



National Center for **Research** on
Rural Education (R²Ed)

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

Gina M. Kunz & Susan M. Sheridan

Presented at the

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

in the

Rural Issues Connecting Rural Families Spotlight Session

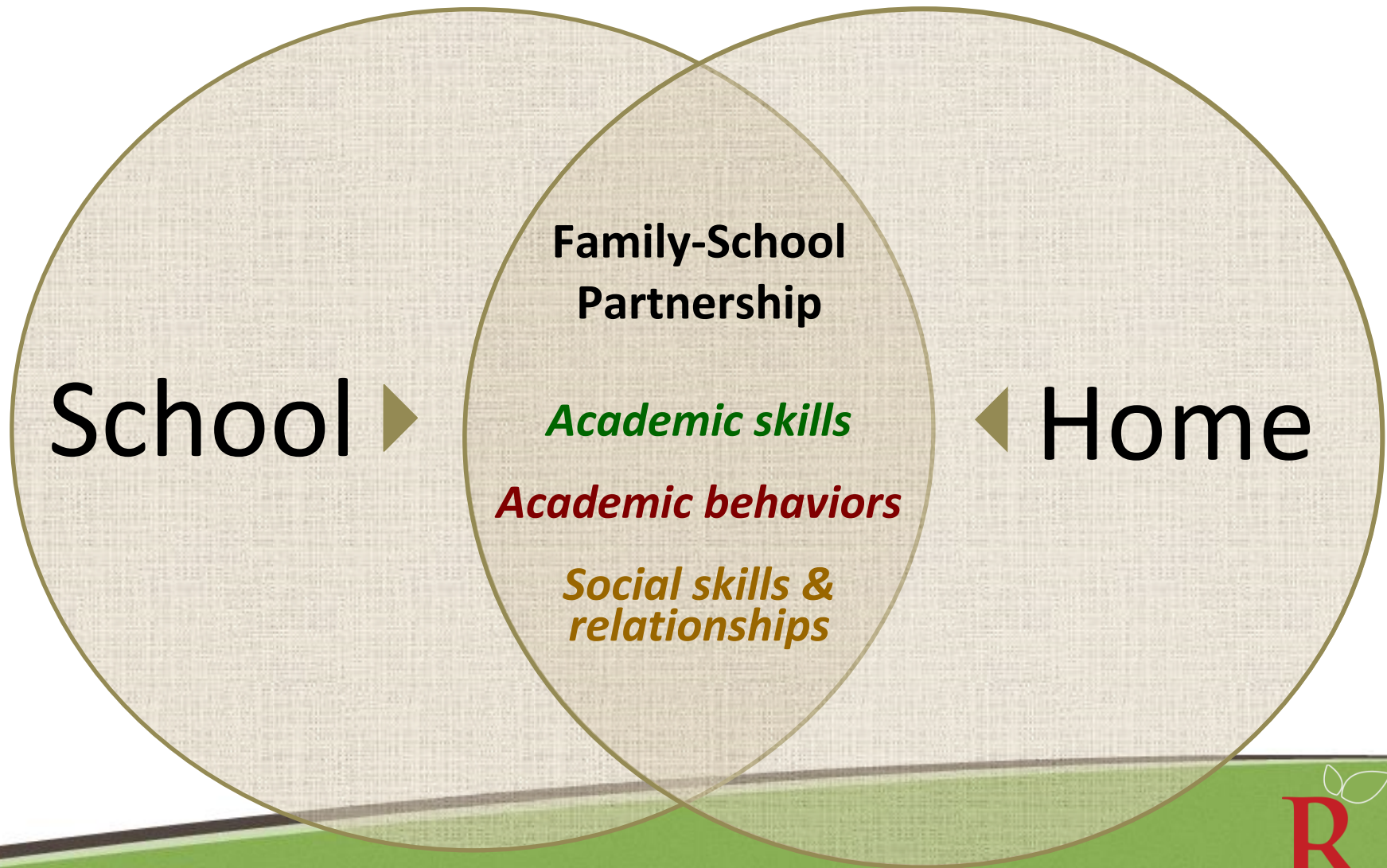


WHY BOTHER?

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

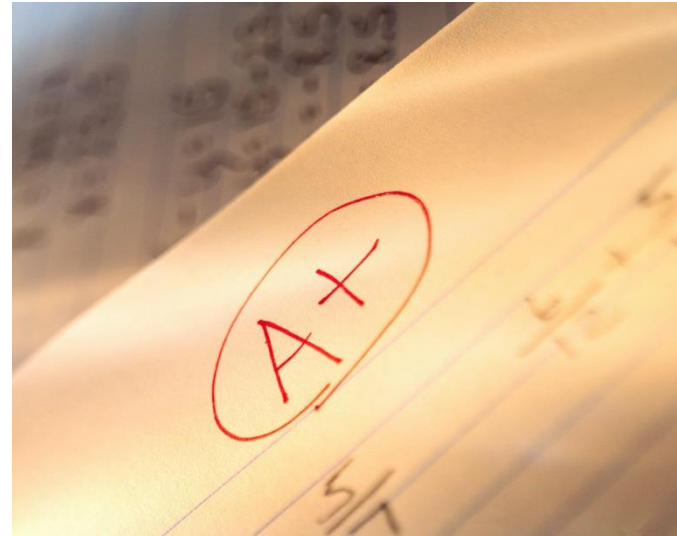


Characteristics

- **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

Gina M. Kunz

gkunz2@unl.edu

National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)

Website: <http://r2ed.unl.edu>

**Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and
Schools**

Website: <http://cyfs.unl.edu>

The research reported here was supported, in part, by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant # R324A100115 and Grant # R305C090022 to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

