The benefits of family involvement in education are clear. Productive home-school collaborations are associated with enhanced academic, social, and emotional outcomes for children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Minke & Anderson, 2005), including specific gains in work completion, attendance, academic engagement, grades, test scores, attitudes toward school, self-concept, and behavior (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003).

In addition, when families and schools collaborate to support children’s education, teachers tend to have more positive views of students’ families, have higher job satisfaction and improved morale, and receive more positive recognition from families related to their teaching and interpersonal skills (Epstein, 1995). Families become more supportive of their children and more confident in their ability to help their children learn, and they gain more positive views of the school and staff members (Epstein, 1995).

A Multifaceted Role
School psychologists, whose broad training in areas such as cognition and learning, school and family systems, child development, and academic and behavioral assessment and interventions, have the ability to play a multifaceted role in fostering family and school collaborations. This includes directly involving families in children’s schooling, as well as providing consultation and education to school staff members about the importance of effective strategies for involving families.

However, teachers and principals often overlook school psychologists’ potential in this regard, assigning them most often the primary responsibility for special education determination and placement (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002). The unfortunate result is that the school psychologist is commonly an underused resource for assisting school personnel in formulating crucial collaborations with families.

A recent study was the first to examine the interrelationships between school climate, including administrative support, professional efficacy, and aspects of school psychologists’ employment and training related to family collaboration (Manz, Mautone, & Martin, in press). In this study, school climate was defined as the extent to which school psychologists felt that principals and colleagues recognized their competence and supported their efforts in addition to providing resources and assistance for collaborating with families. Professional efficacy for family collaboration was defined as the school psychologists’ personal judgments that they possessed the necessary skills for effectively working with families.

Time and Training
Two common aspects of school psychologists’ role and responsibilities were strongly related to their perceptions of school climate and perceived efficacy in connecting to families: time and training opportunities. Insufficient time for communicating and collaborating with families has been consistently identified as a major barrier by school psychologists, and in Manz, Mautone, & Martin (in press) was associated with diminished perceptions of school climate and professional efficacy. In addition, assignment to multiple schools also affected school psychologists’ perceptions of school climate and professional efficacy related to forming partnerships with families. Those situated in a single school reported the most favorable perceptions.

Training opportunities also related significantly to these perceptions. School psychologists who received at least one professional development workshop related to family-school partnership every two years reported significantly higher views of school climate and professional efficacy than those who did not receive such training.

Of interest, the extent of school psychology experience, indicated by length and level (i.e., part time or full time) of employment did not correspond to school psychologists’ perceptions of school climate or professional efficacy. This finding suggests that these perceptions are not simply acquired with experience, but are likely to require direct training and support.
Implications for Principals

This emerging research, strongly suggesting that increased time, training, and resources can improve school psychologists’ capacity for fostering family-school collaborations, raises several implications for school administrators (see box). First, and perhaps most important, principals are in a position to establish a school climate that is supportive of family-school collaboration. Principals should consider a climate that encourages all staff members to communicate with families, not just when there are problems but on an ongoing and regular basis. In addition, principals can create a family-friendly school environment by providing space in their buildings that is inviting to parents and includes resource materials for parent use.

Principals need to be clear on the role of school psychologists in facilitating partnerships between their schools and families. Increasing their time to directly collaborate with families, or to assist colleagues in doing so, is an important starting point. One strategy for increasing school psychologists’ time and availability for working with families is to rely more heavily on the pre-referral component of the special education referral process. As schools continue to move toward a response to intervention model for special education eligibility determination, school psychologists should be increasingly available to assist with prevention models that include family-school partnership as an essential component.

Principals also can support school psychologists’ efforts to engage families as partners in the education process by assisting them to restructure their roles within the school community. Their broad training makes school psychologists well-suited for involvement in family-oriented program development and evaluation, workshops or training for families and staff, and consultation and collaboration with community-based providers. For example, school psychologists may be involved in:

- Consultation with families and local primary-care providers to manage social-emotional or behavioral difficulties, such as anxiety or attention disorders;
- The development and management of a parent-teacher organization;
- Evaluation of outcomes from a family education program; and
- Provision of family training sessions related to home-based educational activities, family involvement in education, or behavior management strategies.

Although increasing the availability of school psychologists and restructuring their roles are useful suggestions for increasing their involvement in activities related to family-school collaboration, the feasibility and potential benefits of these

### Strategies for Supporting School Psychologists

**Use the pre-referral process** to develop strategies to address academic and behavioral difficulties by:

- Reducing the burden on school psychologists for special education eligibility determination; and
- Increasing school psychologists’ availability for collaborating with families.

**Provide professional development workshops** for school psychologists and other school staff members related to partnering with families.

**Provide family-friendly and private space** in which the school psychologist can meet with families.

**Communicate the importance of family-school collaboration** to the entire staff by:

- Encouraging all staff members to connect with families before children have difficulties and on a regular basis; and
- Emphasizing that staff members should be cognizant of cultural norms when interacting with families of diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Allow the school psychologist to alter his or her role** to include the following:

- Involvement in the coordination of a parent-teacher organization;
- Provision of workshops for teachers related to partnering with families;
- Provision of family education (e.g., parenting skills, addressing challenging behavior at home, home-based learning activities); and
- Consultation/collaboration with families and community providers to manage students’ emotional/behavioral needs.

**Advocate for the school psychologist to be placed in only one school within your district.**
changes are diminished by the common practice of assigning psychologists to multiple schools. Assignment to a single school creates a promising context for school psychologists to enhance their involvement with families. In addition to expanding their time for collaborating with families, their consistent and frequent presence in the school affords them the opportunity to become a familiar and trusted professional easily approached by colleagues and family members.

Research suggests that ongoing professional development further enhances school psychologists’ capacity for effective family collaborations (Manz, Mautone, & Martin, in press). The provision of such professional development has the twofold benefit of skill-building and conveying to staff that family collaboration is a priority for the school’s administration. Inservice workshops could include diversity training related to the particular cultural groups that comprise the school community.

Family-school collaboration clearly is important for children’s educational success and school psychologists are natural resources for promoting these collaborations. Although a greater understanding is needed about ways to support school psychologists’ efforts to facilitate family-school collaborations, principals are well-poised to support them by expanding their roles and responsibilities while providing needed professional development.

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