Ohio’s Parent Teacher Partnership Program

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Abstract
This manuscript describes the design and implementation of a personnel preparation statewide change initiative for teacher educators and parents of students in over 90 school districts and 20 higher education institutions in Ohio. This training program is designed to create positive changes in the skills, attitudes and dispositions of families, teachers and administrators about effective parent/teacher partnerships. In this program, teachers and families of students with disabilities are trained together as a learning community sharing the goal of supporting the success of students. This manuscript describes: (a) the research base and the theoretical framework of the training program, (b) the core concepts and the components of the training program, and (c) the implementation process of the training program throughout the state. This initiative provides a formal, systematic support for school districts and families of children with disabilities in Ohio and is expected to make a significant change in student achievement.

Keywords: changes initiative, statewide, teacher preparation, families, disabilities

INTRODUCTION
Teachers serving children with disabilities need to be prepared with a solid understanding of the value and implications of creating collaborative partnerships with families. They must master the skills of establishing rapport with parents and other family members relevant in children’s lives, developing and sustaining collaborative relationships based on trust, using effective communication and supporting families to participate as partners across all phases of the educational processes. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe a statewide change initiative thorough which teachers and families from 90 districts are trained to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to establish effective partnerships. Moreover, this initiative extends to teacher preparation programs, as 20 higher education institutions are preparing to implement this training model in their teacher preparation programs.

Research findings suggest that children whose families establish a partnership with their schools receive higher test scores, have better attendance records and are more likely to graduate and attend college (Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy & Weiss, 2007). In addition, when families have opportunities to participate in educational teams, including pre-referral intervention teams, there is a better alignment between the needs of the students and the delivered services, and the number of unnecessary referrals for special education decreases (Chen & Gregory, 2011). Due to the unique knowledge families have on the strengths and needs of their children, parents can bring critical contributions in supporting teachers to make informed decisions regarding appropriate evidence-based practices to be implemented for meaningful learning outcomes (Cook, Shepherd, Cook & Cook, 2012).

UNIVERSITY COURSE
Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in northwest Ohio started a class in 2006 in their Special Education Program that brought theory and practice together. In this class, a parent of a child with disabilities co-teaches the class with a faculty member. Ten parents of children with disabilities are embedded in the class for the entire semester with 30 students. Students are also expected to meet the families outside of class for 20 hours throughout the semester. The qualitative and quantitative research
STATE WIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSITY COURSE

Through this grant, a total number of 16 districts in the State of Ohio have been selected to participate in the implementation of the first year of this program. Parents of children with disabilities and teachers involved in the Ohio Improvement Plan (OIP) will participate in training sessions provided throughout the program. The ODE-OEC will also collaborate with four institutions of higher education (IHE) to ensure training not only at in-service level, but also at pre-service level; therefore, preparing a taskforce of teachers and administrators trained prior to entering the field to work with families from the beginning of their careers.

An equal number of teachers and families are to be selected to participate in the initial phase of the PTPP. The teachers and families selected for the PTPP are starting their training with an orientation/preparation session in which they are to learn about the benefits of establishing equal partnerships in an environment conducive for communication, transparency and constructive discussions. Teachers and families in the PTPP are representative of the diversity of the community. All teachers and families participating in the PTPP are receiving incentives for their participation, as well as support with childcare and transportation services as necessary.

The implementation of the PTPP at a state level and its extension at the IHE in Ohio is intended to lead to changes in the level of teachers, school professionals and parents’ knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions necessary to establish and maintain effective collaborative partnerships between schools and families for the purpose of improving student outcomes. When teachers and families learn together about family and teacher perspectives and experiences, the attitudes, knowledge and dispositions of both teachers and families’ change towards an enhanced value placed on collaborative partnerships (Murray, Mereou, & Handyside, 2013).

The PTPP is designed to create, from the beginning of the training, an opportunity for teachers and families to partner in a learning community in which they can develop a team vision and mission on how school-home partnerships should develop and function to better serve student outcomes. The expectation for teachers and parents being trained under the PTPP is that they develop as set of values as a team, which will translate in goals and objectives to be accomplished in future partnerships established between schools and families.

The parents and teachers being trained in the PTPP learn the skills of valuing each other’s expertise so they can work as a team to support academic and
behavioral student outcomes. They learn how to communicate as a team and how to share decision-making power. One of the most important components of the PTPP is the learning about and exercising the skills of sharing information and resources, and for creating genuine opportunities for families and teachers to participate as partners in making decisions for the best interest of the students.

CONCLUSIONS
When this training program is fully implemented, it is expected that within five years in Ohio more approximately 90 school districts and 20 universities will have trained thousands of parents, teachers, pre-service teachers and administrators on developing effective partnerships with parents of students with disabilities. The PTPP was designed to be self-sustainable. The first cohort of teachers, administrators and families in the PTPP are prepared to become trainers for future cohorts, who in their turn will support training further cohorts. The program will be implemented for a five-year period with a projected increase in school-home communication due to shared understanding of core collaboration concepts, knowledge foundation and skills exercising, which would lead to a new sense of trust and communication for better student outcomes.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
This study focused on the design and implementation of a statewide change initiative consisting of a training program for teachers and families of students with disabilities in Ohio. Due to the timeline and the progression of this program, this study is presenting only a sequence of the project. It will be beneficial to determine the overall effectiveness of the program implementation. Additionally, it would be valuable to conduct comparative analyses with similar programs delivered in other states in order to identify the most effective professional development strategies.

REFERENCES


