



National Center for **Research** on  
**Rural** Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

# The Role of Family-School Partnerships in Increasing Science Literacy in Rural Communities

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Building Science Literacy Through Engagement In Community  
and Environmental Stewardship Seminar Series

in the

*Rural Issues Connecting Rural Families* Spotlight Session

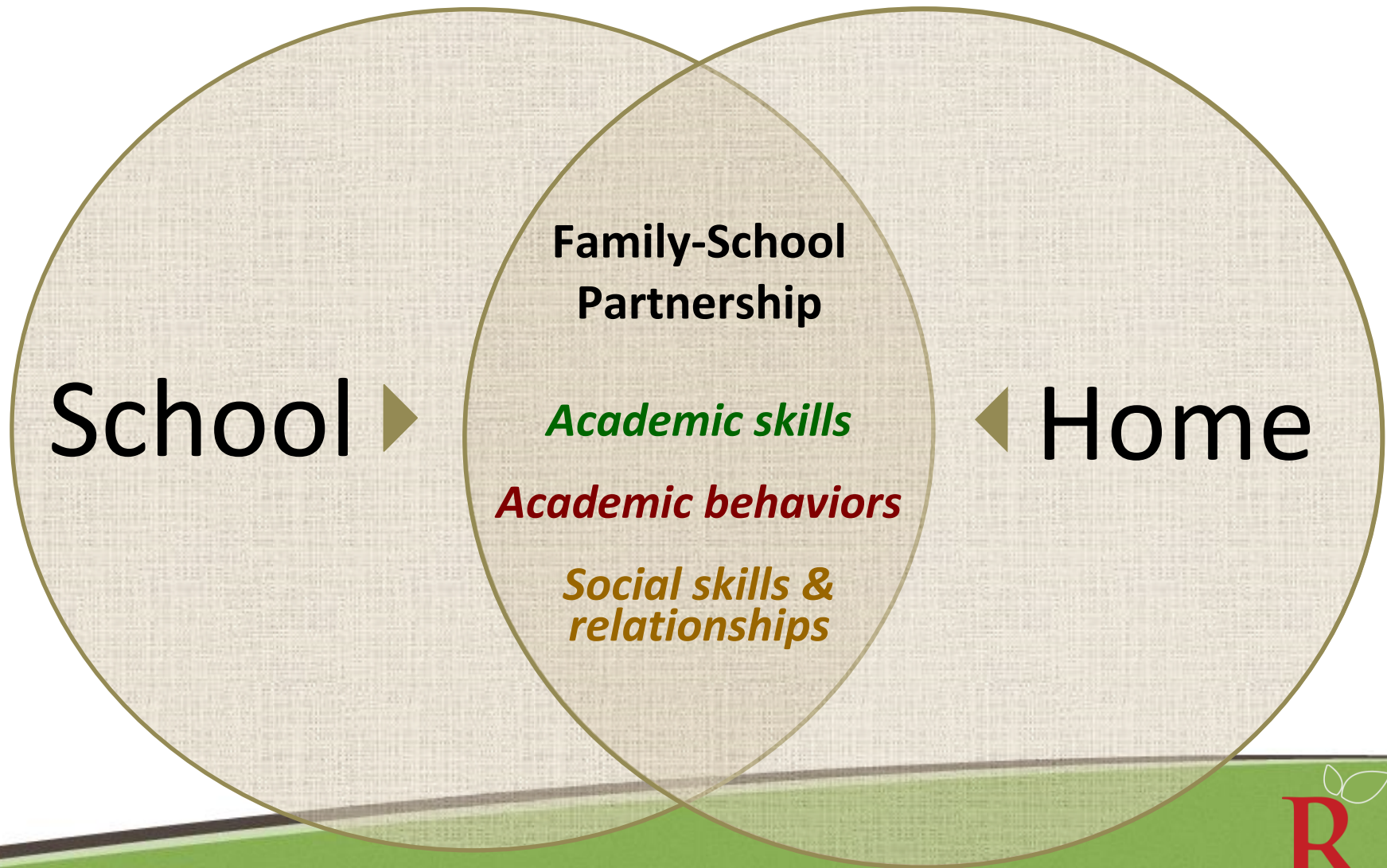


**WHY BOTHER?**

# What Promotes Learning?



# What Strengthens Learning?





**HOW CAN THIS BE ACCOMPLISHED?**

# Family-School Partnerships



# Family-School Partnerships

- Student-centered learning, growth and development
- Meaningful relationships between families and schools beyond methods of “traditional education”
- A new way of doing business



# Goals of Family-School Partnerships

- Improve experiences and outcomes for children
- Strengthen relationships (among adults & with child)
- Address education across settings (e.g., home, school)
- Increase:
  - cooperation and collaboration
  - diversity of expertise and resources
- Increase shared:
  - commitments to educational goals
  - understanding of problems, challenges, needs across settings
  - ownership for problem solution
- Adopt various perspectives



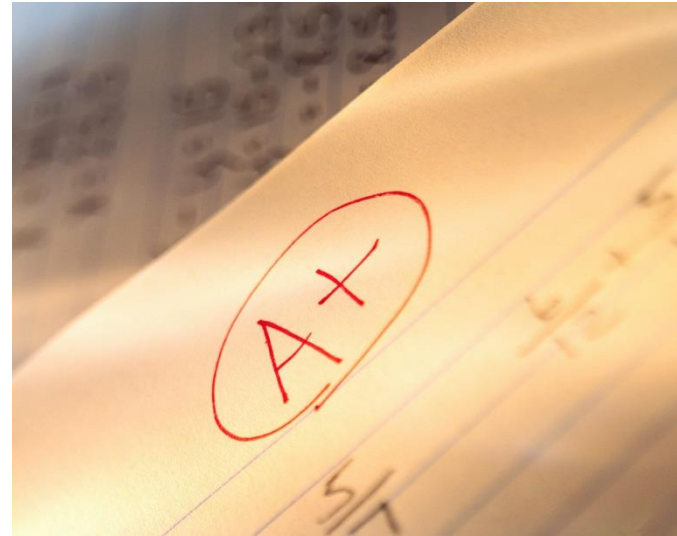


# Characteristics

- **Relationships** involve: close collaboration between parents and schools that have clearly specified *rights* and *responsibilities*.
- **Relationships** that are:
  - Valued
  - Balanced
  - Cooperative and interdependent
  - Based on mutual respect, trust, and open communication
  - Student-centered

(Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2009, p. 1)





**WHY DO THEY MATTER?**

# Key Research Findings

Highly correlated with many positive outcomes for students, families, and teachers

- Improved academic skills and performance
- Improved academic behaviors and decreased disruptive behaviors
- Long-term academic success; school completion
- Teacher enhancement in instructional skills
- Greater parental knowledge of school functioning



# Federal Policy and Learning Across Settings

- Recognizes the need to address student's time spent out of school - students spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school from birth-18 (Clarke, 1990); offers valuable learning time
- Mandates schools to engage in partnerships with parents to meet the increasing academic, behavioral, and social needs of students
- See IDEA, NCLB for federal mandates calling for parents as partners in their child's education





**HOW CAN WE ENSURE EFFECTIVE FAMILY-  
SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE  
SCIENCE LITERACY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES?**



# Engage Parents as Partners to Expand STEM Learning Opportunities

- Linkages between home and school and expanded learning opportunities arise when families and schools work *together* to support learning
- Key is helping parents recognize and learn ways to take advantage of incidental, informal learning opportunities – at home and in the community
- Establish with parents how they can best enhance and expand learning opportunities and experiences, especially related to science



# Maintain Meaningful Cross-System Communication

- Establish an easy method of frequent bi-directional communication between school and home (e.g., daily or weekly school-home notes)
- Establish regular, frequent communication early in the school year as part of the routine
- Share science literacy materials with parents to support expanded learning and provide opportunities for students to share what they and their parents learned / discovered together



# Identify and Monitor Specific Goals

- Jointly determine goals for students in science at conferences or through some other simple means
- Set specific goals for individual students (e.g., who will contribute what on a topic) and/or for the class as a whole
- Record specific information related to the identified goals and send feedback as part of the school-home notes
- Provide a place for parents to record progress the student makes at home related to the topic and further questions about the topic





# Schedule Celebrations in Science

- Periodically (e.g., 1-4 times/yr) schedule a family-community-school night for students to share with adults and other students what they have learned in science
- Include accomplishments that occur across home and school
- Allow students (e.g., in groups) to “be the teacher” with small groups of adults, showing them what they learned or leading them in a science learning activity
- Post pictures from these celebrations in the classroom to keep families and accomplishments across home and school “in the classroom” throughout the year



**FAMILY-SCHOOL  
PARTNERSHIPS  
PROMOTE SUCCESS  
FOR STUDENTS  
NEEDING ADDITIONAL  
SUPPORTS**



# Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC)

*A strength-based, cross-system problem-solving and decision-making model wherein parents, teachers, and other caregivers or service providers work as partners and share responsibility for promoting positive and consistent outcomes related to a child's academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development*

– Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008, p. 25



# CBC Goals

- Bring *together families and schools* on behalf of children's learning
- Establish and maintain *positive home-school relationships* via partnership
- Promote positive *outcomes for students* through joint, cross-system planning
- Promote *parent engagement* via meaningful participation
- Establish daily, positive *home-school communication* system



# CBC Procedures

Implemented in a 4-stage process by semi-structured *conjoint* interviews used to guide meetings with the child's parent(s) and teacher(s) and facilitated by a trained CBC Consultant

- Needs Identification (“Building on Strengths”)
- Needs Analysis/Plan Development (“Planning for Success”)
- Cross-setting Plan Implementation
- Plan Evaluation (“Checking and Reconnecting”)



# CBC in Rural Communities

Addresses challenges to partnerships in rural settings:

- Provides access to effective instructional and behavioral supports
- Increases meaningful interactions and communication between parents and teachers
- Fosters shared responsibilities for parents and teachers who work as partners
- Focuses on and enhances strengths of all parties
- Strengthens relationships through cooperative, goal-directed, solution-oriented services



# Early Findings within the Rural Context

*For strengthening relationships and partnerships:*

- Partnership-building strategies used by CBC consultants may effectively address family-school partnership barriers unique to rural settings:
  - small communities, perceptions and attitudes of participants based on generational histories
- Increased trust and altered negative attitudes may result from:
  - frequent contact, constructive problem solving, mutual input toward solutions, individual roles and responsibilities, and home-school communication



# Summary of Preliminary Results

- CBC appears promising for students whose behavioral challenges interfere with learning in rural schools
- Effects of CBC appear to extend beyond student outcomes to positive practices and beliefs of teachers and parents who are responsible for students' learning and adjustment
- Effects are especially encouraging given the need for effective services in rural areas for students with behavioral concerns





# Contact Information

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