

Partnership Action Plan: *Learning Leaders*

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Family, Community, and Professional Partnerships

What is an Effective Partnership?

- A partnership occurs when two or more parties unite and agree to work toward a mutual goal (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
- When the two parties come together to improve student learning, the partnership is known as an educational partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
- Effective partnerships have several characteristics in common (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - Effective partnerships feature shared leadership and mutual respect towards all partners.
 - These unions are not one-sided and do not utilize top-down leadership methods.
 - Partners mutually create goals that benefit all of the parties involved.
 - All parties demonstrate a sense of commitment to the purpose of the partnership and work to accomplish goals together.
 - Effective partners do not pass judgement on one another, and instead seek to establish a bond of trust and a sense of accountability.
 - Within effective partnerships, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are honored, funds of knowledge are recognized, and duties are culturally relevant.
 - High returns and feedback are important aspects of partnerships that are labeled as “effective.”
- Many effective partnerships begin with the creation of a strong and detailed partnership action plan (Cox-Peterson, 2010). The information that follows represents the partnership action plan for the *Learning Leaders* partnership.

Description of the Partnership

- *Learning Leaders* is a partnership that I designed to help provide my students with a cohesive learning experience between the home and the classroom. The major focus of this partnership is learning at home.
- The action plan outlined here will address the major partners included, such as myself, my 30 third-grade students, and their families. The families in my classroom are quite diverse, so the number of included family members will vary throughout this process. It is my hope, however, to partner with at least one family member from each family, for a minimum of 30 family members. This action plan addresses third grade classrooms and families.
- This union is called *Learning Leaders* because everyone involved will be empowered to take a leadership role. With an effective partnership, such as this one, each partner will benefit, take part in decision making, share responsibility for learning, provide mutual support, and work towards mutually beneficial goals. These characteristics help to foster collaboration and improve the overall condition of the partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
- The purpose of this project is to help incorporate families' assets and needs into the classroom, and to expose families from diverse backgrounds to some of the different ways that learning can be integrated outside of the classroom.
- By inviting families into the classroom, modeling activities, encouraging collaborative decision making, and drawing on families' assets, we will be able to jointly brainstorm, discuss, and create ways that learning can be easily integrated into the home, on any budget and with any time frame.
- Through this partnership with students and their families, we will be able to promote students' learning experiences in the home, fostering stronger connections between both families and their children, as well as the home and the school.

*The term families, rather than parents, will be used throughout this presentation because it is more inclusive of and sensitive to the diverse family structures that are present in the United States today (Cox-Peterson, 2010).

What is Currently Taking Place and What I Intend to Take Place

- *Learning Leaders* is a new partnership and will be piloted throughout the upcoming school year.
- Although this partnership is new and nothing is currently taking place, I will complete front-end assessments (see next slide) in order to assess the amount and quality of learning at home that is already taking place.
- I intend for multiple events, meetings, and interactions to take place throughout the development and duration of this partnership.
 - I will build relationships with families in order to gain trust, begin to get a sense of their values/interests, and build an understanding of the best times and places to meet.
 - I will then complete front-end assessments, discuss my action plan with the principal, and hold an informational meeting to introduce the partnership to students and their families, so that mutual goals and benefits can be discussed.
 - Throughout the year, all partners will engage in planning regular meetings, discussing ways to integrate learning outside the classroom, and sharing ideas/cultural experiences that could assist in the enhancement or creation of strategies for learning at home.
 - Although I will collect informal feedback and formative data many times, I will also conduct a summative evaluation at the end of the academic year. This will help me to judge the effectiveness of the program and make improvements for continuing the program with my future classes (or to expand the partnership to include multiple classrooms). I intend for *Learning Leaders* to take place like this because Cox-Peterson (2010) states that partnerships are likely to be successful if they start with a targeted focus and concentrate on one area before expanding.

Rationale

- I chose to create the *Learning Leaders* partnership because of my previous classroom experiences and because of the many benefits suggested by current research.
- When student teaching, I noticed that many family members avoided contact with teachers, while many teachers were concerned that students were not given the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom.
- Educational partnerships appear to address these issues because they foster personal relationships for teachers, provide information on at-home learning opportunities for families, and promote academic achievement for students (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
- Partnerships between teachers and parents that specifically focus on home learning help family members to make explicit comments related to classroom curriculum while at home, and assist students in correctly completing assignments in the classroom (Vandermaas-Peeler, Boomgarden, Finn, & Pittard, 2012).
- Some families do not feel comfortable interacting with teachers. Because this is especially true for families from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Doucet, 2011), I chose to create an educational partnership since these unions can be used to connect with families from diverse backgrounds (Yull, Blitz, Thompson, & Murray, 2014).
- Partnerships that specifically focus on improving the quality of home learning also appear to be successful in improving the schooling experience. After completing an intervention that sought to improve home learning, parents and teachers stated that they gained better understandings of each other's perspectives and actions (Mereoiu, Abercrombie, & Murray, 2016). In a similar study, both parents and students stated that they had a better understanding of class concepts when families engaged in a training seminar that focused on at-home learning (Meyer et al., 2016).
- Learning at home is an important partnership focus because these experiences can provide students with the opportunities and information that are necessary for succeeding in k-12 classrooms and navigating the higher education system. This educational success can help students to improve their economic class, even lifting some families out of poverty (Cox-Peterson, 2010).

Description of Major Partners

- Partners are the people, groups, or organizations that are involved in a partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2010). The partners described here were chosen because this is a new partnership and is focused on a specific classroom. If this partnership were to expand in the future, more partners would be added.

Learning Leaders partners include:

- Teacher:** I will be one of the major partners in this new partnership. While I may draw on my colleagues as resources throughout this process, I am the only teacher that will be highly involved during the stages of partnership implementation, outlined here. I am a first-year teacher hoping to foster a partnership, which will help me get to know the families and students at this school. It is my hope to include more partners in the future, after evaluating the effectiveness of this pilot partnership.
- Students:** There are 30 third-grade students in my classroom. These students come from a diverse range of cultural, linguistic, and family structure backgrounds. Many of my students are performing at or below grade level in reading and math. Some attend after school programs, while others spend time with extended family members after school.
- Family Members:** The families in my classroom are quite diverse. Most parents and other highly involved family members work full-time. Some live in modest homes, while others live across the street from the school, at a large apartment complex. As of now, it appears that the number of family members will vary throughout the partnership implementation process. It is my hope, however, to partner with at least one family member from each family, for a minimum of at least 30 family members.
- Administration:** At this large elementary school, there is one principal and one assistant principal, both of whom are bilingual. I plan to share the goals of this partnership with both of these individuals. I hope to recruit at least one of these individuals to help with the implementation, and possible expansion, of this partnership. Having a bilingual and experienced partner would also be a tremendous resource for this new partnership.

Partners' Roles and Relations to One Another

- **Teacher**
 - Introduce this partnership opportunity to all potential partners and communicate regularly with students, their families, and any administrative parties that decide to join in this effort
 - Collect data to help increase the effectiveness of this partnership, including front-end assessments, formative assessments, and summative evaluations (Cox-Peterson, 2010)
 - Get to know students and their families in order to better understand their assets and needs
 - Work collaboratively with parents, students, and administration to develop meaningful and relevant goals and at-home learning opportunities (Cox-Peterson, 2010)
- **Students**
 - Encourage family participation and communicate interests, assets, and needs to partners so that completion of at-home learning is relevant and enjoyable
 - Participate in goal selection, interviews, observations, discussions, events, and at-home learning activities (Cox-Peterson, 2010)
 - Feel empowered to keep families accountable and provide feedback to the teacher, as well as other partners
- **Family Members**
 - Develop common goals with other partners and plan at-home learning activities with the teacher and students (Cox-Peterson, 2010)
 - Implement at-home learning activities and encourage students to be actively engaged in the partnership
 - Provide the teacher with regular feedback on the effectiveness of the program, as well as information on the families' assets and needs (Cox-Peterson, 2010)
- **Administration**
 - Develop a relationship with families in order to provide feedback and suggestions as to how families can be more equitably involved
 - Provide support, and assist the teacher in goal setting and locating resources for families and students (Cox-Peterson, 2010)
 - Translate when necessary and provide information on the larger educational context

Front-End Assessment

- Because I want to ensure that this is an equitable and collaborative partnership, I will seek input from all of the major partners before beginning major planning and goal development. This will also help me to identify potential barriers and needs (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - Interview: I will first interview members of the administration to gain background on the history of educational partnerships at this specific school. It would also be important to ask about their goals for the program, the extent to which they could be involved, and how they feel about shared responsibility.
 - Survey: I will then create surveys for both parents and students in order to gain a better understanding of their level of interest in the partnership, availability, cultural values/interests, demographic information, resources/assets, and transportation/childcare/other needs.
 - Achievement Data: It would also be important for me to collect students' previous state achievement scores and classroom measures so that I know which content areas the at-home activities should focus on most.
 - Reflection: I will assess myself by writing a one-page reflection on my current level of involvement with families, as well as my relationships with families in the past. This may help me to identify change (positive or negative) later on.

Epstein's Involvement Connection

- *Learning Leaders* directly draws upon Epstein's six types of family involvement. Because it is recommended that partnerships only concentrate on one or two types of involvement to help narrow their focus (Cox-Peterson, 2010), *Learning Leaders* focuses on learning at home and shared decision making.
- Learning at Home
 - The major purpose of this partnership is to increase students' exposure to at-home learning and to provide parents with the tools to directly relate class content to these activities.
 - The teacher, families, students, and administrative partners will design activities that potentially center on literacy development and problem solving, based on families' assets and needs. Activity menus, newsletters, modified backpack centers, directions, content connection information, journals, and other supplies will be sent home to guide implementation (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - When teachers provide parents with specific instruction or tips for integrating classroom content into home learning, students achieve higher levels of academic success (Vandermaas-Peeler, Boomgarden, Finn, & Pittard, 2012).
- Shared Decision Making
 - Because this partnership focuses on empowering every partner involved to become a leader, shared decision making is also a major concentration. Because decision making does not have to be a formal process, families will be invited to form groups, based on interest, to help them create at-home learning activities.
 - By focusing specifically on shared decision making, the processes of goal creation, task delegation, feedback collection, and activity construction will become more collaborative, making the partnership even more effective (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - Sharing decision making and collaborating at every step of partnership implementation will also help me to honor diverse perspectives, address multiple concerns, and promote a democratic environment (Cox-Peterson, 2010).

Objectives

- Objectives are specific statements that provide guidance for partnership activities. These statements are attainable, measurable, and should take place over a short period of time (Cox-Peterson, 2010). *Learning Leaders* objectives for the duration of the pilot are:
 - Each student and family member will attend at least two informational meetings or planning events at school (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - The teacher will plan at least six opportunities (partnership meetings and small group planning) throughout the school year so families have multiple opportunities to come into the classroom to collaboratively design and discuss at-home learning activities.
 - Students will create at-home learning logs and reflection journals.
 - Administrator(s) will attend at least four partnership-wide meetings and meet with the teacher at least three times to make suggestions for improving the partnership.
 - Students and families will implement at least three purposeful, content-integrated, and culturally-relevant at-home learning opportunities throughout the school year (no matter how small or large) (Cox-Peterson, 2010).

Goals

- Goals are long-term statements that describe potential outcomes for the partnership. These statements are general, take place over time, and help partners to gain a mutual understanding of the purpose for the partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2010). *Learning Leaders* goals are:
 - Students and families will develop a sense of appreciation for learning at home and seek out these opportunities on their own.
 - Teachers and administrators will develop an understanding of families' strengths, interests, and cultural values (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - Students' academic achievement in reading and mathematics will improve on classroom assessments and on state-mandated tests (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - Administrators will develop an appreciation for educational partnerships and consider implementing or expanding them in the future.
 - Families, students, teachers, and administrators will develop positive and collaborative relationships with one another.

Description of Potential Barriers

- Barriers are potential issues or setbacks that may hinder the development of an effective partnership. Cox-Peterson (2010) states that some barriers must be anticipated during the planning stages of the partnership. *Learning Leaders* anticipated barriers include:
 - **Inexperience:** *Learning Leaders* is a brand-new partnership and the action plan outlined here is a first-time proposal. All of the partners involved may be new to the idea of partnerships and lack a firm understanding of what it means to be a partner. Inexperience can also be a barrier because there are no long-standing rules or procedures (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - **Language:** Many of the families at this school do not speak the same language as the main teacher involved (me). This may hinder family member involvement or make it more difficult for partners to communicate throughout the duration of the partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - **Time:** Because many of the family members at this school work one or more jobs and have busy schedules, it may be difficult for them to attend meetings and implement learning at home activities. It may also be hard for me, as the only teacher involved, to create schedules, demonstrations, and events while working full-time. Lastly, it may be difficult for any involved administrators to take the time out of their schedules to be involved in the creation and implementation of this partnership.
 - **Power:** Because teachers and administrators are generally highly-educated and hold leadership roles within the school/community, some family members or students may view them as increasingly powerful people. Feelings of inferiority or superiority may hinder the development of a partnership that focuses on collaboration and shared decision making (Cox-Peterson, 2010).

Seeing Barriers as Strengths and Beginning to Think of Ways to Address Them

- **Inexperience**

- Although inexperience is an identified barrier, new partnerships present partners with a “clean slate” in which they can foster equitable collaboration, shared decision making, and a funds of knowledge perspective from the beginning.
- To address this barrier, it is important to keep all partners informed and ensure that communication is a priority (Cox-Peterson, 2010). Consistently collecting feedback may also help to ensure that the new partnership is effective.

- **Language**

- While a language barrier may need to be addressed, seeing language as a resource can actually improve the effectiveness of the partnership. Families who speak languages besides English can design at-home learning activities that teach about their home language. This will help other families and partners to appreciate all languages.
- By asking a member of the bilingual administrative team to become a partner and serve as a translator, ensuring all materials are provided in other languages (Cox-Peterson, 2010), and communicating an appreciation for diverse languages, *Learning Leaders* will be able to address this barrier.

- **Time**

- Because many people involved in this partnership have limited free-time, I will be challenged to get to know all partners better in order to accommodate their schedules. This deeper relationship will help me to foster collaboration and show my commitment to include all families in the partnership.
- To address this barrier, I will complete front-end assessments and build relationships with all of the partners early on in the partnership process in order to gain an understanding of their time commitments and other scheduling needs (Cox-Peterson, 2010).

- **Power**

- Because there may be a perceived power difference within this partnership, I would have to improve my ability to empower others. By learning different ways to empower people, I would be provided with a strong skillset for future partnership endeavors.
- I would involve families and students at every stage of the partnership process and ensure that each decision is made collaboratively in order to empower partners from the beginning.

Timeline - Fall

- **August**

- Meet with the principal and assistant principal to discuss the partnership opportunity and invite them to join as partners
- Get to know students and families through casual campus conversations, calls home, and newsletters
- Implement front-end assessments: Interview the principal/assistant principal, Survey students and families, Obtain students' previous achievement data, and Complete teacher reflection

- **September**

- Analyze front-end assessment data and organize a spread sheet with families' interests, assets, and needs
- Organize first partnership meeting: Find a time that works for most partners, Invite/introduce partners, Organize transportation/childcare options, Plan for a translator (either the principal, assistant principal, or someone else), Design a discussion that third grade students can contribute to about their experiences with at-home learning
- Send home a preliminary at-home learning flier: Provide workspace suggestions, Briefly introduce benefits in order to build or activate families' background knowledge
- Informal interview with administrator/ feedback

- **October**

- Hold first meeting: Describe learning at-home, Facilitate a collaborative discussion about goals, Provide examples that involve a range of family members, Model an example (choose topic based on surveys), Create student logs and journals
- Send home a secondary at-home learning flier: Provide tips for integrating content into their normal activities with no added time, and on no additional budget
- Informal interview with administrator/ feedback
- Complete teacher written reflection of partnerships' strengths and weaknesses

Timeline - Winter

- November
 - Plan and hold first planning session: Invite all adult family members, Send home flier asking them to think of ways they can turn a cultural home activity into an example of a content-aligned at-home learning activity, Place families in groups based on interest (i.e. food, math, etc.), Guide them in creating a flier for other partners to use when implementing the at-home learning activity that they designed
 - Circulate at-home learning activity suggestions to all partners via flier (or other preferred methods)
 - Collect and analyze student achievement data; Complete informal interview with administrator
- December
 - Hold second meeting: Invite partners, Organize transportation/childcare options, Plan for a translator, Design a discussion that third grade students can contribute to about their experiences with at-home learning, Complete an at-home learning activity designed by the administrator at the meeting while circulating and discussing the improvement of implementation, Revisit goals and objectives, Hold an open dialogue, Discuss student logs and journals
 - Distribute and analyze family member surveys; Conduct student informal interviews: review journals and logs
- January
 - Plan and hold second planning session: Invite all adult family members, Send home flier asking them to think of ways they can turn a cultural home activity into an example of a content-aligned at home learning activity, Place families in groups based on interest, Guide them in creating a flier for other partners to use when implementing the at-home learning activity that they created
 - Circulate at-home learning activity suggestions to all partners via flier (or other preferred methods)
 - Complete teacher reflection journal; Complete informal interview with administrator
- February
 - Plan and hold third planning session: Invite all adult family members, Send home flier asking them to think of ways they can turn a cultural home activity into an example of a content-aligned at home learning activity, Place families in groups based on interest, Guide them in creating a flier for other partners to use when implementing the at-home learning activity, Discuss student logs and journals
 - Circulate at-home learning activity suggestions to all partners via flier (or other preferred methods)
 - Collect and analyze student achievement data

Timeline - Spring

- March
 - Conduct student informal interviews: review journals and logs
 - Hold third meeting: Invite partners, Organize transportation/childcare options, Plan for a translator, Design a discussion that third grade students can contribute to about their experiences with at-home learning, Have a volunteer family complete an at-home learning activity, Revisit goals and objectives, Hold an open dialogue about experiences
 - Distribute and analyze family member surveys; Complete teacher reflection
- April
 - Complete summative evaluations: Family member surveys, Student surveys, Administrator survey, Final teacher reflection guide
 - Send home a completed list of all of the activities, strategies, and ideas that were created and or discussed, along with additional tips for summer activities and activities with fourth grade standards connections
- May
 - Analyze summative evaluation data, discuss results with partners, and decide if the partnership would benefit others if it continued as is/ or if it was expanded to include others
 - Discuss the possibility of continuing the partnership with the next class, recruit volunteers from the first year to see if they would be interested in partnering with new parents or expanding to other classrooms
 - Send out a paper and video newsletter to the partners and wider school/community population to show what was accomplished and gain support (if the partnership is to be continued, expanded, or modified in the future) (Cox-Peterson, 2010)

Formative Assessment

- Formative assessment takes place throughout the duration of partnership activities and helps partners to improve planning and implementation processes (Cox-Peterson, 2010). These assessments will help to refine the partnership throughout the implementation process.
 - Family members will complete anonymous surveys twice throughout the academic year. These surveys will have statements that cover a range of topics: the amount of learning at home taking place, appreciation of at-home learning, effectiveness of planning sessions/meetings, quality of relationships with other partners, level of empowerment, and additional needs. Family members will respond using a Likert scale that ranges from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”
 - Students will be informally interviewed twice throughout the academic year by the teacher. They will be asked about a range of topics, including what they think of being involved in the partnership process, how empowered they feel, level of enjoyment with home learning, and how home learning impacts their classroom experiences. They will be allowed to reference their notes, journals, photographs, or other materials when participating. Students achievement scores in reading and math will be analyzed twice throughout the year to see if/how they are improving in key subject areas that have been ideally integrated into the home.
 - The member of administration will be assessed via informal interview with the teacher three times thought the academic year. Topics will range from: suggestions to increase involvement, identifying personal benefits or school-wide benefits of the partnership, and reflecting on the benefit of educational partnerships in general.
 - The teacher (me) will complete at least five reflective journals throughout the academic year. Cox-Peterson (2010) holds that reflective practices can help to improve partnership efforts. These reflections will help me to identify strengths and weaknesses of the partnership, as well as clarify my specific role during the implementation stages of the partnership.

Summative Evaluation

- Summative evaluation takes place after the partnership has concluded or at a significant point in the process. These evaluations will help to measure the effectiveness of the union and guide future decision making surrounding the partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2010).
 - Family members will complete an open-ended survey, with written prompts that measure: how many events they attended, the approximate level of learning at home that now takes place, why or why not learning at home strategies were implemented, favorite topics, opinions on meeting and planning session processes, thoughts/reflections on what it means to learn at home, and changes they noticed in their relationships with other partners.
 - Students will complete a survey, with similar topics. This survey, however, will feature language that students can comprehend, and students will respond by choosing an “emoji” that best exemplifies their response. Responses will range from an angry face to an extremely happy face.
 - The administrator will complete an open-ended survey, similar to the family member survey. This document, however, will not cover topics about activities implemented in the home, but will feature additional questions about how the partnership could be expanded, who else could benefit, and if there are other resources (such as community resources) that should be drawn upon for the next year (if continued).
 - The teacher will complete one last reflection page, detailing the strengths and weaknesses of several aspects of the partnership (from relationships and interactions, to the amount of observed participation and student learning).

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