

Chapter 17

SCHOOL-FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND RTI

By Amy L. Reschly, Ph.D.

Overview

Family involvement. Family support for learning. The role or contributions of parents to student achievement. Nearly ubiquitous among educational initiatives and legislation over the past few decades is the desire to increase the involvement of families in their children's education. However, the aspiration of effectively working with families to improve schools and student outcomes has not yet been achieved in most school districts across the United States.

As other chapters in this guide emphasize, successful RTI implementation requires careful planning, ongoing professional development, and changes to assessment, instructional and intervention practices. Professional roles, such as those of school psychologists and teachers, must also change. Changes inherent in RTI provide educators a rare opportunity to meaningfully engage and partner with families to support students' achievement and social-emotional and behavioral development (Reschly & Christenson, 2009). Given the impact families have on student attitudes, motivation, behavior, achievement and other outcomes, and research that suggests when schools work with families, student outcomes are improved (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), it can be argued that families are essential to the successful implementation and desired results of RTI (Reschly, Coolong-Chaffin, Christenson & Gutkin, 2007).

The Range of Family Involvement

How has the field of family engagement evolved?

While the desire to work with families to improve schools and student outcomes has been constant, if not increasing, our understanding of family support and engagement in education has evolved. The status of this field is important to understanding how schools may effectively work with families on RTI.

The term parent involvement has fallen out of favor in recognition of those who also raise children: single parents, grandparents, foster parents and stepparents. Hence, the term family more accurately represents the group of individuals with whom schools wish to connect to support students' development and learning. Further, family involvement has often been thought of as participation in a school-defined activity, such as attending an orientation night or volunteering at the school. This perception of family involvement is much too narrow. In reality, there are a number of ways families support or are engaged with learning in the home and at school. (Reschly & Christenson, 2009).

Recent classifications reflect family support and involvement across settings. Okagaki and Bingham (2009) divided these variables into strategies that are direct (homework help, school activities)

and indirect (establishing rules and routines regarding homework and television time). Similarly, based on a comprehensive review of the literature, Ysseldyke and Christenson (2002) delineated five components of home support for learning:

- **Home expectations and attributions:** High, realistic expectations about schoolwork are communicated to the child and the value of effort and working hard in school is emphasized.
- **Discipline orientation:** There is an authoritative, not permissive nor authoritarian, approach to discipline, and the child is monitored and supervised by the parents.
- **Home-affective environment:** The parent-child relationship is characterized by a healthy connectedness that is positive and supportive.
- **Parent participation:** There is an educative home environment, and others participate in the child's schooling and learning at home and at school.
- **Structure for learning:** Organization and daily routines facilitate the completion of schoolwork and support for the child's academic learning (Ysseldyke & Christenson, 2002).

Further, Kohl et al. (2000) also offered an expanded interpretation that includes behavioral and relational components across home and school: parent involvement at school, parent involvement at home, parent-teacher contact, quality of the parent-teacher relationship, teacher perception of the parent, and parent endorsement of the school.

Can family involvement affect student achievement?

Schools and educators almost uniformly report they want more family involvement. An important qualification to this statement is: for what purpose? It is increasingly recognized that different types of family involvement or engagement lead to different outcomes (Jordan, Orzco, & Averett, 2001). The desired outcomes matter. Not every type of family involvement will lead to improved achievement. Some forms of family engagement may facilitate more positive relationships between families and schools, while others may directly affect student achievement. For example, families who volunteer to raise money for a school initiative, perhaps for computers, may send the message to their children that the family supports the school because education is important, but this activity itself is unlikely to affect students' reading achievement or facilitate literacy practices in the home, whereas a specific family tutoring or homework program is much more likely to directly influence student achievement in a subject area like reading.

In a similar vein, context matters. A strategy or program that works with one age group or subset of the population may not work with another. This realization coincides with one of the most prevalent movements within the field of education over the last decade: delineating scientifically- or evidence-based practices and programs. This movement encourages educators to look at what works, for whom, and under what conditions (Reschly & Christenson, 2009).

What evidence supports the need for family engagement?

Across education and psychology, there have been efforts to describe and quantify which interventions, strategies or general practices are supported by research. The focus on research- and evidence-based practices is apparent in legislation, such as No Child Left Behind and the most recent reauthorization of IDEA, the creation of the What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>), state departments of education, and various task forces, among others. RTI models seek to use these evidence-based instructional practices and interventions within each tier paired with ongoing addi-

tional evaluation of effects for groups and individual students. Although further research is needed, there is a burgeoning evidence base of family- and family-school interventions that educators may draw upon to inform practice and improve outcomes.

A number of meta-analyses provide evidence of the effect of family involvement on student achievement (Ginsburg-Block, Manz, & McWayne, 2009) and there is empirical evidence supporting interventions that include home and school components (Christenson & Reschly, 2009). The Parent and Family Intervention domain of the Task Force on Evidence-Based Interventions in School Psychology reviewed and coded family- and family-school interventions (parent education, parent involvement, family/parent consultation, family-school collaboration/partnership, family systems therapy, and early childhood family-focused interventions). The Task Force found support for the positive effects of family and school-family interventions. Further, and of particular note for schools as they begin to implement RTI, the most promising interventions (Carlson & Christenson, 2005) were those home-school collaborative interventions which emphasized:

- Family-school dialogue, two-way communication, and monitoring, such as daily report cards and home-school notes;
- Parent education programs that taught specific behaviors, such as parent management training, behavior therapy, and communicating with adolescents;
- Parent involvement programs that taught parents to be tutors in a specific academic subject, such as reading or math; and
- Conjoint (home and school) consultation, such as structured problem-solving consultation with families and educators focused on addressing student difficulties.

What terms should you adopt for working with families?

One issue in the family involvement and educational literature is the proliferation of terms and unclear concepts. *Parent involvement* is one of the most commonly used phrases in the literature and in practice, but it is too narrow in regards to who is involved and who provides support for student learning and behavior; hence, *family* is the preferred term. The words “parent” and “family” are fairly easy to exchange, but what is meant by involvement, support, engagement, relationships, collaboration and partnerships is not always easy to decipher. Involvement has often been used to signify school-defined family behavior (for example, volunteer or homework helper) rather than family involvement at home and at school. Further, it has not typically extended to the more affective support families provide students; hence, this term is also too narrow. Families provide support, or are engaged in student learning and development, in their homes and at schools; thus, *family support* or *family engagement* more accurately depict family investment and actions related to student learning and development.

Relationships involve interactions or connections among individuals. Applied to families and schools, there is always a relationship between these entities; however, family-school relationships vary in terms of quality and frequency of interaction (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Therefore, a family-school relationship may be negative and strained with little contact (or very frequent contact) or at the other end of the continuum, the relationship may be positive, trusting, and supportive of student learning and development. It is important to differentiate the family-school relationship from specific actions or behaviors that families or schools engage in (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2009). Essential principles for establishing healthy family-school relationships include:

- **Efficacy beliefs:** Families and educators influence child success or difficulty;
- **Commitment:** Everyone works together for students; and

- **Continuity:** Everybody establishes consistent goals and communication across time. (Clarke et al.).

The family-school relationship is the foundational element to establishing mutual support and collaboration across home and school to enhance student outcomes.

The terms *school-family collaboration* and *school-family partnerships* are sometimes used interchangeably. Each phrase has been used to describe an interactive, mutually supportive relationship centered on student learning (Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2009). However, a true partnership requires, but extends beyond, collaboration. Partnerships between educators and families are comprised of shared goals, shared contributions, and shared accountability (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000) and are accomplished through collaboration and joint problem-solving (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The purpose of a partnership is not to increase family involvement; rather, partnerships are established to enhance student learning and outcomes across academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains (Christenson & Sheridan).

Within RTI, educators should have a goal of collaborating or partnering with families for assessment, intervention planning, implementation, evaluation and decision-making.

Partnering with Families

Why consider families as part of RTI reforms?

There are theoretical and pragmatic ways to answer this question. From theories of human development, it is recognized that individuals develop within contexts. Further, individuals and context influence one another over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). For children and youths, the primary contexts for development are homes and schools.

In a more pragmatic vein, most of students' time is spent outside, rather than within, our schools. One study estimated that more than 90 percent of students' time from birth to the age of 18 is passed outside of school; or conversely, less than 10 percent of time is spent in school (Walberg, 1984). Furthermore, how students use their time outside of formal schooling affects attitudes, behavior and achievement. There is diverse literature that describes the contributions of the family home environment on important student outcomes (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Dearing & Tang, 2009). Further, variables in the family home environment, such as TV watching, accurately predict performance on high-stakes assessments (Barton & Coley, 2007). That is, more TV watching is negatively correlated with achievement. In addition, studies that examined student growth across the school year and summer suggest that one of the keys to understanding the achievement gap among various groups of students is how time is spent outside of school; some groups continue to grow or maintain skills over the summer while others lose ground (for example, Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2001; Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996).

The importance of out-of-school time is further underscored by meta-analyses that indicated after-school and summer programs had positive effects on the achievement of students who were academically at-risk (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000; Lauer et al., 2006). Hence, out-of-school time is an important consideration for any group or institution that aspires to improve student achievement or other outcomes. Moreover, families are the brokers of student time outside of schools and serve as the principal connection between students, schools and communities (Reschly & Christenson, in press). Educators would be ill-advised to minimize the role that families and home environments have on students and school performance. In fact, there is evidence that interventions that address home and school are more effective than isolated interventions at only home or school (for example, Heller & Fantuzzo, 1993; Valdez, Carlson, & Zanger, 2005).

However, understanding student success or difficulty requires more than appreciating the direct effects of homes or schools on student outcomes. The interaction between these major socializing contexts, home and school, are also of prime importance for understanding development and outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The instructional environment for students may be conceived of as comprising school factors, home factors, and home-school support components (Ysseldyke & Christenson, 2002). The home-school support components may be thought of as a set of common factors across homes and schools that promote competence for children: shared standards and expectations; consistent structure; cross-setting opportunity to learn; mutual support; positive-trusting relationships; and modeling, where adults model the behaviors and attitudes they wish to engender among students (Ysseldyke & Christenson). The bottom line is this: In order to apply the full range of evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for students, educators must engage and partner with families (Reschly & Christenson, 2009, in press). The current challenge is further delineating research-based practices and understanding the process for establishing collaborative relationships and partnerships among educators and families (Jordan et al., 2001).

How should educational practices change with improved family-school relationships?

Recognizing the importance of families, schools, and the school-family relationship has major implications for educational practice (Reschly et al., 2007). One such implication concerns our definitions of low- and high-risk circumstances for children. Drawing from the work of Pianta and Walsh (1996), low-risk circumstances feature family and school systems that are well functioning and align in messages and expectations across home and school. High-risk circumstances involve incongruence and relationships of poor quality across the two major socializing agents for students. This idea of low- and high-risk circumstances is a departure from the significance ascribed to the explanatory value of status or demographic variables often used to describe students and families (for example, low-socio-economic status; single-parent family; or non-native English speakers). Further, by focusing on these primary environments and congruence and relationships between these environments, risk conditions are amenable to intervention efforts (Reschly & Christenson, 2009).

Traditionally, assessments have decontextualized student performance (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Student success or difficulty cannot be viewed as a function of homes, schools or students. Furthermore, by largely ignoring students' environments and failing to obtain a complete picture of student performance, schools are much less likely to implement effective interventions. Assessments must integrate information from multiple sources and include critical contexts — homes and schools. These critical contexts should also inform intervention selection and implementation. Families are a vital source of information about students. Educators should strive to have a range of family-, school-, and collaborative family-school interventions available to their school team, students and families. From this possible set of interventions, schools can select strategies or programs that match students' needs and account for family preferences and capacity. School teams must plan for and invite family engagement in all stages of the problem-solving process from assessment and intervention planning and implementation to evaluation and decision-making (Reschly et al, 2007).

How can RTI facilitate family engagement?

RTI has the potential to address many long-standing criticisms of educational practice. These include focusing on what's wrong with the child, allotting too little time for prevention and early intervention, over-relying on special education placements to address issues, and failing to link assessment and intervention practices. (Reschly et al., 2007). The practices inherent in an RTI model — screening, early intervention, and frequent collection of data regarding student progress — provide real opportuni-

ties for meaningful school and family engagement. Screening and early intervention provide an entrée to connect with families at the first sign of a concern, thereby pairing promising early interventions with powerful socializing agents — homes and home-school relationships. The types of data collected in RTI may be used for regular communication between families and schools because the data are collected frequently, designed to be sensitive to the effects of interventions, and are easier to understand than those data obtained through many traditional assessments. Furthermore, the core of both RTI and school-family partnerships is structured problem-solving, an activity that can connect families and schools in the RTI process. Finally, families may receive very different and more positive messages in an RTI model versus a traditional model. No longer is the focus on what's wrong with the child and where to deliver services, but on alterable environmental variables. This change in focus can be a catalyst for collaboration and mutual support across schools and families (Reschly et al., 2007, Reschly, 2008).

NCLB and IDEA mandate parental involvement, so why is more guidance needed?

The passage of NCLB and reauthorization of IDEA clearly reflect a belief in the importance of family involvement for student and school success. Several components of NCLB centered on parent/family involvement, such as reporting and communication requirements regarding student and school performance and school choice, as well as requirements for professional development on family involvement within schools and districts and the implementation of parent involvement programs in each Title I school (Epstein, 2005). From its inception in 1975 as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act to its incarnation as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act in 2004, special education law has defined parental rights for consent, refusal, and a role as a member of each student's IEP team (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

What has been found in practice, however, is that there is a difference between parental rights and meaningful participation or engagement between families and educators. Educators are largely unprepared to communicate and work with families (Jordan et al., 2001) and many of the regulations for parental involvement are ambiguous (Epstein, 2005). Moreover, as many educators and families will attest, attendance at a meeting does not equal active parental engagement in assessment, intervention planning, implementation or evaluation, eligibility determination, or IEP goal development. A number of families are passive throughout eligibility and IEP processes (Harry, 1992). Those who are not passive are sometimes viewed by the team as "problems," when in reality, by asking questions and trying to provide input, families are demonstrating their investment in their child's education, their concern for him, and their desire to be involved — ironically, the very things educators report they would like to have more of.

In sum, there are both training and implementation issues in effectively working across homes and schools to support students. Rights and expectations can be legislated, but collaboration and engagement require relationships and trust between educators and families. School-family engagement centered on creating optimal learning conditions for children is needed to accomplish our educational goals for schools and students (Reschly & Christenson, in press).

A Comprehensive Model of School-Family Engagement and RTI

How do families fit into the tiers of RTI?

The RTI model is usually described and depicted as a triangle or pyramid divided into thirds wherein a large portion of the base represents Tier 1, the smaller middle portion of the triangle repre-

sents Tier 2, and the tip of the triangle, the smallest area, corresponds to Tier 3. These tiers and principles — ensuring high quality practices for all and the increasing intensity and frequency of data collection and interventions in each respective tier — fit very well with a model of school-family engagement. Tier 1 represents all students, families and educators with a focus on establishing healthy family-school relationships, effective family-school communication, and a climate in which families feel welcome and their engagement in supporting students' education at school and at home is recognized as essential to the success of the school and students. At Tier 2, just as there are more intensive interventions and frequent data collection, so too is there more communication, joint problem-solving, and collaboration with families. Tier 3 represents an even more intensive level of collaboration, joint problem-solving, communication, and shared decision-making (Reschly, 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2009).

Tier 1. In their seminal book on schools and families, Christenson and Sheridan (2001) offered a framework for fostering the conditions that should be in place for educators to establish collaborative relationships and partnerships with families. Their formula was the “four As.” The first three As — approach, attitudes, atmosphere — underscore the importance of creating a context for school-family collaboration through expectations for school-family engagement recognition of the myriad ways families support their students, and working together for students' success. The fourth A represents the actions that schools and families undertake to support learning.

The school context for healthy school-family relationships, collaboration, and partnerships is the critical consideration for establishing Tier 1 in a comprehensive model of school-family engagement in RTI. It is important these conditions — or relationships — are established prior to signs of student difficulty as these relationships facilitate the intervention-oriented problem-solving that is the basis of RTI (Reschly, 2008). The extent to which families are supportive of learning inside and outside of school are a function of both family characteristics (parents' views of their roles, efficacy for helping their child) and life context (parental knowledge and skills, time and energy, family culture) and the school social context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2009). It is notable that family characteristics and life context are alterable to some degree. General school efforts or more targeted family programs may affect parents' views of their roles in supporting student education, their self-efficacy, or their knowledge and skills.

The social context of the school is also alterable. Administrators are crucial to creating the school context for school and family engagement to support student learning. Principals set the expectations for school and family communications, send messages about the importance of families, offer suggestions for families and school-family support, and have an impact on the climate in the school (Hoover-Dempsey et al). Teacher attitudes and behavior are also related to family engagement around education. Specific invitations for involvement from teachers and from students are particularly important to increasing family engagement (Hoover-Dempsey et al). Studies have found that the strongest predictor of family engagement at school and at home is family perceptions of teacher outreach (for example, Patrikakou & Weisberg, 2000).

Tiers 2 and 3. RTI is based in a problem-solving process (D. Reschly & Bergstrom, 2009). Problem-solving is also at the core of partnerships between educators and families (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) and provides the structure for school-family engagement in Tiers 2 and 3 (Reschly, 2008, Reschly & Christenson, 2009). This is part of the answer to the question, “*Well, what do we do with families?*” *Answer:* Joint problem-solving with a focus on supporting student learning.

What families and educators do to support student learning together and separately will vary based on a variety of factors, such as students' area(s) of concern, age, family, and educator capacity. The keys are that: 1) families are invited to collaborate and given the message that their engagement is essential to supporting their child and the RTI team; and 2) educators have a range of family- and school-family collaborative interventions available to the team. In some cases, families may collaborate with educators through problem-solving and decision-making and provide information about their

child for an intervention delivered primarily at school. In others, families may implement a particular intervention at home or interventions will be delivered at home and at school.

The findings of the Parent and Family Intervention domain of the Task Force on Evidence-Based Interventions in School Psychology regarding the most promising interventions are also helpful for envisioning how schools and families work together in Tier 2 and Tier 3. In particular, home-school collaborative interventions that emphasized two-way communication and joint monitoring; parent education programs and involvement programs that focused on specific behaviors or families' roles as tutors in specific subjects; and consultation (Carlson & Christenson, 2005). Sheridan's model of school-family consultation, conjoint behavioral consultation, is notably also grounded in problem-solving (more information may be found at <http://cehs.unl.edu/edpsych/graduate/spCbc.shtml> and in Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). Furthermore, Christenson & Sheridan (2001) offered several ideas for roles for families in assessment and intervention, such as collecting data; providing input in the identification of student difficulties and design and implementation of interventions; and chairing meetings.

Schools and families share responsibilities for student outcomes. However, it is incumbent upon schools to establish Tier 1 conditions and initiate collaborative problem-solving within RTI. Given the importance of specific invitations for family support, school teams may want to consider assigning an RTI team contact person for each family as soon as screening data indicate there is a concern. The contact person can provide initial information about the concern; explain the problem-solving process; discuss who will attend the meeting and their roles; establish that the focus of the meeting is on early intervention and how educators and families can work together to help the student; and give very clear messages to the family about the importance of their input and engagement. This contact can help facilitate family engagement by giving members the opportunity to prepare for problem-solving meetings. The contact can prompt family members to think about their concerns about what is happening, prepare questions for the other members of the team, and develop ideas for intervention.

Special Education and RTI. Special education services are an intensive, individualized form of intervention. As noted previously, despite family rights and regulations that encourage active involvement, families have often been passive through this process. In some cases, very acrimonious relationships have developed between families and educators by the time eligibility determination is reached. A comprehensive school-family engagement RTI process has the potential to address many of the criticisms and shortcomings of family involvement and family-school interactions surrounding students receiving services in special education (Reschly, 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2009). The process would address prevention, early intervention, school-family collaboration, and joint problem-solving. Families and schools would work together to address student difficulties long before eligibility determination is reached. Furthermore, the comprehensive school-family engagement RTI model presented here would be in compliance with the IDEA regulation regarding the necessity of progress monitoring in general education and communication with families prior to referral for special education consideration for Specific Learning Disability (IDEA, 2004 34 C.F.R 300.309).

What are the benefits of school-family engagement in RTI?

There are a number of benefits for school personnel, families and students (Reschly et al., 2007). In general, RTI is promising as a model of reform and for improving achievement and behavior for all students. In addition, there are positive outcomes of active parental engagement in students' education and collaboration across families and schools, which benefit students, families and schools. Positive features of the model help students benefit from screening and early intervention, and provide enhanced communication between home and school (reducing risk). Students are able to participate in their own interventions, from data collection and goal setting to reporting on their own preferences and ideas. Benefits to families include the opportunity to be involved as soon as a concern arises, to provide important information about their children, to partner with schools in assessment and interven-

tion, and to share responsibility with educators. School professionals will spend less time conducting traditional assessments and more time in direct intervention and consultation with teachers and families. Moreover, RTI is an opportunity to consider the broader learning environment to understand student difficulties. Educators have a greater impact through interventions and share responsibility with families for student outcomes (Reschly et al.).

Teachers already have so much to do. How can we ask them to do this, too?

A short answer might be that it is expected and legislation encourages, if not requires, it. But more important is the fact that families have a large impact on student attitudes, behavior, motivation and achievement. If we want better outcomes for our students, we cannot ignore families. Neither schools nor families are solely responsible for student learning. Shared responsibility means that educators are not shouldering this duty alone. Working together should lighten, not increase, educators' load. Further, there is evidence that when families and schools work together, students have better outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). That being said, educators' concerns about their own time and what it means to communicate regularly and be engaged with families are valid. Should a teacher communicate individually with every family, every day? Of course not.

RTI is a useful framework for cultivating school-family engagement. Recall that Tier 1 is the context or climate for communication and healthy relationships. Teachers work to establish a climate in which families feel welcome and valued and there is a means for regular communication, should the need arise. As students require more intensive interventions, the frequency of communication and problem-solving with families also increases. Hence, home-school notes, home visits, parent education programs, and similarly intensive school-family engagement practices will be needed by a smaller portion of families within each classroom (Reschly & Christenson, in press).

How do you improve family participation?

This frustration is often expressed by educators. The concerns about lower levels of school involvement are often applied to families with certain demographic characteristics: those who have low-socioeconomic status, who are immigrants, who do not speak English, who have lower levels of education, or are of certain minority racial-ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, there isn't a magic bullet or singular event or activity schools are missing that will fix varying degrees of involvement (Mapp & Hong, 2009). Therefore, an answer to this question requires considering the purpose and context for involvement, appreciating culture, and evaluating whether or not your strategies are working.

One important consideration is the purpose and context of the school's family-involvement initiatives. What is it that the school hopes to accomplish? To create a sense of community among families and educators? To provide more opportunities for family-school communication regarding student progress or behavior? To improve attendance at parent education programs? To offer greater support and engagement at home? The purpose and desired outcomes should drive the selection of strategies, activities and events. The broadened definitions of family support and engagement at home and at school discussed earlier in this chapter should be useful to educators as they seek to determine what they hope to accomplish by engaging with families. Further, family support and engagement factors are not unique to a particular socioeconomic class or racial-ethnic group. Or, in other words, what families do (the process) is more important than who they are (their demography) in determining student outcomes (Reschly & Christenson, 2009). However, schools should also examine how school culture (for example, values, norms and beliefs about families) facilitates or impedes their efforts to increase family involvement and school-family engagement (Mapp & Hong, 2009).

In general, we must be cautious about over-generalizing differences between racial-ethnic groups in the United States. There is often greater variability within than between these groups (Phinney, 1996). That is, there is more variation within Hispanic and white families, for example, than differences between families in these groups. However, there are cultural differences in families' attitudes and beliefs about education; their aspirations for their children; and the ways in which they support learning and show respect for educators. (Hill, 2009, and Okagaki & Bingham, 2009 for comprehensive reviews of culture and family engagement.) Context does matter. Failure to appreciate cultural differences between families and schools may affect the success of schools' family-engagement initiatives.

There is a great need for further research on how schools effectively engage families of different socioeconomic and cultural groups. There are models or examples of effective school-family engagement in the literature that describe programs and activities such as:

- Engaging in parent-to-parent mentoring;
- Offering effective use of interpreters;
- Providing child care at events or meetings;
- Helping families deal with transportation issues to get to school;
- Having a community dinner before events; and
- Being creative with staff time to meet families in other settings or conduct home visits.

The key is the fit of the activity or program to the particular context and the school's goals and desired outcomes. Ultimately, it is important for schools to regularly evaluate the success of their school-family engagement initiatives to determine where they need to make modifications and improvements.

Amy L. Reschly, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the School Psychology Program at the University of Georgia. She received her doctorate from the University of Minnesota following the completion of an internship in the Minneapolis Public Schools. Areas of expertise include engagement and dropout prevention; working with families and schools to promote student success; and, curriculum-based measurement and problem-solving. Reschly is an associate editor of School Psychology Quarterly. She coedited The Handbook of School-Family Partnerships (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group).

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