Educator's Voice

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Family Engagement and Community Partnerships

In this issue …

Family Engagement and Community Partnerships help to build a more vibrant school environment. These valuable practices broaden the scope of support given to students by employing significant input and involvement from families and other partners.

This volume features these important initiatives by individuals and teams engaged in cultivating more robust relationships across our school communities. Authors present innovative practices which include building relationships through family home visits; empowering families with academic parent-teacher teams; offering restorative circles and peer mediation in a trauma-informed school; setting the stage for student directed learning through musical entrepreneurship; improving early literacy achievement for at-risk elementary students; and helping parents from diverse backgrounds to overcome barriers and become more involved in their child's education.
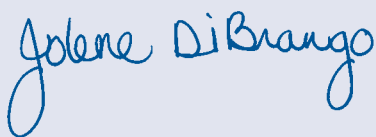
Dear Colleagues,

As we consider how to best serve the whole child, we know we can't do it in isolation. When we open our doors to families and community organizations and regard them as valuable resources, we can build understanding and increase communication. This important collaboration can help to make our schools more successful in every way.

When families and community organizations are treated as partners they become significant contributors to a more vibrant school experience for our students. And as we understand and become more responsive to the families that we serve, by learning more about them, where they live, and what *they* need to help their children to be successful at school, new bonds are formed. When families become more engaged and more actively involved in their child's daily education, we are better able to support the overall wellbeing of our students.

Schools are at the center of our communities. Strong schools can strengthen those communities and community partners can help us strengthen our schools. Engaged families and meaningful community partners help us to integrate academic, social and emotional learning, fostering a healthier school environment.

This volume highlights the various ways educators and communities have been partnering to help create the next generation of resilient citizens who will be equipped to fully participate in our society. The projects described here represent important work that opens the doors to bridge home-school and community connections in a meaningful way.

Sincerely,

Jolene DiBrango

Jolene T. DiBrango,
Executive Vice President, NYSUT

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Educator's Voice

Family Engagement and Community Partnerships

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Moving Beyond Zero-Tolerance Policies: Restorative Practices in School

SUMMARY

Restorative approaches are proven to have a significant impact on the school environment, placing the emphasis on the relationships between students and adults within the school. A unique partnership between the Schenectady City School District and an area dispute resolution center is giving students and educators the tools to improve their school.

All children have a human right to a quality education in a safe and supportive school environment.

Although this is a deeply embedded principle in the fabric of our nation's educational system, we are facing an exclusion crisis that is dismantling the very framework upon which education was built. Unwelcoming school environments, outdated zero-tolerance discipline policies, low expectations and standardized testing are silencing the voices of our youth, parents and educators. Across the nation, children of color, children with special needs, and children living in poverty are disproportionately impacted by all of these policies and practices. Punitive and ineffective approaches to school safety and discipline have dramatically increased suspensions, expulsions and police interventions. Subsequently, these punitive interventions have not improved student behavior, but rather increased the likelihood that students will be disengaged from school and then drop out (Dignity in Schools, 2012).

The alternative for Schenectady High School has been adopting a restorative approach to discipline. In two years, we have been able to reduce superintendent hearings by more than 25 percent. In four years, we cut physical altercations in half. Furthermore, the number of days that students are excluded from school has been reduced by a sizeable

Philip Weinman, a member of the Schenectady Federation of Teachers, is a National Board Certified Teacher and currently serves as the engagement supervisor and night school principal at Schenectady High School. Weinman has led the building in developing respite programs and restorative practices that support students and help teachers to build positive relationships and close the proficiency gap. He is a leading member of the district's Trauma Sensitive Schools core team. His vision is to develop a trauma-sensitive school that is invested in restorative practices as a necessary systematic change for all students. Weinman has been nominated for the Schenectady district teacher of the year, the YMCA outstanding educator award and received his school building leadership certification at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

Sarah Rudgers-Tysz is the executive director of Mediation Matters, a nonprofit community dispute resolution center serving Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren and Washington counties. Rudgers-Tysz currently serves as the president of the board of directors for the New York State Dispute Resolution Association.

Philip Weinman, Schenectady Federation of Teachers
Sarah Rudgers-Tysz, Mediation Matters

amount through the district's diversion process. We achieved these positive outcomes through a collaborative partnership with Mediation Matters, a local nonprofit community organization that specializes in dispute resolution, mediation and restorative practices.

The Schenectady School District is a large urban district in the Capital Region. The district has always been welcoming to partners from the community, recognizing that others have expertise to share and that as members of the same community we are all stronger when working together. Mediation Matters and the Schenectady district have partnered for well over 15 years, as the district was open to exploring alternative conflict resolution services for the students, educators and administrators. The partnership has been beneficial to both organizations since the district brings expertise on the students and staff while Mediation Matters brings expertise on mediation and restorative practices. Mediation Matters staff are present within the school working side by side with the teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals. District staff members participate in trainings, consult on program design and assist with the background research and

evaluation for the programs. District staff also provide information on how the restorative programs intersect with other initiatives within the schools. We each play a critical role that is supportive of one another and builds on the others' strengths.

Growing a Community Partnership

The collaboration between the SCSD and Mediation Matters started as a peer mediation program and grew to encompass restorative circles, alternative discipline approaches, diversion practices for students facing long-term suspensions, and a variety of alternative techniques used within the school. It takes both partners in this collaboration to fully embed these practices within the district. Working together, we demonstrate how building community strengthens the whole.

> *"The work around restorative practices has provided the framework for students to build social capital with peers and staff by allowing them the opportunity to navigate through difficult situations in a safe environment." — Diane Wilkinson, Schenectady HS principal*

The work around restorative practices has provided the framework for students to build social capital with peers and staff by allowing them the opportunity to navigate through difficult situations in a safe environment.

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According to its mission statement, the Schenectady City School District "will be a continually improving school district dedicated to excellence in teaching and learning, equity, engagement and efficiency." Superintendent Larry Spring has been working to address school culture and community issues in an effort to increase students' connections to school and improve attendance and graduation rates. Restorative services, including peer mediation and restorative circles, are at the core of those efforts. Working in partnership with Mediation Matters has helped the district set and achieve their goals.

Peer Mediation

Peer Mediation takes trained student mediators who sit with fellow students in conflict to help them have a productive conversation about the challenges between them. Supervised by a Mediation Matters coordinator, the sessions are entirely run by the student mediators who have instant credibility with their peers because they have shared experiences and understand the environment in which they all exist. This isn't more adults telling them what to do; it is trained mediators helping fellow students to listen to one another and seek to understand how each side approaches a problem. Mediators do not solve the problem for the participants, nor do they have judgment about those problems — the mediators' role is to facilitate the conversation and help the students to engage with one another in constructive ways.

Mediation Matters staff trains students to serve as peer mediators (and eventually co-facilitators for the restorative programming). The peer mediation training is a two-day intensive session where the students learn skills to sit with their peers in conflict without judgment. They practice active listening and learn about conflict and how it can sometimes lead to better understanding between individuals. The training involves practice role play and many exercises that help the students gain confidence working with others in conflict.

The student mediators come to the program for many reasons — some of our best mediators are former participants who appreciated the respect they were afforded in the process so much that they want to give back to others.

District demographics

The Schenectady City School District (SCSD), with a population close to 10,000 students, is one of the largest school districts in the Capital Region of New York.

— Source: www.schenectady.k12.ny.us

Selected statistics:

- 78% of Schenectady CSD students are eligible for free lunch or reduced lunch
- 84% of students are economically disadvantaged
- Schenectady is ranked 13th in the nation for highest childhood poverty rate among cities over 65,000 in population.

Student voices

Fiona: *"I am a peer mediator to help solve conflicts and change the reputation of Schenectady High School."*

Omar: *"I am a peer mediator because I love working with people and showing students in our school that there are people that care and you can talk to."*

Don: *"I am a peer mediator because I love helping people work through their problems, also I love bringing positive energy into school and to students."*

Marquis: *"I'm a peer mediator because I'm great at solving problems but I also would like to change people's views on situations and help them solve it."*

While the program is supervised by staff from Mediation Matters, the school support from teachers, administrators, and the students is critical for its success. Mediation referrals come from all sources and as we see students referring themselves or their peers at increasingly higher rates we know that it has become a part of the fabric of the school. The mediation service even expanded to host mediations between students and teachers. Those cases are handled by Mediation Matters staff members, sometimes in partnership with peer mediators. It opens up the dialogue and helps the student see the teacher as a human being and the teacher see the student as more than just another person in the class. Here is an account of one of these cases as shared by a school librarian:

Mediation Matters

Mediation Matters has been providing conflict dispute resolution services for more than 35 years. The nonprofit organization supports communities in Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren, and Washington counties. Begun as a mediation center to support the courts and administrative agencies, services have expanded into unique areas including peer mediation programs with school districts. School programs include conflict coaching and restorative practices.

The library space in our school community has as many uses as there are users. The right of access and quiet enjoyment is guaranteed. Recently, a group of students engaged in behavior that infringed upon the rights of other users so they were escorted from the library. Following administrative intervention, peer mediation sessions were set up with the students and me on an individual basis facilitated by Ms. Collazo [Mediation Matters coordinator].

The experience for me was extremely beneficial because a safe neutral space both physically and socially was provided for productive conversation. All parties had an opportunity to express their feelings, observations, and share their assessment of the situation. Conversation — this is extremely important. I cannot imagine this type of conversation taking place otherwise. I came away with new understandings of the student perspective

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Mediation and restorative practices have been a catalyst at Schenectady High School, helping to reduce disciplinary hearings and improving our school's climate.

related to the situation and I believe the converse to be true as well.

My relationship has changed with the students in the sense I feel we have gotten to know each other in a way that did not exist prior to this experience. Perhaps it could be considered mutual respect. Since this experience I have recommended other faculty members consider this as an option to attempt to resolve teacher/student conflicts.

Our case numbers from all referral sources have never been higher and the fact that this program can intersect with the restorative work so well has enhanced all of these initiatives.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices are approaches to building a culture within the school that focus on relationships among the entire school community. The theory is that we want to enhance learning by engaging students in a way that values them, holds them accountable, and sends them the message that they belong in the school. A fundamental premise of restorative practices is that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than *to* them or for them (Costello, 2010).

The New York Civil Liberties Union did a comparison study between six schools that implemented restorative responses as compared to 89 similarly placed schools that used metal detectors and more traditional punitive measures and 12 impact schools that were targeted for increased policing. They found that the six schools had significantly higher than average attendance, student stability and graduation rates, as well as a lower than average incidence of crime and school suspensions (NYCLU, 2010). Another study found that over the course of three years post-implementation, cumulative graduation rates rose 60 percent in restorative justice (RJ) schools (Jain, et. al., 2014).

Mediation and restorative practices have been a catalyst at Schenectady High School, helping to reduce disciplinary hearings (see Figure 1), and improving our school's climate. Since implementing restorative practices in the school, Schenectady High School has already seen a 7 percent increase in its graduation rate. However, the district's over-suspension of students with disabilities and students who are members of minority groups is still an ongoing problem worthy of serious consideration from a trauma-informed lens.

The harmfulness of racial microaggressions (i.e., use of racial slurs, demeaning a person's racial heritage, or subtly excluding persons of color) in addition to "internalized racism, overt racist experience, discrimination, and oppression within the lives of people of color" is widely recognized in the literature, and is relevant for our district, as we have a highly diverse student population (DeAngelis, T. 2009, p. 40). It is likely that both problems add stress and additional trauma to the lives of many SCSD students. As a district we have been working with the Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality (TAC-D) for a number of years. This work will continue so that we ensure poverty, race and disability are never predictors of success.

As members of the SCSD educational community, we each have the ability to mitigate the impact of these adverse circumstances by examining our own values and assumptions and their impact on our understanding of students and our interactions with them. We can be resiliency-promoters by doing our part to establish school restorative environments that are safe and predictable with consistent routines, limits and expectations. We can also begin to help students gain a sense of control by creating opportunities for choice and establishing caring and trusting relationships with students in order to foster positive teaching and learning outcomes (SCSD, 2017).

Consider what happens in a home when a young person "breaks the rules." They are often grounded — which draws them into the home further. Contrast that to a school where we suspend or expel them — which drives them out and severs the relationship. David Miller, an associate professor of school psychology at the University at Albany most recently articulated *"rather than functioning as a punisher, suspensions often function as a reinforcer for some students. In such situations, it allows kids to escape what for them is an aversive environment and when that occurs can inadvertently result in an increase — rather than a decrease in problem behavior* (Matson, 2017)." It is these limiting factors that led the Schenectady City School District to partner with Mediation Matters.

Figure 1

16/17 and 17/18 SHS (September) Discipline Comparison
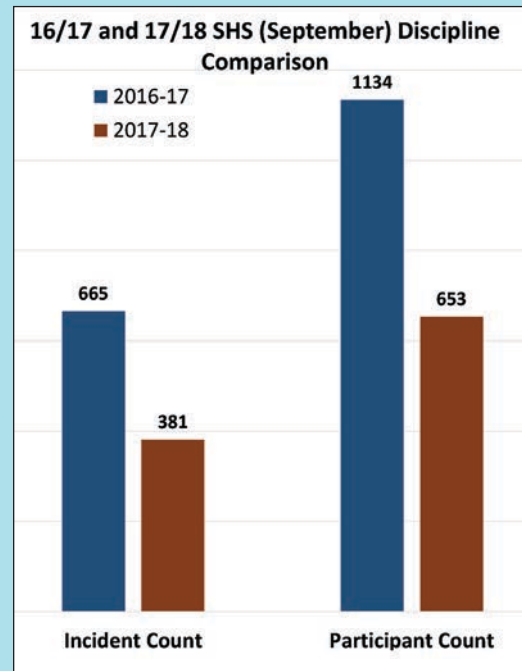
Source: Schenectady High School

Moving Beyond Zero-Tolerance Policies: Restorative Practices in School

Restorative practices and trauma sensitive schoolwide initiatives give teachers and students the tools to build positive school environments around healthy relationships.

Implementing restorative practices has started with implementing community-building circles. A Restorative Circle places all members of a community (classroom, club, group) in a circle and the "Circle Keeper" asks meaningful questions and then passes a talking piece consecutively around the circle. The talking piece provides a forum to truly hear one another as no one speaks until the talking piece is passed to them. It allows the members of the circle to sit with each question and answer (if they choose) from their heart.

To bridge the equity gap, circles are used to give all students an equal opportunity to participate and an opportunity to voice their opinions. This, too, builds community as space is given to all to share and students who have not previously spoken find the courage to contribute in this environment. Tom Cavanagh supports these findings in his 2009 study where he found that relationships were the primary reason students attended and strived to do well in school. Cavanagh

Students and educators participate in a restorative circle.

(2009, p. 62–85) states *"Where positive peer relationships were present, students felt safer to contribute, take risks with their learning, and learn from each other … group dynamics of the classroom make a difference to student motivation and attitudes toward learning."*

Trauma-Informed Schools

The Government Law Center reported that Schenectady County had the highest rate of index crimes in New York State, 50 percent higher than the index crimes reported in New York City (Liebman, 2016). In addition, a large percentage of our students have experienced one or more adverse childhood experiences (SCSD, 2016). In a trauma-informed school, the adults in the school community are prepared to recognize and respond to those who have been impacted by traumatic stress. In addition, students are provided with clear expectations and communication strategies to guide them through stressful situations.

Restorative practices and trauma sensitive schoolwide initiatives give teachers and students the tools to build positive school environments around healthy relationships. The goal is to not only provide tools to cope with extreme situations but to create an underlying culture of respect and support.

Taliah's story illustrates this point.

Taliah is a student who had missed two weeks of school because of a traumatic family experience and was just returning to her biology classroom. She was asked during a community circle of 18 students who inspired her? Taliah responded: "Myself. I have to inspire myself because I am the only one that is going to get myself to class and be able to take accountability for the work I need to do. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one that cares." As the talking piece was handed to Mrs. Larkins, she responded to Taliah that she cared and invited Taliah to stay after school to get caught up on her work. After the circle, Taliah attended class more than 90 percent of the time and passed the New York State Biology Regents exam. Hers is one of countless stories of students who have had adverse childhood experiences and avoided classes because they didn't think anyone cared.

Creating an environment that is safe for students to express themselves, and encouraging an opportunity to build appropriate relationships is the pathway to connecting students to our school's curriculum. Teddy Roosevelt said it best: "No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care." At Schenectady High School we are creating a culture of care.

Restorative practices allow students to take responsibility for their actions and can help them understand that when they act poorly they affect those around them. Moshe, a student who cursed at a teacher, was asked to have a conference with the teacher to provide a forum for exploration of the impact of his actions. After the conference, Moshe stated, *"I was happy to actually talk to the teacher after I flipped out on her. I was in a really bad spot and wanted to make it right. I never got to do that before. Normally I just get sent to the office then go back the next day."*

Policies and Outcomes

Last year, Mediation Matters held more than 30 teacher-student conferences and 251 circles. The teacher and student are asked to discuss the disagreement and explain how the behavior impacted the relationship. Under our old policy, students would simply be given a detention or in-school suspension and would've never been asked to face the person that they had offended. The goal of restorative justice is to mend the damaged relationship and as an added benefit keep students from missing class. If the negative behavior continues, we still increase the severity of the consequence and hold the student responsible, but through restorative

> Creating an environment that is safe for students to express themselves, and encouraging an opportunity to build appropriate relationships is the pathway to connecting students to our school's curriculum.

Figure 2: Punitive to Restorative Approach

Infraction	Old Policy (Punitive)	New Policy (Restorative)
Insubordination	Detention or in-school suspension	Reflective letter or mediation with the person harmed
Verbal conflict	One-day out-of-school suspension	Individual conflict coaching session or impromptu circle
Minor physical altercation	3- to 5-day suspension	Peer mediation or restorative circle with stakeholders
Physical altercation	5-day suspension or Superintendent's hearing	Informal hearing with parents or formal conference to repair harm

Source: Schenectady High School

programming it does so while helping students to understand the broader impact and still feel welcome within the school environment. To improve this process we have developed a comprehensive strategy that holds students accountable to their peers, teachers and, most importantly, themselves.

Figure 2 illustrates a simple comparison of growth in our policies. Depending on the infraction, some traditional discipline may accompany the restorative response, but even traditional discipline can maintain relationships if offered with a restorative lens.

Data from staff surveys indicate that 79% of the circles have improved teacher/student relationships and decreased student discipline in the classroom. In addition, 96% of teachers also agreed that they would recommend the process to peers. Leah Akinleye, a biology teacher and now Schenectady High School's engagement dean, reflected on how the circle process expanded her thinking around restorative practices.

> *I learned about the use of restorative practices to create a classroom community through an email and briefly from a previous professional development session. At first, I thought "hey, why not, it's one less day with a challenging class." Little did I realize the transformation within the class through the use of just one restorative circle. Relationships make a classroom a welcoming and productive place indicating the bond between teacher and student and between students. One student specifically, Steve, lacked these connections with myself and his classmates. He came late in the year, so we already had a comfortable classroom environment that he did not feel a part of. This disallowed Steve to be a productive member of the classroom community. Steve was a young, black male who experienced personal trauma, did not engage in school but still had a love of learning. He was challenging; I welcomed him. I told him my expectations; I set the tone.*

Upon starting the restorative circle, I didn't know what to expect. First, we introduced ourselves and shared what animal represents us. Then, we spoke about classroom expectations. The students expressed how although Ms. A is strict she cares about us and expects us all to be successful. They all agreed on that. Then the questions got personal. Some kids passed but most students didn't. "Who is your inspiration?" We got to Steve and he said his mother. We went around again and dug deeper. Two young men I least anticipated to get emotional started to cry when sharing about their fathers and family members. The other students were shocked but gave support. This was an amazing experience for me to witness how in crisis the students all came together.

From that restorative circle the classroom dynamic improved. We did another circle focused on community that involved games and team building. Since that first restorative circle, Steve and many other students left with a connection to each other and to me. Steve only missed one of my classes, he checked in every morning and every period 6. He wanted someone to listen. He wanted to feel valued. He wanted teachers to not judge him for his loudness, dark skin, attire and lack of resources. He wanted teachers to accept him for who he was and what he is going to become. He felt alone and needed that connection. Steve is 14 and I am 33. We are from a

Figure 3: Language Shifts

Punitive	Restorative
School and rules violated	People and relationships violated
Justice focuses on establishing guilt	Justices identifies needs and obligations
Accountability = punishment	Accountability = understanding impact, repairing harm
Justice directed at offender, victim is ignored	Offender, victim and school all have direct roles in justice process
Rules and intent outweigh whether outcome is positive/negative	Offender is responsible for harmful behavior, repairing harm and working towards positive outcomes
No opportunity for remorse or amends	Opportunity given for amends and expression of remorse

Source: Schenectady High School

completely different upbringing, but searching for the same acceptance, voice and purpose. Restorative practice is not a period off, it's an experience creating classroom communities, relationships and lifelong connections that provide an opportunity for change.

Implementing Restorative Practices

Restorative practices and mediation are not *another program* — they are a *new approach to doing school.* Therefore, to best establish the services at the very foundation of the school, it is wise to implement in tiers. Starting initially with basic language shifts (see Figure 3) where the philosophy is doing school "with the students" rather

Figure 4

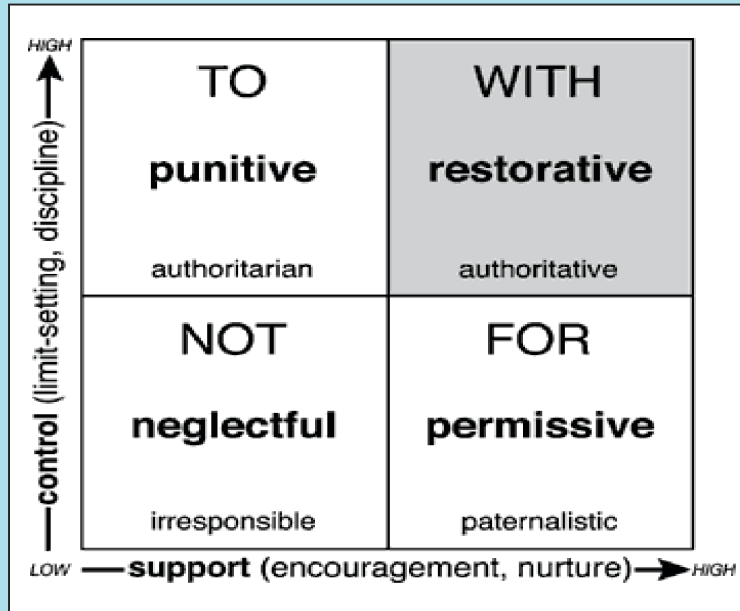Source: International Institute for Restorative Practices

During these early stages it is wise to partner with an outside organization to help with training and implementation. As training and implementation are ongoing, the outside partner can handle the most serious issues needing full facilitated conferences as they require extensive training to facilitate.

Using a community partner can help you gain the training and experience you will need to fully embed the program into the school. If a staff member is forced to do this in addition to their other duties, it often is left to the side and it does not remain a focus, which means it is just another initiative that failed. Plus, having an outside center like Mediation Matters, allows districts to benefit from their experiences with other districts. Whether it be peer mediation or restorative practices, we have seen schools succeed most often when they seek outside assistance with more than just training. When districts bring in that support for the design of the systems they wish to build, the initiative is sustainable long-term and extends deeper into the school community.

Some schools have met with challenges when administrators impose the program on teachers without seeking their participation and input. Further, we have seen schools falter when they train everyone without supporting the implementation after the training. But, if the school seeks input from key

than holding school "for the students." (See Figure 4).

Implementing community building circles first among staff and then expanding into classrooms has the effect of building a community of practitioners and supporters of the process. You need champions for the processes you seek to build and those champions need to be people who are respected among their peers. These professionals make up your stakeholder group who will help you build internal partners and define success for evaluation of the initiative. Later, once you have the buy-in to move forward you can begin to address minor infractions through restorative approaches.

stakeholders and implements in incremental ways, the teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals build a community among themselves which makes the environment a more productive place to work and the students can feel the shift even in the first phase of service.

At Schenectady High School, the data and student feedback from the community circles have inspired us to develop a 10-person restorative practice team made up of all stakeholders (including Mediation Matters) that now has the capacity to have a wide array of circles covering different topics operating in the building daily (see Figure 5, page 15). This grew out of the work done in the initial phase and was successful once we had gained the support from the larger school community. It is through this work that the high school has been able to move into holding conferences for more severe actions and a process to respond to students reentering the school after a longer suspension. Again, it is particularly helpful to have a community partner like Mediation Matters to collaborate on these more serious processes as the staff builds internal capacity and receives the training to continue the services long term.

Conclusion

On Aug. 23, 2017, five Schenectady High School students, who are active peer mediators, were invited to speak to the board of education as the board reviewed the new 2017–18 code of conduct. These are students who have received the training and have served as mediators for their fellow students and the teachers within the high school. The five students stood energetically in front of the board members and spoke about their experiences. It is important to note that the new code of conduct was met with some initial resistance but, eventually, it was unanimously approved.

Jasmine, who had found it difficult to express herself earlier, clearly stated: *"Circles in the classroom changed me. They gave teachers an opportunity to finally see me for who I am." "The circles,"* Zariah chimed in, *"give everyone an opportunity to be heard. Teachers don't always know what we go through and in a community circle we can let them know."* Mark Snyder, who has been a board member for two years, then asked: "Do you think restorative practices are changing the culture for our younger students?" The five girls simultaneously answered *YES. "We have become their mentors."*

These young women, and so many students like them, are the leaders in the school community and are strengthening relationships, one mediation, one circle, and one conference at a time.

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Family Engagement through Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

SUMMARY

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams are a vehicle for improving early literacy achievement in at-risk elementary school students. Learn how one Ossining educator used the approach to improve recognition of letter names and sounds along with building a partnership between home and school, family and teacher.

Increasing student achievement is the fundamental goal that grounds everything we do as educators. One tool for increasing student achievement is the school/family partnership. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is intended to reduce the academic achievement gap and acknowledges the importance of the school/family partnership by linking Title 1 funding directly to parent/family outreach and engagement (Henderson, 2015). According to the Revised Template for the Consolidated State Plan, *"The Family and Community Engagement Program is an initiative focused on building respectful and trusting relationships between home, community, and school."* In order to support student success, family engagement must take priority in school plans and become an integral part of the educational system.

School leaders, teachers, parents and families can all benefit from taking a closer look at parent involvement versus family engagement as they plan interactions with families. A shift from parent involvement to family engagement means that parents are equipped with knowledge about specific skills that are necessary for their child to understand in order to successfully master a grade level standard. It should also mean that any and all family members or caregivers can participate in the critical role of helping students to build these skills at home.

In recent years, family engagement has become a significant focus for many urban and suburban school districts (Henderson and Mapp, 2007; Mapp and Kuttner, 2013; Paredes, 2017). Family engagement here is defined broadly as a parent/teacher collaboration intended to drive student learning and achievement (Paredes, 2017).

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Mary Catherine Hillman, Ossining Teachers Association

Halgunseth (2009) notes that family engagement should be continuous, reciprocal and strength based. Mapp and Kuttner (2014) add that family engagement must be relational and collaborative, developmental, and linked to learning. While families generally want their children to do well in school and have a desire to help them succeed, often the past academic experiences of parents can negatively impact their involvement in their child's education (Mapp, 2003; Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez, 2015).

Some children from economically disadvantaged families may enter high school with literacy skills five years behind those of higher-income students (Reardon, Valentino, Kalogrides, Shores, & Greenberg, 2013). Additionally, poverty and what Shonkoff and Garner term "toxic stressors" in early childhood can lead to lasting impacts on learning (2012). Examples of toxic stressors include homelessness and hunger, or having parents who are absent or incarcerated.

Traditionally, parents have been given the opportunity to be involved in their child's schooling when they meet their child's teacher at Back to School Night or an open house. Typically this is where information is presented and rules and procedures are explained. In many school districts, parent/teacher conferences are scheduled twice during the school year, once in the late fall and then again in the early to mid-spring. This time provides an opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss student progress and achievement. Many times however, this small chunk of time gets taken up by questions about behavior, or explanations about classroom/school policy or procedures. As such, these traditional opportunities for parent interaction are limited in ways, and do not always facilitate an environment of collaboration and support as called for by proponents of family engagement.

Family and Community Engagement

The Template for the Consolidated State Plan states, " The Board of Regents recognizes that (1) improved student achievement is linked to engaging parents and families in the education process, (2) parents and families are the first educators of children, and (3) education is the shared responsibility of schools, parents and families and the community.

Family Engagement through Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

APTTs empower families with the tools and strategies to recognize that they are their child's first educator.

The often limited and precious time that parents and educators have to spend together can be even better utilized when families are provided with opportunities to learn about what is expected of their child and how they can work with the teachers to help their child outside of school. While it is important for parents to meet with their child's teacher, when families are truly engaged, this meeting can be a chance for the parents and teacher to work as a team to create a plan of action with the needs of the child in mind. In the ideal situation, the teacher is not the only one doing the talking and successes can be celebrated and challenges/struggles acknowledged and discussed.

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

One model that rethinks the traditional time teachers and parents have to spend together can be found in the work of Maria Paredes. In her work, Paredes examines Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT). In APTT classrooms, the teacher(s) and the entire class of parents or other caregivers, come together three times a year to meet as a team. At these meetings, classwide data is shared, individual student progress is noted and goals for improvement are set. This model has been shown to create strong partnerships and collaboration between families and teachers for the benefit of student learning and achievement (Paredes, 2017).

APTTs involve families as partners with the teacher/school in the education process. They empower parents/families with the tools and strategies to recognize that they are their child's first educator. Teams also allow adult stakeholders to build relationships around trust and shared responsibility.

Ossining UFSD Ethnicity by percentage

- Latino — 54.3%
- White — 26.3%
- Black — 12.2%
- Asian
- Multiracial
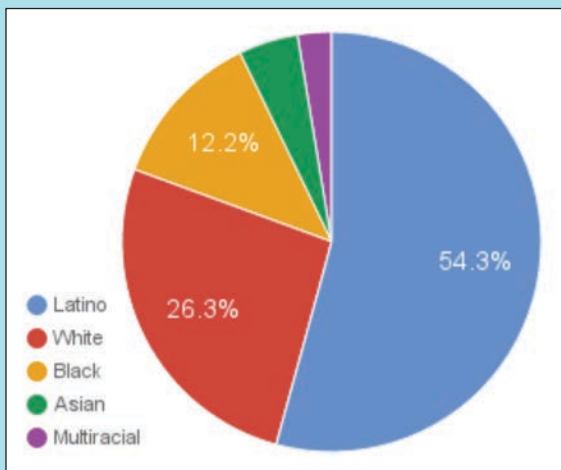
Source: nysed.gov school report cards

Park School/Ossining district

Number of economically disadvantaged students

- Park School
- Districtwide

2012-2013 2013-2014 2014-2015
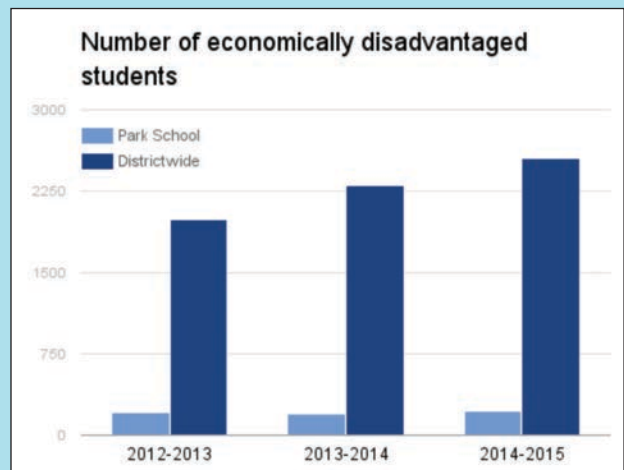
Source: nysed.gov school report cards

Action research study

In order to investigate the impact of family engagement on academic achievement in early literacy, I conducted a small-scale pilot study with six families as part of an action research graduate course. Although the number of participants is not statistically significant, this study might provide foundational information that could inform a larger study.

The setting was a kindergarten classroom in Park Early Childhood Center in Ossining, New York. This pilot study investigated the link between family engagement and student achievement in order to explore whether collaboration with families, modeled and directed practice of a specific activity, clear expectations and goal setting, would lead to increased student achievement.

The focus of the action research study was an examination of the letter name and letter sound fluency of a small group of students and their families in a kindergarten classroom. The participants received an invitation to an additional group conference with the teacher. The targeted students were those who were receiving Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and were at risk for chronic absenteeism. The purpose of the additional meeting was to engage families as a group in supporting their child's learning. Specifically, this plan would include

goal setting and collaboration in support of the school's learning goals specific to literacy. This practice would include a data-driven conversational shift around goal setting, as well as detailing and modeling of supports during the additional group meeting. A follow-up conversation during parent/teacher conferences would allow discussion of student progress and next steps/additional goal setting. This action research utilized components of the APTT model, however I did not hold a meeting with the entire class, which is how a true APTT meeting would be held.

Figure 1 shows how parent/teacher conferences with goal setting and modeling of home supports will lead to a stronger understanding by families of how to support their child at home by practicing a specific strategy or activity that is linked to learning. This support from families, paired with the learning in the classroom, leads to increased student achievement in literacy.

It is important to note that interactions between teachers and families as they work together as a team provide multiple opportunities to help increase student achievement.

Group Meeting

The group meeting with families focused on three main areas: data sharing, modeling and practice and goal setting.

■ Data Sharing

Families were welcomed and thanked for taking the time to meet with the teacher outside of the usual parent/teacher conference days. I provided each family member with a folder containing data specific to their child's progress. In this case, each family received information about the upper-case and lowercase letters and sounds that their child could identify, untimed, at that point in the school year. They were also given a graph that included bars for letter naming fluency (LNF) and letter sound fluency (LSF) for all six students who were targeted for the extra meeting. This graph showed how these children scored on

benchmarking data (timed one-minute probes) as compared to the average kindergarten student. This information was kept confidential by assigning each student to a letter (A-F). The data was presented and explained and family members were given the opportunity to process the information and ask questions.

■ Modeling and Practice

The next component of the meeting involved modeling and practice of a specific activity that families could do at home with their child to practice letter name and letter sound fluency. Families watched as I modeled the activity and then they were given a chance to act as if they were at home with their child. This was beneficial because at this point, participants could ask questions and anticipate situations or roadblocks that might occur at home and we were able to

Figure 1: Logic model for action research study

Parent/Teacher Conferences with goal setting and modeling of home supports linked to learning

Monitor student progress

Parent/Teacher Conference to review progress and set goals

Families have a better understanding of how to support their child at home through engagement that is linked to learning.

Increased student achievement in literacy through family engagement.

brainstorm ideas and solutions to the challenges. Participants were shown how to time the fluency measure and also practiced how to give an answer to their child after three seconds of non-response so that the child could move on in a timely fashion to complete the timed activity. Families were given links to online resources that further reinforced the skills being targeted at the meeting.

■ **Goal Setting**

Lastly, I worked with each participant on creating a goal for improvement for their child. Family members left the meeting knowing exactly what and how to practice at home with their child and what the expectations were for anticipated growth by the next meeting, nearly a month later.

In the following vignette a parent learns more about his child's progress:

Families are welcomed and thanked for attending. When data is shared one parent stops the group and says: "Wow! Now I really know what I need to help my daughter do." His daughter is a student falling below grade-level expectations. "I'm here to show you how we can work together to help your daughter," the teacher responds. The teacher models an explicit activity. "She'll love doing this with us," the father says. Parents practice the activity with each other, some pretending to play the role of a child. "So this is the letter and

sound chart that my child always comes home chanting," says another parent. The families are given a chance to see the materials and interact with the letter/sound chart in a way that they might typically not be able to do if it was just sent home in their child's folder. The families then make an agreement to practice the activity for a specified amount of time over a specified number of days. "I can do this," said the father who was originally so excited about the chance to learn how to help his daughter. "We can do this," he rephrased his thought, "… my daughter, me and you, of course! Thanks for bringing us in here to see this so clearly."

Findings

A brief post-meeting questionnaire was completed by each participant. Parents in attendance identified many aspects of the meeting that they considered to be helpful. These included: *"Practicing the names of the letters while the timer was running."* And, *"Her explaining the chart and monitoring our child."* One parent also noted that it was particularly important for him to feel that he now knew that no matter what he could talk to me about anything that has to do with his child.

All parents in attendance felt strongly that because of the meeting they would

be better able to monitor their child's progress. They also agreed that they left the meeting with a much better understanding of what to do with information sent home from school. Additionally, because of the meeting, parents identified that they felt they could have more meaningful conversations with their child about how he/she is doing in school.

The following tables show the results of progress monitoring for the four students who accepted invitations to the meeting. The students whose families attended the meeting (Student A and Student B) made significant progress in letter naming fluency and were able to sustain that progress throughout the remainder of the school year. Progress from two of the four students whose

families did not attend the group meeting (Student C and Student D) is shown in the tables. These students did not show a substantial increase in their rate of improvement as compared to their peers.

Discussion

The data show that students A and B both improved significantly in LNF a week after the additional group meeting. Not only did they continue to improve, but this improvement was sustained throughout the remainder of the school year with the continued support of the AIS teacher and classroom interventions which were put into place in April.

It should be noted that students made the most progress in letter naming

Progress monitoring: Letter Naming Fluency (number correct in one minute)						
	2/2 Week prior to meeting	2/16 Week after meeting	3/2 Day after follow up parent/teacher conference	3/16	3/30	End of Year
Student A	4	26	33	30	36	36
Student B	16	26	25	27	32	32
Student C	20	27	22	6	12	29
Student D	8	8	7	6	2	13

fluency after families were trained in the activity to help at home. Letter sound fluency progress was slower for the two students whose families attended the meeting, however they did meet their Student Learning Objective (SLO) by the end of May.

My relationship with the families who attended the additional meeting became a closer and more meaningful one. We began to rely on each other for support in the quest to ensure academic improvement for the child. Notes went home on a weekly basis to encourage continuation of the activity at home. Student attitude and confidence also increased as they saw themselves improving from week to week. One student was proud to admit, "I'm practicing this at home with Daddy

every night!" when she was praised for improvement after a progress monitoring day.

This building of relationships and trust is consistent with the findings of Henderson and Mapp (2002) who identify that "students do better in school and in life when their parents are engaged in their education. Family engagement contributes to a range of positive student outcomes, including improved student achievement, decreased disciplinary issues, and improved parent/child and teacher/child relationships." The post-meeting surveys also indicate that parents appreciate the extra effort to provide them with guidance in supporting their child's academic success. The importance of engaging parents in this

> Family engagement contributes to a range of positive student outcomes, including improved student achievement, decreased disciplinary issues, and improved parent/child and teacher/child relationships."

Progress monitoring: Letter Sound Fluency (number correct in one minute)

	2/2 Week prior to meeting	2/16 Week after meeting	3/2 Day after follow up parent/teacher conference	3/16	3/30	End of Year
Student A	9	9	13	11	22	36
Student B	4	15	13	13	17	21
Student C	6	11	11	11	15	23
Student D	3	5	3	1	2	0

way is supported by the work of Hill and Tyson (2009), who say that, "when it comes to how strongly parent involvement predicts student achievement, a parent's participation in school itself is a blip on the radar screen compared to a parent holding high expectations and setting goals for their individual child, monitoring progress and holding them accountable, and supporting learning at home, among other things."

Although this was a small-scale pilot study that used only parts of the APTT model, it is clear that there was a measurable positive impact on both relationship building and student achievement. These findings support the importance of family engagement for school success (Henderson and Mapp (2002), Bryk and Schneider (2002).

This practice has the potential to involve all teachers and staff members across the school community. Classroom teachers, special educators, social workers, psychologists, reading specialists, special area teachers, etc., can utilize this model to help link family engagement to learning and provide families with the skills and strategies they need to help their child practice at home.

This action research project served as a springboard for professional development opportunities for others. At the end of the school year, I was formally trained in APTT and presented the findings of the action research pilot study at a building-level faculty meeting, as well as a professional learning community on family engagement. I also developed a three-hour workshop entitled, "Making the most out of back to school night and parent teacher conferences," which presented research in the family engagement field and focused on APPT and student-led conferences as a means to link family engagement to learning. Seventeen teachers throughout the district attended this workshop in June 2017.

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Building Home-School Connections through Parent-Student University

SUMMARY

How can teachers engage families with diverse language backgrounds? One district used a multi-faceted approach to create a more inclusive atmosphere for parents, with an eye toward student academic success. The Parent-Student University helps families to overcome common barriers and to become more informed and actively engaged in their child's life at school.

Every parent wants his or her child to succeed in school.

This idea transcends demographics including race, religion, ethnicity, education level, income level and family composition. Research shows that student educational success can be related to family involvement in school. According to Henderson & Mapp (2002), "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." With parental involvement in learning, student achievement increases regardless of ethnic background, socioeconomic status or parental level of education (Antunez, 2000). But obstacles can sometimes arise when trying to build these home-school connections, especially with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Lack of time, language barriers and childcare needs can sometimes interfere with a family's ability to get involved.

Parent-Student University (PSU) at Hicksville Public Schools was created to help families to overcome these obstacles and strengthen communication among students, teachers, administrators and families of a historically at-risk population. PSU is a biannual evening event where families of English language learners (ELLs) can gather, enjoy a meal and attend workshops related to education while learning about other related services. The supervisor of the English as a New Language program, Lisa Estrada, and

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Lisa Estrada is the supervisor of English as a New Language (ENL), bilingual, and world language programs at Hicksville Public Schools, in Hicksville, New York. Her educational experience and training includes more than 27 years of ESL and bilingual education in K–12 settings. She provides professional development and curriculum design on instructional strategies and technology integration for linguistically diverse students.

Justina Ketyer, Hicksville Congress of Teachers
Lisa Estrada, Hicksville Public Schools

the guidance chairperson, Effie Rafaelides, recognized the need for increasing parent involvement of ELLs in our community and were instrumental to its creation.

Nuts and Bolts

One of the original goals of PSU was to help immigrant parents become more aware of the "nuts and bolts" of secondary schools in the United States. As a district, our objective was to provide training to parents in understanding school culture and to help them learn more about what is expected of them as members of our school community. Some were not exactly sure about how to support their children's education at home (Lopez, 2001). We wanted them to have a "blueprint" of the structure of their child's education in Hicksville. We also wanted to help them to think about post-secondary plans for their children.

In order to help parents understand the basic framework of school and how their child is assessed, Mrs. Estrada and Mrs. Rafaelides chose topics for the first event including information about the secondary curricula, report cards, and requirements for graduation. We hoped addressing these topics would serve as a starting point to help families to become more involved in their child's learning.

We relied heavily on Hicksville High School staff to reach out to Spanish-speaking students and families. A bilingual teaching assistant phoned all Hicksville middle and high school Spanish-speaking families. Students were personally invited to this event through presentations in all ENL classrooms conducted by teachers and the bilingual guidance counselor, Patricia Aliperti. Ms. Aliperti maintains an open-door policy with Spanish-speaking parents, answering questions and providing support whenever necessary. She connects families with community counseling services and identifies the neediest of families for free resources. Students and their families have received bicycles, coats, and holiday meals from local organizations. In addition to Spanish, letters went home in English and Hindi, encouraging families to attend. We even scheduled automated calls to serve as reminders as the date drew near.

Hicksville Demographics

The Hicksville Public School District in Nassau County, Long Island, is in a suburban area about 30 miles from New York City. It includes seven elementary buildings, one middle school and one high school.

The district serves 5,940 students, more than 600 of whom are ELLs with 31 language backgrounds. Of those students, 72.5% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Student enrollment data shows this population is growing. In the previous school year (2015–16), Hicksville counted only 471 ELLs. The three most common languages spoken after English are Spanish, Urdu and Punjabi.

Building Home-School Connections through Parent-Student University

Hicksville teachers work with students participating in Parent-Student University.

Under the CR Part 154 regulations, each school is required to hold two parent meetings per year. PSU is an additional event parents may attend if they wish to. Many parents work long hours with demanding and often inflexible schedules. For them, visiting schools during the day could mean lost wages or the possibility of losing a job. In light of these and other constraints, we welcomed all family members, thereby removing the barrier of childcare for many. Seventy-five adults and children attended the first PSU event from 6–8 p.m. at Hicksville High School. By holding the event in the evening, our district addressed one of the most common hurdles to parental involvement. Although the event was held at the high school, ELL parents from all buildings were invited, so the connections formed are districtwide.

ENL teachers provided homework help, read books with children or just talked with them about their day.

National Honor Society members entertained young children with movies and games while their parents attended workshops. A workshop entitled "Planning for the Future" outlined the requirements for graduation including courses of study, number of credit hours, and standardized tests. It offered strategies for parents to talk to their teenagers about their aspirations and to set short- and long-term goals. Another workshop, "Tips for Parents of Secondary Students" offered ideas for parents to support their children at home. Parents were advised to limit students' screen time, facilitate regular, on-time school attendance, and encourage students to participate in school activities. Both workshops emphasized the important role the family plays in a student's academic success.

One workshop entitled "Tips for Parents of Elementary Students" included practical information about proper nutrition, medical checkups and sleep. We demonstrated how to help with homework and ways to support literacy development at home. We discussed ways to reduce the stress of learning a new language and adjusting to a new school and culture. We highlighted challenges their children may face such as difficult reading material and understanding and participating in class discussions. A father remarked, "I never knew how hard it is for my

son in school. I never knew what they had to do." These types of skills-based workshops address the needs and interests of parents as determined by prior relationships with them (Harry and Waterman, 2008).

Another well-attended presentation entitled "Legal Services" was provided by the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN). This organization provided legal consultation and assistance regarding citizenship applications. Attorneys discussed the free legal services and community workshops available to all families. Families were encouraged to call the attorneys for private pro bono appointments. Many of the families in attendance took advantage of the opportunity to ask questions and have continued to use the services of this organization. In fact, CARECEN has temporarily suspended accepting new pro bono cases after the last PSU as it has reached its maximum caseload. The center also offers free English classes and community workshops on various topics for adults.

Student volunteers were available to translate material and presentations into many of the languages represented, including: Hindi, Urdu, Nepali, Albanian, Bengali, Farsi, Vietnamese, Pashto, Creole, Tamil, Chinese, Punjabi and Spanish.

PSU also provided additional opportunities for Hicksville Congress of

Teachers members to get involved with union activities. Teachers who have attended PSU said it gave them a chance to talk to parents and to find out what they need to help their students to become successful. They felt they became advocates for their students and families. One teacher said, "It was different than speaking to them at a parent-teacher conference. We were more clearly on the same team, with the same goal. I learned a lot from them."

Finally, to show our appreciation, we provided a full dinner of pizza, pasta, salad, refreshments and dessert. Sharing a meal brings everyone together and is also an incentive for families to attend future events. We used round tables in the cafeteria decorated with tablecloths and flowers to create a warm, inviting atmosphere. We wanted families to feel welcomed and respected. One parent remarked, "This is the first time I have come to something like this. I never went to anything at any of

Dinner is served at one of the PSU events.

my son's schools. I feel so happy to be here tonight." At the end of the night, a drawing was held and two families received turkeys for Thanksgiving donated by administrators.

Parent Survey

After the event, families were asked to complete a survey, both to assess their feelings about the event and to help identify topics for future workshops. The survey (see appendix) helped ensure that our PSU events and workshops met the needs of the families we serve. Included were questions about the cultural backgrounds of the attendees, whether or not an interpreter was used, and which time of day is best for future events. We confirmed through the survey that evenings work best, and that the availability of interpreters and babysitting were a tremendous help to the parents who attended. Some parents commented on how they enjoyed sharing dinner with their families in the nicely decorated high school cafe. Others were surprised to learn about services the Hicksville district offers, such as a bilingual classroom for elementary students. Several families of low-incidence languages, like Polish and Greek, were happy to connect with other families, students and staff members who also speak those languages.

Survey results also showed the parents' most popular interests were learning

English, followed by parenting tips, help with homework and legal services. As a follow-up, information about adult ENL classes in the area was sent to those parents who inquired.

Other workshop requests included:

- Financial counseling
- College and career planning
- Power School (an online academic scheduling program)
- Health-related topics
- Social services
- Email and Internet access
- American culture and traditions
- Sports
- Scholarships

Making it Happen

One source of funding for Parent Student University comes through the Hicksville Congress of Teachers' Local Action Project (LAP) team. LAP is an intensive community outreach/coalition building intiative offered through NYSUT.

Members from the Hicksville CT, including Justina Ketyer, attended a week-long workshop during three consecutive summers (2014–16) to improve internal and external communications, strengthen member participation and improve community outreach.

The HCT used some funds from its participation in LAP to cover the cost of dinner and refreshments, decorations and paper goods. By helping to fund PSU, the Hicksville local union strengthened relationships with community members and improved parental communication.

More resources

Our ELL students and their families have many economic and educational challenges. According to Eric Jensen (2009), "Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance (p. 14)." In talking to and working with our ELL families, we learned that necessary social services were often out of reach due to lack of funds and language barriers.

Hicksville LAP Team

The Hicksville Congress of Teachers LAP team focused on four pillars: increasing member involvement, improving political action, strengthening community engagement and expanding communications.

Increasing member involvement: The HCT established the Member Engagement (ME) Committee in fall 2014. Using the slogan, "Turning ME into WE," the HCT emphasized the importance of supporting the union and its mission through the individual work of its members. The ME Committee comprised about 40 members who met with Peter Lanzo, one of NYSUT's Labor Relations Specialists, during the year to develop their understanding of unionism and to participate in charitable work. Through the ME Committee, the HCT created opportunities for member involvement for teachers who don't have the time or inclination for leadership roles within the union. Since 2014, individual participation at all HCT events has increased by about 26 percent, according to union attendance records.

Improving Political Action: The HCT appointed a Political Action Committee (PAC) chair to address the second pillar of LAP. The PAC chair helps organize the annual VOTE-COPE initiative, a non-partisan fund to which members voluntarily contribute to support education- and labor-related issues. The HCT also participates in phone banking (both in person and virtual) to help pass the annual district budget. In spring 2017, the HCT executive board met with candidates running for membership on the district's school board.

Strengthening Community Engagement: Parent-Student University is one activity that addresses the third LAP pillar, strengthening community engagement. Other events included welcoming families to Hicksville's open house, collecting food and money for a local food pantry, sponsoring and attending local youth sports events, collecting supplies for local veterans and more.

Expanding Communications: Finally, HCT worked toward improving both its internal and external communications. By using the software program Zoho, union leaders can easily group members by building, department or interest and contact them by email. It helps keep members apprised of upcoming dates or events and maintains public information such as department affiliation and years of service. HCT established and maintains active social media accounts to keep the community aware of its activities. Articles about community-related events are published in local newspapers and on the HCT website.

Building Home-School Connections through Parent-Student University

Through a partnership with a community literacy organization, PSU was able to provide free books to families.

To better serve the needs of our families, we contacted the Health & Welfare Council of Long Island (HWCLI). Through this organization, we were able to increase the awareness of public policies and programs. The president and CEO, Gwen O'Shea, coordinated with local agencies to present a workshop at PSU called "Health Services." HWCLI arranged for presenters from its Nutrition Outreach & Education Program (NOEP). They explained enrollment in programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the New York State Health Insurance Marketplace. The coordinator of NOEP assisted our families in completing SNAP and health insurance applications for their children. Contact information for a Spanish-speaking enrollment administrator was also provided for families to assist them with their health insurance needs. Appointments were held at Hicksville High School for these families.

Hicksville social workers connected us with the Hispanic Counseling Center (HCC), a multi-service agency with a culturally competent, bilingual staff. The center offers programs for the prevention and treatment of chemical dependency, mental illness, and youth and family services free of charge. One of HCC's stated goals is to "enhance the strengths of Long Island's families and children through counseling, prevention, vocational and educational services to enrich their lives." We distributed pamphlets for HCC and described its available services. These organizations have been invited to participate in this year's PSU.

We also informed parents about some of the resources available to them right in Hicksville. One resource unknown to many is the bilingual program at Old Country Road School — which houses the bilingual program and the district's greatest number of Spanish-speaking families — and the bilingual classes available at Hicksville Middle School and Hicksville High School. Another is *The Book Fairies*, a not-for-profit group that collects and distributes gently used books throughout Metropolitan New York and its surrounding areas. Through *The Book Fairies*, hundreds of books spanning all reading levels are available for students to take home. Students were surprised the books

were free and did not have to be returned. One very enthusiastic girl shouted, "I can keep them? This is awesome!"

Since the launch of the PSU, attendance at PTA meetings has increased by about 10 percent at Old Country Road School. Teachers have also reported fewer parents missing appointments for parent-teacher conferences held in the fall.

Planning ahead

Equipped with experience and parent survey results, we planned for the next PSU event. As indicated by the list of workshop requests above, parents' interests were wider than originally expected. We decided to broaden both our audience and the scope of our workshops. Families of ELLs from all nine (elementary and secondary) school buildings were invited. Therefore, we expanded our focus to what parents could do at home to promote success with younger learners.

Planning is underway for the 2018 Parent-Student University. Hicksville has recently established a Parent Center in the administration building in which meetings can be scheduled and materials distributed. This will be a valuable resource for parents, especially since the staff is bilingual and culturally aware. We will highlight the Parent Center at PSU, along with a few new initiatives. To ensure parents have

access to their children's progress reports and report cards, we will offer a new workshop about Hicksville's online educational feedback system called Power School. Using Chromebook computers we will help register parents for Power School and establish parent accounts so they can view their children's grades and progress reports online. We will also demonstrate and explain its features. Through Power School, parents can monitor their child's schedule and attendance, and access school notices. They can view grades for each student, even if they attend different schools in the district. If they download the application, they can use a smartphone to access this information as well. Although many of our families lack Internet access at home, almost all parents have a smartphone to stay abreast of their children's progress. They may use the Parent Center or the Hicksville Public Library for this purpose as well. Administrators for the Parent Center will be scheduling open hours so parents may use computers and language learning software to improve their English skills.

The district has also purchased a subscription to Propio Language Services, an over-the-phone interpreting system with more than 200 available languages. It is quick and easy to use. Teachers, school nurses and administrative staff can communicate with families in the language with which they

Since the launch of the PSU ... teachers have reported fewer parents missing appointments for parent-teacher conferences.

Building Home-School Connections through Parent-Student University

> If we continue our efforts to make parents feel welcome and make it easier for them to participate, we can ensure success for us and, more importantly, for our students.

are most comfortable. Teachers can also use the service for both phone and in-person parent conferences to discuss student progress. We have found this service invaluable for connecting with families who speak another language at home. It has changed the culture surrounding communication and outreach by removing language barriers. Propio helps teachers and staff feel more confident in creating successful dialogs about students. Thus, they may be inclined to communicate more often.

Although Parent-Student University is only two years old, Hicksville has made good progress in strengthening the home-school connection for English language learners. By acknowledging the language and culture of our students and providing information and services tailored to their needs, we were able to establish very real relationships among teachers, administrators and families. We hope to expand our program to reinforce these relationships throughout the district. Our students' success depends on it. "When schools support parent involvement at home and school, students make greater gains. When schools build partnerships with families by responding to their concerns and honoring their contributions, they succeed in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving student achievement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002, p. 8)."

Many elementary students who attended Parent-Student University said they enjoyed seeing their teachers and getting free books. But a more important measure of the program's success is parents' attitudes toward school and their increased participation in their children's education. One parent commented, "I feel like because I don't speak English, I can't help. Now I think I can help him [her son] in different ways." It is with this confidence that we hope parents will become more involved, ask more questions and support their children at home.

In the future, our focus will be creating opportunities for our ELL parents to contribute to the schools in a significant way. Researchers have found that parental attendance at as little as one to two additional events per year was associated with meaningful gains in literacy among low-income students (Dearing, Krieder, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006). To that end, bilingual staff could promote PTA meetings and be available to interpret. Providing transportation to school events like open house or parent-teacher conferences might remove an obstacle for some families. Establishing a group of parents who could attend events together and support each other may help increase attendance as well. If we continue our efforts to make parents feel welcome and make it easier for them to participate, we can ensure success for us and, more importantly, for our students.

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Appendix 1: Survey

HICKSVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PARENT AND STUDENT UNIVERSITY
November 24, 2015
SURVEY

Thank you for attending this evening! We are so happy that you were able to join us.

Student Name: _____ Grade:_____

Home Language: _____

1. Who attended the workshop?   # of Parents in attendance _____

 # of Guardians in attendance _____   # of Children in attendance _____

2. Did you have a translator assist you? Yes _____ No _____

3. Was it helpful having a translator? Yes _____ No _____

4. What did you find most helpful this evening? _____

5. Was it helpful having childcare? Yes _____ No _____

6. What did you like most about this evening's workshop? _____
_____

7. We would like to provide future workshops. What time works best for you? _____
_____

8. Would you prefer morning or evening workshops? _____

Please check topics you would like to see covered in future workshops.

_____ Learning to Speak English

_____ Health Related Topics

_____ Social Services

_____ Legal Advice

_____ Financial Counseling

_____ College and Career Planning

_____ Power School Access and Academics

_____ Email and Internet Access

_____ Parenting Tips

_____ American Culture and Traditions

Other Topics: _____

Building Capacity for Family-School Engagement through Labor/Management Collaboration

SUMMARY

In one low-income neighborhood in the city of Troy, NY, a unique project by the teacher's union and the district is working to strengthen family-school engagement using home visits, increased communication and Academic Parent-Teacher Teams.

At the start of every school year do you say to yourself,

how can I get the parents and families more involved with my class? Let's increase the number of people that show up at open house and parent conferences. If more parents are involved, then good things will come and our students will do better, right?

School 2 is a neighborhood K-5 elementary school located in the North Central section of Troy. The school serves approximately 300 students, with a majority of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Despite making progress on improving test scores and other metrics, the school was placed in the state's receivership program. Under receivership, the school and the superintendent developed a plan to improve academic performance. Fortunately, School 2 had already implemented many of the changes suggested by the state, including an increase in professional development and training for school staff, operating as a community school and finding new ways to work with families and the community to support learning and academic achievement.

At the same time the Troy Teachers Association was looking for new ways to work with families, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) was looking for locals to take part in a project on family engagement. Funded by the

Seth Cohen, a 31-year veteran of the Troy City School District, teaches earth science and agricultural sustainability at Troy High School. A graduate of SUNY Geneseo (Bachelor of Science in Geological Sciences) and SUNY Albany (Master of Science in Secondary Education), Cohen is a proud public school advocate. He is the K-12 curriculum leader for science as well as the president of the Troy Teachers Association. He is especially proud of fostering a climate of collaboration between labor and management in all aspects of the educational community in Troy.

Natélege Turner-Hassell began her career as a teacher. For eight years, she taught at Giffen Memorial Elementary School in the Albany City School District. She holds both an SDL (School District Leader) and SBL (School Building Leader) certificate from the College of Saint Rose. Prior to becoming principal of School 2, Turner-Hassell served as the Troy City School District Response to Intervention coordinator for five years.

Seth Cohen, Troy Teachers Association
Natélege Turner-Hassell, Troy City School District

National Education Association (NEA), the goal of the Parent School Engagement and Empowerment Project (PSEEP) was to work with locals to advocate for students and the community using home visits and Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT). Home visits consisted of classroom teachers, teaching assistants and other School-Related Professionals making visits to a child's home before the academic school year started. These visits typically took place during the last two weeks of August, with each visit lasting 20–30 minutes. The APTT is a method to enhance the focus of a traditional parent-teacher conference into a more academic strategy rather than simply a conversation.

Labor/Management Collaboration

An important aspect of public school reform is the relationship between the educators and the administration, labor and management. The teachers, represented by their union, must have a voice in policies and procedures.

Building-level principals have a major role in carrying out those policies and procedures. Conflicts often arise between labor and management when there are ideological differences on the policies and procedures. However, if labor and management can build relationships that foster collaboration among educators (teachers and principals), and focus on teaching and problem-solving, then students will obtain greater academic achievement.

One criterion for taking part in the NYSUT Parent School Engagement and Empowerment Project was strong

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams

Developed by Dr. Maria C. Paredes in the mid-2000's, the APTT model is a way to repurpose the traditional parent-teacher conference by having teachers "coach parents to become engaged, knowledgeable members of the academic team (O'Brien, 2012)."

APTT has two components. First, large group meetings are held by the teacher and all the parents of the classroom to review and explain academic data. At the initial meeting, parents and teachers will set SMART academic goals (Specific, Measureable, Actionable, Realistic and Time-bound). Teachers can also model for parents activities they can do at home with their children. Second, in-depth individual conferences are held among teacher, student and parents to review performance data, discuss how the at-home support is progressing and continue to build strong relationships.

> A school striving for parent engagement ... tends to lead with its ears — listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about.

labor/management collaboration and willingness of the staff to try a new approach. Findings in a series of studies conducted by the American Rights at Work Education Fund (2011) continue to support the benefits of labor and management collaboration and the importance of finding ways to work together, including transforming public schools, engaging with families in more meaningful ways and connecting with families in purposeful ways. These findings are supported by similar studies by Rutgers University (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2014) that show schools with higher levels of labor/management collaboration work together to find solutions and try new approaches for school improvement.

Attempts had already been made to involve families in the school, with limited success. In an attempt to try a new approach, the teachers, staff and administrators at School 2 wanted to understand the difference between "involving" versus "engaging" and determine whether engagement would make a difference in their efforts to get families more connected to the school. Historically, about 30 to 50 families attended open house (about 10% of the enrollment) and families of students who were struggling academically did not attend school events or programs. Participating in the PSEEP might help the school gain more insight into the benefits of home visits while at the same time teach them how

to improve their outreach to parents and families. According to the Flamboyan Foundation (2014), "the largest predictor of whether families are engaged at school and at home are the specific family and school engagement practices that encourage and guide families (p.3)."

The focus of the PSEEP for the Troy Teachers Association was on family-school engagement, building trusting relationships and using the Academic Parent-Teacher Team approach in place of a "traditional" open house in September. The goal of family engagement is not to serve clients but to gain partners (ASCD, May 2011). Studies also show that "family engagement matters to the success of the school as an enterprise (p.10)." Bryk et al.'s (2010) study of school reform efforts across 400 Chicago schools revealed that schools with high trust levels among parents, teachers, and school leadership are more likely to experience improvement in math and reading achievement than schools where trust levels among these groups are lower.

The first question to be addressed was on terminology: involvement versus engagement. The dictionary defines involve as "to enfold or envelope," whereas to engage is "to come together and interlock." Thus, involvement implies doing to; in contrast, engagement implies doing with. A school

striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth — identifying projects, needs, and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. A school striving for parent engagement, on the other hand, tends to lead with its ears — listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about.

The Troy TA had been discussing a partnership with families, but how to go about that was the real question. The teachers, staff and administrators needed to understand what family engagement was all about and then they needed to be trained in some new processes and approaches. In August of 2016, 56 classroom teachers and staff were trained by NYSUT on "must haves" for building capacity for family-school engagement (see box 1), conducting family (home) visits (see box 2) and implementing the Academic Parent-Teacher Teams.

Given the "must haves," the teachers and staff at School 2 needed targeted training to make the family-school engagement visits productive, purposeful and successful. It is well-documented that an important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. Families, however, are the first teachers of their children. Therefore, teachers and staff needed to understand how to go about building a relationship so both teacher and family could positively affect the academic environment for their children. The family visit approach is based on the tenets of trust, active listening, collaboration, and honor and respect for ALL families.

Figure 1

Six "Must Haves" for Capacity-Building Family-School Engagement (FSE) Visits

1. Labor and Management Collaboration

2. Voluntary participation

3. Understand purpose of visit: Home visiting is about relationships

4. Advance planning

5. Training

6. Reflection

The training targeted six areas:

1. **Assumptions and Beliefs:** Step back and examine cultural assumptions and personal biases if any, toward families, children and communities due to differences, disparities, and experiences.

2. **Conversations and Communications:** Practice strategies and tips for engaging in "authentic" conversations that aim to build trust and leverage family and community assets for student learning and success.

3. *Family School Visit Approach:* Review and understand the six elements of NYSUT's evidence-based approach to conducting family visits and tips for building a trusting relationships with families and school.

4. **Practice:** Use the "I Do, We Do, You Do" modeling strategy to apply FSE techniques to build capacity and confidence for family visits.

> The constant dialogue between labor (teachers) and management (principals) helped to create a positive climate for teacher collaboration, which led to increased problem-solving efforts.

5. **Reflection:** Engage in guided reflection to capture important takeaways and insights. Use your insights to support instruction, learning, and student success.

6. **Strategy:** Use the power of reflection to guide your actions. Use team discussions to identify, plan, and implement capacity-building strategies for family-school engagement at the individual, grade, and school levels.

The intent of NYSUT's intensive training program is to strengthen school staff's ability to work together for their (family and school) mutual benefit. According to Dr. Karen Mapp, "Despite the desire to work with families from diverse backgrounds, cultures, languages, and socio-economic levels, many schools and educators *struggle* with how to cultivate and sustain positive relationships and build strong partnerships with families (p.7)."

Both educators and families face multiple barriers when building relationships and partnerships for the benefit of their children. Both have a lack of trust in each other ("Will they follow through on what they say they will do for the child"?). Both may view the other's environment as unwelcoming; parents may have past negative experiences when dealing with school officials and educators may see the

community as unsafe for them. Parents may not know how to navigate the system to help their child and the educators may not know which community or family member to talk to about the students. Parents and teachers alike have misgivings on how they will be perceived. Both are in unfamiliar territory. Family (home) visits can be used to break down barriers and build relationships.

The Troy Teachers Association encouraged individual teachers to take leadership roles in setting up home visits and to use their expertise in making academic decisions. The building principal had frequent and informal communication with her faculty, which encouraged the quality of collaboration. The focus of this dialogue was always student-centered and problem-solving.

As a result, the teachers did not feel as though the home visit project and APTT were directives, but rather a joint effort to find solutions for student success. The constant dialogue between labor (teachers) and management (principals) helped to create a positive climate for teacher collaboration, which led to increased problem-solving efforts.

Union leaders, school administrators and central office personnel worked to create an atmosphere of cooperation. Although voluntary, nearly 95% of the

teachers participated in some aspects of the FSE process. Breaking down the barriers between the "professionals" and the family was key to building trust. Visits are arranged in advance, and conducted in pairs with a goal of visiting a cross section of families in the school community. School staff participated in training by NYSUT to develop an understanding about effective family-school partnerships linked to learning. Individual and group reflection on the visits helped foster a climate of success and action.

Family Home Visits

A year before NYSUT came to do the training, the principal encouraged a handful of teachers to do home visits. At that time, there was some apprehension about what was expected of each party. While the teachers benefited from the experience, they realized that training would provide them with needed supports. Participating in the NYSUT training provided a structure and set of protocols to ensure the visits would be more productive. The visits were planned in advance and families knew that the visits were voluntary and were about building trusting relationships. Most importantly, they knew the teachers were there to listen. School staff (the classroom teacher and a teaching assistant, or other School Related-Professional) visited for 20–30

Figure 1: Key tips for having successful home visits

- Call a few weeks in advance to set specific time and place for the visit

- Invite family members to share knowledge about their student's lives, interests, hopes and dreams

- Recognize and respect differences in family structures and roles

- Don't bring anything to write on (no notebook, folder, etc.) — this is a relationship building visit, not an evaluation

- Make no judgments about the home environment

minutes in living rooms, at kitchen tables and on front steps, and at the public library. The basic premise was to assume good intentions and approach all families as partners who only want the best for their children.

The training gave the teachers some background in teacher-family dynamics as well as relationship-building techniques. Before the visits, educators role played making "the call," introducing themselves, stating the reason for the visit, confirming the time and place, and setting the tone. Educators made sure families understood that the visit was to get to know each other better and work together to make sure the child is successful in school.

During the visits the teachers made sure to keep the conversation light and

open. Many teachers started by sharing something about themselves, maybe how long they've worked at School 2 or how many children they have, what they like about the school, etc. This was followed up by asking the parent(s) about themselves and then really listening. A key question on all visits was, "What are your hopes and dreams for your child?" Again, it was crucial for the educators to actively listen to the response and think or comment on how they could assist the parents with those aspirations.

The home visits concluded with "what do you expect from me" and "I hope to see you at parent-teacher conferences, back to school night, etc." In addition, educators extend a genuine thank you for taking the time to meet.

After the summer of training, the home visits were vastly improved from those held previously, with the addition of conversation points, and an explanation of the process. Teachers reported they had more confidence in why home visits are important and how they could lead to academic improvements.

Once back at school, all teams reported individual reflections on how well the visits went, and answered the following questions: "What did I learn from the families about the school community?" "What did I learn or experience that I can use to improve as a teacher?" "How can that knowledge be used to support student learning and success in the classroom?"

Group reflections on the same questions occurred by grade level and were then shared out at a full faculty meeting. The overall response from the educators indicated that the process was positive and productive, especially in the area of breaking down barriers of communication. Each party now had a face to put to the voice over the phone. Teachers said it was now easier to make phone calls home to discuss issues concerning the students. Parents interviewed after the home visits also indicated that they were now more open to hearing from teachers and not to jump to the conclusion that something was *wrong* but that they now had a partner in helping their child succeed.

Feedback from teachers supports the many benefits this project has in preparing staff for relationship building and conducting home visits. The NYSUT model for family-engagement visits highlighted that the visits were less about what the home or physical space looked like, and more about building relationships and making connections with the family members.

Mapp (2013) describes four dual critical capacity areas that are necessary for both staff and families to partner together for student success.

1. Capability — the specific types of human capital, skills and knowledge and know-how

2. Cognition — beliefs and assumptions and world views

3. Connections — social capital, internal and external relationships

4. Confidence — self-efficacy and a person's ability to engage in this type of work.

Two questions were asked of 26 participants regarding the 4 C's as described by Mapp. How would you rate your capacity in each of the areas *before* and *after* the training? The chart below shows a shift of understanding from Poor or Fair to Good and Excellent.

How would you rate your capacity in each of the 4-C areas *before* this training?

Critical capacity areas

How would you rate your capacity in each of the 4-C areas BEFORE this training?	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Capabilities (skills, knowledge	8%	15%	69%	8%
Connections (networks)	0%	23%	69%	8%
Cognition (beliefs, value)	0%	46%	54%	0%
Confidence (self-efficacy)	0%	39%	54%	8%
How would you rate your capacity in each of the 4-C areas AFTER this training?	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Capabilities (skills, knowledge)	15%	85%	0%	0%
Connections (networks)	23%	62%	15%	0%
Cognition (beliefs, value)	15%	85%	0%	0%
Confidence (self-efficacy)	15%	69%	15%	0%

Testimonials

Emily Taylor, a fifth grade teacher at School 2, described the training as one of the most critical and beneficial components of the project. According to Ms. Taylor,

"Just as it can be intimidating for parents to enter into a school, it can be just as intimidating for parents and families to invite us into their homes. Being able to practice the specific language and conversation starters beforehand ensured we were comfortable in our own words, thus encouraging comfort for the family members.

The home visits that were conducted in the summer before the 2015-2016 school year ended up being one of the biggest influences on our practice of building relationships with the students. *When a student knows you have made contact with their family members, when they know you are interested in the hopes and dreams their family has for them, it creates a special bond between you and the student that I found lasted throughout the school year. The families of the students who received home visits were more likely to come to school and participate in activities that benefitted their child, such as the Academic Parent-Teacher Team meetings."*

Teachers reported that modeling the specific skills and elements of home visits greatly enhanced their teaching practice. Erika Koutelis, a first grade teacher at School 2, has been able to make emotional connections with her students that started from her home visits. When students began to shut down during a lesson, she was able to remind them of the home visits and the bond they made over a child's possession. This helped to calm the student and re-focus on schoolwork.

"The trust is just there and it feels like a positive relationship no matter what things we encounter throughout the year, we are a team (meaning family and school)," Koutelis said.

When schools decide to go the route of making home visits and bringing the community into their schools, not just for events and fundraisers but to actually help transform the academic

Families get a chance to interact with their children's education at events such as the Harvest Dinner, below, and the "Dads take your child to school" day, opposite page.

experience, it requires solid leadership. Natelege Turner-Hasselin is a principal who leads by example — it's not, "*you* go, but *we're* going." Teachers would say "she has a clear direction" as to where she wants to take the school. Her message to faculty, staff and community is one of empowerment. Her mantra to the faculty is always "Are we enhancing the quality of our teaching to improve student success and empower families to help in that improvement?" The community must be a part of the solution in each child's education. This philosophy helped with teacher buy-in on conducting the home visits.

A few of the teachers gave feedback on thinking differently, "If we do this together, it can and will work," " ... no more assumptions," "I can be more of a listener and be a partner." Parental feedback was similar, "The home visit made my relationship with the school flourish," "My child is more secure in knowing that her teachers understand where she lives," and "The trust and understanding is wonderful."

During one specific home visit with a family last summer, the student's mom explained that one of her hopes and dreams for her son was to achieve his goal of joining the military. She said she hoped he could use his strengths in math in some capacity while also serving his country. The teacher then took this information and pulled specific texts for this student that were about the military and

math. As a result he began to excel in math and it became a real challenge to find math work that he couldn't conquer. They may not have known about his great aptitude in math had it not been for his mother sharing that with us during our home visit. Making these kinds of home-family connections can translate to more engaged families and students.

Teachers reported that the home visits made them feel more connected to the families and the community they serve. Actually become part of the "village" that it takes to raise a child.

While family involvement is

An involved parent may come to an open house ... but an engaged one is a partner in their child's education.

improving — more than 50 percent of parents attended the fall open house, many of them for the first time — more importantly, *family engagement* is improving. One parent who had previously sent her children to another district elementary school said, "School 2 is THE PLACE for my kids" because the school makes them feel valued and less intimidated by the "professionals."

Stephanie Stinney, the family advocate for the district put it this way, "home visits have always been a part of my job and I believe in the power of such visits and the positive impact they can have on families. Teachers now see that as well and the shift in attitudes makes having tough conversations easier."

Conclusion:

Would you say that the parents of your students are involved or engaged in their child's education? An involved parent may come to an open house or participate in a fundraiser, but an engaged one is a partner with the teacher/school in their child's education. Relationship building through home visits and structured academic parent/teacher meetings lead to improved partnerships.

A positive climate between labor and management is critical to fostering the partnerships between families and schools. When teachers and administrators have free and open student-centered dialogue, relationships and greater academic success are possible.

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Every Voice Matters

SUMMARY

One district is using a unique approach to have students take ownership of their own learning while also creating a connection with a community partner. The Entertainment industries elective at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill High School puts students in charge of their learning and empowers them with deciding the legacy that they will leave behind.

"What would you do if you knew that the world could be different because of us?

What would you say if you saw a group standing up for the ones who can't?

Would you be surprised and would you want to rise up and would you be excited?"

"We Stand" lyrics written by D. Roberts; Ei Original Student Hits 2016-17

In 2006, Entertainment industries (Ei) was approved by the board of education as an elective class at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill (VVS) High School. The class was offered to students in grades 11 or 12.

Ei operates as a multimedia company equipped with an educational recording studio. It prepares students to contribute to their local, global and school communities. This class has three objectives:

1. Students will learn the career skills necessary to succeed in a workplace environment. These skills include:

■ Attendance and punctuality

■ Daily work attitude

■ Work quantity and quality

■ Ability to follow instructions and procedures

■ Human relation skills

2. Students will identify, experience, and/or create resources, venues, and opportunities to contribute to their local, global, and school communities allowing real-world

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Eileen Hubbard
Vernon-Verona-Sherrill Teachers Association

connections to take place. The entire class researches and chooses a charity or cause to support and publicize. When possible, communication is established between Ei students and key members of their chosen charity. In 2017, students were able to meet Kennedy Hubbard of "Kennedy's Cause." The students raised and donated more than $1,000 to support Kennedy and her quest to fund research for a cure for lymphatic malformation. Students complete the program realizing that they made a genuine impact on the world.

3. Students will learn the various steps to safely create, produce, promote, and market a project in their local, global, and school communities. This project is an entirely student-created performance that varies every year depending on the talents and passions of the Ei students. The entire performance is designed by students, including the staging, music, marketing, promotion, libretto, lighting and sound. Their original music, all written with the intent to help support or help heal other teens, is sold on a student-recorded and produced CD.

Not every student who joins this class is a musician, so the Ei curriculum is spiraled to provide students many opportunities to write lyrics and record music using professional music software. Working to create, solve problems, collaborate, and make decisions actually makes us more of a flipped classroom.

The Ei class was the first elective offered at VVS High School that was required to be interdisciplinary and project based while also obtaining a community partner. The Buck Institute for Education (BIE) states that "project-based learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem, or challenge (2017, pg 1)." Students understand at the beginning of the class that they are required to work and manage the coffee cart (Ei Cafe Cart) and the recording studio while also promoting the class and giving back to their community through a public performance. With facilitator

guidance, the students use their individual and group strengths to create ways to make a positive impact on their community.

Ei is co-taught by an English teacher and a music teacher using strategies from PBL. Those strategies are evident in the students' focus on lyric writing, oral and written communication skills, songwriting, performing, and music recording and producing in a fully equipped recording studio located at VVS High School. There is also an additional focus on the business skills needed to promote, market, and successfully run the student-managed recording studio and the Ei Cafe Cart. Students who successfully complete the class receive three college credits in

Project-Based Learning

In addition to a focus on student learning goals, educators are instructed to design PBL with the following essential project design elements:

■ **Key Knowledge, Understanding and Success Skills** — The project is focused on student learning goals, including standards-based content and skills such as critical thinking/problem solving, communication, collaboration, and self-management.

■ **Challenging Problem or Question** — The project is framed by a meaningful problem to solve or a question to answer, at the appropriate level of challenge.

■ **Sustained Inquiry** — Students engage in a rigorous, extended process of asking questions, finding resources, and applying information.

■ **Authenticity** — The project features real-world context, tasks and tools, quality standards, or impact – or speaks to students' personal concerns, interests, and issues in their lives.

■ **Student Voice & Choice** — Students make some decisions about the project, including how they work and what they create.

■ **Reflection** — Students and teachers reflect on learning, the effectiveness of their inquiry and project activities, the quality of student work, and obstacles and how to overcome them.

■ **Critique & Revision** — Students give, receive, and use feedback to improve their process and products.

■ **Public Product** — Students make their project work public by explaining, displaying and/or presenting it to people beyond the classroom.

Source: Buck Institute for Education, 2017

written and oral communication through Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC).

"Have you ever met someone who made you feel inside

That you're a waste of space and should be pushed aside?

Don't ever listen to them because they're full of lies.

Just believe in yourself and you'll be able to fly."

"Believe in Yourself" lyrics written by A. Kotwica; Ei Original Student Hits 2014-16

How do educators turn the theory that "learning is social before it is cognitive" into practice? "We practice teamwork everyday" is a phrase spoken by English co-teacher Donna Schonewetter. She believes that one of the toughest aspects surrounding instruction in a PBL environment is teaching students how to collaborate with peers that they may not have known prior to this class. The Ei class attracts students from all facets of the high school along with students who may not be connected to or invested in their school community. In order to build a sense of community and relationships within Ei, the first 10 weeks are critical for success in such a project-based class. In the book *Powerful learning: What we know about teaching*

for understanding (Hammond & et al, 2008), we are reminded that the research regarding PBL agrees projects that require students to remain engaged and to collaborate with others results in deeper learning. Immediately, collaborative activities requiring students to be paired in random groups are created with teachers working as facilitators. Working to provide solutions to real-world problems, creating educational videos for younger students, sharing their life experiences through different writing activities, and working at the cafe cart are just a few ways in which Ei encourages teamwork and collaboration involving their community.

"What does it mean? To truly find your own voice,

And help others find it if you have the choice. What does it mean?

So stand up and stand out, every voice matters.

And it means, what we're told, everyone matters.

People can learn to respect another, people deserve a chance.

People can change how the world acts, if they see a small glance."

"What Does It Mean?" lyrics written by B. Witter; Ei Original Student Hits 2016-17

Projects that require students to remain engaged and to collaborate with others result in deeper learning.

Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn

Every Voice Matters

> Appreciate what you have and don't take things for granted.

> You have a voice and the power within yourself to use that voice to make a change in the world.

> Everyone belongs somewhere.

What will your legacy be? In Ei, this becomes the challenging question for every group of students who enroll. Students are given both a voice and a choice regarding how they want to be remembered after they leave high school. For juniors and seniors, this is a very significant topic. Each class wants to create a unique project that reflects their time in high school. When Ei's original community partnership of six years ended, the students were asked to create the next community-based component of the class. The Every Voice Matters Campaign was born with a focus on three beliefs:

1. **Teens should appreciate what they have and not take things for granted.** Students recognized that there are others that can and will be less fortunate than themselves.

2. **Teens have a voice and the power within themselves to use that voice to make a change in the world.** Students noted that everyone needs to have the confidence to stand up for themselves and others; to not be a bystander but to be a leader.

3. **Everyone belongs somewhere.** Students wanted all teens to know that there is a place in this world for everyone no matter their race, belief, gender, etc.

"I ain't no boxer but I put up a fight, been chasin' my dreams and now they in my sights.

I'm talkin' the money and the fame too, but through all the struggles I'm still the same dude.

They say what don't break you, well, it makes you

So to everyone who's hatin', I'd like to say thank you."

"Thank You" lyrics written by Z. Millson (ZMill$); T.R.A.P.

Can student freedom create authentic learning moments? In addition to the presence of a final product, research tells us that PBL should be both student driven and authentic (Thomas, 2000). The VVS Entertainment industries class meets for an 80-minute block every day. The basic structure of the class is as follows:

1. 5-10 minute introductory activity

2. 50-60 minutes of breakout groups

3. 5-10 minutes of self-reflection and goal setting

Introductory activity

The "Daily Skeleton" was developed as a 5-10 minute introduction activity that encourages teamwork while also providing a focus for the day. Teachers set up the initial activities, which are gradually released to the students. Each student becomes responsible for the guiding question of the day. Some questions tend to focus on how to improve sales at the Ei Cafe Cart where the resulting action would be the creation of an advertisement or new jingle to be played on the morning announcements. Students would then plan how and when to complete the task while also tracking the impact on sales. Other questions revolve around current projects, such as "What makes a good CD?" or "Should we have a theme to our CD?" The action that follows that discussion might alter how the project is promoted and advertised, and also the actual music and lyrics. Other questions relate to the previous day's activities and projects, or provide real-world questions about the entertainment industry.

Teachers are able to assess student learning through observation of these student-created discussions and also the teamwork and collaboration that is developing or continuing to grow with the students. Other times, guiding questions become a theory to prove. For example, students can be asked a question that they must work together to answer on chart paper:

THE DAILY SKELETON

Get your head into it first...
• Listen
• Watch
• Respond

Then put your heart, hands, and feet to work...
• Be passionate
• Be focused
• Be productive

Day	Responses
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	

Practice teamwork every day...

"You don't inspire your teammates by showing them how amazing you are. You inspire them by showing them how amazing they are."

Robyn Benincasa,
World Championship Adventure Racer

One particular day, students stood around a poster board that contained a ukulele outline drawn in the center. Without talking, 10 students shared two markers and collaboratively answered the question, "What makes a performance great?" They wrote their answers outside of the outline of the ukulele without talking. They silently

> The criteria may change from year to year based on the students who take the class and it may not contain every factor needed, but the outcome remains the same: student ownership and pride.

answered the question based upon their own views and passed the marker to their classmates. After two minutes, one student read the question and answers. Students then discussed their answers and what they might want to add. The process was repeated for a second time using the inside of the ukulele outline, only this time students answered the question, "How will we know when our projects are performance ready?"

Through a teacher-led discussion, students again expressed their views and explained their answers while drawing correlations between the two questions. There was no right or wrong in this activity. The poster became their very own criteria for judging when any original student work created in class was finished and ready to share.

The criteria may change from year to year based on the students who take the class and it may not contain every factor needed, but the outcome remains the same: student ownership and pride. The teacher needs to step back and allow students to take control of their learning. Failure is a possibility. Instead of saying, "Why don't you try X?" or "Don't forget to add Y," the teacher's role becomes more like a facilitator asking for clarifications and making sure all student voices are heard, then stepping back to watch for

those teachable moments as students apply what they "think" to what they "do." Through this process, students become involved in creating their own learning.

Breakout groups

The main portion of time spent in Ei is through independent and collaborative breakout groups. Students are aware of their concert date when they begin their journey in September and are then challenged to plan accordingly. After receiving training in semester one, students are then given the freedom to choose how their class time is spent during semester two. To-do lists are created and updated daily in a Google document projected for all to see. The recording schedule is planned and created through the use of backward design. Students estimate how much time they will need for a dress rehearsal, how much time is needed for mixing and mastering songs for the CD, and then identify how much time is left. Musicians and recording technicians are assigned a recording station and a specific time allotted for recording per song. Simultaneously, time is spent writing articles, creating press kits, creating the concert program, marketing and promoting the concert, contacting local media, and updating social media sites.

A normal day in Ei when the class is nearing concert time may look like utter chaos from the outside; students talking, laughing, performing, and working on a variety of activities in a shared space. From a constructivist perspective, learning is messy. Brooks & Brooks (2011) describe constructivist classrooms as a place where students primarily work in groups and are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories about the world. One where teachers generally behave in an interactive manner, mediating the environment for students and seeking students' points of view in order to understand students' present conceptions for use in subsequent lessons. The authors go on to describe the constructivist classroom as a place where assessment of student learning is interwoven with teaching and occurs through teacher observations of students at work and through students' exhibitions and portfolios. Ei is a class where students search for understanding on how to genuinely make a positive difference in their very own community.

Self-reflection and goal setting

The teacher's main role throughout the process is as a facilitator who provides feedback when needed. In Ei this is done through content-specific rubrics for both English and music projects (See Figure 1 and Figure 2). These rubrics are designed to allow for both student- and teacher-generated feedback. Goals are discussed daily between students and facilitators. The daily performance review, which is used for self-reflection during the last

Figure 1: Daily Performance Evaluation

Entertainment industries Daily Performance Evaluation for:

Date						Total	Comments
Attendance and Punctuality							
Work Attitude							
Work Quantity and Quality							
Instructions and Procedures							
Human Relation Skills							
Week Total						/ 25 points	

Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn

A mutual goal is to provide the students with the skills they need to be more successful accessing the curriculum in her classroom.

5-10 minutes of class, is used to help students identify "what makes a great employee?" Facilitators are given the freedom to observe the learning while giving students the freedom to create the final product and own the process.

"But we are more than this.

We were born for this.

We feel it in our hearts.

We are more than the sum of our parts.

Nobody's monochrome, black and white is never shown, monochrome.

Monochrome, your color dreams are now well known, monochrome.

Monochrome, you 'gotta know you're not alone, monochrome."

"Monochrome" lyrics written by S. Tanner; Ei Original Student Hits 2016-17

Figure 2: Daily Performance Rubric

Entertainment industries Daily Performance Evaluation for:

Date:	Below Basic 1 point	Basic 2 points	Proficient 3 points	Advanced 4 points	Outstanding 5 points
Attendance and Punctuality • Arrives on time • Follows the set schedule for the day • Stays at assigned work station • Absences (after three absences all areas will be scored one and recorded for a daily evaluation)	NOT In seat ready to work at 12:57pm, left assigned work area OR no show/ no call; did not report to work	NOT in seat ready to work at 12:57pm, followed SOME instructions but strayed from assigned work area, and stopped before end of shift (2:21pm).	NOT in seat ready to work at 12:57pm, followed MOST instructions, and worked until end of shift (2:21pm).	In seat ready to work at 12:57pm, followed MOST instructions, and worked until end of shift (2:21pm).	In seat ready to work at 12:57pm, followed ALL instructions, and worked until end of shift (2:21pm).
Work Attitude Attributes • **NO** phones or technology (without permission) • Behaves professionally • Lets others finish speaking before talking • Keeps it "G" Rated	Shows NO interest in work or desire to learn.	Shows LITTLE interest or enthusiasm for work.	Shows moderate interest in work and meets SOME the criteria.	Shows interest in work and meets MOST the criteria.	Shows an enthusiastic interest in work; meets ALL the criteria.
Work Quantity and Quality • Remains 100% focused • Participates and completes ALL tasks on time • Pays attention to details • Revises work based on constructive feedback when requested	Does LITTLE or NO required work.	Needs assistance to do required work and completes SOME work on time.	Does required amount of acceptable work and completes MOST work on time.	Does the required amount of neat, accurate work and completes ALL work on time.	Does more than the required amount of work, shows an exceptional aptitude for doing neat, accurate work and completes ALL work on time.
Instructions and Procedures	Refuses to follow instructions or use reference materials.	Needs repeated detailed instructions.	Usually follows instructions and uses references with little difficulty.	Follows instructions and uses references with no difficulty.	Shows initiative in interpreting and following instructions and using references.
Human Relation Skills	Disruptive and uncooperative when dealing with people.	Needs to improve human relation skills.	Tries to be compatible with people.	Usually thoughtful, courteous, and tactful in dealing with people.	Extremely thoughtful, tactful and understanding when dealing with people.

Does it really take a village to raise a child? Ei connects to the community in a very authentic manner through hands-on training at SubCat Studios. Owned by VVS alumni Ron Keck, this professional recording studio in Syracuse, NY, prides itself on quality studio recording, remote recording, audio mixing, mastering, graphic design, and CD duplication. Every year, the Ei class selects one of the original songs composed for the Every Voice Matters campaign to record at SubCat. Students are treated to stories of famous musicians, TV stars, and other people who have recorded at the studio. The professional audio and recording engineers explain how the studio was founded and how difficult, yet rewarding, it is to have a dream and then persevere in order to turn that vision into a reality. Every student gets the opportunity to perform and be recorded by the professionals at SubCat while the recording engineers explain the process in real-time to those watching. The class has also developed a professional relationship with local radio stations. As a part of marketing the Every Voice Matters concert, an original song is performed live on-air. One student spokesperson is interviewed about the song, class, and concert.

Here is an excerpt from one of the videos:

To watch or listen to student interviews, visit:

■ "Every Voice Matters at VVS"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5LdlyIzwjs

■ "5 2 16 SEG 10 VVS HIGH SCHOOL EVERY VOICE MATTERS PROGRAM"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHZS8RuYR2I

Students advertising their upcoming Every Voice Matters concert on a local radio station.

At an interview on local radio station Big Frog 104, Zack, the student spokesperson, shared, "Ei is all about promoting music ... we learn how to use different production materials, like Pro Tools and how to set up a microphone ... but we also have writing portions ... we learn how to write business letters, song lyrics, and other types of songs."

The radio host found it very interesting that this class "allows all the students to have a voice and speak out." "Definitely!" replied Zack, who went on to promote the Every

Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn

Voice Matters concert. "It's a concert that we do every year, actually this is our second one, and we hope to keep it going. It helps to promote different ideas and like the title says, every voice matters and we want everyone to feel like they actually do matter."

Ei students also interview a variety of VVS Ei alumni who return to visit the class and teachers. They share their experiences in the entertainment industry or how the class helped prepare them for their current career. In the fall of 2017 alumni Maria Macrina brought her gelato stand, the Cremaria, to VVS High School. Students were treated to gelato and then Ms. Macrina answered questions that students had sent to her about her stand and her journey after high school.

Ei students worked to create jingle for a local business.

The visit served two purposes for the students: juniors and seniors were given advice from a former student who followed her dream until it became a reality and they were "hired" to create an original jingle for the Cremaria gelato stand. Students were immediately challenged to use their imaginations for the first time as a team to generate original jingles for a local business while also working to make meaningful connections to their community.

During the Every Voice Matters concert, students involve the community in two very original ways. The Norman J. Reed Legacy Award is presented annually to a member of the community who has established a legacy of making a positive difference in the lives of others. Ei students receive the name of the individual selected by an administrator and work to create a video presentation through interviews of family and community members who speak of the recipient's legacy. The Every Voice Matters Award (EVMA) was created by students to recognize and celebrate one of their own. Ei students receive nominations of fellow students who are well-known for using their voices in a positive way and refusing to be a bystander. They make the selection, create the award, and present the award during the concert.

"I got a passion for the music, plus it comes as therapeutic.

I just love to do it and that's a love that I ain't losin'.

Everyone was always pick and choosin', quick to put me last.

I stood out from the rest, I was known as the outcast.

Sat in the back of class, I was always writing rhymes.

Don't ever judge by a cover you 'gotta read between the lines.

Cuz you ain't got a clue 'bout what a person's been through,

And you ain't never knew what it's like to walk in their shoes"

"My Way" lyrics written by Z. Millson (ZMill$); Ei Original Student Hits 2016–17

What does student ownership look like? When asked to reflect on the process used in this class, students have all had different responses. One student, ZMill$, who had been an independent rapper for years before taking Ei, wrote powerful lyrics that he shared with the group. His lyrics reflected his struggle battling stereotypes and the strength it takes to have confidence in yourself. He shared his song, titled "The Moment's Mine," and asked his peers if they would want to help him, explaining, "I really want a song where everyone in the class gets a part." One student grabbed a guitar, another few girls

volunteered to sing the chorus, and a drummer grabbed our cajon drum and joined the group. ZMill$ had never worked with a band before and they had never worked with a rapper, but in those moments of making music and sharing ideas, a team was created. The entire class eventually became a part of the song, even if it was speaking an intro or finger snapping through the chorus.

When asked at the end of the year what they were most surprised by, the Ei students all respond similarly; they were surprised that they became family. The group song initiative was student created, the melody, vocals, background music, and harmonies were all student generated, and the genuine feeling of pride could be felt at every performance. All proceeds from marketing, ticket and CD sales from the concert are then donated to a charity.

Visualize a stage filled with students proudly holding puzzle pieces, with one side representing a negative self-image of the teen holding it. One by one, the pieces are flipped to expose a positive self-image of that same teen. The process is meant to show an audience that regardless of the negativity and stereotypes that surround them, these teens will battle and belong somewhere. They will be the leaders who show the way. The performance was a vision created entirely by teenagers.

Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn

When students are given the freedom to choose goals, the responsibility in how to complete the journey, and the opportunity to celebrate all the moments experienced of a job well done, they own not only the product but also the feeling.

Envision a collaborative environment where students work side-by-side to raise money and awareness for a charity that they have chosen to invest in. This is student ownership in action. A curriculum where music becomes the vehicle of change and words are a call for action. A class whose purpose extends beyond the four walls of the high school. This is what student ownership looks like when a class family is created and students choose to positively affect their community through their actions. A legacy that students not only share, but create themselves is the product of student ownership.

When students are given the freedom to choose goals, the responsibility in how to complete the journey, and the opportunity to celebrate all the moments experienced of a job well done, they own not only the product but also the feeling. A feeling that will last a lifetime.

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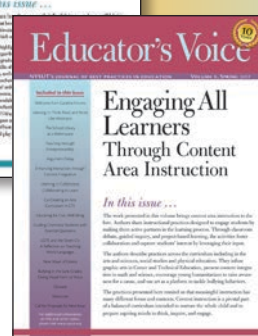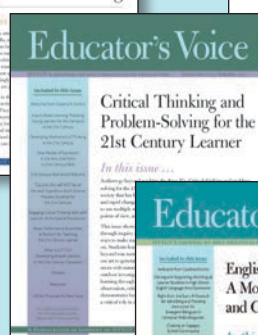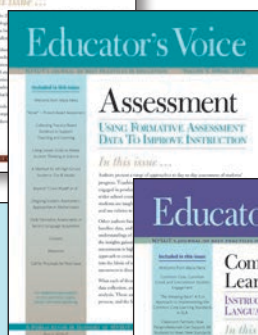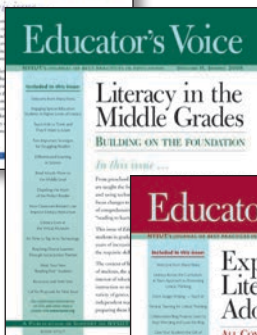
Glossary

Conflict coaching
A one-on-one process that helps students prepare for difficult conversations by understanding their role and identity within an interpersonal conflict.

Exclusion
Any suspension, expulsion or involuntary transfer that removes a student from his or her regular classroom.

Zero tolerance
Any school discipline policy or practice that results in an automatic disciplinary consequence such as a suspension or expulsion for any student who commits one or more listed offenses.

Stakeholder
Any person/group with a vested interest in the educational outcomes at public schools, with such interests including but not limited to: the life success and potential of students and their families; the quality of working conditions for those who are employed at or rendering services to public schools; and the credibility and reputation of those who are charged with the responsibility of producing educational outcomes.

School Community
Includes students, teachers, administrators, counselors, social workers and other school staff, partners, and families in the neighboring community.

Mediation
A process whereby a neutral party hosts a private conversation among two or more people in conflict. The mediator does not pass judgment, give advice, or suggest options. Mediators facilitate the conversation and encourage clear and open communication so that all parties understand one another's perspectives and find ways to resolve the challenges by meeting the most important needs held by all.

Restorative Justice
A theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by misconduct rather than punishment by:
a. Identifying the misconduct and attempting to repair the damage
b. Including all people impacted by a conflict in the process of responding to conflict; and
c. Creating a process that promotes hearing, reconciliation and the rebuilding of relationships to build mutual responsibility and constructive responses to wrongdoing within our schools.

Restorative Practices
A framework for a broad range of restorative justice approaches that proactively build a school community based on cooperation, mutual understanding, trust and respect and respond to conflict by including all people impacted by conflict in finding solutions that restore relationships and repair the harm done to the school community.

Resources

New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)

Family, School & Community Engagement Initiative

This initiative supports school district and union efforts in developing capacity to implement effective strategies for engaging families and school staff in meaningful and purposeful ways to improve student success. NYSUT has developed a series of trainings related to family-school engagement linked to learning, conducting home (family) visits, implementing Academic Parent-Teacher Teams and student-led conferences, engaging ELL populations and family school engagement at the secondary level. NYSUT also offers technical assistance by "taking stock" of current efforts and developing a schoolwide plan to engage families for student success. For more information, contact Carolyn Williams at *cwilliam@nysutmail.org*.

www.nysut.org

National Education Association (NEA)

The NEA website includes articles on family, school and community engagement, reviews of research and best practices on parental involvement in education, and tools and resources on how educators and parents are working together for student success. The NEA has developed a training resource manual, The Power of Family School and Community Partnerships (2011), to assist association leaders, staff and members with facilitating family-school-community partnership training sessions designed to help participants create and build partnerships in their own local communities. The training places special emphasis on assisting priority schools in raising academic achievement of their students.

www.nea.org and www.neatoday.org

NYSUT would like to thank The New York State Family Engagement Coalition for creating this resource guide. The coalition consists of organizations and agencies that share the same interests and work to:

- Advocate in a unified voice for family engagement policies and practices in New York State to all levels of state government (executive, legislative and agency);
- Disseminate and communicate the latest research and best practices on family engagement;
- Advise New York State Education Department regarding family engagement as it relates to policy and practice; and
- Develop and maintain a statewide family engagement network of families, practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council

The Building a Strong Foundation for the New York State Learning Standards resource provides strategies and tips for engaging with families in prekindergarten through third grade. Guidance was developed by the New York State Head Start Collaboration Office and the New York State Association for the Education of Young Children.

www.nysecac.org/

New York State Council on Children and Families

The Council produces *The New Parent Guide: Starting Life Together*, a guide to aid parents through the first five years of parenting. Whether you are the mother or father (through birth, adoption, or foster care), a grandparent, partner, family friend, aunt or uncle with parenting responsibilities, what you say and do in your role as a parent matters.

www.nysparentguide.org/

Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP)

Since 1963, the PCHP has been providing under-resourced families the necessary skills and tools to help their children thrive in school and life. The program uses an evidence-based early literacy, parenting and school readiness model with a proven track record of closing the achievement gap. The site includes information about the program model, news, events and videos, and testimonials as well as data to support the proven outcomes.

www.parent-child.org

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is devoted to developing a brighter future for millions of children at risk of poor educational, economic, social and health outcomes. The work focuses on strengthening families, building stronger communities and ensuring access to opportunity. The foundation advances research and solutions to overcome the barriers to success, help communities demonstrate what works and influence decision makers to invest in strategies based on solid evidence.

http://www.aecf.org/resources/engaging-parents-developing-leaders/

Attendance Works

Attendance Works, a national initiative aimed at advancing student success by reducing chronic absence, created the Bringing Attendance Home toolkit with the help of practitioners who have worked successfully with families to improve attendance. The toolkit is filled with ideas, activities and materials that you can use to spark conversations with parents about how good attendance can help them fulfill their dreams and aspirations for their children's futures.

www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-toolkit/
Bringing Attendance Home: Engaging Parents in Preventing Chronic Absence

Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
Parent Resource Guides

The Campaign is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, business leaders, government agencies, states and communities across the nation to ensure that more children in low-income families succeed in school and graduate prepared for college, a career, and active citizenship. The Campaign focuses on an important predictor of school success and high school graduation — grade-level reading by the end of third grade. In New York State, four large cities and seven counties are part of the Grade-Level Reading Communities Network.

The Campaign offers parent resource guides to help communities equip parents with the information, tools, and supports that will help them succeed as their children's first teacher, brain builder, tech navigator, advocate and coach. These guides build on the Supporting Parent Success framework that identifies nine essential competencies that communities can help parents strengthen in order to support their children's school readiness, school attendance and summer learning.

Readiness — *http://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/School_Readiness_r34.pdf*
Attendance — *http://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Attendance_r14.pdf*
Summer — *http://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Summer_r14.pdf*

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC)

The ECAC developed research-based practical guidance support for effective early childhood practice. While the engagement and involvement of families was embedded throughout the documents, "Family Engagement: Engaging Families in Prekindergarten

Through 3rd Grade: Building a Strong Foundation for the New York State Learning Standards" was specifically addressing the topic. The Office of Early Learning, the NYS Association for the Education of Young Children and the NYS Head Start Collaboration Office teamed up to develop the documents and the Office of Early Learning played a significant role in the production of the Family Engagement Brief.

www.nysecac.org/files/7714/5994/9952/6._FamilyEngagementTwelvePageWeb.pdf

Edutopia
Parent Partnership in Education: Resource Roundup
Experts agree that parent involvement in education is one of the biggest predictors of student success. So where can parents begin? Edutopia's parent partnerhip in education resource roundup is a compilation of articles, videos, and other resources to help parents engage productively with their children's teachers and school.

www.edutopia.org/parent-leadership-education-resources

The Global Family Research Project

The Global Family Research Project is an independent, entrepreneurial nonprofit organization that supports all families and communities in helping children find success in and out of school. A worldwide exchange of ideas is created to further the understanding and implementation of anywhere, anytime learning for all. They also connect research, policy, and practice to support a community of people dedicated to advancing children's learning and development.

www.globalfrp.org

Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)
Patterns of Practice: Case Studies of Early Childhood Education and Family Engagement in Community Schools
IEL's work focuses on three pillars required for young people and their communities to succeed. IEL strives to involve the broader community with public education to support the learning and development of young people. This means helping bring families, schools, and community resources together as partners for the common good.

http://iel.org/resources

Johns Hopkins University Study Report

This report summarizes results from a follow-up evaluation focusing on the association between home visits and student achievement.

www.pthvp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/JHU-STUDY_FINAL-REPORT.pdf

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

The NAEYC is a professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy and research.

https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/family-engagement

National PTA

PTA's process for building successful partnerships starts with the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships and consists of three steps: Raising awareness about the power of family and community involvement, taking action to cultivate involvement through specific programs and practices, and celebrating success as your school sees increased involvement and its impact. The benefits of family-school-community partnerships are many: higher teacher morale, more parent involvement, and greater student success are only a few. To that end, the PTA developed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Implementation Guide, a tool for empowering people to work together for the educational success of all children and youth.

www.pta.org

www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/runyourpta/national-standards/national_standards_implementation_guide.pdf

New York State Education Department
Office of Early Learning

NYSED's Office of Early Learning provides a host of resources for families and educators, including guidance to program administrators about family engagement practices through the NYSED Tool to Assess the Effectiveness of Transitions from Prekindergarten to Kindergarten. School and program administrators can use the Transitions Toolkit to assess the comprehensiveness of their transition plans designed to welcome incoming students and their families as they transition into a K-12 system. The website includes links to online parent resources, professional development and an online newsletter.

www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning

New York State PTA

Family engagement is a school-family partnership that raises student achievement, improves school and community, and increases public support.

www.nyspta.org

https://nyspta.org/home/advocacy/family-engagement/

School Community Journal

The *School Community Journal* is a free, open access, online, refereed journal that includes research and field reports related to the school as a community of teachers, students, parents, and staff.

www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/SCJ.aspx

Search Institute

Search Institute bridges research and practice to help young people be and become their best selves. The institute's American Family Assets Study presents a compelling national portrait of families, and introduces the Family Assets — relationships, interactions, opportunities and values — that help families thrive.

www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Family_Assets_Framework.pdf

Southern Poverty Law Center
Teaching Tolerance

Teaching Tolerance provides free resources to educators — teachers, administrators, counselors and other practitioners — who work with children from kindergarten through high school. Educators use these materials to supplement the curriculum, to inform their practices, and to create civil and inclusive school communities where children are respected, valued and welcomed participants. The curriculum emphasizes social justice and anti-bias. The anti-bias approach encourages children and young people to challenge prejudice and learn how to be agents of change in their own lives. The Social Justice Standards show how anti-bias education works through the four domains of identity, diversity, justice and action.

www.tolerance.org/supplement/family-engagement

Teachers College Record

The *Teachers College Record* is a journal of research, analysis, and commentary in the field of education. In 2016, the TCR published a study by Hua-Yu Cherng that suggests race and immigrant status are determining factors in whether or not an educator will reach out to a student's family. Read about the study in *The Atlantic* article linked below.

www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/11/which-parents-are-teachers-most-likely-to-contact/507755/

U.S. Department of Education

When families, communities and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits. For schools and districts across the U.S., family engagement is becoming an integral part of education reform efforts. Some resources are also available in Spanish.

www.ed.gov/family-and-community-engagement?src=rn

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Celebrating Diversity in Our Schools

New York State's classrooms are among the most diverse in the country. As our school communities welcome a growing population of culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse students, we are challenged to help them assimilate and to build a school community that is responsive to their diverse needs.

Culturally responsive teaching embraces diversity by encouraging all students to share their own perspectives, experiences and differences in order to foster a community of learning that nurtures these unique characteristics and incorporates them into the fabric of the school. We call for articles that document culturally responsive teaching practices across K-12 or in partnership with higher education.

Examples of submission areas include (but are not limited to):

- Multicultural awareness

- Culturally responsive teaching and the brain

- Student-centered learning

- Student-directed learning

- Culturally mediated instruction

- Social justice education

- Family and community engagement

- P-20 partnerships

- Higher education research and practice

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Celebrating Diversity in Our Schools

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Please tell us about your proposal by referencing each of the following nine elements (approximately 2–5 pages) and submit to NYSUT by June 15, 2018. Please include the element titles.

Be sure to complete the author submission sheet and send it in with your proposal.

1) **Title:** What is the working title for your article?

2) **Topic:** What do you plan to write about? What practice or program will your article focus on? (Please provide specifics about school(s), grade levels, etc.)

3) **Relevance:** Why is this practice relevant to the theme of this year's volume on Culturally Responsive Teaching? Why is this topic important to you?

4) **Setting:** Describe your setting and the student population(s) involved in the practice or programs.

5) **Practice:** Describe the practice or program and your method or approach.

6) **Outcomes:** What are the intended outcomes or indicators of success and how do you plan to measure or observe them?

7) **Research Base:** Describe the academic research base that supports your practice. (Please provide specific examples/citations.)

8) **Diversity:** How does your practice address the needs of diverse populations?

9) **Collaboration:** Explain how your practice involves collaboration with parents or other members of the school community.

Deadlines for Volume XII:	
June 15, 2018	Proposal submission deadline
July 6, 2018	NYSUT responds to proposal
Sept. 7, 2018	Completed article submission
Spring 2019	Publication

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Celebrating Diversity in Our Schools

AUTHOR SUBMISSION FORM

Name of Author(s) (If multiple authors, select one author as the primary contact person). At least one author *must* be a NYSUT (or affiliate) member. Please spell out all information, do not use acronyms.

Primary author's name: _____

Name of school: _____

School location: _____

Current position (title and grade level/s): _____

_____

Union affiliation: _____

Next author's name: _____

Current position (title and grade level/s): _____

_____

Union affiliation: _____

Next author's name: _____

Current position (title and grade level/s): _____

_____

Union affiliation: _____

Do all of the authors work in the same building? If not, tell us where they work:

_____

_____

Primary Author CONTACT INFO (all fields are required)

Email address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Alternate telephone number: _____

Home address: _____

_____

Information can be submitted electronically to:

llembo@nysutmail.org

Or by mail to:

NYSUT Research & Educational Services

Attn: *Educator's Voice*

800 Troy-Schenectady Road

Latham, NY 12110

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Celebrating Diversity in Our Schools

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

Grade and Audience:

Author(s) can describe practices or programs in any grades (P-20) on the topic of culturally responsive teaching.

This is a practitioner journal. Our readers include teachers, school-related professionals, pupil personnel services providers, union leaders, parents, administrators, higher education faculty, researchers, legislators, and policymakers. For examples, please browse previous volumes of *Educator's Voice*.

Please write your article to the practitioner. Authors are encouraged to write in a direct style designed to be helpful to both practitioners and to others committed to strengthening education. All education terms (i.e., jargon, all acronyms) should be defined for a broad audience. For articles with multiple authors, use one voice consistently. Please limit the use of writing in the first person.

Article Length:

The required article length is flexible. Please submit approximately 2,000 – 3,000 words (or 7–9 double-spaced pages plus references). This is just a range as every article is unique.

Rights:

Acceptance of a proposal is not a guarantee of publication. Publication decisions are made by the Editorial Board. NYSUT retains the right to edit articles. The author will have the right to review changes and if not acceptable to both parties, the article will not be included in *Educator's Voice.* NYSUT may also retain the article for use on the NYSUT website (*www.nysut.org*) or for future publication in *NYSUT United*.

Manuscript Basics:

- Use American Psychological Association (APA) 6th edition style for in-text citations and references.
- Do not use footnotes or MLA publishing guidelines.
- Double-space your manuscript.
- Submit your manuscript as a Word document.
- We cannot accept Google documents.
- Do not submit copyrighted material unless you have permission from the publisher.

Graphics Guidelines:

- Although your images may be embedded in the manuscript for review, submit all graphics as separate files.
- Save all images in high-resolution (300 dpi). Anything downloaded from a website will be low-resolution (72 dpi) and will <u>not</u> be acceptable. If using a cellphone, choose high quality settings.
- Any graphics (photographs, charts, tables, or samples of student work) must be submitted in separate attached PDF, TIFF, or JPEG files. Do not embed images into an email.
- Add a parenthetical place marker to your manuscript for images that will be included in the appendix or elsewhere (for example, "see image 3 on p. 16").
- Image file names should correspond to image place markers in the manuscript (for example, "image 3 student work sample").
- We need permission to reprint artwork; you need release forms to use images that include people. Photos should illustrate the context, rather than the subject(s) looking posed.

NYSUT Education & Learning Trust

The Education & Learning Trust is NYSUT's primary way of delivering professional development to its members. ELT offers courses for undergraduate, graduate and in-service credit, partnership programs that lead to master's degrees and teaching certificates, and seminars as well as professional development programs for teachers and school-related professionals.

NYSUT Education & Learning Trust offers the following training sessions on Family-School Engagement:

■ Labor/Management Collaboration

This introductory session (2 hrs.) is intended to build capacity and understanding of labor/management collaboration as a vehicle for innovation, collaboration and sustainability of new initiatives and school improvement linked to family and community engagement.

■ Family –School Capacity Building and Planning

This session (4-6 hrs.) will engage union locals in a process to examine the challenges and lack of opportunities to build school and family partnerships for success; the process conditions linked to learning and the presence of organizational conditions needed for effective family and community engagement; the policy and program goals to build and enhance capacity for effective family school engagement linked to student outcomes; and assess family and staff capacity outcomes to sustain the work, improve outcomes for students, and foster school improvement at the school and/or district level.

■ Family/School Engagement Visits

This session (4 hrs.) will introduce an evidence-based Family School Engagement Visit approach based on tenets of trust, active listening, collaboration and cultural responsiveness where educators are asked to develop new understandings related to the diversity of the families and communities they serve. During this session, educators will be immersed in a series of capacity building activities including practicing, modeling and role-playing scenarios and use of a coaching map to ensure the Home Visit conversation is authentic and genuine.

Following the initial round of Home Visits, a 60 minute post-visit debrief session designed to capture important takeaways and facilitate reflection will be conducted. Toward the end of the school, to reflect on how family visits and other FSE strategies impacted changing beliefs and assumptions, strengthened relationship with families and students, instruction, and student behavior and attendance. Educators will discuss recommendations for improvement, and plans for the next round of FSE visits.

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■ **Family Engagement Linked to Learning**

This 2-3 hr. session explores new evidence on family-school engagement practices that accelerate student learning. While some parents may support fundraising events, attend back to school nights and celebrations and participate in parent organizations, these involvement activities have a lower impact on student learning.   During this session educators will examine the "touch points" that the school has with families and examine higher impact strategies and family-engagement practices that work in concert with classroom instruction and student learning. Some of the strategies include academic/parent teacher teams, data sharing, student led conferences and parent support networks.

■ **Positive Parent-Teacher Communication**

This 2 hour seminar engages educators in discussing the benefits of having consistent and positive parent communication for student achievement, learning and development. The seminar addresses the following topics: Why is consistent and meaningful communication important, what are the qualities of meaningful conversations, tips for Developing Positive Relationships with parents, the importance of effective and timely communication, breaking down biases with students and parents, communicating with ELL parents, tips for working with challenging parents and more!

■ **Academic Parent-Teacher Team**

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT), an innovative approach to conducting parent-teacher conferences, is a way to build the dual capacity of family and schools to improving academic outcomes for students. APTT engages family members in meetings led by grade level teachers where family members learn foundational skills and strategies to do at home. During this six hour session, participants examine the essential elements of the APTT model, which includes facilitating three meetings a year, plus a 30 minute individual conference with families. The essential elements of APTT are an icebreaker, data sharing on literacy and mathematics, modeling, and SMART goal setting. Teachers will learn how to facilitate the process, hear about lessons learned related to implementation as well work in groups to begin planning to implement an APTT program in their school.

■ **Family-School Engagement for English Language Learners**

This 2-3 hr. session will examine family engagement practices focused on English language learners and their families. As the largest growing segment of the student population, the ELL student population has increased in schools over the last twenty years. While ELL families face the same barriers and challenges as other demographics, ELLs face a number of unique barriers to school engagement, communications, and involvement.

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