The schools are slated to receive $500, with options for about 40 demonstration/implementation grants later on.

District Level. Sacramento has invited its next fifteen schools to join the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, and provided training for their Action Teams. Three districts and 23 schools will form a consortium in the Ypsilanti, Michigan area in collaboration with professors from Eastern Michigan University, creating important university-school partnerships in that area.

School Level. School Action Teams in the 555 partnership schools are developing and implementing numerous activities that address all six types of partnership. For example, a Connecticut school runs a Family Connection program that addresses student writing skills and parent-child interactions; a Florida school is promoting interactive homework.
The Network was initiated in 1996, and attracted about 280 members for the 1996-97 school year. The membership for the 1997-98 school year will include eight states, about 50 districts, and over 650 schools (some of whose districts and states are also members). Other schools, districts, and states are in the process of completing membership forms for the 1997-98 school year.

States, districts, and schools that join the Network are provided with manuals, certificates, newsletters, training workshops, collections of best practices, e-mail and web site assistance, and opportunities to participate in research projects. In turn, the states, districts, and schools have a buy-in process — they commit in writing to funding their staff of facilitators and partnership activities, to reporting year-end progress, and to implementing the components of the program (Action Teams working with the six types of partnership) as specified.

Factors that Support National Scale-Up for School-Family-Community Partnerships

The factors cited in the Baltimore City district scaling up process all apply to scaling up on a national level — the need to show results, the need for a program that is structured to be replicable and which includes materials that support its use, the need for district facilitators to work with schools, the need for basic funding, and the need for local and national support networks.

CRESPAR researchers Simon, Epstein, Sanders, and Salinas, analyzing data gathered from the first 222 schools enrolled in the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, found a number of other factors related to the national scaling up of the program.

- The program can reach diverse schools. Socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic composition of Partnership-2000 schools covered a wide range.

- Elementary schools joining the partnership have stronger initial programs than do middle and high schools, and schools that serve poorer students have weaker programs initially. All schools, however, can progress from their starting points to strengthen their connections with families and communities.

- Direct district assistance to schools is more important than district policies for enabling schools to develop strong programs. In short, districts need to do more than say that they support partnerships; they need to provide their schools with funding and facilitation.

- Schools and districts that use some of their funding to establish a paid coordinator position for the program at their school are able to implement stronger programs.

The national support network — the Network of Partnership 2000 Schools — is the primary national scaling up mechanism for helping schools, districts, and state departments of education.
develop, implement, and scale up positive and permanent programs of school, family, and community partnerships.