

Why NNPS?

How is NNPS connected to the *Dual Capacity-Building Framework*?

NNPS guides the development and continuous improvement of effective and equitable programs of family and community engagement.

The *Dual Capacity-Building Framework (DC-BF)* is a policy statement from the U. S. Department of Education based on decades of research by many scholars—including NNPS researchers. It tells educators **to** establish programs of family engagement and identifies conditions **to** put in place for successful programs.¹ It notes that adult capacity-building is key for districts and schools to conduct programs of family engagement.

The *National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)* at Johns Hopkins University is a professional development organization that helps educators become experts in **how to** implement effective and equitable programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

NNPS guides educators on the imperative of implementation. NNPS identifies evidence-based structures and processes and provides easy-to-use tools and guidelines for schools, districts, organizations, and states to organize plans, implement activities, evaluate, and continually improve goal-linked programs of family and community engagement.

Johns Hopkins University is the “home base” for the network. NNPS offers publications, training, materials, and other forms of on-going support and guidance. NNPS learns from its diverse members in this and other countries, and members learn from each other about successful ways to create welcoming schools and how to engage family and community partners to support student learning and development at all grade levels. This is the way that educators, parents, and community partners build their capacities to work as partners in children’s education.

Give it a closer look . . .

The *Dual Capacity-Building Framework (DC-BF)* outlines **process conditions** and **organizational conditions** for programs of family and community engagement.

NNPS’s research identifies and guides the development of four essential structures and processes for programs of family and community engagement at the school level:

- **Action Team for Partnerships (ATP)**—an essential structure for leadership and action in each school
- **One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships**—a goal-linked plan with activities for the Framework of Six Types of Involvement to engage parents and community partners in different ways and in different places
- **Implementation** of plans
- **Evaluation** of the quality of each activity and annual assessment of program progress

At the district level, NNPS tools, training, and on-going support enable district leaders to guide schools to implement the essential structures and processes and continually improve their programs.

NNPS guides state leaders to identify the leaders for partnership in their districts and encourage them to build all schools' capacities to conduct effective and equitable programs of family and community engagement.

With this kind of *nested leadership*—state leaders assist district leaders who “shepherd” their schools’ ATPs, linked to NNPS for on-going technical assistance—it is possible to move from policy directives to excellent partnership programs.

Process Conditions

DC-BF states that the following *process conditions* are key for designing partnership programs that strengthen educator and family capacities work together to improve schools and increase student success.

***Linked to Learning.* DC-BF states that partnership programs should be aligned with school and district achievement goals and should connect families with teaching and learning goals for students.**

NNPS’s *One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships* is a tool—a template—that school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) use to select, schedule, and implement goal-linked family and community engagement activities throughout the school year. The 4-page plan enables ATPs to engage family and community partners with students on 2 academic goals, 1 behavioral goal, and the overall goal for a welcoming school climate. Each school must customize its *One-Year Action Plan* to align family engagement activities with goals for student learning and development in its *School Improvement Plan*. District leaders guide their schools to write strong, clear, goal-linked plans for partnerships.

***Relational.* DC-BF recognizes that programs of family engagement must build respectful and trusting relationships between home and school.**

NNPS guides district leaders for partnerships to facilitate or “shepherd” each school’s *Action Team for Partnerships* (ATP) to plan and implement activities that engage more and different families at school, at home, and in the community. It is well known that parents, teachers, and other partners share responsibility for children’s education. The NNPS framework of six types of involvement² enables ATPs to design or select and conduct activities that emphasize 2-way communications and honest exchanges to build respect and trust among teachers and parents as partners in children’s education.

Trust and mutual respect require more than knowing that these are important qualities of real partnerships or hoping for them to happen. Educators and parents build trust, respect, and caring relationships over time by working together; conducting well-planned, goal-linked family and community engagement activities; and by exchanging information and opinions that matter for student success.

***Developmental.* DC-BF expects that partnership programs will increase the intellectual, social, and human capital of stakeholders engaged in the program.**

In NNPS, the members of school-based ATPs share leadership for conducting planned activities. They strengthen leadership and organizational skills as their programs improve from year to year. When

ATPs write annual plans, conduct team meetings, reach out to all families, work with community partners, and evaluate their efforts, they become increasingly expert on family and community engagement and learn the workings of the school and district.

Data and fieldwork indicate that with NNPS's tools, materials, networking, and on-going guidance on partnership program development, everyone learns.

- District leaders become expert, over time, by guiding schools in their locations to continually improve their partnership programs.
- State leaders become expert, over time, by improving district leaders' skills to guide their schools to implement policies for family and community engagement.
- School-based ATP chairs and co-chairs become knowledgeable and capable leaders over time. They learn successful strategies to engage all families. Some ATP members may advance to other leadership roles for school improvement, district administration, and other positions.
- Parents on ATPs communicate with educators, parents, and community members of the team, and learn to reach out to all other parents of students in their schools. They develop leadership skills, extend social networks, and increase their confidence about helping their children succeed in school.
- Students benefit from their families' support and improve academic and behavioral outcomes.

***Collaborative:* DC-BF states that learning should occur in group rather than individual settings, and should focus on building learning communities and networks.**

NNPS *is* a network and learning community. Members learn from researchers and from each other to improve plans and practices of school, family, and community partnerships at all grade levels. NNPS learns from network members about new questions that should be studied; which training tools should be improved or developed; and which new reports, articles, and books will advance knowledge and know-how at the school, district, and state levels.

In NNPS, district leaders and school teams conduct *both group and individual* activities that strengthen parents' participation in their child's education and that improve teachers' connections and communications with parents. Partnership activities may include *group and subgroup* meetings and events at school and in the community. Activities also may include *individual* parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher-student conferences, home visits, and parent-child learning activities at home. Annual NNPS books on *Promising Partnership Practices*, monthly *E-Briefs*, and website enable members to share innovative designs for group and individual engagement activities.

NNPS professional development workshops for school-based teams include educators, parents, students, and members of the community. Partnership activities engage all partners in education to support student success in school.

***Interactive:* DC-BF tells leaders of programs of family and community engagement to give participants opportunities to practice and apply new skills.**

In NNPS, schools' action plans for partnerships emphasize learning by doing. For example, most *Family Reading Nights* are designed for students and parents to experience grade level, standards-based learning activities in booths, stations, or classrooms. Often, students are the "teachers" who show parents what they are learning and how to do specific skills that they could practice together at home.

Workshops for parents often include time to test activities that they will conduct with their children at home. The old “make-and-take” novelties have been replaced by creative and enjoyable activities that enable parents to connect with children on grade-level learning goals.

District activities, such as career fairs, require teachers, parents, and students to work with community partners on students’ pathways to postsecondary education and training for future employment. See many examples of interactive engagement activities in NNPS’s annual book *Promising Partnership Practices* at www.partnershipschools.org in the section Success Stories.

Organizational Conditions

DC-BF discusses three *organizational conditions* that enable states, districts, and schools to implement and sustain programs of family engagement. The organizational conditions support the processes described above.

***Systemic:* DC-BF states that partnership programs should be linked to core educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school turnaround.**

One of NNPS’s leadership strategies at the district and state levels is “Align program with policy.” Tools, training, and on-going communications help leaders consider how family and community engagement activities may support systemic goals for successful schools and successful students. Written policies that are “on the books” apply to all schools in a district; and/or all districts and their schools in a state; and/or all jurisdictions receiving Title I or other funds with requirements for family and community engagement.

Educators at all policy levels focus on system-wide goals for student achievement, school improvement, and other indicators of student success in school (e.g., attendance, health, good behavior, readiness for kindergarten, successful transitions to middle school, high school, and college or careers). District leaders work, over time, to “scale up” the number and quality of partnership program in all schools. A systemic partnership program aims to engage all families—not just a few—to support goals for student success and school improvement.

***Integrated:* DC-BF directs organizations to embed work on family engagement in other important structures and processes such as training and professional development, teaching and learning, curriculum, and community collaboration.**

No longer “off to the side” while “real” school improvement proceeds, family and community engagement is a central and essential element for good school organization and for strong district and state leadership. Studies show that goal-linked family and community engagement activities help students meet the learning and behavioral targets set by other school improvement initiatives.

When districts and schools select a new curriculum or improve instructional approaches, and when states select student assessments, they must ask: What roles can family and community partners play in helping students reach these major goals? Schools with effective and equitable partnership programs ensure that family and community engagement activities are linked to learning to help more students—indeed, all students—reach proficiency targets at each grade level, are promoted to the next grade, and graduate from high school on time.

***Sustained:* DC-BF recognizes that programs must operate with adequate resources and infrastructure support.**

NNPS guides state and district leaders and school teams to work—step-by-step—toward sustainable partnership programs that are *permanent*. That is, like a reading or math program, a partnership program must be important and strong enough to continue even when leaders change. Sustainable programs continually improve under new leadership with adequate staff and viable budgets. Leaders in NNPS use tools and training to ensure that family and community engagement structures and processes are solid, involve all families, address goals for students’ learning and development, and are always improving.

Summary

The three *organization conditions* are linked. Systemic, integrated, and sustained conditions reinforce each other and support the process conditions discussed above. DC-BF—a policy statement—suggests that if these organization and process conditions were operating, then educators and parents would connect with and learn from each other and help children succeed in school. The policy statement does not—and cannot—tell educators *how to* design, implement, and improve these conditions.

NNPS has learned that schools, districts, and states need to use research-based approaches to establish high-quality programs of family and community engagement. Basic training, easy-to-use tools, good plans, and annual evaluations are needed, along with on-going guidance and networking, to attain the goals set by official policies.

Policies—like DC-BF, Title I Section 1116, and state and district documents—outline “the letter of the law.” They convey the intent of educators who seek to improve schools. They reveal knowledge based on research and on practice that family and community engagement are important for student success. NNPS tools, training, on-going support, and networking help schools, districts, and state departments of education bring policy statements to life—delivering the “spirit of the law” in strong and sustainable partnership programs.

-
- 1) U.S. Department of Education. (2013), Partners in education: A dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/partners-education.pdf>
 - 2) Epstein, J. L., et al. (2019). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, fourth edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.