

# BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Preparation for Building Partnerships with Families:

A Survey of Teachers, Teacher Educators, and School Administrators

Kay Wright, Ed.D  
Professor  
Child and Family Studies  
College of Health Sciences  
Eastern Kentucky University

Tabitha Daniel, Ed.D  
Professor  
Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education/Elementary Education  
College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Western Kentucky University

Kathryn S. Himmelreich, M.S. Ed.  
Doctoral Candidate  
School Psychology  
Education, Counseling, and Psychology Department  
College of Education  
University of Kentucky

### Abstract

Three questions were proposed for study of the extent to which Kentucky's teachers are prepared to work with families in the roles which they play in the education of their children. These roles include being teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers. The questions addressed the pre-service preparation by institutions of higher education, staff development activities of local school districts, and gaps in preservice and practicing teacher levels.

A representative sample of teachers across all grade levels and areas of the state completed questionnaires exploring their attitudes about the effectiveness of their preservice and staff development preparation to collaborate with families. Teacher educators and local school administrators charged with organizing staff development activities completed similar questionnaires.

Responses of teachers, teacher educators, and administrators suggest limited preparation of teachers to work with families. Middle and high school teachers seem less well prepared than are teachers of young children. Teacher educators and administrators also report needing additional training to work with families. Most importantly, teachers across all grade levels, teacher educators, and administrators appear to want more assistance in strategies for working with families in ways that will benefit children and adolescents.

### Preparation for Building Partnerships with Families:

#### A Survey of Teachers, Teacher Educators, and School Administrators

All parents are teachers of their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Gordon, 1976).

This point of view encompasses the belief that education occurs in many contexts and is not limited to direct classroom instruction. “Parents as teachers” reflects our understanding that families are the context within which most children learn to value learning and to see themselves as learners. The family is where the child’s natural curiosity and sense of competence in learning more about the world, both near and far, are first rewarded and guided or rejected.

The strength of our educational system lies not in the separation of our homes, schools, and communities, but in the collaborative partnerships which are formed and which unite us in a common goal—the education of our children. This important role of parents is reflected in the eighth goal of our nation’s Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994: *“Every school and home will engage in partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children”* (Morrison, 1998).

#### Theoretical Support for the Role of Parent as Teacher

To value the role of the parent as teacher, we must embrace the following theoretical premises. First, *education is a social experience*. Learning occurs in the

sociocultural worlds of our families and communities (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning experiences of children at home are embedded in the daily routines of family life and in their relationships with those who care for them. Participating in cooking and sharing meals, caring for siblings, household chores, and routine errands to the grocery store all provide opportunities for children to construct knowledge in meaningful settings.

Shared family stories, reading books together, and conversations assist children in learning about oral and written communication, problem solving—both cognitive and social, and the importance of literacy. Observing parents and other family members in their acquisition of knowledge through oral communication, reading books, trade journals, and newspapers; and/or engaging in “cyber” research, further strengthens the child’s attitudes about the acquisition and use of knowledge in “real-life” settings.

The second premise involves *recognizing the multiple ways that children learn* which do not necessarily involve a traditional paper and pencil task. In our society, we value that which is logical and mathematical as the true measure of one’s intelligence. However, as noted by Gardner (1985), children demonstrate their learning strengths in many other ways including musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, linguistic, naturalistic, bodily kinesthetic, and spatial intelligence. The child’s natural tendencies toward work in these areas are generally recognized and encouraged by family and community members who may share similar interests and/or who want to support diverse aspects of the child’s growth and development. Many families must negotiate

and advocate for their children to ensure that opportunities designed to enhance these unique ways of knowing and/or talents are provided within school settings.

Finally, we must be aware that the *family is a system operating in interdependent ways with other systems* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) within and across communities. Children have first hand experiences with many of these systems including day care centers, nursery schools, religious institutions, health care settings, homes of family and friends, and schools. They are also affected by systems which they do not personally experience including the policies of government agencies, school boards, and parental workplaces. It is the parent who is faced with negotiating across these systems to ensure that children's health, care, and educational needs are met within the context of family, cultural, and societal values. This role is broadened when parents have children with disabilities, learning differences, English as a second language, or who are non-English speaking.

#### Defining the Roles of Families in Partnering with Schools

It is evident that in forming partnerships, teachers can assist parents in supporting their children's learning. It is also evident that parents can offer their knowledge of the child, their worldviews, and skills for the benefit of teachers and children. Clearly, parents needs to be considered as part of the school community or culture along with teachers and children. However, it is not always clear to parents, teachers, children, or administrators *how* and *to what extent* parents should be involved. This incongruity is reflected in the models presented by a number of

researchers (Gordon & Breivogel, 1976; Epstein, J.L., et al., 1997; Swap, S.M., 1993; and Henderson & Berla, 1994).

One of the earliest models of parent involvement was provided by Ira Gordon in the early 1970's in his observations of parents in the school community. He observed five roles of parents which he represented as spokes on a wheel. He viewed the most common role of *parents as an audience* with parents invited to open houses to observe the work or routines of their children at school. A second role was of *parents as direct and active teachers* of their children at home. Third, parents were *utilized as volunteers* within and outside the classroom. Fourth, *parents served as paid employees*. Finally, *parents served as decision makers*. Gordon noted that these roles should be seen as equal elements rather than as hierarchal with effective partnerships requiring efforts at each "spoke". He also pointed out that the individual interests, time, and strengths of parents would factor into roles (Gordon & Breivogel, 1976).

Six types of involvement form the framework of Joyce Epstein's (1997) view of school-family-community partnerships. These types are: (1) assisting parents with *parenting skills* and schools in understanding families; (2) *communicating with families* about school programs and student progress through home-to-school and school-to-home communications; (3) involving families as *volunteers and audiences* at school and locations as supporters of student learning; (4) involving families in working with their children in *learning at home*; (5) including families as *decision-makers* through school

councils, parent-teacher organizations, committees, and other parent groups; and (6) providing services to the community and *coordinating resources and services* for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other community groups (Epstein, J.L., et al., 1997). While individual results for students, teachers, and families vary across these types of involvement, the collaborative efforts of families and teachers serve to enhance student learning.

Three models depicting parent roles were presented by Susan Swap (1993). The *protective model* separates the functions of school and home with parents delegating and holding schools responsible for the education of their children. The *school to transition model* holds parents accountable for supporting teachers in their efforts to educate children. Supportive activities are outlined by schools and include fund raising, reinforcing school expectations at home, supporting school parties, and providing a home environment that nurtures school success. The *curriculum enrichment model* is representative of many early childhood programs, including Head Start, and supports the partnership approach to parent involvement with parents and educators working together.

In their comprehensive review of studies focusing on the importance of family involvement in education, Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla (1994), outlined four roles which reflect common themes found in the work of Gordon, Swap, Epstein, and others.

Participation of parents in these roles appears to assist children in doing their best in school. These roles include: (1) *parent as teacher* creating a home environment which supports children in their learning; (2) *parent as supporter* contributing knowledge and skills to the schools enriching the curriculum and providing services and support to children; (3) *parent as advocate* negotiating the system for fair treatment and responsiveness of the system to families; and (4) *parent as decision-maker* participating in joint problem solving at every level including councils and committees (Henderson & Berla, 1994). When parents are enabled to play these key roles in quality school settings, children demonstrate heightened achievement scores, do better in school, stay in school longer, and go to better schools.

In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student's family is able to:

- (1) Create a home environment that encourages learning
- (2) Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
- (3) Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1).

#### Preparation of Teachers to Collaborate with Parents

Early childhood programs have long recognized the importance of parent involvement with parents participating in conferences, volunteer efforts, parent

education programs, home visitation programs, and advisory councils. Head Start, begun as a federal initiative for “disadvantaged” children and families in 1965, exemplifies this model of parent involvement in early childhood programs. Consequently, programs training teachers to work with young children have historically included training in working with families.

Parent involvement in the school setting declines progressively from early childhood through high school (Shartrand, et al. , 1997). While children and adolescents become more self-sufficient with age, they continue to need to support and guidance of caring adults including their teachers, family, and community members. Unlike early childhood programs, there does not appear to be systematic training available to teachers in elementary and secondary settings to assist them in collaborative efforts with families (Shartrand, et al., 1997). Nevertheless, teacher education in family involvement may be one of the most potentially effective methods in reducing barriers to school-home partnerships (Chavkin, 1991).

The importance of working with families for the benefit of student learners and the potential for institutions of higher education to make an impact in assisting teachers in partnering with families appears to be reflected in many of our teacher standards including those in the state of Kentucky at both the beginning and experienced teacher levels.

New Teacher Standard VI: Collaborates with Colleagues/Parent/Others

The teacher collaborates with colleagues, parents, and other agencies to design, implement, and support learning programs that develop student abilities to use communication skills, apply core concepts, become self-sufficient individuals, become responsible team members, think and solve problems, and integrate knowledge (Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board, 1999, p.5)

Experienced Teacher Standard 8: Colleagues with Colleagues/ Parents/Others

The teacher collaborates with colleagues, parents, and other agencies to design, implement, and support learning programs that develop student abilities to use communication skills, apply core concepts, become self-sufficient individuals, become responsible team members, think and solve problems, and integrate knowledge (Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board, 1999, p.6)

In Kentucky, Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education Teacher Performance Standards are very explicit about the extent of collaboration with family and community members reflecting a broader definition of collaboration and community engagement:

Standard VI: Collaborates with Colleagues/Parents/Others

The early childhood educator shall collaborate and consult with the following to design, implement, and support learning programs for children: staff in a team effort; volunteers; families and primary caregivers; other educational;

child care, health and social services providers in an interagency and interdisciplinary team; and local, state, and federal agencies (Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board, 1995, p. 6).

A commitment to collaboration with families is also reflected in the Professional Code of Ethics for Kentucky School Personnel (704 KRS 20:680) which accompanies the application for Kentucky Teacher Certification. In Section I. Certified personnel in the Commonwealth... (3) Shall strive to uphold the responsibilities of the education profession... : (B) To Parents:

.Shall make reasonable effort to communicate to parents information which should be revealed in the interest of the student.

.Shall endeavor to understand community cultures and diverse home environments of students...(1999, p.1).

Clearly, in order for teachers to meet these expectations, we must provide training and first hand experiences in working with parents and families at both the preservice and staff development levels. Further, this training should be integrated throughout teacher preparation curriculum rather than being treated as an isolated component. Knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes toward families should be sustained through inservice training (Shartrand, 1997).

Recognizing both the importance of collaborating with the families and the need for instruction in such efforts, it becomes of interest to explore how Kentucky's teachers are supported in their training to work with families and with communities.

More specifically:

- (1) Are *teacher preparation programs* assisting teachers in meeting requirements of the new teacher standards and the statement of professional ethics as they relate to collaboration with families and communities? Does this preparation encompass facilitating parents and families in their roles as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers (Berla & Henderson, 1994)?
- (2) Are *local school districts* continuing to assist teachers in meeting the experienced teacher standards and the statement of professional ethics as they relate to collaboration with families and communities through on-going staff development activities? Do these staff development activities encompass facilitating parents and families in their roles as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers (Berla & Henderson, 1994)?
- (3) What are the gaps in preparation at both the preservice and practicing teacher levels and how can changes be made so that Kentucky's teachers are supported through training and children benefit from the collaborative partnerships of teachers and families?

#### Method

Exploring answers to these questions required ascertaining the viewpoints of

teachers about their preparation to work with families and communities through teacher education and staff development experiences. It also required eliciting the viewpoints of local school district administrators with respect to staff development activities which support teachers in their work with parents and community members. Finally, it required gathering information from teacher educators about the role of universities in preparing teachers for collaborative partnerships. Questionnaires were designed for use with these groups addressing four areas of parent involvement: parents as teachers, parents as supporters, parents as advocates, and parents as decision-makers (Henderson & Berla, 1994)

#### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of questionnaires designed to determine the effectiveness of both teacher preparation and staff development aspects of teachers' preparation to partner with families.

#### Participants

Geographic region, grade level, and years in service were factors considered in determining the teachers who would receive questionnaires. In total, 64 teachers were selected for the pilot study. They were divided equally among the eight service regions in Kentucky, i.e., groupings of counties served locally by the Kentucky Department of Education through regional service centers. Questionnaires were mailed to eight teachers in each service region. Two were preprimary teachers indicating they taught in the state's public four-year-old programs. (These programs are designed for four-year-

old children labeled at-risk by their family's economic status or are three or four years of age and have an identified disability.) Two teachers were elementary teachers teaching kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Two teachers were junior high or middle school teachers serving children in grades 6 through 8 and two teachers were high school teachers serving adolescents in grades 9 through 12.

In addition to representing specific grade levels and service regions, length of service was considered. Teachers who had been teaching for three years were selected because they were likely to: (1) have experienced and formed an opinion of staff development training, and (2) recall and know the relevance of their prior training in a teacher preparation program. Teachers in the primary, middle, and secondary levels were randomly selected from a computer-generated list of teachers completing their third year of teaching. Such a list of preprimary teachers with given years of experience was not available through the Kentucky Department of Education as many public four-year-old programs are contracted to Head Start programs. A listing of teachers working in four-year-old programs was obtained through the Department of Education and teachers were randomly selected from the lists by region.

### Materials

Teachers across grade levels were asked to complete two questionnaires. One questionnaire addressed their perceptions of the extent of their preparation at the preservice level to collaborate with families. A second questionnaire addressed their

perceptions of the school district's staff development activities relative to working with families. Each of these questionnaires contained 20 items addressing the teachers' preparation to support families. The questions were divided equally into four categories: (1) parents as teachers, (2) parents as supporters, (3) parents as advocates, and (4) parents as decision-makers (Berla & Henderson, 1994 ). While questions addressed similar content, wording was adapted according to the grade level and job responsibility of the respondent. A 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) was used in each questionnaire. (See Appendices A and B.)

### Design and Procedures

During the pilot study, the 64 teacher participants were mailed the questionnaires, a demographic sheet, a set of directions for completing the survey, and a cover letter outlining the nature of the project. In order to ensure their anonymity, names were omitted from the questionnaires. Each questionnaire was coded with a number and the packet contained a postcard with that number. Respondents were asked to return the postcard under separate cover so that a record of those returning questionnaires could be kept. Addressed and stamped envelopes were included for return of the questionnaires. Following the due date of questionnaires, phone calls were made to those respondents who had not returned the postcard.

### Scoring

Forty-one percent of the pilot study sample returned their questionnaires.

Responses of the recipients returning pilot study questionnaires addressing preservice and staff development activities across preprimary, elementary, middle school, and high school levels were analyzed to determine the reliability of the 20 items in terms of how well they “fit” under each of their respective categories: (1) parents as teachers, (2) parents as supporters, (3) parents as advocates, and (4) parents as decision-makers. SPSS procedures were used to calculate the standardized item alpha score for each of the four categories of parent involvement across each of the four levels. Standardized item alpha scores were as follows for the four categories of the preservice questionnaire: parents as teachers, .81; parents as supporters, .89; parents as advocates, .93; and parents as decision-makers, .80. Standardized item alpha scores were as follows for the four categories of the staff development questionnaire: parents as teachers, .91; parents as supporters, .92; parents as advocates, .91; and parents as decision-makers, .93.

### Sample Study

Having determined that the questionnaire items were appropriate for eliciting viewpoints relative to preparation for working with families and communities in each of four categories, the sample study was implemented. The scope of the study was broadened to include teachers, local school district administrators, and teacher educators.

### Participants

Teachers. Concerns for a representative sample of teachers by grade level,

region, and three years of teaching experience continued in the selection of teachers for the larger study. Questionnaires were mailed to a total of 465 teachers in the state. Fifteen preprimary, 15 elementary, 15 middle school, and 15 high school teachers were randomly selected, from computer generated lists provided by the Kentucky Department of Education, in each of seven service regions. With the exception of preprimary teachers, all teachers were completing or had completed their third year of teaching according to the lists provided by the Kentucky Department of Education. As with the pilot study, “years in teaching” was not available for the preprimary teachers. The school structure in one of the regions was elementary and secondary without middle or junior high schools. This level was omitted and only preprimary, elementary, and high school teachers were selected for the study from that region. In total, 120 preprimary, 120 elementary, 105 middle school/junior high, and 120 high school teachers were selected from randomized lists to receive questionnaires.

Administrators. Questionnaires were also sent to the school district administrator responsible for coordinating staff development activities. There are 176 school districts in the state. Questionnaires were sent to one administrator in each of these 176 districts.

Teacher educators. Seventy teacher educators in the state’s teacher preparation programs were sampled for their perceptions of teacher preparation to partner with families. Teacher educators represented both public and private institutions. Names of individuals receiving the questionnaires as teacher educators of preschool teachers

were obtained through a listing disseminated by preschool personnel in the Kentucky Department of Education. Names of individuals receiving elementary, middle, and high school questionnaires were obtained from respective department heads at the college and university level.

### Materials

Teachers. During the sample study, 465 teacher participants were mailed the questionnaires, a demographic sheet, a set of directions for completing the survey, and a cover letter outlining the nature of the project. In order to ensure their anonymity, names were omitted from the questionnaires. Each questionnaire was coded with a number and the packet contained a postcard with that number. Respondents were asked to return the postcard under separate cover so that a record of those returning questionnaires could be kept. Addressed and stamped envelopes were included for return of the questionnaires.

Administrators. Administrators received four questionnaires relative to their perceptions of staff development activities designed to help teachers in their efforts to partner with parents. The questionnaires addressed four separate levels: preprimary, elementary, middle, and high school. Respondents were asked to complete each questionnaire. (See Appendix C.) Administrators also received a demographic sheet, cover letter, set of directions, stamped and addressed return envelope, and return post card.

Teacher educators. Teacher educators received one questionnaire addressing

the efficacy of college courses and experiences in meeting the needs of preservice teachers. (See Appendix D.) Teacher educators also received a demographic sheet, cover letter, set of directions, stamped and addressed return envelope, and return post card.

### Procedures

Procedures similar to the pilot study were followed for the study with participants receiving packets containing questionnaire(s), a set of directions, postcard, cover letter, and stamped, addressed envelopes. Participants not responding by the due date received follow-up reminder postcards. Teachers and administrators not responding also received follow-up sets of materials following the absence of their response to the reminder postcard.

### Results

The first question asked was: Are teacher preparation programs assisting teachers in meeting requirements of the new teacher standards and the statement of professional ethics as they relate to collaboration with families and communities? Does this preparation encompass facilitating parents and families in their roles as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers? Exploring the possible answers to this question involves looking at the responses of teachers and teacher educators to the teacher preparation questionnaire. Teacher responses from the pilot study are generally included with the sample study.

## Demographic Information and Responses of Classroom Teachers

### Demographic Information

Twenty-eight percent of teachers in the sample study returned questionnaires. The combined percentage of returns for the pilot and sample study was 30%. Demographic information presented is based on that reported on the demographic information sheet.

Regional service center. The eight centers were represented by percentage returns of questionnaires as follows:

1	Murray	16.6 %
2	Bowling Green	15.3 %
3	Louisville	14.6 %
4.	Northern KY	15.3 %
5	Lexington	10.2 %
6	Corbin/London	10.8 %
7	Morehead	8.3 %
8	Prestonsburg	4.5 %
	No response	4.5 %

Grade level. The percentage of teachers responding decreased across grade levels. Preprimary teachers had a 31.2% rate of return, elementary teachers 26.8% middle school teachers 22.5%, and high school teachers 16.6%.

Years taught: A listing of teachers in their third year of teaching was made available by the Kentucky Department of Education for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Such data was not available for preprimary teachers. Consequently, a number of primary teachers were in field longer than three years. Also, the listing did not account for service as a teacher out-of-state or in private settings. The mean for

years of teaching for the sample was 7.04 years.

Degree. Degrees held according to frequency were as follows: Bachelor's, 50.3 %; Master's, 39.5%; Planned 5<sup>th</sup> Year, 6.4 %; Specialist, 1.3 %; and Doctorate, .6 %. Degree was not reported by 1.9 % of the sample.

Years certified and certification held. The highest percentage (49%) of teachers reported becoming certified between the years 1991-1995. An additional 24.2% had been certified between 1996-1999. Eight of the teachers did not hold certificates and were teaching in preprimary situations which were originally filled by non-certified individuals. Certificates for birth to primary have only become available in recent years.

Information was not successfully obtained in the pilot study regarding certificates held. However, this information was acquired in the sample study. Teachers could be certified at more than one level. Across the sample, exclusive of the pilot study, 51.9% held a primary-grade 5 certificate, 21.4% held a birth to primary certificate, 21.4% held a primary - grade 12 certificate, and 20.6% held a grade 5-9 certificate, 16.8% held a grade 8-12 certificate, 5.3% held a grade 5-12 certificate. These figures do not reflect those certified in special education. However, 20.6% of the sample, exclusive of the pilot, study indicated they had been enrolled in a special education program. In addition, 3.8% reported they had been enrolled in certification programs in administration and 3.8% reported they had been enrolled in counseling programs.

Rank. Most teachers (42.7%) responding held Rank III status. Thirty-five percent were Rank II, and Rank I was held by 16.6%. The higher percentage at the

lower Rank III level may be attributed to the request that teachers had only been in field for three years.

Institution of higher education attended. Most teachers (59.2%) attended public institutions. Private institutions were attended by 39.5% of the teachers responding. Some teachers (1.3%) has attended both public and private institutions. Most teachers were graduates of institutions within Kentucky. These institutions are ranked by frequency of attendance reported.

Western Kentucky University	21.0%
Eastern Kentucky University	11.5%
Morehead State University	10.8%
Murray State University	10.2%
Northern Kentucky University	9.6%
University of Louisville	7.0%
University of Kentucky	4.5%
Other	24.2%
No response	1.3%

### Response to Questions Relative to Preservice Preparation to Work with Families

Teachers were asked a number of questions about their teacher preparation and staff development programs separate from the questionnaire. Responses are as follows:

(1) *Did you take course(s) which prepared you to work with parents/families in*

*public school programs?* Within the sample, 51.6% reported “yes” and

45.9% reported “no”. Some individuals (2.5%) chose not to respond to this

item.

(2) *Would you describe the course(s) you took where you received information*

*regarding working with families as...?* Of the choices given, the greatest

number (34.4%) reported receiving such instruction in human development and learning courses, 30.5% reported instruction in special education courses, 26% in methods courses, 11.5% in counseling courses, 11.5% in parent involvement courses, and 1.5 % in administration courses. This question was not asked of the pilot study participants.

(3) *Where was the course(s) taught where you received information regarding*

*working with families?* This question was not included in the pilot study

and 26.7% of those sampled did not respond to this question. Of those

who did, 56.5% reported “Education”, 6.9% reported “Human

Environmental Sciences/Family and Consumer Sciences”, 6.9% indicated

“other”, and 2.3% reported both “Education” and “Human Environmental

Sciences/Family and Consumer Sciences”.

(4) *Do you believe students in your teacher education program received sufficient*

*information about how to work with families in ways that promote effective*

*communication between home and school and, subsequently, student*

*achievement?* Responses of participants in the pilot study indicated that

11.5% thought received sufficient information and 88.5% did not believe

they received sufficient information. Responses of the sample study were

considered by grade level. Thirty percent of the *preprimary teachers*

responded “yes” while 62.5% reported “no”. Some (7.5%) omitted this

question. At the *elementary level*, 17.6% responded “yes” while 82.4%

responded “no”. At the *middle school level*, 37.1% responded “yes” and

60% responded “no”. Some (2.9%) of middle school teachers did not respond to this question. At the *high school level*, 13.6% responded “yes” and 86.4% responded “no”.

(5) *Which source has been the greatest help in learning about working with families?* Fifty percent of pilot study participants reported that staff development activities had been the greatest help and 3.8% indicated their teacher education training had been the greatest help in working with families. Interestingly, 42.3% reported “other” as being the most help while 3.8% did not respond to this question. Comments indicate “other” is often attributed to personal experience as a teacher.

During the sample study, the question was considered by grade level. *Preprimary teachers* reported greatest sources of help in the following order: staff development 50%, other 22.5%, teacher education program 15%, 7.5% both staff development and teacher education programs and 5% did not respond to this question. *Elementary teachers* reported greatest sources of help in the following order: staff development 44.1%, other 44.1%, teacher education 8.8%, and 2.9% did not respond to the question. At the *middle school level*, teachers indicated the greatest sources of help in order as 45.7% staff development, 22.9% teacher education program, 14.3% other, and 8.6% no response. *High school* teachers responded in the following order with respect to that which was

most helpful: 40.9% staff development, 40.9% other, 18.2% teacher education program.

(6) *Would you like additional assistance in learning more about working with families?* This question was asked in both the pilot and sample study. While 3.8% of the respondents did not complete this item, 73.9% indicated they would like more assistance in working with families. Only 22.3% responded “no”. In the sample study, this was considered by grade level. At the *preprimary level*, 67.5% responded “yes”, 27.5% responded “no”, and 5% did not respond. At the *elementary level*, 82.4% responded “yes”, 14.7% responded “no”, and 2.9% did not respond. At the *middle school level*, 74.3% responded “yes”, 20% responded “no”, and 5.7% did not respond. At the *high school level*, 72.7% responded “yes” and 27.3% responded “no”.

#### Responses of Teachers to the Teacher Preparation Program Questionnaire

Reliability of instrument. SPSS procedures were used to calculate the standardized item alpha score for each of the four categories of parent involvement across each of the four levels. Standardized item alpha scores were as follows for the four categories of the preservice questionnaire: parents as teachers, .85; parents as supporters, .85; parents as advocates, .81; and parents as decision-makers, .89.

Group differences in responses. The means for the four categories of parent involvement are presented in Table 1 across four grade levels. These means reflect the

ratings of the teachers with respect to their preservice teacher preparation.

Table 1

Means of Four Categories of Family Involvement as Reported by Teachers across Four Grade Levels (Teacher Preservice Preparation)

Category	Prepri.	Elem.	Middle	High	Total	F.	Sig.
Teachers	2.92	2.81	2.94	3.08	2.92	.487	.692
Supporters	3.27	2.86	3.15	2.98	3.09	1.959	.122
Advocates	3.31	2.94	3.21	3.26	3.18	1.304	.275
Decision-Makers	2.86	2.51	2.75	2.79	2.73	1.280	.283

Note. Maximum rating = 5.  
 $p < .05$ .

SPSS procedures were utilized in determining the analysis of variance. Results of the ANOVA, as represented in Table 1, indicated there were no significant differences between the responses of teachers across grade levels with regard to the four categories of family involvement.

Responses of Teachers to Staff Development Questionnaire

Reliability of instrument. SPSS procedures were used to calculate the standardized item alpha score for each of the four categories of parent involvement across each of the four grade levels. Standardized item alpha scores were as follows for the four categories of the staff development questionnaire: parents as teachers,. 90 ;

parents as supporters, .94; parents as advocates, .91; and parents as decision-makers, .93. These scores were very high indicating how well these items “held together” in representing the category of parent involvement.

Group differences in responses. The means for the four categories of parent involvement are presented in Table 2 across four grade levels. These means reflect the ratings of the teachers with respect to their staff development experiences.

Table 2

Means of Four Categories Family Involvement as Reported by Teachers across Four Grade Levels (Staff Development)

Category	Prepri.	Elem.	Middle	High	Total	F.	Sig.
<b>Teachers</b>	<b>3.75</b>	3.30	<b>3.08</b>	<b>2.92</b>	3.33	5.830	.001 **
<b>Supporters</b>	<b>3.70</b>	3.25	<b>3.07</b>	<b>2.76</b>	3.27	5.802	.001 **
<b>Advocates</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>3.38</b>	6.375	.000 ***
Decision-Makers	3.26	3.08	3.04	2.78	3.08	1.263	.289

Note. Maximum rating = 5.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Using SPSS procedures, an analysis of variance (Table 2) indicated significant differences across grade levels in three of the four categories of parent involvement: parents as teachers, parents as supporters, and parents as advocates.

Post hoc tests were conducted to determine the nature of the differences. In the *parents as teachers category*, there was a significant ( $p=.006$ ) difference between the responses of the preprimary and middle school teachers. There was also a significant ( $p=.002$ ) difference between the response of the preprimary and high school teachers.

In the *parents as supporters category*, there was a significant ( $p=.018$ ) difference between the preprimary and middle school teachers. There was also a significant ( $p=.001$ ) difference between the preprimary and high school teachers' responses.

In the *parents as advocates category*, there was a significant ( $p=.003$ ) difference between the response of the preprimary and elementary teachers. There was also a significant ( $p=.001$ ) difference between the responses of preprimary and high school teachers.

### Demographic Information and Responses of Teacher Educators

#### Demographic Information

Fifty-three percent of the 70 teacher educators sampled responded to the questionnaire. Demographic information presented was provided by those respondents on the demographic questionnaire.

Regional service center. Teacher educators were represented in each of the eight service regions. Keep in mind that there were not an equal number of these questionnaires sent to each service center as institutions are not equally divided among those centers.

1	Murray	8.1%
2	Bowling Green	10.8%
3	Louisville	13.5%
4	Northern KY	10.8%
5	Lexington	16.2%
6	Corbin/London	13.5%
7	Morehead	5.4%
8	Prestonsburg	10.8%
	Not reported	10.8%

Position/degree. Teacher educators held faculty position presented in order of rank: professor 16.2%, associate professor 18.9%, assistant professor 48.6%, and 5.4% instructor. Questionnaires were completed by several faculty members (10.8%) who indicated they were administrators within their colleges or departments. Doctoral degrees were held by 83.8% of the respondents and Master's degrees were held by 16.2%. Respondents reported that 86.5% were educated in public institutions and 10.8% were educated in private institutions. Respondents were also asked to identify the area in which they were prepared to teach. Responses are listed by frequency of report: curriculum and instruction (59.5%), elementary education (32.4%), middle school (29.7%), high school (24.3%), administration (18.9%), special education (10.8%), counseling (8.1%), and preprimary education (8.1%). Respondents may have responded to more than one area particularly considering each held a minimum of two degrees.

Higher education institution. In order to protect the anonymity of the respondents, they were not asked to identify the institution in which they were employed.

Program area. Teacher education programs were indicated as departments

where most (83.8%) of the faculty members were housed. Other programs listed included Curriculum and Instruction (2.7%), which is generally a part of teacher education, more than one department (10.8%) and other (2.7%). Respondents were also asked to identify the certification level in which they were teaching. The following responses are ranked in order of frequency of response: Birth to Primary (8.1%), Primary through Grade 5 (37.8%), Primary through Grade 12 (45.9%), Middle School (45.9%), Grade 8 through 12 (35.1%), Grade 5 through 12 (29.7%). Responses indicate that some teacher educators work with more than one certification level.

#### Responses to Questions about Preparation to Work with Families

In an effort to explore the preparation of teacher educators to prepare teachers to work with families/communities, the following questions were asked:

- (1) *Did you take a course(s) with a heavy component on working with parents in public school programs?* Most teacher educators (75.7%) did not take such a course(s) while 24.3% reported they did participate in such a course(s).
- (2) *Do you believe you received sufficient information about how to work with families in ways that promote effective communication between home and school and subsequently student achievement?* Most (56.8%) responded “no” while 37.8% responded “yes”, and 5.4% did not respond to this item.
- (3) *In your work with preservice teachers do you require a portfolio task or course assignment in which your students reflect on the involvement of parents in the education of their children?* Most teacher educators (51.4%) reported

they included such tasks, 45.9% reported they did not include such tasks or assignments, and 2.7% did not respond to this item.

- (4) *Would you like additional assistance in learning more about working with families?* Seventy-three percent of the teacher educators responded “yes”, 13.5% responded “no”, and 13.5% did not respond to this item.

### Teacher Educator Program Questionnaire

Reliability of instrument. SPSS procedures were used to calculate the standardized item alpha score for each of the four categories of parent involvement across each of the four grade levels. Standardized item alpha scores were as follows for the four categories of the staff development questionnaire: parents as teachers, .79 ; parents as supporters, .90; parents as advocates, .86; and parents as decision-makers, .83. The parents as teachers standardized item alpha was lowered by the heightened response given to the item dealing with training for conducting parent conferences.

Group differences in responses. The means for the four categories of parent involvement are presented in Table 3 across four grade levels. These means reflect the ratings of the teachers with respect to their teacher education programs.

Table 3Means of Four of Categories Family Involvement as Reported by Teacher Educators across Three Grade Levels

Category	Elementary	Middle	High	Total	F.	Sig.
Teachers	3.81	3.56	3.36	3.59	1.778	.183
Supporters	3.83	3.60	3.43	3.63	.875	.425
Advocates	3.88	3.58	3.53	3.68	.769	.471
Decision-Makers	3.45	3.27	3.41	3.40	.159	.853

Note. Maximum rating = 5.  
 $p < .05$ .

Using SPSS procedures, an analysis of variance indicated no significant differences (Table 3) across grade levels in three of the four categories of parent involvement.

The second question was: Are local school districts continuing to assist teachers in meeting the experienced teacher standards and the statement of professional ethics as they relate to collaboration with families and communities through on-going staff development activities? Do these staff development activities encompass facilitating parents and families in their roles as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers? Exploring answers to this question involved the analysis of information taken from the staff development questionnaires addressing on-going staff development.

This questionnaires were completed by the school administrator responsible for coordinating district-wide staff development.

### Demographic Information and Responses of Administrators

#### Demographic Information

Of the 176 administrators sampled, 33% returned the questionnaires.

Demographic information presented reflects that which was reported by the participants on the demographic questionnaire.

Regional service center. The following information reflects percentages of administrators who responded representing each service area. Please note that the number of administrators sampled varied across centers as the districts are not evenly dispersed by Regional Service Centers.

1	Murray	13.8%
2	Bowling Green	19.0%
3	Louisville	0%
4	Northern KY	20.7%
5	Lexington	12.1%
6	Corbin/London	13.8%
7	Morehead	13.8%
8	Prestonsburg	5.2%
	Not reported	1.7%

Administrative position held. Each administrator completing the questionnaires was responsible for coordinating district staff development activities. Administrative positions held were reported as follows:

Instructional supervisor	32.8%
Assistant Superintendent or Superintendent	22.4%

Director of Instruction	27.6%
Curriculum Coordinator	12.1%
Principal	3.4%
Position not reported	1.7%

Degree. Doctoral degrees were held by 13.8% of the administrators. The remaining 84.5% held Master's degrees. One individual (1.7%) did not report degree held.

College/university attended. Seven administrators reported one or more degrees from out-of-state. The remainder had degrees from college(s)/university(ies) within Kentucky. Reporting by number of respondents attending the college/university, those institutions are represented as follows:

Western Kentucky University	13
Eastern Kentucky University	13
University of Kentucky	12
Morehead State University	11
Murray State University	7
University of Louisville	3
Union College	3
Cumberland College	3
University of Louisville	3
Campbellsville University	2
Paducah Community College	1
Spaulding University	1
Northern Kentucky University	1
Georgetown College	1
Centre College	1
Alice Lloyd College	1

Certificate. Administrators were asked to list the type of certification held. The certifications are presented below. Please note that administrators will hold several certificates.

Elementary	48.3%
Middle School	19.0%
High School	48.3%
Special Education	6.9%
Counseling	17.2%
Administration	93.1%*

\*One individual did not report certification.

### Responses of Administrators Relative to Preparation for Working with Families

Administrators were asked a number of questions about their preparation to work with families. Responses are as follows:

(1) *Did you take a course(s) which prepared individuals to work with parents in public schools?* Within the sample, 41.4% responded “yes”, 53.4% responded “no”, and 5.1% did not respond to this question.

(2) *Would you describe the course(s) you took where students received information regarding working with families as...?* Of those who reported they took a class relative to working with families, 44.8% reported it was an administration course, 22.4% reported it was a counseling course, 22.4% reported it was a human development and learning course, and 8.6% reported it was a methods course. Administrators may have reported in more than one category.

(3) *Where was the course(s) taught where you received information regarding working with families?* Education departments/colleges provided this information for 58.6% of the respondents, Human Environmental Sciences/ Family and Consumer Science departments/colleges provided such

courses for 5.2% of the respondents, and 5.2% reported taking these courses in other programs. Some of the respondents (31%) chose not to complete this item. Again, respondents may have listed more than one department/college.

(4) *Do you believe you received sufficient information about how to work with families in ways that promote effective communication between home and school and, subsequently, student achievement?* The majority (70.7%) of administrators responded with "no", while 24.1% responded "yes" and 5.1% did not complete this item.

(5) *Do you believe teachers in your district receive sufficient information about how to work with families in ways that promote effective communication between home and school and, subsequently, student achievement?* "No" was the response of 58.6% of the administrators. Another 37.9% responded "yes" and 3.4% did not respond to this item.

(6) *Would you like additional assistance in learning more about working with families?* The majority (77.6%) of administrators responded "yes" to this item, while 15.5% responded "no" and 6.9% did not respond to the item.

#### Responses of Administrators to the Staff Development Questionnaire

Reliability of instrument. SPSS procedures were used to calculate the standardized item alpha score for each of the four categories of parent involvement across each of the four levels. Standardized item alpha scores were as follows for the four categories of the preservice questionnaire: parents as teachers, .89; parents as

supporters, .94; parents as advocates, .93; and parents as decision-makers, .93. Once again, these standardized item alpha scores are very high.

Group differences in responses. The means for the four categories of parent involvement are presented in Table 4 across four grade levels. These means reflect the ratings of the administrators with respect to the staff development experiences of their districts.

Table 4

Means of Four Categories of Family Involvement as Reported by Administrators across Four Grade Levels (Staff Development)

Category	Prepri.	Elementary	Middle	High	Total	F.	Sig.
<b>Teachers</b>	3.30	<b>3.58</b>	3.39	<b>3.00</b>	3.31	3.932	.009 **
<b>Supporters</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>3.37</b>	3.16	<b>2.87</b>	3.20	4.269	.006 **
Advocates	3.51	3.52	3.56	3.19	3.44	2.333	.075
Decision-Makers	3.35	3.31	3.33	3.15	3.28	.588	.623

Note. Maximum rating = 5.

\*\*significant at  $\leq .01$ .

Using SPSS procedures, an analysis of variance indicated significant differences (Table 3) across grade levels in two of the four categories of parent involvement. Those areas were parents as teachers ( $p=.009$ ) and parents as supporters ( $p=.006$ ).

Post hoc tests were conducted to determine the nature of the differences.

In the *parents as teachers category*, there was a significant ( $p=.004$ ) difference

between the responses of the elementary and high school teachers.

In the *parents as supporters* category, there was a significant ( $p=.008$ ) difference between the preprimary and high school teachers. There was also a significant ( $p=.017$ ) difference between the elementary and high school teachers' responses.

The final question asked: *What are the gaps in preparation at both the preservice and practicing teacher levels and how can changes be made so that Kentucky's teachers are supported through training and children benefit from the collaborative partnerships of teachers and families?*

#### Relationships of Responses of Teachers and Teacher Educators

An ANOVA was conducted to determine the possible relationships between the responses of teachers and teacher educators across the four categories of family involvement. The ANOVA revealed significant differences between the responses of the teachers and teacher educators indicating that teacher educators rate preparation to work with families at the preservice level higher than the teachers across all categories of family involvement. This ANOVA is presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Analysis of Variance for Differences in Four Categories of Family Involvement across Four Grade Levels Using Teacher and Teacher Educator Responses

Categories	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F.	Sig.
Teachers					
Between Groups	14.118	1	14.118	19.008	.000***
Within Groups	147.925	200	.740		
Total	162.043	201			
Supporters					
Between Groups	9.254	1	9.254	12.042	.001***
Within Groups	152.925	199	.768		
Total	162.179	200			
Advocates					
Between Groups	8.159	1	8.159	9.568	.002**
Within Groups	165.441	194	.853		
Total	173.600	195			
Decision-Makers					
Between Groups	14.033	1	14.033	18.824	.000***
Within Groups	144.621	194	.745		
Total	158.654	195			

p < .05.

\*\*significant at <.01.

\*\*\*significant at < .001.

Relationships of Responses of Teachers and Administrators

An ANOVA was also conducted to determine if there are differences between how administrators and teachers perceive the availability and quality of staff development at the practicing teacher level across the four categories of parent involvement. The ANOVA presented in Table 6 indicates no significant differences in the responses of teachers and administrators.

Table 6Analysis of Variance for Differences in Four Categories of Family Involvement across Four Grade Levels Using Teacher and Administrator Responses

Categories	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F.	Sig.
Teachers					
Between Groups	8.293E-02	1	8.293E.02	.093	.761
Within Groups	185.881	208	.894		
Total	185.964	209			
Supporters					
Between Groups	4.339E-02	1	4.339E.02	.042	.837
Within Groups	212.460	208	1.021		
Total	215.503	209			
Advocates					
Between Groups	.731	1	.731	.899	.344
Within Groups	164.936	203	.812		
Total	165.667	204			
Decision-Makers					
Between Groups	1.715	1	1.715	1.899	.171
Within Groups	186.927	206	.907		
Total	188.642	207			

---

$p < .05$ .

### Discussion

Responses of teachers, administrators, and teacher educators will be presented by the questions addressed in the study. The information which seems most relevant to the topic of building partnerships with families will be discussed.

#### Question 1

**Are teacher preparation programs assisting teachers in meeting requirements of the new teacher standards and the statement of professional ethics as they relate to collaboration with families and communities? Does this preparation encompass facilitating parents and families in their roles as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers?**

#### Responses of Classroom Teachers Relative to Teacher Preparation

The results of the study suggest that the teachers who participated in this study did not believe they received sufficient preparation at the pre-service level to collaborate with parents and family members. Almost 75% of the teachers gave responses reflective of the teacher preparation programs which they had attended in Kentucky.

One indication of teacher attitudes is the high percentage of negative responses to the question, *“Do you believe students in your teacher education program received sufficient information about how to work with families in ways that promote effective communication between home and school and, subsequently, student achievement?”* In

the original, pilot study, 88.5% of the teachers responded “no” to this question .

Responses in the sample study were considered by grade level. At the preprimary level, 62.5% responded “no”; at the elementary level, 82.4% responded “no”; at the middle school level, 60% responded “no”; and at the high school level 86.4% responded “no”.

A second indication of teacher attitudes is the low percentage of teachers actually taking courses which prepared them to work with families. Only 52% of all teachers responding had taken a course which prepared them to work with families in public school settings. Only 26% reported receiving information about working with families in methods courses which would seem to serve as the best place for prospective teachers to learn about collaborating with families in the teaching/learning process.

A third indication of teacher attitudes is the means across the four categories of parent involvement which never exceeded 3.6, at any grade level, on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strongly Agree”. When calculated as means for combined grade levels, the means from highest to lowest were knowing how to *assist parents as advocates* (3.18); knowing how to *assist parents as supporters* (3.09); knowing how to *assist parents as teachers* (2.92); and knowing how to *assist parents as decision-makers* (2.73).

Finally, we need to consider the differences across the grade levels in terms of how well prepared by their teacher preparation programs teachers feel to work with families. Responses of teachers in this study indicated they saw no significant differences in their preparation across grade levels.

In considering these results, it is important to keep in mind the low responses of the teachers to the multiple requests to complete the questionnaire. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the frequent requests for written data received by teachers, or the local districts' policies regarding provision of such information, or an attitude about the training which they received in order to work with parents and communities. The data collected reflects teacher concerns for needing more information on working with families during their pre-service preparation. However, additional teachers need to be surveyed in order to generalize these findings to the larger population of Kentucky's teachers.

#### Responses of Teacher Educators Relative to Teacher Preparation

The responses of teacher educators suggest three important findings. The first deals with the systemic nature of problems in educating teachers to work and collaborate with families and communities members for the benefit of our children. When asked if they had courses in their programs of study to help prepare them to work with families, 76% of the teacher educators responding reported they had not had such preparation. When asked, *“Do you believe you received sufficient information about how to work with families in ways that promote effective communication between home and school and subsequently student achievement?”*, 58% of the respondents said “no”. Most of the teacher educators (84%) held doctoral degrees. (Only 8% of this group indicated they were prepared as preschool teachers.)

Second, teacher educator responses do reflect a concern for helping prospective teachers prepare to collaborate with families. Most teacher educators (51.4%) reported they required students to reflect on parent involvement during a portfolio task. The majority (73%) responded that they wanted more information about how to work with families.

The third important finding in the teacher educator category relates to the differences in perceptions of teachers and teacher educators about the preparation of teachers to work with families. The mean scores of responses of teacher educators across all grade levels in each category of parent involvement are higher than those reported by teachers. Teacher educators responses revealed a mean in the area of *assisting parents as teachers* as 3.59 as compared to 2.92 for teachers. The mean for teacher educators in *assisting parents as supporters* was 3.63 as compared to 3.09 for teachers. In *assisting parents as advocates*, the mean of teacher educator responses was 3.63 as compared to 3.18 for teachers. Finally, in the category of *assisting parents as decision-makers*, the mean for teacher educator responses was 3.40 as compared to the mean of 2.73 for teachers. These means suggest that teachers feel they are less well prepared to collaborate with families than do their teacher educators.

**Question 2**

**Are local school districts continuing to assist teachers in meeting the experienced teacher standards and the statement of professional ethics as they relate to collaboration with families and communities through on-going staff development activities? Do these staff development activities encompass facilitating parents and families in their roles as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers?**

**Responses of Teachers Relative to Staff Development**

Two findings are highlighted in the responses of teachers to their staff development experiences. First, teachers across all grade levels reported that staff development experiences were more helpful in assisting them in working with families than their teacher preparation programs. Second, there were significant differences found between the grade levels with preprimary teachers' means indicating they were receiving more assistance than upper grade levels, particularly middle and high school. This difference was reflected in the *parents as teachers* categories by the significant difference in the responses of preprimary teachers and middle school teachers. In the *parents as supporters* category, there were significant differences in the responses of preprimary teachers and middle school teachers and between preprimary teachers and high school teachers' responses. In the *parents as advocates* category, there was a significant difference in the responses of preprimary teachers and elementary teachers and between preprimary teachers and high school teachers.

Teachers in this study want additional help in building partnerships with families and communities. In the pilot study, 74% of the total respondents responded that they would like additional assistance in learning more about working with families. In the sample study, the response to this question was considered by grade level. At the preprimary level, 68% responded “yes”; at the elementary level, 82% responded “yes”; at the middle school level, 74% responded “yes”; and at the high school level, 73% responded “yes”. These responses suggest that, regardless of the age and level of independence of the student, teachers want help in collaborating with families for the benefits of children and adolescents. This would also suggest that teachers recognize the importance of working with families, but lack resources and training.

#### Responses of Administrators Relative to Staff Development

The responses of administrators seem to support two findings addressed by teacher educators and teachers. First, the responses of administrators who are responsible for coordinating staff development activities give further indication of the systemic nature of problems which existing in teacher training to work with families. More than one-half (53.4%) of the administrators responding reported they had not taken a course which prepared them to work with families during their training programs. For many (45%), this occurred when they took courses in administration. The majority (71%) of these administrators do not feel they received sufficient information to work with families in ways that promote effective communication and enhance student achievement. A majority (59%) also do not believe that the teachers in their districts receive sufficient information to work with families. This is reflected in the means of their

responses across categories of parent involvement and grade levels. However, like teachers and teacher educators, administrators (78%) want to learn more about working with families.

A second finding relates to the significant differences noted by administrators in their responses to categories of parent involvement across grade levels. In the *parents as teachers* category, there were significant differences between the elementary and high school means. In the *parents as supporters* category, there were significant differences between the preprimary and high school teacher means and between the elementary and high school teacher means. This finding suggests that administrators believe high school teachers receive less training than preprimary teachers in assisting parents as teachers and supporters of their children and that high school teachers receive less training than elementary teachers in assisting parents in supporting their children. Similar findings were noted by teachers in reflecting on their staff development experiences across grade levels.

### **Question 3**

**What are the gaps in preparation at both the preservice and practicing teacher levels and how can changes be made so that Kentucky's teachers are supported through training and children benefit from the collaborative partnerships of teachers and families?**

### Comparing Teacher Responses and Teacher Educator Responses

The most important finding in comparing the responses of teachers to the responses of teacher educators is the disparity which appears to exist between how teachers perceive their levels of preparedness to work with families and how teacher educators view that preparation. In all categories of parent involvement, teacher educators appear to believe that teachers are better prepared than do the teachers themselves. Perhaps, it is a systemic problem of lack of preparation at all levels including that of the teacher educators which contributes to this proposed disparity. Perhaps, it is lack of communication among teacher educators, teachers in field, and families which separates teacher educators from changing realities of family and community involvement for both teachers and families. Whatever the reason, there is clear evidence from responses that teachers and teacher educators do want to know more about how to work effectively with families.

### Comparing Teacher Responses and Administrator Responses

Unlike the comparison of responses of teachers and teacher educators, there were no significant differences between the responses of teachers and administrators in their perceptions of preparation of teachers to work with families. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the means of both teachers and administrators suggest limited preparation of teachers at the staff development level to collaborate with family and community members.

In summarizing this study, there are four findings which seem most important to address through further investigation and collaborative effort:

1. Responses of teachers, teacher educators, and administrators suggest limited preparation of teachers to work with families.
2. Responses of teachers and administrators seem to suggest that teachers working at the middle and high school levels are less prepared than those working with young children.
3. Preparation to work with families appears to be a systemic problem with those training teachers, i.e., teacher educators and administrators, needing additional training to work with families.
4. Most importantly, teachers, teacher educators, and administrators appear to want more assistance in their efforts to work with families for the benefit of children and adolescents.

It is clear that targeting one group for “amelioration” would be insufficient. If we are to help teachers be effective in meeting standards relating to family involvement, we must engage in collaborative efforts that include postsecondary programs, local school districts, related government agencies, families, and community members. Such efforts assist in determining relevant needs of families and children as well as resources needed by teachers to meet those needs in realistic terms.

Suggestions for further investigation involve strategies for building programs

which can be of more of service to teachers. Three possibilities are important to consider:

- (1) more collaboration between university teachers and local school districts so that those involved in teacher preparation become more aware of the changing needs of teachers in working with families;
- (2) more interdisciplinary collaboration across university colleges and departments so that individuals knowledgeable of children, adolescents, and families, e.g., social work, psychology, child development and family studies, counseling psychology, health education, etc., could engage in building programs which would, perhaps, better prepare teachers; and
- (3) integration of strategies for inclusion of parents, families, and community members as resources in creating and implementing curriculum throughout methods courses.

This research was supported, in part, by a grant from the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. The authors would like to thank Robert Sexton, Beverly Raimondo, and Rene Buck for their guidance and assistance. The authors would also like to thank Dr. Lynley Anderman of the College of Education at the University of Kentucky for her efforts in guiding research design and statistical analysis and Dr. Susan Willis of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at Eastern Kentucky University for her editing remarks.

## References

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chavkin, N.F. (1991). Uniting families and schools: Social workers helping teachers through inservice training. School Social Work Journal, (15), 1-10.
- Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, K.C., Sanders, M.G., & Simon, B.S. (1997). School, family and community partnerships: Your handbook for action. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gardner, H. (1985). Frames of the mind: The theory of multiple intelligence. New York: Basic Books.
- Gordon, I.J., & Breivogel, W.F. (1976). Building effective home-school relationships. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Henderson, A.T., & Berla, N. (Eds.). (1994). A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.
- Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board. (1999). Experienced teacher standards for preparation and certification. Frankfort, KY: Department of Education.

Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board. (1995). Interdisciplinary early childhood education teacher performance standards. Frankfort, KY: Department of Education.

Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board. (1999). New teacher standards for preparation and certification. Frankfort, KY: Department of Education.

Morrison, G.S. (1998). Early childhood education today. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice-Hall.

Shartrand, A.M., Weiss, H.B., Kreider, H.M., & Lopez, M.E. (1997). New skills for new schools: Preparing teachers in family involvement. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

State of Kentucky. (1999). Professional code of ethics for Kentucky school personnel: 704 KAR 20:680.

Swap, S. M. (1993). Developing home-school partnerships: From concepts to practice. New York: Teachers College Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society. The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Appendix A

Building Partnerships with Families Teacher Preparation Survey

Teacher Questionnaire - Preservice Training

Preprimary, Elementary, Middle, and High School

Appendix B

Building Partnerships with Families Teacher Preparation Survey

Teacher Questionnaire - Staff Development Training

Preprimary, Elementary, Middle, and High School

Appendix C

Building Partnerships with Families Teacher Preparation Survey

Administrator- Staff Development Training

Preprimary, Elementary, Middle, and High School

Appendix D

Building Partnerships with Families Teacher Preparation Survey

Teacher Educator

Preprimary, Elementary, Middle, and High School