

Title: Research on Parent Liaisons

Date: September 2015

Question: Our district is convening a task group to propose a research based parent liaison/outreach role that would promote family engagement, student achievement and access to family resources. Could you provide research on this topic?

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with references on parent liaisons. Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. For those resources that do not have a free, full-text version available online, we have attached a .PDF version. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Dretzke, B. J., & Rickers, S. R. (2014). The family liaison position in high-poverty, urban schools. *Education and Urban Society, 4*, 1–18.

Abstract: This study examined the roles and responsibilities of family liaisons working in urban schools with enrollments characterized by high poverty, high mobility, and ethnic diversity. Results indicated that the major responsibilities of the liaisons were creating a trusting and welcoming environment, facilitating parent involvement in the school, keeping parents informed on school-related topics, and connecting parents with resources. During job shadows, family liaisons were primarily observed coordinating parent involvement activities, interacting with students, performing routine office tasks, and carrying out other duties as assigned (e.g., cafeteria supervision). To increase their effectiveness, the liaisons requested greater job clarity, more flexibility in their formal work hours, and less time spent on other duties as assigned. In general, it appeared that the family liaisons investigated in this study placed a stronger emphasis on creating a welcoming environment and establishing trust than has been found in research on family liaisons in more affluent communities.

Howland, A., Anderson, J. A., Smiley, A. D., & Abbott, D. J. (2008). School liaisons: Bridging the gap between home and school. *The School Community Journal, 16*(2), 47–68. Retrieved on September 8, 2015, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/E1794797.pdf>

Abstract: Involving families in their children’s education is not only a legal requirement in special education, it also predicts academic achievement, social and emotional

development, and a variety of other positive school outcomes for all children. Unfortunately, school-home relationships often have been ignored or underdeveloped. Disconnections between home and school may be especially acute in urban areas where school personnel may not understand the culture of the students and families with whom they work. In the Indianapolis Public Schools, a large urban school district in the Midwest, efforts to better connect families and schools are occurring through the implementation of a school liaison program. The school district set out to deliberately create this program in order to bridge the gap between schools and families, with particular attention given to parents from diverse backgrounds with children who are receiving special education services. The initial intent was to allow participating families to drive the design of the program, and it appears that the district has been successful in achieving this objective. Program services and activities include conflict resolution, cultural brokering, direct support, and referral. The design of the school liaison program is described and the activities and skills of the liaisons are presented through the voices of the families that this program has served during its first year of operation.

Martinez-Cosio, M., & Iannacone, R. M. (2007). The tenuous role of institutional agents: Parent liaisons as cultural brokers. *Education and Urban Society, 39*, 349–369.

Abstract: This article reports on the contradictory role of parent involvement coordinators charged with increasing participation of low-income immigrant parents. This urban ethnographic study investigates the success of one program that engages Latino, Asian, and African American parents in the governance of their Southern California urban elementary school. It illustrates the dilemmas and tensions that arise as institutional agents serve as cultural brokers, as a bridge between the dominant culture and parents' diverse cultures while also serving as institutional agents. The authors use theories of social and cultural capital to examine the strategies used by a school-based cultural broker to provide bridging social capital to underserved agents seeking an equal role in policy making at their school. They provide examples of three tensions that block bridging social capital, including tension over resources, power sharing, and institutional decision making.

Sanders, M. G. (2008). *How parent liaisons can help bridge the home-school gap*. Columbia, MD: Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved on September 8, 2015, from <http://202.116.45.198/kcyjxl/sskc/jxtj/pdf/8/2.How%20Parent%20Liaisons%20Can%20Help%20Bridge%20the%20Home-School%20Gap.pdf>

Abstract: In this qualitative case study, the author describes (a) how parent liaisons in a diverse suburban district have supported school, family, and community partnerships and (b) the role played by the district family and community involvement specialist. On the basis of analyses of interview, observation, survey, and document data, the author identifies 4 roles played by liaisons that enhanced home-school partnerships. The liaisons provided (a) direct services to families at risk, (b) support for teacher outreach, (c) support for school-based partnership teams, and (d) data for partnership program improvement. On the basis of these findings, the author offers practical recommendations for districts seeking to establish or improve liaison programs to build stronger ties between schools and the families of all students.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. (2007). *Engaging parents in education: Lessons from five parental information and resource centers*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on September 8, 2015, from <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/parents/parentinvolve/engagingparents.pdf>

Excerpt: Children benefit academically when parents and educators work together. For this reason, parents' involvement in their children's education is a priority of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. But a strong connection between parents and educators does not come about automatically. Both parties may need to learn new roles and skills and develop the confidence to use them, especially as parents move beyond traditional activities, like helping children with homework, and toward shared responsibility for school improvement. Intermediary organizations, like federally funded Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), can help. Drawing on lessons learned from five PIRCs across the country that have been meeting this challenge, this guide shares promising strategies for increasing effective parent involvement.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“Parent liaison” OR “family engagement liaison” OR “family liaison”

Search of Databases

EBSCO Host, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.