Framework of Six Types of Involvement

×   Joyce Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement describes six essential dimensions of youth, family, and community engagement and partnership in schools

First developed by **Joyce Epstein** and collaborators in the early 1990s, the Framework of Six Types of Involvement—sometimes called the "School-Family-Community Partnership Model"—has undergone revisions in the intervening years, though the foundational elements of the framework have remained consistent. Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement is one of the most influential models in the field of school, family, and community engagement and partnership.

To support ongoing research and practice related to school, family, and community partnerships, Epstein and colleagues founded the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the **National Network of Partnership Schools**, which are part of the **Center for Social Organization of Schools** in the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University.

> *"The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students."*
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> *Joyce Epstein, "School/Family/Community Partnerships,"* Phi Delta Kappan

The most recent version of the Framework of Six Types of Involvement is described in ***School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*** (4th Edition, 2019), which is co-authored by Epstein and several collaborators: Mavis G. Sanders, Steven B. Sheldon, Beth S. Simon, Karen Clark Salinas, Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn, Frances L. Van Voorhis, Cecelia S. Martin, Brenda G. Thomas, Marsha D. Greenfeld, Darcy J. Hutchins, and Kenyatta J. Williams.

In addition to the framework introduced here, the handbook outlines a comprehensive model of school-family-community partnerships that includes several components, including the development of a school-based action team that can lead partnership initiatives, the creation and implementation of an action plan outlining partnership strategies and programs, the evaluation of quality and progress, and the continual improvement of school-family-community partnerships from year to year. The authors note that the Framework of Six Types of Involvement is intended to support the development and

implementation of a systemic approach to partnerships, ideally one that cultivates a "culture of partnerships" throughout a district or school.

The Framework of Six Types of Involvement builds off Epstein's theory of *overlapping spheres of influence*. The theory distinguishes an *interdependent* view of school-family-community influences from what could be considered a *separate* view of influence. Epstein explains the theory with an example:

"In some schools there are still educators who say, 'If the family would just do its job, we could do our job.' And there are still families who say, 'I raised this child; now it is your job to educate her.' These words embody a view of separate spheres of influence. Other educators say, 'I cannot do my job without the help of my students' families and the support of this community.' And some parents say, 'I really need to know what is happening in school in order to help my child.' These phrases embody the theory of *overlapping spheres of influence*."

In other words, the most effective school-family-community partnerships—i.e., those that have the greatest positive influence on a student's social, emotional, cognitive, and educational development and thriving—recognize that the three primary "spheres" of influence do not operate independently of one another, but are mutually reinforcing—or mutually undermining. Epstein further explains the theory by describing how authentic school-family-community partnerships (i.e., those that are positively mutually reinforcing) work in practice:

- **Family-Like Schools**: "In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more *family-like* schools. A family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach."
- **School-Like Families:** "In a partnership, parents create more *school-like* families. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success."
- **School- and Family-Like Communities:** "Communities, including groups of parents working together, create *school-like* opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize, and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence. Communities also create *family-like* settings, services, and events to enable families to better support their children.

The Framework of Six Types of Involvement is based on decades of research and practice in the fields of educational engagement and school-family-community partnerships. Summarizing the large body of empirical evidence supporting the model, Epstein provides the following helpful synopsis of a few

patterns identified in the research literature:

- "Partnerships tend to decline across the grades, *unless* schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level."
- "Affluent communities currently have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students' families."
- "Schools in more economically depressed communities make more contacts with families about the problems and difficulties their children are having, *unless* they work at developing balanced partnership programs that also include contacts about the positive accomplishments of students."
- "Single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers are less involved, on average, at the school building, *unless* the school organizes opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places to support the school and their children."

As the summary above illustrates, predictable patterns of school, family, and community disconnection will result *unless* educators, students, families, and community members take affirmative, proactive steps to address negative overlapping influences and build positive, mutually beneficial partnerships. That's where the Framework of Six Types of Involvement comes in.

The Framework of Six Types of Involvement

The full technical name of Epstein's framework is the *Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership and Sample Practices*. When discussing the framework, Epstein and her collaborators emphasize that each type of involvement is a two-way partnership—and ideally a partnership that is co-developed by educators and families working together—not a one-way opportunity that has been unilaterally determined by a school.

The six types of involvement are:

1. **Parenting:** Type 1 involvement occurs when family practices and home environments support "children as students" and when schools understand their children's families.
2. **Communicating:** Type 2 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families "design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications."
3. **Volunteering:** Type 3 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families "recruit and organize parent help and support" and count parents as an audience for student

activities.

4. **Learning at Home:** Type 4 involvement occurs when information, ideas, or training are provided to educate families about how they can "help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning."
5. **Decision Making:** Type 5 involvement occurs when schools "include parents in school decisions" and "develop parent leaders and representatives."
6. **Collaborating with the Community:** Type 6 involvement occurs when community services, resources, and partners are integrated into the educational process to "strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development."

What distinguishes Epstein's framework from many similar frameworks is the extensive lists of descriptive examples that Epstein provides to illustrate how each type of involvement works in real-life settings. Rather than relying on an abstract metaphorical presentation (such as a Venn diagram) to explain the model, Epstein and her colleagues developed a set of three comprehensive tables:

1. The first table describes the six types of involvement above and provides an attendant set of representative practices and strategies:

TABLE 1.1.1 Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership and Sample Practices

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating With the Community
Help all families establish home environments to support children as students	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress	Recruit and organize parent help and support	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development

Sample Practices

Type 1 Parenting	Type 2 Communicating	Type 3 Volunteering	Type 4 Learning at Home	Type 5 Decision Making	Type 6 Collaborating With the Community
Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level

Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing for each age and grade level

Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy)

Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services

Home visits at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle, and high school; neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families | Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed

Language translators assist families, as needed

Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments

Parent-student pickup of report cards, with conferences on improving grades

Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications

Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools

Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions | School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents

Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families

Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers

Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information

Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs | Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade

Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home

Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments

Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class

Calendars with activities for parents and students to do at home or in the community

Family math, science, and reading activities at school

Summer learning packets or activities

Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work | Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation

Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements

District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement

Information on school or local elections for school representatives

Networks to link all families with parent representatives | Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services

Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students

Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses

Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others)

Participation of alumni in school programs for students |

This illustration describes how family and community involvement can be implemented in comprehensive school programs across each of the six types: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision-Making, and Collaborating with the Community. Source: *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (Third Edition)*

2. The second table—entitled *Challenges and Redefinitions for the Successful Design and Implementation of the Six Types of Involvement*—presents a set of "challenges" to forms of involvement (i.e., alternative methods and problems that will need to be solved), as well as redefinitions of conventional terms such as *workshop*, *volunteer*, or *community*:

TABLE 1.1.2 Challenges and Redefinitions for the Successful Design and Implementation of the Six Types of Involvement

Challenges					
Type 1 **Parenting**	**Type 2** **Communicating**	**Type 3** **Volunteering**	**Type 4** **Learning** **at Home**	**Type 5** **Decision** **Making**	**Type 6** **Collaborating** **With the** **Community**
Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building Enable families to share information about culture, background, and children's talents and needs Make sure that all information for families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school	Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type Review the quality of major communications (e.g., the schedule, content, and structure of conferences; newsletters; report cards; and others) Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home	Recruit volunteers widely so that *all* families know that their time and talents are welcome Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable employed parents to participate Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive	Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives *students* responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers Involve families with their children in all important curriculum-related decisions	Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups	Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships Ensure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services Match community contributions with school goals; integrate child and family services with education
Redefinitions					
"Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time; "workshop" also may mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, anytime	"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community	"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time—not just during the school day and at the school building	"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life "Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing—not "teaching" school subjects	"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not a power struggle between conflicting ideas "Parent leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families	"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also neighborhoods that influence student learning and development "Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but also by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools "Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just families with children in the schools

Epstein and her collaborators describe several challenges to the successful design and implementation of family and community involvement, as well as "redefinitions" of common school practices that are aligned with each of the six types. Source: *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (Third Edition)*

3. The third table—entitled *Expected Results for Students, Parents, and Teachers of the Six Types of Involvement*—provides descriptions of representative outcomes of the six types of involvement for students, parents, and teachers:

TABLE 1.1.3 Expected Results for Students, Parents, and Teachers of the Six Types of Involvement

Results for Students					
Type 1 Parenting	**Type 2 Communicating**	**Type 3 Volunteering**	**Type 4 Learning at Home**	**Type 5 Decision Making**	**Type 6 Collaborating With the Community**
Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents	Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades	Skill in communicating with adults	Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork	Awareness of representation of families in school decisions	Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences
Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family	Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct	Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers	Homework completion	Understanding that student rights are protected	Awareness of careers and options for future education and work
Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework	Informed decisions about courses and programs	Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers	Positive attitude toward schoolwork	Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students	Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community
Good or improved attendance	Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator		View of parent as more similar to teacher and home as more similar to school		
Awareness of importance of school			Self-concept of ability as learner		
Results for Parents					
Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school	Understanding school programs and policies	Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carryover of school activities at home	Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year	Input into policies that affect child's education	Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services
	Monitoring and awareness of student progress		Discussions of school, classwork, and homework	Feeling of ownership of school	
		Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education	Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject	Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions	Interactions with other families in community activities
Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting	Responding effectively to student problems			Shared experiences and connections with other families	Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school
	Interactions with teachers and ease of communications with school and teachers	Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school	Appreciation of teaching skills	Awareness of school, district, and state policies	
Feeling of support from school and other parents		Gains in specific skills of volunteer work	Awareness of child as a learner		
Results for Teachers					
Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children	Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly	Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school	Better design of homework assignments	Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions	Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction
Respect for families' strengths and efforts	Appreciation and use of parent network for communications	Awareness of parent talents and interests in school and children	Respect of family time	View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles	Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practice
Understanding of student diversity			Recognition of equal helpfulness of single parent, dual income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning		
Awareness of own skills to share information on child development	Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress	Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers			Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services
			Satisfaction with family involvement and support		

This illustration provides examples of common results for students, parents, and teachers when the six

types of involvement are successfully operationalized and practiced in a school. Source: *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (Third Edition)*

While the Framework of Six Types of Involvement provides a level of detailed description absent from similar models, Epstein addresses a few limitations of the framework. For example, Epstein writes, "The tables cannot show the connections that occur when one practice activates several types of involvement simultaneously." The tables are useful because they provide simplified, well-organized presentations of complex social and organizational dynamics, but like all simplifying models the tables cannot take into account every factor that may positively or negatively impact different forms of involvement and school-family-community partnership, including the myriad cultural dynamics at play in any given school or community.

Epstein also points out that the tables "simplify the complex longitudinal influences that produce various results over time." Even the best-designed programs can produce poor results for reasons that may be elusive to those involved. And as time goes on, and the conditions of any given program or approach evolve, the parsing of positive and negative influences and causes may be even more difficult to isolate and identify.

For example, the tables do not directly address larger questions, such as disproportionality in school-family-community power; the harmful effects of influences such as institutionalized bias, discrimination, and racism; or strategies such as community organizing and protest that aim to wrest some degree of power away from institutions that may be reluctant or unwilling to share power or partner in authentic ways with students and families. One of the hazards of omitting frank discussions of power, privilege, or prejudice, for example, is that people may start doing *the right things*, but they may do them for *the wrong reasons*, which can result in new programs that merely reproduce the same problems, conflicts, discrimination, or inequitable results as the old programs.

Summarizing the options available to school, family, and community partners, Epstein provides readers with the following consideration:

"Schools have choices. There are two common approaches to involving families in schools and in their children's education. One approach emphasizes conflict and views the school as a battleground. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment guarantee power struggles and disharmony. The other approach emphasizes partnership and views the school as a homeland. The conditions and relationships in this kind of environment invite power-sharing and mutual respect, and allow energies to be directed toward activities that foster student learning and development. Even when conflicts rage, however, peace must be restored sooner or later, and the partners in children's education must work together."

Acknowledgments

Organizing Engagement thanks Joyce Epstein for her contributions to improving this resource and for permission to reproduce images from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (Third Edition)*.

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