Prospects for Change: Preparing Educators for School, Family, and Community Partnerships

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This study explores the preparation of future teachers and administrators to conduct school, family, and community partnerships. Based on a sample of 161 schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE) in the United States, the survey examined not only the courses and content presently offered to prospective educators, but also leaders' perspectives and projections for the future. The results extend previous studies by identifying structural, organizational, and attitudinal factors associated with differences in SCDEs' coverage of partnership topics, preparedness of graduates to conduct family and community involvement activities, and prospects for change. Specifically, SCDE leaders' beliefs that partnership skills were important, required by accreditation organizations, and preferred by school districts hiring new teachers and administrators were significantly associated with more content covered on partnerships, better preparation of graduates, and future plans to require courses on partnerships for undergraduate and graduate students. SCDE leaders pointed to factors that may limit program change including faculty attitudes, university procedures, and state restrictions on additions to graduation requirements. The data suggest that SCDE leaders must be active change agents and team builders to guide their

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institutions to prepare future educators to conduct effective family and community involvement programs and practices.

For many years, researchers and educators have been discussing whether and how teachers, principals, and counselors are prepared to work with students' families, with the public, and with organizations in the community. Despite persistent calls for new directions in teacher and administrator education to include courses on parent education, parent involvement, school and family partnerships, and community relations, most colleges and universities need to do more to prepare teachers and administrators to understand and work with students' families and communities (Epstein, 2001; Garcia, 2004; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Kaplan, 1992; Katz & Bauch, 1999).

The lack of attention in higher education to educators' skills in conducting family and community involvement activities is puzzling because major directives for school improvement, comprehensive school reform, and district leadership call for this component of school organization (Boyer, 1995; Herman et al., 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Indeed, new federal policies require every school, district, and state department of education to communicate effectively with all parents and the public about students' achievement test scores and the quality of teachers and schools (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). The same legislation requires schools to organize and implement programs and practices to involve families in their children's education in ways that help students improve skills and achievements. It is becoming clear that educators need to know more about how to communicate effectively, share ideas, solve problems, and work together as members of teams with other educators, parents, and community members (Achinstein, 2002; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Jones, 2003; Lawson, 2003; Murphy, 2002; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002; Sanders, Jones, & Abel, 2002). Still, most teachers and administrators are educated to think of themselves as individual leaders of classrooms, schools, or districts, with little attention to the importance of teamwork and collaborations with parents, community partners, and others interested in students' success in school.

Background

There are long-standing facts about the lack of educators' preparation to work with students' families. A southwest regional survey of 133 colleges and universities in six states conducted in 1980 found that, across states, between 4% and 15% of teacher educators taught a full course or

part of a course on parent involvement (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). About 37% of teacher educators surveyed taught at least one class period on the topic, almost exclusively for students taking special education and early childhood education courses. In the same study, just about all of the practicing teachers and administrators who also were surveyed recognized a gap in their education and agreed that better preparation was needed in order for all educators to understand and work with families. Over 70% of these educators thought there should be a *required* course on parent involvement in undergraduate education.

A survey of elementary school teachers in the state of Maryland revealed that few teachers attributed their practices of parent involvement to knowledge gained in formal education courses (Becker & Epstein, 1982). As in the earlier studies, most teachers who had even one class period on the topic of parent involvement specialized in early childhood or special education or took administrative or other courses for an advanced degree. Topics often were limited to the legal requirements or rights of families to be involved in specific decisions about children with special needs.

Change over the past 2 decades in the preparation of educators to understand and work with families and communities to support their children's education has been slow. An informal survey of six University of California campuses that prepared new teachers found that few courses or classes within courses were offered on family and school partnerships (Ammon, 1990). A study of 271 undergraduate early childhood education majors in a large southeastern university indicated that the students had positive attitudes about all types of parental involvement but felt minimally prepared to conduct partnerships (McBride, 1991). About 60% of these future teachers reported that they had no more than one class session on the topic. Fully 76% of the sample recommended that a full course on parental involvement be required at the undergraduate level.

In Minnesota, more than half of the 27 colleges and universities with degree granting undergraduate education programs offered no course related to parent involvement for prospective teachers of grades K–12 (Hinz, Clarke, & Nathan, 1992). Only 1 college had even one required course, and only 6 of 1,300 course listings prepared educators to understand or develop comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

A study of the 50 states indicated that no state required a full course on family involvement for the certification or licensing of teachers (Radcliffe, Malone, & Nathan, 1994). Eleven states required coverage of some topics of family involvement for teachers of early childhood and 15 states required coverage for special education teachers. About one fourth required elementary educators to show competence, however obtained, in school,

family, and community partnerships. Fewer states expected middle or high school educators to have competence in family involvement. Only 7 states required principals or central office administrators to study parent involvement or demonstrate proficiency in promoting parent involvement in their schools. None included this competency in requirements for recertification or renewal of certification, thereby reducing the likelihood that practicing educators would develop or update skills to work well with families and communities.

A study of 1,992 official certification materials from all states concluded that parent involvement was not yet a high priority in state certification (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). That study examined about 60 teacher education programs in 22 states that mentioned family involvement among state requirements. Results suggested that teacher education programs responded to state policies about partnerships by offering the topic in some courses, but only 9 programs reported having even one required course on family involvement, usually for future teachers of young children.

Evidence of Progress

Although change has been slow, some progress is evident. In the late 1980s, deans of education and other curriculum leaders at California campuses attended a conference on the need to add topics of school, family, and community partnerships to teacher education. They generated many ideas about how to integrate topics of parental involvement in their required and elective courses for prospective teachers and administrators. Some took action quickly. Representatives from five of the eight campuses at the conference reported making at least one change within 1 year in the content of courses and assignments, such as adding readings about parent involvement to existing courses and adding practical activities with families to supervised student teaching. On one campus, discussions on partnership topics were added to a program that supported 1st-year teachers who had graduated from the university (Ammon, 1990).

Positive actions have been taken by individual professors at various colleges and universities who, independently, designed courses on school, family, and community partnerships or added readings to existing courses in education, sociology, psychology, and social work. For example, Bermudez and Padron (1988) developed a graduate level course at the University of Houston–Clear Lake that included classwork and fieldwork to help educators learn to communicate better with families who spoke Spanish at home. Evans-Shilling (1996) organized a field-based course at California State University–Fresno to provide educators with experiences

in family–school relations. At the University of Georgia, Allexsaht-Snider and colleagues initiated a required 30-session, 45-hr course in early childhood education including understanding family–school relations, working with families at home and school, and connecting schools, families, and communities (Allexsaht-Snider, Phtiaka, & Gonzalez, 1996). She and her colleagues also infused topics on partnerships in other elementary education courses, field experiences, and school internships. C. Riehl (personal communication, April 2004) incorporated readings and discussions of partnerships in a course in the area of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina–Greensboro.

Morris and her colleagues studied the effects on students of a full-semester course on school and community relations at the University of Memphis (Morris & Taylor, 1998; Morris, Taylor, & Knight, 1998). They reported that, over several semesters, students who took the course improved their attitudes about partnerships, gained confidence in working with families, and recognized the need for educators to conduct programs that enable families to become involved in their children's formal education. Other professors in various locations also have increased their undergraduate and/or graduate students' understanding of partnerships as one of the essential components of school and classroom organization and as a major influence on student learning and development (deAcosta, 1996; Graue & Brown, 2003; Katz & Bauch, 1999; Shartrand et al., 1997).

Key education reform groups, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; 2002), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), are encouraging coursework on partnerships. These groups have identified comprehensive and practical knowledge of school, family, and community partnerships as essential for teacher and administrator professional preparation. For example, in its standard for content knowledge for teacher candidates, NCATE emphasized that teacher candidates should understand principles and strategies for school, family, and community partnerships to support students' learning. In 1992, INTASC established 10 principles that all teachers should master, regardless of the subject or grade level they teach. According to Principle 10, teachers are expected to foster relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well being. Also, Standard 4 of the six ISLLC Standards for School Leaders states: "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 16).

In addition, national teacher examinations for new teachers and national assessments for highly accomplished teachers include questions about skills and activities for working with families and communities (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1994).

Research and practical knowledge also has advanced on the structure of school, family, and community partnerships and on how to organize and implement more comprehensive programs in elementary, middle, and high schools (Epstein, Sanders, et al., 2002). Results from longitudinal studies revealed "essential elements" for developing high-quality partnership programs in schools (Sanders, 1999; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon, 2005; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004) and school districts (Epstein, Williams, & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein, Williams, & Lewis, 2002).

Other research, including longitudinal studies, found effects of partnership practices on student achievement, attendance, and other indicators of school success (Catsambis, 2002; Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Christenson, 2004; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Ho & Willms, 1996; Lee, 1994; Sanders, 1998; Sheldon, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Simon, 2004; Van Voorhis, 2003). Discussions and designs of full-service schools (Dryfoos, 1994; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002) and school–community connections (Sanders, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Sanders & Harvey, 2002) have helped educators learn how community resources may be tapped to improve school programs and services to students and families.

Texts and books of readings on partnerships have become available for course and content coverage (Booth & Dunn, 1995; Edwards, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Hiatt-Michaels, 2001; Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weissberg, & Hampton, 1995), and texts for educational leadership and educational psychology, among others, have added topics of family and community involvement (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003; Woolfolk, 2004). Some resources include topics for debates and class discussions, ideas for projects, and examples of exemplary practices for preservice and advanced courses on family and community involvement.

The advances in knowledge about partnerships, examples of college courses created by professors in various locations, national policies on partnerships, and recommendations of national and state accrediting organizations suggest that more schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) may be ready to add topics on school, family, and community partnerships to their curricula. Indicators of readiness to change have not been well documented, however. Most previous studies of college and university offerings on partnerships included select samples and limited analytic models that could not reveal factors that affected the design,

development, or changes in programs to prepare educators to work effectively with students' families. This study includes a larger and more diverse sample of SCDEs than in prior research to learn whether leaders in these institutions were aware of the growing importance of and requirements for education on partnerships and the factors that may affect the likelihood of change in the content of courses at their institutions.

Conceptual Framework

The theory of overlapping spheres of influence provides the conceptual framework for this study (Epstein, 1987, 2001). It asserts that students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development. In studies of school-based partnership programs, the model of overlapping spheres of influence has been used to explain how educators, families, and communities may connect to support student learning and success in school. Pictorially, an *external structure* depicts home, school, and community as dynamic contexts, which can, by design, be pushed together or pulled apart to increase or decrease communication and collaboration. The model also specifies an *internal structure* of interpersonal relationships and exchanges of information between and among parents, children, educators, and members of the community. Key intersecting forces are identified that affect the nature and extent of connections, including students' age and grade levels, and family, school, and community backgrounds, philosophies, experiences, and opportunities.

In school settings, the theory has been activated by an Action Team for Partnerships of teachers, administrators, parents, and community partners who work together to design and implement involvement activities linked to school improvement goals. For example, the team writes annual action plans to involve families and the community in ways that help improve student achievement in math, reading, language arts, or to reach other school goals for student attendance, behavior, and a welcoming climate of partnership. The action plans must include activities for six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community), which prior studies show help parents and community partners become engaged in productive ways (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Sanders, et al., 2002).

The six types of involvement may be operationalized by hundreds of partnership practices. Each type poses specific challenges that must be addressed for schools to reach out to and become partners with all families, including those whose first language is not English, single-parent

families, low-income families, and other families with whom schools traditionally have had limited interaction. Activities for the six types of involvement lead to different results for students as well as results for families, schools, and the community. By understanding the types, challenges, and results of partnerships, educators, parents, and others may plan and implement activities to help students reach specific goals. The work of schools on partnerships has important implications for the education of future teachers and administrators.

In this study, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence is used as a lens through which to examine how teachers and administrators are prepared to think about how students learn and how to organize effective schools and classrooms. Specifically, educators in elementary and secondary schools may hold different attitudes and take different actions if they believe that they should work alone or with others to improve their schools and to help students learn. They may teach differently if they believe that they, alone, are responsible for student learning or that they share responsibilities with educators, parents, and others in the community for student success (Blackwell, Futrell, & Imig, 2003; Epstein, 2001). They may organize their work to collaborate with others if they believe that school improvement is a team effort characterized by shared leadership (Achinstein, 2002; Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Pounder et al., 2002).

Researchers and policy analysts are seriously questioning the usefulness of traditional training of school administrators (Fullan, 2001; Goldring & Greenfeld, 2002; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Murphy, 2002), teachers (Smylie, Conely, & Marks, 2002), and other school leaders (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; Senge, 1999). There is a growing consensus that future educators need competencies in working as team members, sharing responsibilities for leadership, and working as partners with families in diverse communities. In their courses, college professors may emphasize whether teachers and administrators work alone or as a team to promote student learning and success. The design and content of coursework, fieldwork, and student teaching will determine how future educators view the independent and overlapping roles of schools, families, and communities in students' learning.

Interestingly, many professors of education have expressed "serious doubts" about whether they are adequately preparing teachers to succeed in 21st century schools (Public Agenda, 1997; Yinger & Nolen, 2003). Their concerns may reflect an awareness of new federal, state, and local policies and professional standards that emphasize the need for teamwork in schools and for educators to connect with families and communities in planned, goal-oriented partnership programs. To begin to understand these theoretical, policy, and practical issues, this study explored five research questions:

1. According to SCDE leaders, how important is it for future teachers, principals, and counselors to be prepared to work collaboratively with families and communities to help students succeed in school?
2. How aware are SCDE leaders of the recommendations, guidelines, and preferences of external organizations concerning the preparation of educators for school, family, and community partnerships?
3. How do SCDE leaders rate their graduates' preparedness to understand and conduct partnership practices and programs?
4. How do SCDE leaders assess the likelihood that their institutions will change the curriculum to include topics of school, family, and community partnerships in the preparation of educators?
5. Which structural, organizational, and attitudinal factors affect SCDE reports on the coverage of partnership topics, preparedness of graduates to conduct family and community involvement activities, and prospects for change?

Answers to these questions should reveal whether and how SCDEs are incorporating conceptual understanding of the overlapping influence of schools, families, and communities on student learning in the preparation of future teachers and administrators. The answers have implications for whether new educators will succeed in promoting student learning in increasingly diverse classrooms (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002).

Methods

To address the research questions, we conducted a survey of deans of education in SCDE in the United States (Epstein, Sanders, & Clark, 1998).[1,2] In the survey, we used the term *school, family, and community partnerships* to represent the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and its principle

that educators, parents, and others in the community share responsibility for socializing and educating students. Respondents were alerted that the term included "topics and activities of parent involvement, home-school relations, community relations, business partnerships, school-linked social services, and other connections of families and communities."

Sample

Surveys were sent to a random sample of 500 deans in colleges and universities in the United States that grant degrees in education, drawn from the Quality Education Data (QED) list of Deans of Education in 1997. The sample was stratified by sector to ensure a representative sample of public and private institutions. The initial mailing yielded returns from 126 institutions (25%). Follow-up surveys were mailed to a random one-fourth sample of nonrespondents and 24 (26%) were returned. Finally, telephone calls were made to a random sample of 25 leaders at nonresponding institutions and 11 (44%) were reached and surveys completed. Follow-up calls revealed that there were some changes in leaders from the time the QED lists were compiled. Some surveys were passed along to department chairs and other SCDE leaders. Some surveys did not reach the intended parties for varied reasons (e.g., secretarial decisions, retirements, death, changed addresses, reorganized departments), resulting in a *net* sample (or reachable participants; Babbie, 1990) of about 350 and final response rate of 46%. The three-stage random sampling procedures described previously resulted in a sample that more closely approximated the characteristics of the full sample.

The 161 SCDEs were largely representative of the institutions that grant education degrees in the United States. The final sample included one response per institution from 71 deans or associate deans of education (44.1%), 20 chairs of teacher education (12.4%), 6 chairs of educational administration (3.7%), 48 other SCDE chairs or administrators (29.8%), and 16 other SCDE faculty (9.9%). Analyses indicated that the leadership positions of the respondents were not significantly correlated with responses on the key independent or dependent variables in the analyses.

The sample is not without problems. For example, respondents may have been more aware of and attuned to topics of family and community involvement than were nonrespondents. Nevertheless, the diversity in respondents' geography, institutions, and opinions suggest that the sample is an important one for increasing an understanding of the issues underlying potential changes and improvements in preparing educators to conduct effective partnership programs.

Variables

Data were collected on demographic characteristics of the SCDEs; program structure and present course offerings; external guidelines for preparing educators to conduct partnership activities; leaders' attitudes and beliefs about school, family, and community partnerships; graduates' preparedness to conduct partnership activities; and the prospects for change in programs to prepare teachers, administrators, and counselors on partnerships.[3]

Demographics

Information on the SCDEs included sector (private = 0, public = 1), region, degrees offered (bachelor's, master's, doctorate), size of faculty and student body, race of students (percentage African American, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, and White/Non-Hispanic), and gender of students (percentage male and female).

Current Programs and Present Practices

Data were collected on the number and nature of full, required, and elective courses on partnerships (percentage offering full, required, and elective courses and course titles); percentage covering 15 specific topics on school–family–community connection in existing courses or stating the topics should be added in the future; placements of graduates (percentage placed in inner city, other urban, suburban, and rural schools and percentage placed in or out of state); and percentage stating that master's and doctoral theses were written on school, family, and community partnerships in recent years.

Attitudes, Graduates' Preparedness, External Guidelines, and Readiness for Change

Respondents were asked for their beliefs about the importance of knowledge and skills on family and community involvement for students at different stages of preparation (e.g., in developing resource notebooks, student teaching, writing course papers, for certification). These items were coded on a 3-point scale from 0 (*not important*) to 2 (*very important*).

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[3]The survey instrument, list of participating SCDEs, and lists of titles of required and elective courses on partnerships and courses that cover partnership topics are in Epstein et al. (1998).

Respondents also noted whether they agreed or disagreed about the importance of partnership topics for educators preparing for different degrees and professional specialties (i.e., teaching, administration, and counseling). These items were coded on a 4-point scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). Using the same 4-point scale, respondents also rated the preparedness of the new teachers, administrators, and counselors who graduate from their SCDE to work effectively with all students' families and communities. They noted, too, how they thought their graduates would describe their own readiness for partnerships with families and communities (0 = unprepared, 1 = tentative, 2 = competent, or 3 = expert).

The SCDE leaders estimated the potential for changes in courses and content at their SCDEs for graduate and undergraduate students preparing for different education degrees (0 = no need for change; 1 = need for change and for which students, graduate/undergraduate courses, for teachers, administrators, counselors, and in required, elective, or targeted infusion in other courses).

A measure of pressures from external organizations to prepare new teachers for partnerships was based on respondents' awareness of state laws (0 = no, 1 = yes) for initial certification or license, renewal, and specific competencies or standards for teachers, administrators, and counselors. They also identified the major accreditation organizations for their SCDEs and whether these organizations "have standards or guidelines for preparing teachers to work with families and communities" (yes, no, or do not know). Finally, they reported whether principals want to hire teachers who know how to work well with all families coded from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*).

Three open-ended questions obtained respondents' insights into changes needed in their SCDE programs to include topics of school, family, and community partnerships, the likelihood of change over the next few years, and other comments on the preparation of educators to conduct partnerships. The mix of closed- and open-ended survey questions aimed to increase the depth of answers to the five research questions that guided the study.

Results

How Representative Was the Sample of SCDEs?

The iterative random sampling procedures yielded a study sample of 101 public (62.7%) and 60 private (37.3%) SCDEs located in 37 states in the northeast (23.7%), south (27.6%), midwest (25.0%), and west (23.7%). The

SCDEs ranged in size from 3 faculty members in a small department to over 350 faculty in a large school of education and from fewer than 50 under-graduate students to over 5,000 undergraduate and 1,000 graduate students. The distribution of SCDEs in this sample reflects well the pro-portions of students enrolled in public and private SCDEs (see Snyder & Hoffman, 2001, Table 260).

Over 80% of the SCDEs enrolled 10% or fewer African American, Hispanic, or Asian American students, and many served no students from racial minority groups. Fully 76.3% of the colleges and universities reported more than 75% White/nonhispanic students. On average, 70% of the students in SCDEs were women and 30% were men. Thus, students preparing to be teachers, administrators, and counselors in these SCDEs were predominately White and female. This distribution matches the national pattern and historic underrepresentation of men and minority groups in education (National Education Association, 2003; and see Snyder & Hoffman, 2001, Table 10).

What Courses and Content Were Offered?

Courses offered. Over half of the 161 respondents (59.6%) reported that their SCDEs offered a full course on parent involvement or school, family, and community partnerships. Surprisingly, most of these were full *required* courses (67.5%), half of which at about 30 SCDEs were targeted for graduate students. Few SCDEs (8.7%) offered more than two full required or elective courses for graduate or undergraduate students.

Topics or strands in other courses. Almost all respondents (91.8%) reported that their SCDEs offered at least one education course that included a few sessions on topics of parent involvement or partnerships. Only 35.6% reported that topics on parent involvement were covered in more than two required courses, and even fewer (12.8%) reported that partnership topics were covered in more than two elective courses.

Content covered. Respondents reported that topics of family and com-munity involvement were most commonly covered in full courses or as components of courses in early childhood education (89.6%) and special education (93.6%). This has been the historic pattern reported in all previ-ous surveys on parent involvement of teacher educators and practicing teachers. Data from this study indicate, however, that topics on school, family, and community partnerships were being added to other courses preparing teachers, administrators, and counselors to work at all school levels. At more than half of the SCDEs, at least one general education

course included some coverage of theories of partnerships (74%), research (58.9%), and practical activities such as how to conduct a parent–teacher conference (90.4%), how to organize and involve volunteers (69.1%), and how to work with parents on school decision-making teams (55.8%).

Other skills and practices were less prominent in current courses, such as how to design interactive homework for students to share with parents (48.7%), how to conduct parent workshops (48.6%), how to design and produce school or class newsletters (46.2%), how to develop school-linked social service programs (45.9%), how to coordinate community resources (40.3%), and how to plan and implement a yearlong program of school, family, and community partnerships (24.1%). Overall, the SCDEs ranged from covering none of these topics (2.5%) to covering all 15 of the topics listed in the survey (6.2%), with an average of 8.3 topics covered.

The responses about content covered should be put in perspective. Most SCDEs covered a few topics of partnerships in one or more class periods of *one* course. More complex topics (such as how to organize comprehensive partnership programs or how to evaluate effects of family and community involvement) were rarely offered to future teachers and administrators. The few SCDEs that covered all of the basic, research, practical, and advanced topics did not necessarily do so in a full course on home–school–community connections. However, having a full course on partnerships was correlated with covering more of the 15 topics ($r = .244, p < .01$).

How Did SCDE Leaders View the Importance of Knowledge and Skills on Partnerships?

The survey respondents strongly agreed (69.8%) or agreed (26.4%) that "all teachers should know how to conduct practices of school, family, and community partnerships with all families." Even more dramatically, respondents strongly agreed that all school principals (89.2%) and counselors (85.3%) should have these competencies.

Knowledge and practical skills in school, family, and community partnerships were deemed "very important" for student teaching by 58.4% of respondents, with another 40.3% saying "somewhat important." Only 1.3% suggested that student teachers did not need to know about partnerships. Similarly, knowledge and skills of partnerships were considered very important by 49.7% for resource notebooks, 48.3% for certification, 28.8% for teaching exams, and 27% for course papers. More respondents believed that knowledge of partnerships was very important for teachers' placed in Title I schools serving poor students (52.5%) compared to those placed in non-Title I schools (39.3%). It should be noted that only 7.4% said such knowledge was "not important" for teachers.

*How Aware Were SCDE Leaders of External Guidelines
for Preparing Educators to Conduct Partnerships?*

School and district hiring preferences.   Most graduates of the participating SCDEs were hired in suburban settings. About two thirds (64%) of the SCDEs placed fewer than 5% of their graduates in central city schools or other urban areas. Leaders in SCDEs were aware that schools and districts hiring their graduates valued educators with competencies in school, family, and community partnerships. For example, 55.1% strongly agreed and 39.7% agreed that school principals wanted to hire teachers who knew how to communicate and work well with all families.

State laws.   About 82.8% of the respondents reported that they placed their graduates in schools and districts in their respective states. About 40% of survey respondents acknowledged that there were laws or guidelines in their states that required educators to be prepared to work with families and communities to obtain professional certificates or licenses. These institutions reported an average of 2.3 state laws or guidelines on partnerships, mainly related to initial certification and required competencies for new teachers.

Accrediting organizations.   Almost all respondents (92.9%) reported that their SCDEs were accredited by one or more national and/or state organizations (e.g., NCATE and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification [NASDTEC]). Over half (57.6%) stated that at least one of their accrediting agencies had "standards or guidelines for preparing teachers to work with families and communities." A few institutions (6%) were guided by three or more accrediting organizations with standards or guidelines on partnerships.
More important, over one-in-ten respondents (13.2%) did not know if their states had laws or recommendations about partnerships for state credentials, and about one fourth (23.5%) did not know if their main accrediting organization had standards or guidelines on partnerships. The figures suggest that in some SCDEs state regulations and accreditation guidelines to improve courses and coverage on home–school–community connections were unclear or easy to ignore among other recommendations for new curricula for future teachers and administrators.

How Well Were Recent Graduates Prepared to Conduct Partnerships?

Most SCDE leaders reported that their recent graduates were not well prepared to conduct programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships. Figure 1 shows that although most respondents
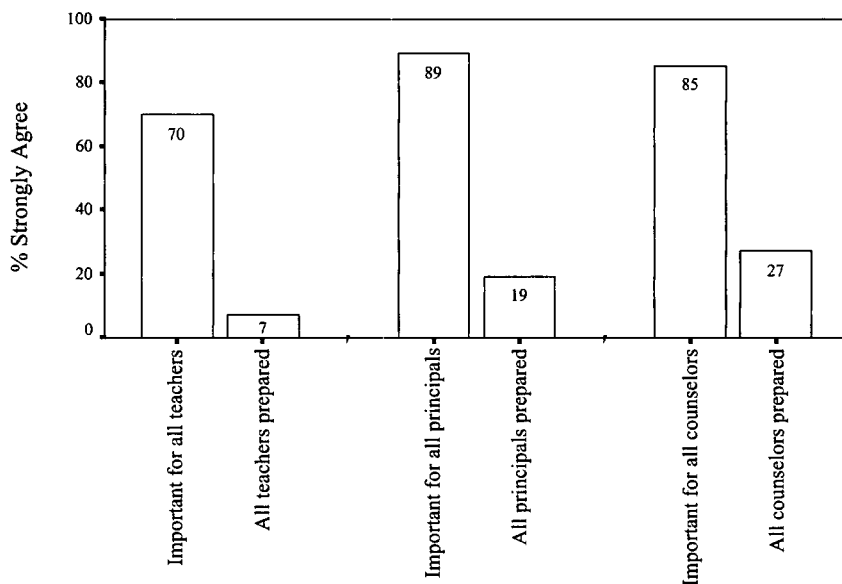
Figure 1. Importance versus preparation of graduates to conduct home–school–community connections. $n = 161$.

believed this competence was important, only 7.2% strongly agreed that the new teachers who graduated from their programs were prepared to work with all students' families and communities. Only 19.1% and 27% strongly agreed that the new principals and counselors, respectively, graduating from their SCDEs were well prepared to conduct partnership programs. According to these education leaders, their current courses and content coverage were not adequately preparing new professional educators to work with students' families and communities.

How Did SCDEs Plan to Improve Courses and Coverage on Partnerships?

The leaders from about two thirds (63.9%) of the SCDEs agreed that "school, family, and community partnerships should be more prominent" in their curricula and suggested several improvements. Most said that they needed to increase *required* courses on school, family, and community partnerships at the graduate level for administrators and counselors (70%) and at the graduate (50%) and undergraduate (40%) levels for those

preparing to be teachers. Others thought they should increase coverage of partnership topics as *strands in other courses* for undergraduates preparing to teach preschool, elementary, middle, and high school. Only a few suggested adding elective courses on partnerships for undergraduate students preparing for teaching.

Most respondents whose SCDEs were not covering diverse topics on school, family, and community partnerships said that they should do so. The top panel of Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of SCDE leaders who reported that they already covered (and, presumably, would continue to cover) topics and competencies on school, family, and community partnerships. The bottom panel shows the percentage who said they should cover these topics in the future, including aspects of theory, research, and practical skills. The survey respondents recommended that their SCDEs add an average of 4.9 more topics about partnerships to their present coverage. Notably, over 60% of the SCDE reported that they needed to prepare future teachers or administrators to plan and implement full programs of partnership—presently the competency covered least often.

The two panels of Figure 2 are not fully dependent. By adding responses in the two panels, we can see which topics are recognized as important by all SCDE leaders and which topics are not yet on some leaders' agendas. For example, there was nearly full agreement (93% to 97%) that the historic and basic topics of family involvement in special education, early childhood education, and conducting parent conferences are important for future educators and should be continued or added to SCDE courses. Other topics elicited more varied opinions. From 20% to over 30% of SCDE leaders reported that their courses neither covered nor needed to add topics to prepare educators to plan and conduct workshops for parents, develop school-linked social service programs, coordinate business and community resources for student learning, design and produce school newsletters, and plan and implement a full year's program of partnerships. The varied responses from the SCDE leaders suggest different levels of awareness or opinions about partnership topics and skills, particularly those that are more complex to conduct or that require leadership to develop school–community connections.

The descriptive statistics indicate that leaders of SCDEs were aware of the importance of school, family, and community partnerships, the low preparation of their students, and the need to improve course requirements and coverage of partnership topics. Their diverse opinions indicated the need for more analytic tools to better understand the status and prospects of partnerships.
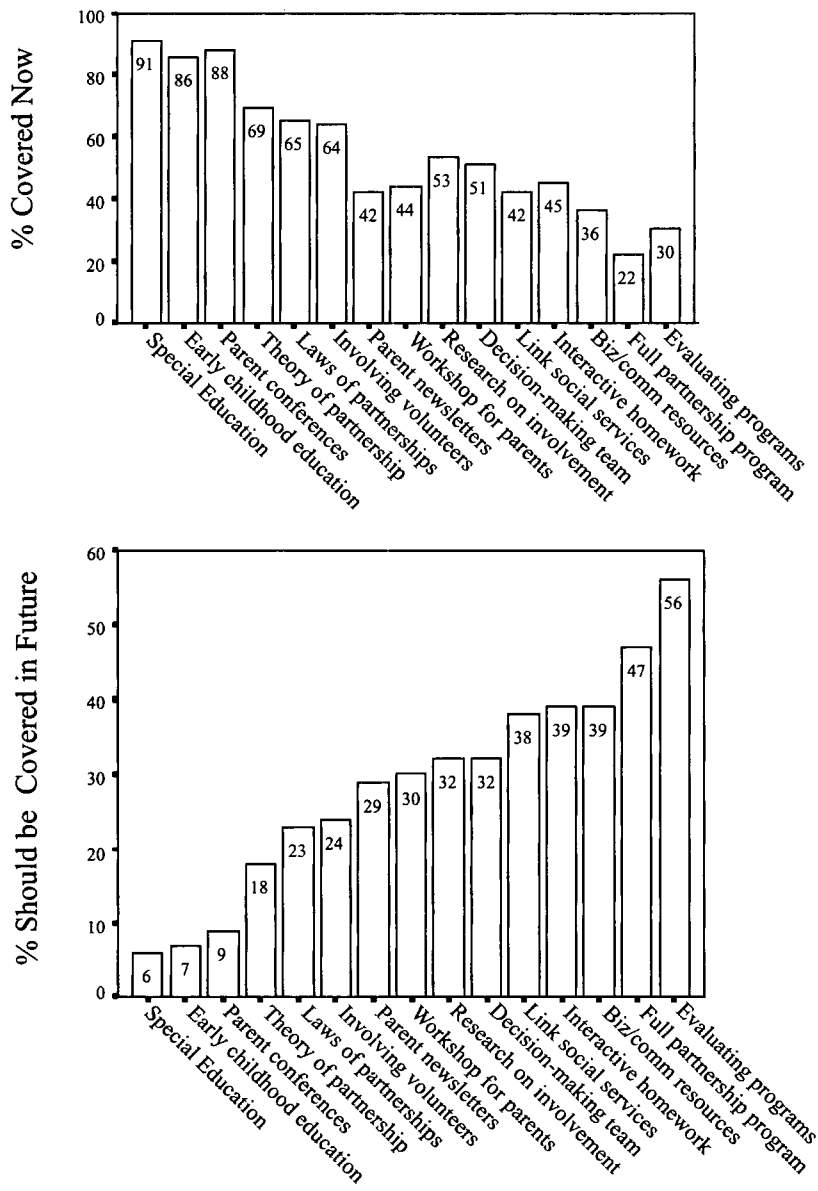
Figure 2. Course content on partnerships. *n* = 161.

*Which Institutional and Leadership Factors Influenced Course Offerings,
Graduates' Preparedness, and Prospects for Change?*

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify characteristics that help to explain which SCDEs offered more courses and content on partnerships to undergraduate and graduate students. The analyses explored whether institutional demographics, current curriculum, attitudes of leaders, and external pressures in the form of state mandates and guidelines, accreditation requirements, and districts' hiring preferences independently affected course content covered, graduates' preparedness, and future plans to change the curriculum on school, family, and community partnerships.

Curriculum: Courses and Coverage

Model 1 in Table 1 shows that neither sector nor size was significantly associated with the present coverage of partnership topics. Model 2

Table 1
Factors Influencing Extent of Coverage of 15 Topics on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Background						
Sector (public/private)	.003	.039	−.008	−.090	−.024	−.260
Size	.020	.224	−.005	−.058	.022	.236
Curriculum						
Full course on						
partnerships			.245	2.989**	.211	2.367**
External pressures						
and attitudes						
State law on						
partnerships				−.027	−.294	
Accrediting organization						
guidelines on partnerships					.180	1.986*
Importance of skills						
for student teaching,						
certification, licensure,						
placement					.233	2.648**
R^2		.022		.060		.152

Note. Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported for comparisons across models. $N = 161$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

reveals that, regardless of whether they were private, public, large, or small, SCDEs that offered students a full required or elective course on partnerships were significantly more likely than other SCDEs to cover more basic, practical, and advanced topics of home–school–community connections ($\beta = .245, p < .01$).

With the availability of a full course statistically controlled, Model 3 reveals that SCDEs were more likely to cover more partnership topics if they were accredited by organizations with guidelines on partnerships ($\beta = .180, p < .05$) and if the leaders believed that skills in school, family, and community partnerships were important for student teaching, licensing, certification, and placement after graduation ($\beta = .233, p < .01$). These variables explained about 15% of the variance in content covered on school, family, and community partnerships. Similar analyses that were conducted indicated that, regardless of sector or whether a full course on partnerships was offered, SCDEs covered more partnership topics if the leaders believed that principals wanted to hire teachers who were prepared to conduct partnerships ($\beta = .268, p < .01$).

Table 1 shows that a full course on partnerships was one way that SCDEs covered more basic, research, practical, and advanced topics on home–school–community connections. The explained variance of topics covered more than doubled when measures were added to the equation of leaders' beliefs that partnership skills were part of teachers' professional development, required by accrediting organizations, or preferred by principals hiring graduates.

Graduates' Preparedness

Table 2 examines factors that influenced SCDE leaders' reports of how well their students presently were prepared to conduct partnerships. Respondents from private colleges and universities were more likely than those from the public sector to strongly agree that their graduates were well prepared to conduct partnerships ($\beta = -.348, p < .001$), as shown in Model 1. Although there was no independent effect of SCDE size on estimates of student preparedness, education departments in private colleges and universities tended to be smaller than programs in public institutions. Survey respondents in private, smaller institutions may have been more familiar with and confident about their graduates' competencies than were respondents from larger SCDEs.

With sector and size statistically controlled, Model 2 in Table 2 shows that SCDE leaders believed that their graduates were better prepared when the curriculum covered more content on partnerships ($\beta = .220,$

Table 2

Factors Influencing Students' Preparedness on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Background						
Sector (public/private)	−.348	−4.083***	−.399	−4.197***	−.350	−4.265***
Size	−.046	−.536	−.050	−.603	−.038	−.459
Curriculum						
Coverage of content on partnerships			.220	2.843**	.165	2.073*
External pressures and attitudes						
Importance of skills for student teaching, certification, licensure, placement					.192	2.408**
R^2		.135		.183		.217

Note. Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported for comparisons across models. $N = 152$.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

$p < .01$). Model 3 indicates that leaders' beliefs about the importance of partnership skills for certification, licensure, and placement had a significant, independent effect on their reports of graduates' preparedness (β = .192, $p < .01$). Although sector was the most important variable in these analyses, the explained variance in student preparedness increased significantly to about 22% when the extent of content covered and leaders' attitudes were added to the equation.

Respondents also were asked to estimate what their graduating students would say about their own readiness to conduct partnerships, ranging on a 4-point scale from 0 (*unprepared*) to 1 (*tentative*), 2 (*competent*), or 3 (*expert*). Analyses, similar to Table 2, which accounted for sector, size, and leaders' attitudes, indicated that respondents from SCDEs that offered at least one full course on partnerships were more likely to predict that their students would say they were better prepared to work with families and communities (β = .154, $p < .07$). It is interesting that SCDE leaders' estimates of their students' preparedness to conduct partnerships were linked to the *breadth* of content coverage, but their beliefs of what the graduates, themselves, would say about their own preparedness were more strongly linked to the *depth* of coverage in a full course on

home–school–community connections. The latter results were consistent with the actual reports from students who took a full course on partnerships in the study by Morris et al. (1998).

Readiness to Improve Programs

Analyses in Table 3 included only the SCDEs whose leaders said they "should do more in the future" on partnerships. The two panels of Table 3 show that, regardless of sector or size of institution, respondents were more likely to say that they plan to have more *required* courses in the future for undergraduate and graduate students if their SCDEs presently covered at least some content ($\beta = .244$ and $\beta = .315$, respectively) and if they identified more topics that should be covered ($\beta = .323$ and $\beta = .488$, respectively). Also, leaders who believed partnership skills were important for educators' certification, licensure, and placement, said that they should add required courses in the future for undergraduate ($\beta = .261$) and graduate ($\beta = .214$) students preparing to be teachers and administrators.

The SCDEs most likely to add required courses on partnerships to the preparation of educators were those that had initiated coverage of some topics in various courses, whose leaders recognized that many topics need to be covered in the future, and who believed that partnership skills were important for students' professional advancement. The measures in Table 3 explained 16% and 22% of the variance in SCDE plans for adding required courses on partnerships for undergraduates and graduates, respectively. Table 3 provides new information on which SCDEs might do more in the future to prepare teachers and administrators to conduct partnerships, but the survey data cannot reveal the complexities underlying the prospects for change. To delve deeper into the differences among SCDE leaders' views and intentions, we examined respondents' explanations for their plans and prospects.

Leaders' Comments: Voices From the Field

The survey included three open-ended questions for respondents to discuss their ideas on needed curricular changes at their SCDEs, barriers to change, and better ways to prepare future teachers, administrators, and counselors to conduct effective school, family and community partnerships. The comments were sorted and coded by topic and summarized to help explain and expand the results of the survey data analyses. The strongest themes expressed by respondents are reported.

Table 3
Factors Influencing Future Plans for Required *Courses on Partnerships for Undergraduate and Graduate Students*

Variables	Plan for Required Courses for Undergraduates		Plan for Required Courses for Graduate Students	
	β	t	β	t
Background				
Sector (public/private)	.215	1.717	.189	1.638
Size	−.067	−.538	.029	.251
Curriculum				
Coverage of content on partnerships	.244	1.637	.315	2.118*
Extent of topics needed in future	.323	2.185ˈ	.488	3.378***
External pressures and attitudes				
Importance of skills for student teaching, certification, licensure, placement	.261	2.295*	.214	1.893
R^2		.161		.215

Note. Includes schools, colleges, and departments of education that report they need to do more in the future to make school, family, and community partnerships prominent in the curriculum and answered for undergraduate students ($n = 80$) and for graduate students ($n = 81$). Standardized regression coefficients (b) are reported for comparisons across models.
  *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.***$p < .001$.

Suggestions for Curricular Change

Nearly all of the 161 respondents (96%) answered the first question on whether and which changes were needed at their SCDEs to better prepare teachers and administrators to work with families and communities. These comments add depth to the analyses in Table 3 by providing some reasons for the different plans to change course offerings on partnerships.

Add a Full Course

A few leaders (8%) indicated that their SCDEs needed to add a full course on school, family, and community partnerships. According to one department chair, "We definitely need to have a course that focuses on these issues" (Case #86). Another chair stated, "I believe that there is strong need for a specific course that focuses on school, parent, and community collaboration and parent-as-teacher. This content is now covered in several classes. There is a need for a well-defined and focused class" (Case #227).

Integrate Topics in Other Courses

More respondents (20%) indicated that partnership topics should be integrated or infused in existing courses. According to one dean of teacher education, "I would suggest that the topic be treated in virtually all peda-gogical courses from an awareness level through application in the student teaching experience" (Case #66). A chair of teacher education echoed this perspective, stating "Not new courses, but better integration of courses" (Case #99).

Some SCDE leaders commented on why they believed that integration of topics in and among courses would result in more comprehensive cov-erage and preparation of educators. For example, one professor of educa-tion argued that "more course content [is needed] in existing courses to prepare students for more parent and community involvement in the operation of the school" (Case #188). Other respondents viewed infusion as the only practical way to cover partnership topics because of constraints on curricular change. One dean of education stated that, "It [a full course] would be nice, but current state and NCATE requirements do not permit the addition of more courses" (Case #68). Another dean wrote, "New addi-tional courses are a real problem. There are too many required components!" (Case #201).

Target Topics to Courses on Student Diversity and Special Needs

Other respondents (about 8%) suggested that the topic of school, family, and community partnerships should be targeted for coverage in courses on student diversity, including courses on students with special needs, students living in poverty, and students of color. For example, an associate professor stated, "We are planning to broaden the scope of the existing course on diversity issues to focus more on working with parents from different cultures" (Case #154). Another professor suggested that, "There needs to be a family and community course with a strong multicultural basis" (Case #160). A director of early childhood education reported that "We are adding special education certification to our program and family involvement will be a significant part of the curriculum" (Case #163).

The targeted approach to partnerships may indicate that some SCDE leaders are aware of the growing diversity in U.S. public schools and that they need to prepare teachers and administrators to work with the fami-lies of all students, including those with varied educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003). Alternatively, this attitude may indicate that, for some respondents, school, family, and

community partnerships are viewed as relevant only for teachers working with special groups of students and families.

Add Practical Field-Based Experiences

One fifth (20%) commented that their SCDEs needed to provide prospective teachers and administrators with practical hands-on experiences working with families and community organizations. According to the dean of one school of education, students required "more involvement at the grassroots level with families and communities. ... [They] need to go into the communities to dialogue with families" (Case #70). An assistant professor noted that students needed "activities which place [them] in field-based experiences that directly deal with families and communities" (Case #172). Another concluded, "There's only so much telling and talking. After a time, some type of practicum is called for" (Case #194).

The varied comments from SCDE leaders reflect an ongoing debate among college educators about the best and most feasible ways to improve the preparation of future teachers and administrators to conduct partnership activities. Some suggest that full, required courses are needed so that all students obtain coherent and comprehensive coverage of partnership topics. Others recommend integrating or infusing partnership topics in many other courses that prepare educators for their profession, whereas still others suggest targeting courses on student diversity. Regardless of their suggestions of course format, many suggested that all future educators should have practical, field-based experiences on partnerships.

Initial studies and informal reports from professors who have initiated innovative courses on partnerships are weighing in on the "full course" side of this debate (Katz & Bauch, 1999; Morris et al., 1998). Analyses reported in this study indicate that SCDEs that offered a full course on partnerships were more likely than others to cover more topics of school, family, and community partnerships (see Table 1), and the extent of coverage affected leaders' reports on whether graduates were prepared to conduct partnership activities (see Table 2). New studies will be needed to learn whether the alternative approaches to curricular change in required courses or in integrated or targeted curricula affect (a) how well new teachers and administrators are prepared to conduct partnerships; (b) how graduates, themselves, evaluate their preparedness; and (c) if and how well graduates who have had college courses and classes on partnerships implement involvement activities when they are placed as new teachers and administrators in schools and districts.

Factors Affecting the Likelihood of Curricular Change

The second open-ended question, addressed by 66% of the 161 survey respondents, asked whether they believed that the curricular changes they suggested would be made in the next year or two, and what factors might influence the likelihood of change at their SCDEs. Responses suggest that although curricular change to increase coverage of partnership topics may occur in some SCDEs, it is unlikely to be swift or universal.

Attitudes of SCDE Faculty

About 10% of the respondents indicated that faculty attitudes were key. Some respondents suggested that to include school, family, and community partnerships effectively in the curriculum, SCDEs needed "professor awareness of the importance of including the topic" (Case #138) and "course instructors who believe in the involvement of families and communities, and have experience in doing so" (Case #107). One dean was doubtful that meaningful change would occur because of "faculty resistance. Faculty see it as unnecessary" (Case #2). By contrast, a few respondents were optimistic that the positive attitudes of the faculty toward the topic would lead to positive change. As one chair stated, "Faculty are very interested. We see the need" (Case #142).

State Laws and Guidelines

Some respondents identified state mandates for teacher preparation in school, family, and community partnerships as an important impetus for curricular change. Almost 15% noted that their SCDEs were revising teacher education programs because of state laws and regulations: "We are assessing and revising our program in keeping with Indiana Professional Standards Board mandates" (Case #5). Others reported both internal and external pressure for change: "We are currently revising our program to meet new state guidelines. Also, we recognize the importance of better preparing teachers to connect with homes and communities" (Case #110). Some reported that progress followed pressure to change: "We hope to have our program in place by fall, ... which will also reflect new state licensure standards" (Case #229). These comments support other studies that suggest that state policies may affect teacher quality and influence the specific skills that teachers bring to their work (Darling-Hammond, 1999). In this study, the survey data indicate that many higher education leaders are becoming aware of federal, state, and local policies, pressures, and preferences for teachers, counselors, and

administrators who are prepared to work effectively with families and communities.

Crowded Curriculum

Although state guidelines have served as catalyst for change in some SCDEs, other respondents indicated that state restrictions prevented them from instituting desired changes. One chair of curriculum and instruction reported that change probably would occur on a "very limited basis due to state limitations on the number of hours that can be required for a teaching certificate" (Case #103). Similarly, a dean of education explained, "By state law, we are limited as to the number of education courses/hours we can offer" (Case #117).

Indeed, nearly 10% of the comments on the likelihood of change were not optimistic about providing students with more comprehensive preparation to work with families and communities because their programs were "full." According to one director of graduate studies in education, "Programs are very full, with few electives. There are many areas that faculty think should be added, but little room" (Case #23). A dean of education similarly responded, "No room in the curriculum—already too many mandates" (Case #68).

Change Process in Higher Education

Nearly one third of the respondents (30%) indicated that their SCDEs were already at varied points in the change process. For example, one dean reported, "The faculty is discussing it now" (Case #52). Another echoed, "We are currently discussing these issues" (Case #59). In a statement revealing the complexities of institutional change, an associate professor of education stated, "It has passed the curriculum committee and is now open for discussion in the Faculty Senate" (Case #143).

Some respondents indicated that they have moved beyond the discussion stage. According to one associate professor, "We're in the process of redesigning two of the three programs that we offer" (Case #74). Another respondent acknowledged, "The [need for greater] emphasis is recognized and plans are being made to implement changes" (Case #162). Still others have gone beyond planning and designing to actual implementation. One respondent explained, "A new preservice field experience on communities is being instituted" (Case #98). Two other respondents expected new "service learning" courses for family involvement to be implemented.

A few respondents were skeptical that their SCDEs would change in the next year or two due to lack of resources (5 respondents) or the slow

change process characteristic of large institutions (5 respondents). For example, one associate dean of education estimated that changes in the curriculum to address the topic of school, family, and community partnerships would take from "4 to 5 years because of the vagaries and difficulties of institutional change" (Case #131). The responses to this open-ended question placed SCDE leaders on a continuum of readiness for change, with some colleges and universities already in the process of revising curricula to include topics of partnerships and others expressing concern about the challenges or barriers they may face in planning for change.

Other Ideas on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

The final open-ended question, addressed by close to 50% of the sample, asked if respondents had other ideas to discuss about preparing teachers and administrators to conduct school, family, and community partnerships.

Importance of Improving Programs

Many leaders' added comments about the importance of partnerships for effective teaching and school administration. Most common were statements such as: "A strong school–family relationship is vital to success in education" (Case #192). Others reiterated the need for the curriculum to reflect up-to-date definitions of involvement, saying: "Without parental involvement in the student's education, the student will struggle to be successful. Schools need parent involvement, and not the window dressing 'donuts for dad, muffins for mom'" (Case #206). Still others agreed: "This should be taught, and not just expected to occur by accident" (Case #212).

Need for Collaboration With Schools and School Districts

Some respondents explained that for effective change to occur, there must be dialogue and cooperation among all parties who are responsible for the preparation of future teachers and administrators. This included awareness of the need for SCDE leaders to talk with state, district, and school leaders. Many agreed: "We need to have dialogue on this issue among all parties related to both preservice and inservice programs" (Case #75), and "SCDEs' cooperation with preK–12 districts on this topic is essential" (Case #118).

Some recognized that SCDEs can play a leadership role in redirecting attention to school, family, and community partnerships: "In order to

dramatically improve the needed partnerships, schools and higher educational institutions need to start our thinking with communities, parents, and their children" (Case #185). Others thought the leadership should come from school administrators: "These types of course experiences are difficult for us to require unless the schools routinely do them. Not all schools have significant family programs" (Case #92). These responses suggested that changes in teacher and administrator preparation may depend on new multidirectional communications and collaborations among leaders from SCDEs, school districts, schools, and the general public.

The open ended surveys questions revealed the varied opinions of SCDE leaders about whether new courses will be offered or content on partnerships will be added to existing courses. Despite general interest in and optimism about needed changes to prepare educators to understand and conduct family and community involvement, respondents were very realistic about the pace of change in their institutions.

Conclusions

This study provides new information on the preparation of future teachers and administrators to conduct school, family, and community partnerships. Based on a sample of 161 colleges and universities in the United States, the survey examined not only the courses and content presently offered to prospective educators, but also leaders' perspectives and projections for the future. The results extend previous studies by identifying structural, organizational, and attitudinal factors associated with differences of SCDEs' coverage of partnership topics, preparedness of graduates to conduct family and community involvement activities, and prospects for change. Four findings increase an understanding of the progress that has been made over the past decade and the challenges to future improvements in preparing prospective teachers and administrators to conduct effective school, family, and community partnerships.

Most SCDEs offer at least one course and some coverage of topics on partnerships, but not enough to prepare all teachers, counselors, and administrators to conduct meaningful programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships. As in the past, most present offerings on partnerships are in programs preparing educators for early childhood and special education. However, this study provides evidence that some SCDEs are extending coverage of basic, research, practical, and advanced topics on family and community involvement in courses for all undergraduate and graduate students preparing for careers in education. More institutions have

courses and content on partnerships than reported in past studies, but most prospective teachers and administrators still do not have access to full courses on partnerships. Some SCDE graduates may be able to piece together information on family and community involvement from various courses, but most will not gain the depth of knowledge and skills that they need if topics on partnerships continue to be presented in selected courses in one class period.

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in research on partnerships, including professors' publications and graduate students' papers. Of 142 SCDEs in this sample that offered graduate-level degrees, about one fourth (23.5%) reported that one or more master's theses or doctoral dissertations on parent involvement or partnerships were completed at their institutions over the past 3 years. This new statistic suggests that there is significant production of research at colleges and universities on family and community involvement. It suggests that more professors and graduate students are becoming familiar with the theories and research on partnerships and are producing new knowledge on school, family, and community partnerships. This forecasts continued advances in knowledge of the processes and outcomes of partnership approaches and activities. At these institutions it is likely that partnership topics will be shared and discussed in professors' courses and in presentations by graduate students.

Leaders at SCDEs are aware of growing pressures and explicit guidelines and policies for increasing future educators' skills on partnerships. Some SCDEs are taking action to help their graduates meet the mandates and recommendations for competencies in family and community involvement issued by state departments of education, accrediting organizations, and by school and district administrators who want to hire graduates with strengths as team players and with skills in working effectively with families. External guidelines and requirements to change the education of educators to include competencies in conducting partnerships are likely to increase. For example, NCATE has sharpened its requirements for teacher preparation to require reports on how graduates meet stated standards of NCATE organizations (L. Jacobson, 2004), several of which specify standards for family and community involvement.

Leaders in SCDEs are aware of the need to improve the preparation of new educators to conduct school, family, and community partnerships, and most expressed a readiness, on paper, to change. When asked how best to incorporate more coverage on partnerships in the curriculum, about half of the respondents strongly recommended full, required courses and half strongly recommended the infusion of partnership topics in existing courses in education. Unlike past emphases on early childhood and

special education, almost equal numbers of respondents recommended adding *required* courses on partnerships to the curriculum for those preparing to be teachers at the preschool (51.3%), elementary (46.7%), middle (41.9%), and high (42.1%) school levels. Near equal numbers recommended integrating topics on partnerships in other courses that prepare new teachers for all levels of schooling.

Although most leaders noted the need to improve their programs, many identified factors that could limit the likelihood of change at their SCDEs in the short term. Open-ended survey responses identified some of these factors, including faculty resistance to change, state laws that restrict additions to teacher education programs, and university procedures that delay changes in course offerings and graduation requirements.

Based on all of the results of this study, we estimate that between one fourth and one half of SCDEs, nationally, may follow through to improve the preparation of educators to conduct effective partnerships with families and communities in the next few years. Change is more likely in SCDEs that are already engaged in the change process on partnership; where leaders say more topics on partnerships are needed for all prospective educators, not just those specializing in early childhood or special education; where principals and counselors are prepared for their professions in educational administration programs; where master's and doctoral theses on partnerships are completed; where leaders are aware of state policies, accreditation requirements, and district hiring preferences for competencies on partnerships; and where more graduates are placed in economically disadvantaged and diverse communities. Changes at SCDEs with these characteristics could result in improving the preparation of over 50,000 new teachers and administrators each year to conduct more effective family and community involvement activities.[4] This would greatly increase past efforts and serve as a good start toward preparing all educators for their professional work with students, families, and communities.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study extends prior studies, but the data still are limited. Although the iterative random sampling procedures used in the initial survey, follow-up mail, and follow-up phone interviews helped to strengthen and diversify this sample, nonrespondents may differ from the participants. That is,

[4]Estimate is based on the number of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral education degrees awarded in 1998 (Snyder & Hoffman, 2001, Table 257).

as noted earlier, the SCDE leaders in this study may have been more familiar with and interested in the topic of partnerships than were those missing from the sample. Thus, the results of this study should be interpreted to generalize to SCDEs where leaders are aware of the importance of the topic of partnerships, although we believe that refers to most SCDEs in the United States.

Future research may build on this study by focusing, separately, on samples of deans of education, chairs of teacher education, chairs of educational administration, or faculty in schools of education to increase an understanding of the opinions and intensions of these groups. Or, nested samples of faculty within particular departments, such as teacher education or educational administration, may give a fuller picture of the role of SCDE leaders in setting priorities and influencing change in covering of partnership topics in courses and field experiences. Strategies for increasing survey response rates, including funding for telephone interviews or follow-up surveys, also would improve the quality and representation of the sample. A larger final sample would allow for more in-depth and comparative analyses of subgroups (such as public vs. private or primarily research vs. teaching institutions) and the development of more robust regression models.

Others may extend this study by exploring the specific content on partnerships needed by those earning credentials as elementary, middle, and high school teachers, principals and other administrators, and counselors. Although this study extended earlier work by contrasting SCDE leaders' views about the importance of partnership skills for educators in different positions, more could be done to identify the common and distinct content needed for particular credentials and effective practice by teachers, principals, and counselors at different school levels.

An important topic that emerged from this study that has not been studied systematically is whether and how graduates are best prepared to effectively involve families and communities in student education by taking a full course on partnerships or by accumulating knowledge and skills as topics are infused in many courses. Samples of undergraduate and graduate students may be surveyed or interviewed to determine whether and what they learned about partnerships and how they rate their own preparedness for family and community involvement in practice.

Needed Leadership

This study reveals a dramatic gap at most SCDEs between leaders' strong agreement that it is important for educators to conduct effective

partnerships and their reports of the poor preparedness of their graduates to do so. The results of the study suggest three aspects of SCDE leadership that need to be addressed to better prepare graduates to work well with families and communities.

SCDE Leaders Need to Set Priorities and Actively Influence
the Change Process at Their Institutions

Institutional change in higher education requires leadership, effort, and action. "If we put something in the bag, we'll have to take something out," wrote one dean (Case #127). This comment, common in discussions with higher education leaders, refers to setting priorities. To improve course offerings and coverage of partnership topics, SCDEs must set priorities, based on emerging theories, research, and explicit policies, to ensure that graduates are prepared to take new approaches to conduct family and community involvement.

To set and meet priorities, SCDE leaders need to become change agents and team builders at their institutions. If, as the data indicate, deans and department chairs recognize the importance of partnerships, then they must actively influence faculty attitudes and create conditions and incentives that will achieve change in course offerings and course content (Blackwell et al., 2003). If they do not guide change at their institutions, SCDE leaders are tacitly supporting the inadequate preparation of their graduates to conduct partnerships.

There are examples of this kind of leadership and teamwork in SCDEs. Northeastern University's School of Education set priorities for infusing school, family, and community partnerships in all courses for prospective educators, and is working through a change process to assist professors to meet this goal (Mapp, 2002). In Florida, a consortium of colleges and universities conducted statewide and regional Curriculum Infusion Institutes to alert professors and deans of education to strategies for improving the preparation of teachers and administrators about partnerships, share syllabi, review resources, and develop curricular plans (Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 2000). Courses have been designed to embed or infuse topics of partnerships in a series of six courses at Northern Illinois University (Shumow, 2004) and as on-line modules for professors to use at the University of North Texas (A. Jacobson, 2004) to provide future teachers with specific skills as they complete their course sequences. The Harvard Family Research Project's Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) conducts projects and maintains a website (www.MACROBUTTON HtmlResAnchor finenetwork. org) to engage professors of education on topics of family and community

involvement. Johns Hopkins University's graduate division of education initiated a 15-credit certificate program, Leadership for School, Family, Community Collaboration, to prepare educators to take responsibility for developing comprehensive partnership programs (Graduate Division of Education, 2003).

SCDE Leaders Need to Connect the Preparation of Educators to Emerging Theories of Learning and Leadership

Because change is difficult to achieve in higher education, it will help SCDE leaders to base plans for improving the preparation of educators to conduct effective partnerships on strong theories of student learning and school leadership. Most SCDEs have not yet embraced the theory of over-lapping spheres of influence to help future teachers and administrators understand that students learn and develop, simultaneously, at home, at school, and in the community, with the assistance of many adults (Epstein, 1987, 2001). To organize schools and to teach children from this perspective, educators need to become experts in teamwork, collaboration, and effective communication with colleagues, parents and community partners.

The same skills are central to emerging theories of effective school leadership, which emphasize teamwork, shared responsibilities, and "transformational" leadership for educators at all policy levels (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1999; Murphy, 2002). The theories assert that teachers, administrators, district, state, and university leaders, parents, and the public all must take leadership roles in improving schools and in increasing student success. Each participating individual and organization is expected to change for the better through purposeful communications, interactions, and shared leadership.

Thus, deans, department chairs, and others at SCDEs must attend to challenges such as faculty attitudes that oppose change and university procedures and state laws that may delay or limit change. They also must exercise leadership to guide professors to align courses for future teachers and administrators with converging theories of school leadership for improved student learning.

SCDE Leaders Need to Initiate Useful Interactions and Collaborations With Practicing Education Leaders

Communications and interactions between SCDEs and other education organizations at all policy levels need to improve. Many SCDE leaders reported that they did not know if their accreditation organizations had specific guidelines for preparing educators to conduct partnerships or if their

state set requirements for skills on partnerships for teacher and administrator credentials. Without this knowledge, SCDEs cannot make informed decisions about new courses or content to prepare graduates for their professions.

More than just collecting lists of requirements, SCDE leaders have a responsibility to initiate periodic communications and meetings with state, local district, and school leaders to learn about and discuss new programs, state policies, regulations for credentialing, and district hiring preferences for educators with competencies in teamwork, family and community involvement, and other skills needed in present-day schools and classrooms (Rigden, 2002). SCDE leaders also may help practitioners and policy leaders learn about new theories and research on student learning and school improvement, including more effective home–school–community connections. Beyond information exchanges, SCDEs and local districts and schools may work closely together in university–school collaborations, which are designed to improve both partners' organizations (Blackwell et al., 2003; Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Kochan, 1999; Yinger & Nolen, 2003).

There are examples of promising university–school collaborations. The National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University provides materials, inservice education, and on-going guidance to help educators apply research on partnerships in practice. In turn, the researchers benefit from having active partners in research and evaluation studies (Epstein, Sanders, et al., 2002; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sanders, 1999; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon, 2003; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). The University of South Carolina's School of Education assists school councils statewide to improve their leadership and partnership activities (School Improvement Council Assistance, 2002). The University of South Florida, University of North Florida, and University of Texas–El Paso are working with local schools and school districts to provide future teachers with field experiences in family and community involvement and to bring parents and practitioners to university classes (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2002; Munter & Tinajero, 2004; Wade, 2004). These university–school collaborations not only help improve school programs, but also improve the preparation of future teachers and administrators by linking coursework with fieldwork and real-world interactions with practicing educators and families.

The SCDE leaders' reports on school, family, and community partnerships were positive, yet realistic, making the outlook for change uncertain. Whether SCDEs improve courses and content on partnerships will depend on complex change processes in diverse institutions of higher education. Cautious optimism may be in order. Given the survey results that confirm SCDE leaders' strong beliefs in the importance of preparing

future educators to conduct partnership activities and current national attention to improving teaching and leadership in education through teamwork and family and community involvement, the time is right for all SCDEs to address school, family, and community partnerships as a fundamental issue in educational practice and school improvement.

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