



Excerpt from

Guidebook:

What Schools Can Do to Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families

This document is a hardcopy version of a resource that can be downloaded at no cost from the Center's website (<http://wmhp.psych.ucla.edu>)

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Welcoming & Social Support: An Essential Facet of Schools

Estimates suggest that 20-25% of students change schools each year.

These figures are higher in school districts with high immigrant populations. Although, some make the transition easily, many find themselves alienated or “out-of-touch” with their new surroundings, making the transition into a new school difficult. Youngsters entering a new school and neighborhood are confronted with multiple transition challenges. The challenges are compounded when the transition also involves recent arrival in a new country and culture.

Youngsters vary in terms of their capabilities and motivation with respect to psychological transition into new settings. Students entering late in a school year often find it especially hard to connect and adjust. Making friends means adjusting to the new social milieu and personalities of the school population. A focus on school-wide strategies for successful school adjustment of newly entering students and their families is essential to reduce school adjustment problems, ease the process of bicultural development, and establish a strong psychological sense of community in the school. A commitment to welcoming new students and families not only focuses on those entering at the beginning of a term but for all who enter throughout the year.

Welcoming new students and their families is part of the broader goal of creating schools where staff, students and families interact positively with each other and identify with the school and its goals. An atmosphere can be created that fosters smooth transitions, positive informal encounters, and social interactions; facilitates social support; provides opportunities for ready access to information and for learning how to function effectively in the school culture; and encourages involvement in decision-making. Welcoming and social support are critical elements both in creating a positive sense of community at a school and in facilitating students' school adjustment and performance.

The following guidelines provide strategic suggestions for welcoming newcomers.



A new boy came to my class. I said hello to him cheerfully. I asked if he would like to play with me. He said "yes". Then I went walking with him to our house talking with him about things.

Intervention

Overview: Phases, Barriers, & Key Intervention Tasks

•Phases of Intervention•

Strategies to enhance welcoming to a school and increase home involvement in schooling evolve over three overlapping phases:

1. The first phase involves a broad focus. It emphasizes use of general procedures to welcome and facilitate adjustment and participation of all who are ready, willing, and able.
2. The focus then moves to those who need just a bit more personalized assistance. Such assistance may include personal invitations, ongoing support for interacting with others and becoming involved in activities, aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive, and so forth.
3. Finally, to the degree feasible, the focus narrows to those who have not made an effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved (e.g., due to major barriers, an intense lack of interest, or negative attitudes). This phase continues to use personalized contacts but adds cost intensive special procedures.

•*Interfering Barriers*•

One major concern in efforts to enhance welcoming and home involvement, of course, is overcoming barriers that make it hard for students and families to function in the new community and school. Research on barriers has suggested a variety of familial, cultural, job, social class, communication, and school personnel attitude factors that interfere with successful transitions to new settings and make involvement at school difficult.

Barriers can be categorized as *institutional*, *personal*, or *impersonal*, with each type encompassing negative attitudes, lack of mechanisms and skills, or practical deterrents.

For instance, *institutional* barriers encompass such concerns as inadequate resources (money, space, time), lack of interest or hostile attitudes on the part of staff, administration, and community toward interpersonal and home involvement, and failure to establish and maintain formal mechanisms and related skills. As examples, there may be no policy commitment to facilitating a sense of community through enhanced strategies for welcoming students and families; there may be no formal mechanisms for planning and implementing appropriate activity or for upgrading the skills of staff, students, and parents to carry out desired activity

•*Key Intervention Tasks*•

In pursuing each intervention phase, there are *four* major intervention tasks:

1. Establishing a mechanism for planning, implementing, and evolving programmatic activity
2. Creating welcoming and initial home involvement strategies (e.g., information and outreach to new students and families; a school-wide welcoming atmosphere; a series of specific “New Student/New Parent Orientation” processes)
3. Providing social supports and facilitating involvement (e.g., peer buddies; personal invitations to join relevant ongoing activities)
4. Maintaining support and involvement--including provision of special help for an extended period of time if necessary

Each of these tasks is delineated on the following pages.

Task 1

A PROGRAM MECHANISM

Planning, implementing, and evolving programs to enhance activities for welcoming and involving new students and families requires institutional organization and involvement. This takes the form of operational mechanisms such as a *steering committee*. That is, for a program to be effective at a school, it must be school-owned, and there must be a group dedicated to its long-term survival.

In the case of efforts to enhance the welcoming and involvement of new students and families, a useful mechanism is a *Welcoming Steering Committee*. Such a committee is designed to:

- (a) adopt new strategies to fit in with what a school is already doing
- (b) provide leadership for evolving and maintaining a welcoming program over the years.

The group usually consists of a school administrator (e.g., principal or AP), a support service person (e.g., a dropout counselor, Title I coordinator, school psychologist), 1-2 interested teachers, the staff member who coordinates volunteers, an office staff representative, and possibly 1-2 parents. A change agent (e.g., an organization facilitator) is useful in helping initiate the group and can serve as an ex-officio member.

Some First Activities for the Welcoming Program Steering Committee

- I. Define the role of the steering group and identify possible additional members
- II. Clarify activities already "in place for welcoming and providing social support to students and their families
- III. Find out about welcoming and social support activities carried out at other schools
- IV. Plan ways to enhance welcoming and social support for New Students and their families
 - A. Increase visibility of the activities
 1. Make presentations to introduce the program to the rest of the staff
 2. Design welcoming posters and other materials
 3. Designate a mailbox for staff suggestions and communications
 4. Establish locations for new students and families and staff to access welcoming and social support materials
 - B. Do a needs assessment "walk through"
(What do new students and families see and experience?)
 1. Are there appropriate Front Office welcoming messages and procedures? (e.g., Is anything more needed in terms of materials? other languages needed for communication with families?)
 2. Are there tour procedures for new parents and students?
 3. Are there procedures to welcome student into the classroom and introduce parents to teacher ? (e.g., Are there peer greeters and buddies? Materials to welcome newcomers to the class?)
- V. Next Steps (plan specific ideas to be pursued over the next few months)

Task 2

CREATING WELCOMING AND INITIAL HOME INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

It is not uncommon for students and parents to feel unwelcome at school. The problem can begin with their first contacts. Efforts to enhance welcoming and facilitate positive involvement must counter factors that make the setting uninviting and develop ways to make it attractive. This task can be viewed as the welcoming or invitation problem.

From a psychological perspective, the welcoming problem is enmeshed with attitudes school staff, students, and parents hold about involving new students and families. Welcoming is facilitated when attitudes are positive. And, positive attitudes seem most likely when those concerned perceive personal benefits as outweighing potential costs (e.g., psychological and tangible).

A prime focus in addressing welcoming is on ensuring that most communications and interactions between school personnel and students and families convey a welcoming tone. This is conveyed through formal communications to students and families, procedures for reaching out to individuals, and informal interactions.

An early emphasis in addressing the welcoming problem should be on establishing formal processes that:

- (1) convey a general sense of welcome to all
- (2) extend a personalized invitation to those who appear to need something more.

In this respect, it can be noted that communications and invitations to students and their families come in two forms:

- (1) general communications (e.g., oral and written communications when a new student registers, classroom announcements, mass distribution of flyers, newsletters)
- (2) special, personalized contacts (e.g., personal conferences and notes from the teacher).

For those who are not responsive to general invitations, the next logical step is to extend special invitations and increase personalized contact. Special invitations are directed at designated individuals and are intended to overcome personal attitudinal barriers and can be used to elicit information about other persisting barriers.

Task 3

PROVIDING SOCIAL SUPPORTS AND FACILITATING INVOLVEMENT

Social supports and specific processes to facilitate involvement are necessary to:

- (a) address barriers
- (b) sanction participation of new students and families in any option and to the degree each finds feasible (e.g., legitimizing initial minimal degrees of involvement and frequent changes in area of involvement)
- (c) account for cultural and individual diversity
- (d) enable participation of those with minimal skills
- (e) provide social and academic supports to improve participation skills.

In all these facilitative efforts, established peers (students and parents) can play a major role as peer welcomers and mentors.

If a new student or family is extremely negative, exceptional efforts may be required. In cases where the negative attitude stems from skill deficits (e.g., doesn't speak English, lacks social or functional skills), providing special assistance with skills is a relatively direct approach to pursue. However, all such interventions must be pursued in ways that minimize stigma and maximize positive attitudes. Some reluctant new arrivals may be reached, initially, by offering them an activity designed to give them additional personal support. For example, newcomers can be offered a mutual interest group composed of others with the same cultural background or a mutual support group (e.g., a bicultural transition group for students or parents -- Cárdenas, Taylor, & Adelman (1993); a parent self-help group -- Simoni & Adelman, 1990). Parent groups might even meet away from the school at a time when working parents can participate. (The school's role would be to help initiate the groups and provide consultation as needed.) Relatedly, it is important to provide regular opportunities for students, families, and staff to share their heritage and interests and celebrate the cultural and individual diversity of the school community.

Cárdenas, J., Taylor, L., & Adelman, H. S. (1993). Transition support for immigrant students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 21, 203-210.

Simoni, J., & Adelman, H. S. (1993). School-based mutual support groups for low income parents. *The Urban Review*, 25, 335-350.

Task 4

MAINTAINING INVOLVEMENT

As difficult as it is to involve some newcomers initially, maintaining their involvement may be even a more difficult matter. Maintaining involvement can be seen as a problem of:

- (a) providing continuous support for learning, growth, and success
(including feedback about how involvement is personally beneficial)
- (b) minimizing feelings of incompetence and being blamed,
censured, or coerced.

A critical element in establishing a positive sense of community at a school and of facilitating students school adjustment and performance is the involvement of families in schooling. That is why parent involvement in schools is a prominent item on the education reform agenda for the 1990s. It is, of course, not a new concern. As Davies (1987) reminds us, the “questions and conflict about parent and community relationships to schools began in this country when schools began” (p. 147). A review of the literature on parents and schooling indicates widespread endorsement of parent involvement. As Epstein (1987) notes,

the recent acknowledgments of the importance of parent involvement are built on research findings accumulated over two decades that show that children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities. . . . The evidence is clear that parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account

With respect to students with school problems, parent involvement has been mostly discussed in legal terms (e.g., participation in the IEP process). There has been little systematic attention paid to the value of and ways to involve the *home* in the efforts to improve student achievement. (The term, parent involvement, and even family involvement is too limiting. Given extended families and the variety of child caretakers, the concern would seem minimally one of involving the *home*.)

To involve the home, a staff must reach out to parents and encourage them to drop in, be volunteers, go on field trips, participate in creating a community newsletter, organize social events, plan and attend learning workshops, meet with the teacher to learn more about their child's curriculum and interests, and establish family social networks. It is imperative that the only contact with parents not be when they are called in to discuss their child's learning and/or behavior difficulties. Parents who feel unwelcome or "called on the carpet" cannot be expected to view the school as an inviting setting.

Davies, D. (1987). Parent involvement in the public schools: Opportunities for administrators. *Education and Urban Society*, 19, 147-163.

Epstein, J. L. (1987). Parent involvement: What research says to administrators. *Education and Urban Society*, 19, 119-136.

Welcoming and Social Support as Indicators of School Reform

How well a school addresses the problems of welcoming and involving new students and families is an important qualitative indicator of program adequacy and staff attitudes and, thus, is a probable predictor of efficacy. As such, programs and related mechanisms and processes for addressing these problems can be viewed as essential to any effort to restructure schools.

Interventions to enhance welcoming and home involvement are as complex as any other psychological and educational intervention. Clearly, such activity requires considerable time, space, materials, and competence, and these ingredients are purchased with financial resources. Basic staffing must be underwritten. Additional staff may be needed; at the very least, teachers, specialists, and administrators need "released" time. Furthermore, if such interventions are to be planned, implemented, and evaluated effectively, those given the responsibility will require instruction, consultation, and supervision.

The success of programs to enhance welcoming and home involvement is first and foremost in the hands of policy makers. If these programs are to be more than another desired but unachieved set of aims of educational reformers, policy makers must understand the nature and scope of what is involved. A comprehensive intervention perspective makes it evident that although money alone cannot solve the problem, money is a necessary prerequisite. It is patently unfair to hold school personnel accountable for yet another major reform if they are not given the support necessary for accomplishing it. In an era when new sources of funding are unlikely, it is clear that such programs must be assigned a high priority and funds must be reallocated in keeping with the level of priority. To do less is to guarantee the status quo.

Steps in Welcoming: Key Elements and Activities

In pursuing strategies for enhancing welcoming and home involvement a first concern is to ensure a positive welcome at the various initial encounters school staff have with a new student and family.

Each point of contact represents an opportunity and a challenge with respect to welcoming new students and families, linking them with social supports, assisting them to make a successful transition, and identifying those who do not so that school adjustment needs can be addressed.

On the following pages is a brief description of steps that can be taken at various points of contact and some examples of general welcoming strategies.

~Making Initial Contacts Welcoming: Some Strategies ~

The following strategies are prevention-oriented and focus on welcoming and involving new students and their families. More specifically, they are designed to minimize negative experiences and ensure positive outreach during the period when students enroll.

1. FRONT DOOR: Set up a Welcoming Table (identified with a welcoming sign) at the front entrance to the school and recruit and train volunteers to meet and greet everyone who comes through the door.

2. FRONT OFFICE: Plan with the Office Staff ways to meet and greet strangers (to smile and be inviting). Provide them with welcoming materials and information sheets regarding registration steps (with appropriate translations). Encourage the use of volunteers in the office so that there are sufficient resources to take the necessary time to greet and assist new students and families. It helps to have a designated registrar and even designated registration times.

3. WELCOMING MATERIALS: Prepare a Welcoming Booklet that clearly says WELCOME and provides some helpful information about who's who at the school, what types of assistance are available to new students and families, and some tips about how the school runs. (Avoid using this as a place to lay down the rules; that can be rather an uninviting first contact.) Prepare other materials designed to assist students and families in making the transition and connecting with ongoing activities.

4. STUDENT GREETERS: Establish a Student Welcoming Club (perhaps train the student council or leadership class to take on this as a special project). These students can provide tours and some orientation (including an initial introduction to key staff at the school as feasible).

5. PARENT/VOLUNTEER GREETERS: Establish a Welcoming Club consisting of parents and/or volunteers to provide regular tours and orientations (including an initial introduction to key staff at school as feasible). A Welcoming Video can be developed as useful aid.

(cont.)

6. WELCOMING BULLETIN BOARD: Dedicate a bulletin board (somewhere near the entrance to the school) that says WELCOME and includes such things as pictures of school staff, a diagram of the school and its facilities, pictures of students who entered the school during the past 1-2 weeks, information on tours and orientations, special meetings for new students, and so forth.

7. CLASSROOM GREETERS: Each teacher should have several students who are willing and able to greet strangers who come to the classroom. Recent arrivals often are interested in welcoming the next set of new enrollees.

8. CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION: Each teacher should have a plan for assisting new students and families to make a smooth transition into the class. This includes a process for introducing the student to the others in the class as soon as the new student arrives. (Some teachers may want to arrange with the office specified times for bringing a new student to the class.) An introductory WELCOMING conference should be conducted with the student and family as soon as feasible. A useful Welcoming aid is to present both the student and the family member with Welcoming Folders (or some other welcoming gift such as coupons from local businesses that have adopted the school).

9. PEER BUDDIES: In addition to the classroom greeter, the teacher should have several students who are willing and able to be a special buddy to a new student for a couple of weeks (and hopefully a regular buddy thereafter). This can provide the type of social support that allows the new student to learn about the school culture and how to become involved in various activities.

10. OUTREACH FROM ORGANIZED GROUPS: Establish a way for representatives of organized student and parent groups (including the PTSA) to make direct contact with new students and families to invite them to learn about activities and to assist them in joining in when they find activities that appeal to them.

11. SUPPORT GROUPS: Offer groups designed to help new students and families learn about the community and the school and to allow them to express concerns and have them addressed. Such groups also allow them to connect with each other as another form of social support.

12. ONGOING POSITIVE CONTACTS: Develop a variety of ways students and their families can feel an ongoing connection with the school and classroom (e.g., opportunities to volunteer help, positive feedback regarding participation, letters home that tell “all about what’s happening”).

1. FAMILY COMES TO REGISTER

Designated staff/volunteer to welcome and provide information

Prepared information (in primary languages) on:

- (a) needed documents (e.g., Information card)
- (b) how to get help related to getting documents
- (c) directions for newcomers
- (d) making a registration appointment

Telling families what information is necessary for registration can be made clearer if information also is available in writing--especially in their home language.

2. REGISTRATION APPOINTMENT

Designated registrar --with time to welcome, register, and begin orientation

Designated orientation staff and peers

-Welcome Interview (clarify interests and information desired)

-Provide Information desired about:

- (a) How the school runs each day
- (b) Special activities for parents and students
- (c) Community services they may find helpful
- (d) Parents who are ready to help them join in
- (e) Students ready to meet with new students to help them join in
- (f) How to help their child learn and do well at school
- (g) Tour
- (h) Initial Introduction to teacher, principal, and special resources

Based primarily on teacher preference (considering parent and student interests), student might stay for rest of school day or start the next day.

3a. STUDENT BEGINS TRANSITION-IN PHASE

Teacher introduces student to classmates and program

Peer “buddy” is identified (someone with whom to work with in class, go to recess and lunch -- at least for first 5 days)

Teacher or peer buddy gives student welcoming “gift” (e.g., notebook with school name, pencils); teacher gives peer buddy “thank you gift” (e.g. notebook with school name, certificate, etc)

Designated students introduce and invite new student to out of class school activities

3b. PARENT BEGINS TRANSITION-IN PHASE

Designated staff or volunteer (e.g., a parent) either meets with parents on registration day or contacts parent during next few days to discuss activities in which they might be interested

Designated parent invites and introduces new parent to an activity in which the new parent has expressed interest or may find useful

At first meeting attended, new parent is given a welcoming “gift” (e.g., calendar with school name; coupons donated by neighborhood merchants)

Classroom Welcoming Strategies For Newly Arrived Students and Their Families

Welcoming New Students

Starting a new school can be scary. Two major things a teacher can do to help new students feel welcome and a part of things:

(1) give the student a special *Welcome Folder*

(A folder with the student's name on the front, containing welcoming materials and information, such as a welcome sheet with teacher's name and room and information about fun activities at the school)

(2) assign a *Peer Buddy*

(Train students who are willing to be a special friend

- to show the new student around the class and school
- to sit next to the new student
- to take the new student to recess and lunch to meet schoolmates)

Welcoming New Parents

Some parents are not sure how to interact with the school. Two major things a teacher can do to help new parents feel welcome and a part of things:

(1) invite the parent to a *Welcoming Conference*

(This is meant as a chance for the parents to get to know the teacher and school and for the teacher to facilitate positive connections between parent and school such as helping the parents connect with a school activity in which they seem interested. The emphasis is on *Welcoming* - thus, any written material given out at this time specifically states WELCOME and is limited to simple orientation information. To the degree feasible, such material is made available in the various languages of those likely to enroll at the school.)

(2) connect the new parent with a *Parent Peer Buddy*

(identify some parents who are willing to be a special friend to introduce the new parent around, to contact them about special activities and take them the First time, and so forth)

4a. STUDENT BECOMES INVOLVED IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Over first 3 weeks staff monitors student's involvement and acceptance if necessary, designated students are asked to make additional efforts to help the student enter in and feel accepted by peers.

4b. PARENT BECOMES INVOLVED IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Over the first 1-2 months, staff monitors involvement and acceptance.

If necessary, designated parents are asked to make additional efforts to help the parents enter in and feel accepted

ATTRACTING FAMILIES TO AN EVENT AT SCHOOL

Many family members, especially those whose contacts with school have not been positive, only come to school voluntarily for very special events. A variety of special events might be used to attract them. Two types of activities that seem to have drawing power are those where a family member can see the student perform or receive positive recognition and those where family members can gain a sense of personal support and accomplishment.

An example of the latter type of activity is that of offering a time limited, "parent" discussion group (e.g., 3 sessions) where fundamentals of handling child-rearing and school problems are explored and information about services available for students with problems is provided. Topics in which family members are interested include "Helping your child do better at school," "Helping the school do more for your child," and "Finding better ways to deal with problems at home and at school."

Examples of other events that schools find successful in attracting family members are support groups, friendship circles, ESL classes for parents, Citizenship classes, and special projects to help the school.

Whatever the event:

Remember, first and foremost it should be an activity that family members are likely to perceive and experience as positive and valuable.

Once the special event to be pursued is identified, the following steps can be taken.

****Arrange times and places with the principal and other involved school staff.***

A major consideration is whether the event will take place during the school day or in the evening; in some cases, it may be feasible to offer the event both during the day and again at night to accommodate a wider range of family schedules.

****Plan the specifics of the event.***

For example, in the case of discussion groups, group leaders are identified, topics for discussion identified, materials to stimulate discussion prepared, child care volunteers and activities identified, and so forth.

****Distribute general announcements.***

Flyers are sent home, posted, distributed at pick up time; announcements are made at existing parent activities. All announcements should account for the primary languages spoken by family members.

****Extend personal invitations.***

Three types of personal invitation seem worth pursuing - mailing a letter home, preparing an invitation and RSVP that the student can take home, and calling the home with a reminder. In extreme cases, a home visit may be worth trying.

****Accommodate differences and needs.***

In addition to offering the event at different times of the day, efforts need to be made to accommodate those whose primary language is not English.

Child care at the site might be offered so that parents who cannot leave their children at home can participate in an event without distraction. Efforts also might be made to help organize car pools.

****Ensure that each family member is received positively.***

Efforts should be made to ensure that family members are extended a personalized greeting when they sign-in at the event.

If there are family members present who are already involved at school, they can be asked to participate in making newcomers feel accepted by taking them "under their wings" (e.g., orient them, introduce them to others).

INTRODUCING OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORTIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Toward the conclusion of events, offered to family members (e.g., during the last scheduled session of group discussions), those attending can be introduced to other endeavors the school offers as part of its efforts to establish a positive home-school connection and a sense of community at the school. This step encompasses a general presentation of ways family members can become involved in such endeavors, encouraging expressions of interest, and clarifying reasons for lack of interest.

**** Presentations of Opportunities for Involvement***

The emphasis here is on a vivid and impactful presentation of the various ways families can be involved. Posters, handouts, testimonials, slides, videos, products--anything that will bring the activity to life might be used.

Such a presentation can be made by a school administrator or staff member or by parent representatives. In either case, it is useful to invite parent participants from various activities to come and tell about the endeavor and extend an invitation to join.

****Encouragement of Expressions of Interest***

It is important to take time specifically to identify which family members are interested in any of the described endeavors and encourage them to sign up so that a follow-up contact can be made.

It also is important to identify any barriers that will interfere with family members pursuing an interest and to explore ways such barriers can be overcome.

****Clarification of Lack of Interest***

For those who have not indicated an interest, a "needs assessment" should be done to identify what they would like from the school and/or barriers to their involvement. This might be done informally after the presentation or through a follow-up phone or mail questionnaire.

Similarly, for those who do not participate, a personal (phone/mail) contact should be made to identify and address reasons why.

With specific respect to parents of at-risk students, efforts to ensure family involvement are seen as involving: (a) immediate follow-up with each family and (b) maintaining communication and addressing specific needs.

****Maintaining Communication and Addressing Special Needs***

Essentially, this task requires ongoing efforts to keep in close, personal contact with the family to ensure they feel their involvement is valued and to help them overcome barriers to continued involvement. The following are a few examples of such efforts:(a) sending special notes of appreciation after participation; (b) sending reminders about next events; (c) sending reminders about other opportunities and endeavors that may be of interest to parents; (d) checking periodically to appraise any discomfort a parent has experienced or other needs that should be addressed (including any barriers to continued involvement).

5. ASSESSMENT AT END OF TRANSITION PERIOD

Three weeks after the student enrolls, designate staff interview:

- (a) The teacher to determine if the student has made a good or poor adjustment to the school (Poor school adjusters are provided with additional support in the form of volunteer help, consultation for teacher to analyze the problem and explore options, etc.)
- (b) The student to determine his or her perception of how well the transition-in has gone and to offer encouragement and resources if needed
- (c) The parents to determine their perception of how well the transition-in has gone for the student and for themselves and to offer encouragement and resources if needed

6. FOLLOW-UP INTERVENTION

1. ***Problem analysis:*** This step involves going back to the person or persons who indicated dissatisfaction and asking for more specifics (e.g., what the specific problem is and what the person(s) think needs to be changed). It may also be appropriate and necessary to check with others (e.g., teacher, parent student).
2. ***Intervention plan:*** Based on the information gathered, plans can be made about what to do and who will do it. What to do may range from connecting the student/family with others for social support to helping to identify specific activities and ways to facilitate student/family involvement. Who will do it may be project staff, a volunteer, a teacher, an outreach coordinator, etc.
3. ***Intervention written summary:*** Once such an intervention is carried out the Extended Welcoming -- Summary of Intervention form can be filled out and given to the a case manager or other designated person who monitors follow-through related to interventions.
4. ***Extended welcoming follow-up interview:*** A week after the extended intervention is completed, another (modified) follow-up interview should be carried out respectively, with the student, parent, and teacher. If a problem remains, additional intervention is in order -- *if feasible*.

ENCOURAGING WELCOMING AT OTHER SCHOOLS

~Materials Sent to Schools into which Students Transfer~

When a student leaves to go to another school, the following material can be sent to the student's new principal along with school records.

As the accompanying letter indicates, the materials are meant to help the school, the classroom teacher, and the parents by indicating activity that can aid a successful transition.

Re:

b:

Dear Principal:

We understand that the student named above has transferred to your school.

When a student moves, we use the opportunity to share some welcoming ideas with the receiver school. Enclosed you will find three items:

1. For your school: a brief description of some school-wide welcoming strategies that have been helpful
2. For the classroom teacher: a description of a few classroom welcoming strategies (we hope you will copy and give this sheet to this student's teacher and perhaps all your teachers)
3. For the parent: a description of a few things parents can do to help their child and themselves make a successful transition (we hope you will copy and give this sheet to the student's parents and perhaps other newly arrived parents)

We send this to you in the spirit of professional sharing and with the realization you may already be doing all these things and more. If you have anything along these lines that you would care to share with us, we would love to receive it. Thanks for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

The items to be enclosed with this letter are on the following three pages.

SCHOOL-WIDE WELCOMING

The following strategies are prevention-oriented and focus on welcoming and involving new students and their families. More specifically, they are designed to minimize negative experiences and ensure positive outreach during the period when students and parents first enroll by enhancing

***SCHOOL-WIDE WELCOMING PROCEDURES**

To ensure that first contacts are positive, welcome signs are placed prominently near or in the front office and new arrivals are given a special Welcome Packet and are greeted warmly by the office staff and any professional staff who are available.

The emphasis is on *Welcoming* -- thus, the written material given out at this time specifically states WELCOME and is limited to information that is absolutely essential to aid registration and introduction to the school. (To the degree feasible, this material is made available in the various languages of those likely to enroll at the school.)

***NEWCOMERS' ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES**

- ? orientation meetings and tours
- ? peer student guides
- ? peer parent guides
- ? newcomer support groups for students
- ? newcomer support groups for parents/other family members

***PERSONAL INVITATIONS/SUPPORT TO JOIN ONGOING ACTIVITY**

- ? organized outreach by students to invite and support new student participation in ongoing school activities
- ? organized outreach by parents to invite and support new parents' participation in ongoing parent activities

***SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS**

- ? a Peer Pairing or "peer buddy" program

***EXTENDED WELCOMING**

- ? special outreach to address factors identified as interfering with the adjustment to the school of a new student and his or her family

WELCOMING - DOING IT ON A SHOESTRING

The extension of a hand in welcoming, a smile, the exchange of names, a warm introduction to others ... Greeting those new to a school comes naturally to teachers and principals and can really help new students and their families feel the school is a place that wants them and where they will fit in.

In Utopia (where the number of incoming students is small and there is plenty of time and money to do everything educators would like to do), there is never any problem welcoming new students and their families.

Many schools, however, there is a constant stream of incoming students, and there are many competing demands for our limited time and money. Under these circumstances, it helps to have a few procedures that keep Welcoming a high priority and a natural occurrence--without placing excessive demands on the school's staff and budget.

Establishing and maintaining a few welcoming materials and steps can be an effective and relatively inexpensive way to address this need.

For new *students*, staff time might involve as little as a teacher assigning an official "Peer Welcomer" in the class for the week (or month) or identifying a "Peer Host" for each new student as s/he arrives. In terms of materials, the school could provide as little as a 1 page Welcome sheet for the new student and a 1-page Welcoming "script" to guide a class peer "Welcomer" or "Host."

If more resources can be devoted to welcoming, materials might be expanded to include a welcome folder for each new student and a certificate of appreciation for the help of each peer host. Sometimes others, such as the student council, a student service group, several staff members, a parent group, think welcoming is so important that they take it on as a special focus. In doing so, they may generate additional resources, including possibly encouraging local business to provide additional welcoming activities and materials (such as giving discount coupons and donating school t-shirts).

For new *parents*, a minimal set of low-cost welcoming strategies might include:

- (1) providing office staff with a 1-page welcome sheet (and encouraging them to take a few extra minutes with new students and parents) and
- (2) having a teacher identify a parent volunteer who has agreed to be the room's official "Parent Welcomer"-- phoning new parents to welcome and invite them to school functions.

If more resources can be devoted to welcoming parents, additional steps can be taken to invite parent involvement. Among the possibilities are: additional welcoming and information sheets describing school activities, a special tour of the school, personal invitations to join ongoing parent activities, opportunities to sit down with the principal/other school staff/parents to learn more about their new school and community, and so forth.

***The point is:** Welcoming is an essential part of creating and maintaining a school climate where students and families want to be involved. A few minimal steps and materials can help keep a basic welcoming program in place. And, additions can be made as priorities, time, resources, and talent allow.*

Some Material to Send to Local Businesses for “Adopting a School”

To Local Businesses & Community Groups

How Your Organization Can Help

Awareness of the increasing demands placed on local schools has led the business sector and other community organizations to offer various forms of help. One way an organization can help is to adopt a specific program at a local elementary school. For example a school may need support in welcoming new students and families.

The focus of such a program is on welcoming and assisting with the school adjustment. Strategies have been developed that are designed to help new students and families make a successful transition into the school and enhance a sense of partnership between the school and family. These strategies involve the use of a special set of materials and activities.

Sponsors are needed to help underwrite the modest expenses related to preparing the special materials that have been developed for this program (see attached list).

Sponsors also are needed to help underwrite the special activities (see attached list).

If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact us.

How Sponsors Can Support Special Activities

As can be seen below, personnel costs related to carrying out the welcome program are not great by comparison to most special programs.

(1) *Program Coordinator - 1/2 time (800 hrs. per school year)*. This paraprofessional keeps the school staff informed about the program, prepares and distributes the special materials, gathers and circulates follow-up feedback from new students and their families regarding the program's impact, and so forth. Hired as a "Community Representative" at \$10/hour.

Cost: 800 hours/year X \$10/hour = \$8,000.

(2) *Parent Support Group*. This activity is designed to help parents become involved with the school and at the same time support their efforts to learn how to enhance their children's positive behavior and learning.

Cost: Group leader -- 2 hours/week, 40 weeks/year at \$25/hour = \$2,000.

(3) *Classroom Volunteers to Assist with School Adjustment*. Enthusiastic volunteers are recruited and trained to provide special support for specific students in the classroom who need additional help adjusting to school. (Another way the business sector and other community organizations support this program is by encouraging employees and others to volunteer.)

Cost: Volunteer recruiter and supervisor -- 3 hours/week,
40 weeks/year at \$25/hour = \$3,000.

How You Can Sponsor Special Materials

As can be seen below, the costs of the special materials are quite modest (\$115 provides enough welcoming material to cover 100 new students and their families).

All special welcoming materials are printed in English and Spanish and some are available in other languages such as Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Western and Eastern Armenian, Tagalog.

(1) *Welcoming/Homework Folders for new students.* Each folder contains a special set of welcoming materials (e.g., a welcoming message, an activity sheet, several sheets of drawing/writing paper with the school's name printed on top). The folder can be used by the student to carry homework back and forth to school.

Cost: 100 folders and contents = \$35.

(Folders = 20 cents each; Welcoming material = 15 cents each; total 35 cents for each unit)

(2) *Peer Welcomer Guideline/Homework Folders.* These are given to students who accept the role of a special welcomer. Each folder contains suggestions for how to help the new student join in (become acquainted with the school plant, activities, and students and staff). The folder also contains a Certificate of Appreciation for the Peer Welcomer's efforts. The folder can be used by the student to carry homework back and forth to school.

Cost: 100 folders and contents = \$35.

(3) *Registration Information Sheets and a Welcoming/School Material Folder for new parents.* The Registration Sheet provides information on the specific steps involved in registering a new student at the school. The welcoming folder contains a special set of welcoming materials (e.g., a welcoming message, an introductory booklet to the school, a list of community resources, a handout on helping the student learn at home). The folder can be used by the parent to file away material and information provided by the school.

Cost: 100 Reg. Info Sheets, welcome folders and contents = \$45

Monitoring the Process

As Steps 5 and 6 outline, it is essential to assess whether the initial welcoming activities are successful.

Interviews can be used to accomplish this (see Resource Aids).

The first interviews (with the student, parent, and teacher) can be conducted about three weeks after the student enrolls. The point is to determine whether the student and/or their family have made the transition satisfactorily and, if they haven't, to plan and implement more personalized assistance.

If additional assistance is provided, follow-up interviews (perhaps weekly) are used until a successful transition is accomplished.

Selected References

Welcoming & Social Support

A. The Problem of School Transition and How Welcoming & Social Support Can Help

Transition Support for Immigrant Students

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Welcoming: Facilitating a new start at a new school.

M.B. DiCecco, L. Rosenblum, L. Taylor, & H.S. Adelman. (1995). *Social Work in Education*, 17, 18-29.

Mobility and School functioning in the early grades.

P.S. Nelson, J.M. Simoni, & H. S. Adelman. (1996). *Journal of Educational Research*, 89, 365-369.

Kids, schools suffer from revolving door.

D. Williams. (1996). *American Educator*, 36-39.

A few more references with their abstracts

Mobility and school achievement.

R. Audette, R. Algozine, & M. Warden. (1993). *Psychological Reports*, 72, 701-702.

Discusses concern for students who transfer schools frequently. The literature provides some solutions to problems associated with scheduled and unscheduled transfers: orientation programs, peer tutoring, buddy systems, and discussion groups led by peer guides.

Aiding the relocated family and mobile child.

J.P. Blair, K. H. Marchant, & F.J. Medway. (1984). *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 18, 251-259.

Methods are described that have proved successful in integrating mobile students into a new school. An overview of a program developed by the author to help highly mobile families deal with moving-related stress is outlined.

Confronting the social context of school change.

C. Cherniss. (1991). *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 19, 389-394.

Discusses the distinction between prescriptive, participative, and collaborative approaches to change and argues that the collaborative approach used in this case has certain advantages. Other issues that are considered include the role of conflicting agendas in the change process, the importance of gaining support from district-level and school level leadership, the need to consider ways of insuring maintenance of change, and the relationship between individual, small groups, and cultural level change in educational reform.

B. Research Evaluating Model Support for Transition Programs

Planning the transition process: A model for teachers of preschoolers who will be entering kindergarten.

J.I. Gelfer & J. Mc Carthy. (1994). *Early Development and Care*, 104, 79-84.

Evaluation of a multidimensional program for sixth-graders in transition from elementary to middle school.

R.W. Green & T.H. Ollendick. (1993). *Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 162-176.

A few more references with their abstracts

Sources of stress and support in children's transition to middle school: An empirical analysis.

M.J. Elias, M. Gara, & M. Ubrico. (1985). Special Issue: Childhood vulnerability: Family and life stress. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 14, 112-118.

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Primary prevention during school transitions: Social support and environmental structure.

R.D. Felner, M. Ginter, & J. Primavera. (1982). *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 10, 277-290.

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Planning the transition process: A model for teachers of preschoolers who will be entering kindergarten.

J.Gelfer & J.McCarty. (1994). *Early Child Development & Care*, 104, 79-84.

This article presents a model for planning and carrying out the transition process (TP) of children from preschool to kindergarten.

Evaluation of a multidimensional program for sixth-graders in transition from elementary to middle school.

R. Greene & T.H. Ollendick. (1993). *Journal of Community Psychology*, 21, 162-176.

Examines intervention for poor academic transition to middle school. Follow-up showed a significant improvement in GPA, depression, and teacher-reported behavior problems.

Developing, implementing, and evaluating a preventive intervention for high risk transfer children.

L.A. Jason, D. Betts, J. H. Joseph, A.M. Weine, and others. (1992). *Advances in psychology*. T.R. Kratochwill, S.N. Elliot, & M. Gettinger (Eds.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc: Hillsdale, NJ, pp. 45-77.

Evaluates intervention for high-risk transfer children in grades 1-8.

Helping transfer students: Strategies for educational and social readjustment.

L. A. Jason; A.M. Weine; J.H. Johnson; L. Warren-Sohlberg; and others. (1992). Jossey-Bass Inc, Publishers: San Francisco, CA.

This book examines how children adjust to transferring to a new school. It offers educators, researchers, mental health professionals, and parents practical strategies for easing school transitions and helping children adjust to new environments. The authors integrate current theory and research into an in-depth discussion of the psychological, educational, and social dimensions of school transfer. They highlight difficulties that transfer students face, such as adapting to new peers, meeting new academic and behavioral standards, and adjusting to different teacher expectations. They examine transfer students coping strategies and show how the relationship between academic achievement, social competence, and self-concept can have a positive or negative effect on adjustment to a new school.

C. School Transitions and Special Education

Impact on a social intervention on the transition to university.

D. Lamothe, F. Currie, S. Alisat, T. Sullivan and others. (1995). *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 14*, 167-180.

Empowerment in transition planning: Guidelines for special educators.

G. Lane. (1995). *LD Forum, 21*, 34-38.

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A few more references with their abstracts

Methods for assisting parents with early transitions.

E.M. Reis. (1994). *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 21*, 94-96.

Presents methods designed to assist parents in developing a repertoire of transition skills that can be applied throughout the life of a child with a handicap.

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A. Halpern (1989). *Australia & New Zealand Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 15*, 1-13.

Explores the dimensions of a systematic approach to change and innovation (transition program) to address the needs of students with disabilities as they leave school and prepare to enter the community. A statewide survey of teachers, administrators, and parents identified 5 areas of need that were addressed in the development of a program for changing the patterns of service and care: the transition team model. The components provide structure for successful implementation. These include program standards, local control, a developmental perspective on change, and procedure for effecting change.

An Article on Welcoming

By Mary Both DiCacco, Linda Rosenblum,
Linda Taylor, and Howard S. Adelman

Welcoming: Facilitating a New Start at a New School

Students and families who relocate often have problems adjusting to new schools. Their involvement with a new school often depends on the degree to which the school reaches out to them. This article reports on the approach to intervention developed by the Early Assistance for Students and Families Project for use by schools to facilitate the initial school adjustment of newly entering students and their families. Specifically discussed are the concept of welcoming; intervention phases, tasks, and mechanisms and the special focus on enhancing home involvement.

Key words: adjustments facilitators; parent-school relationship; student aid program

Children who change schools, especially those who change schools, frequently are at risk for a variety of emotional, behavioral, and learning problems. For example, children who move frequently have higher rates of behavior problem and grade retention (Ingersoll, Scammon, & Eckerling, 1989; Wood, Halfon, Scarlata Newacheck, & Nessim 1993). Estimates suggest that 20 percent to 25 percent of students change schools each year. The figures are higher in poverty area schools. Many make the transition easily. For some, however, entry into a new school is difficult. Those entering late in a school year often find it especially hard to connect and adjust (Adelman & Taylor, 1991; Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982). School change means leaving old friends and having to fit into new social and school structures--often with different standards and

expectations. When changes in residence are frequent, youths may feel a sense of powerlessness. Sensing little control over their fate, some give up or lash out

For many of the same reasons, parents, too, may find the transition difficult. As they grapple with the problems associated with family relocation, their involvement with a new school often depends on the degree to which the school reaches out to them. A school's staff, parents, and students can use the crisis-like experience that often is associated with relocation as an opportunity to promote growth and enhance involvement in schooling for students and their families.

This article reports on the approach to intervention developed for use by schools to facilitate the initial school adjustment of newly entering students and their families, especially those who enter after a school session is underway (Early Assistance for Students and Families Project, 1993 b). Also

dimmed are the type of structural mechanisms required to establish and maintain the desired intervention activity (Early Assistance for Students and Families Project, 1993a). The intervention has evolved from a collaboration between a school district and a university and reflects the efforts of a cadre of social workers, psychologists, teachers, and community representatives. General discussions of the conceptual underpinnings for the work are found in the intervention literature on transactional and ecological perspectives. A psychological sense of community and school-based services (for example, see Adelman & Taylor, 1993, in press; General Accounting Office, 1993; Germain, 1982; Pennekamp, 1992; Samson, 1974). For specific approaches used to facilitate school transitions, the project benefitted from experiences reported in earlier studies (see Cardenas, Taylor, & Adelman, 1993; de Agenda 1984; General Accounting Office, 1994; Hammons & Olson, 1988; Lash & KirkPatrick, 1990; Lieberman, 1990; Newman, 1988).

Welcoming. Establishing a Psychological Sense of Community

The work reported in this article is being carried out as part of the Early Assistance for Students and Families Project, a demonstration project funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Initially, the project provided a special intervention program at 24 schools for students not Making a successful adjustment to school (Adelman & Taylor, 1991). Project staff take as a given that "welcoming" is a first step toward helping new students and their families make a successful transition into a new school.

Welcoming should not be viewed simply as

a set Of activities for those at a school to carry out. The danger in approaching the topic in this way is that only those who are designated as welcomers may engage in the activity, and even they May only go through the motions. Consequently, there may be little commitment to helping new students and their families Make a successful transition into the school, and the efforts that are Made May not be seen in their broader context.

The project approaches the topic of welcoming new students and their families within the broad context of creating and maintaining a psychological sense of community at a school (*McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Sarason. 1974*). Essential to such a sense of community is the commitment of staff, students, and families to interact positively with each other and to provide social support, to reach out to new students and their families, and then to involve them in the life of the school. Extrapolating from the relevant literature. such a commitment is achieved best when mechanisms are put in place to ensure sufficient social support, ready access to information, instruction on how to function effectively in the school's culture, and appropriate ways to become involved in decision making.

Intervention

The authors conceptualize the intervention in terms of major phases and basic tasks. It is important to emphasize that the first major concern in efforts to enhance welcoming and home involvement is overcoming barriers that make it hard for students and families to function in the new community and school.

Research on barriers has suggested a variety of factors (for example, familial mores, cultural differences, job, social class, communication skills, attitudes of school personnel) that interfere with successful

transitions to new settings and make involvement at school difficult. Barriers can be categorized as institutional, personal, or impersonal, with each type encompassing negative attitudes, lack of mechanisms and skills, or practical deterrents. Considerable attention is paid to barriers such as a student's shyness or lack of social skills and parent work schedules or lack of child care. We have found that less systematic attention is paid to institutional barriers. These barriers include inadequate resources (money, space, time) and lack of interest or hostile attitudes on the part of staff, administration, and community toward interpersonal and home involvements; they also include the failure to establish and maintain formal mechanisms and related skills for involving homes. For example, there may be no policy commitment to facilitate a sense of community through enhanced strategies for welcoming students and families, and there may be no formal mechanisms for planning and implementing appropriate activity or for upgrading the skills of staff, students, and parents to carry out desired activities.

Phases

Strategies to enhance welcoming to a school and to increase home involvement in schooling evolve in three overlapping phases. The first phase involves 2 broad focus. It emphasizes use of general procedures to welcome and facilitate adjustment and participation of 211 who are ready, willing, and able to participate. The focus then moves to those who need just a bit more personalized assistance. Such assistance may include personal invitations, ongoing support for interaction with others and involvement in activities, aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive, and so forth. Finally, to the degree feasible, the focus

narrows to those who have not made in effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved because of major barriers, an intense lack of interest, or negative attitudes. This phase continues to use personalized contacts but adds cost intensive special procedures.

Tasks

In pursuing each intervention phase, there are four major intervention tasks: (1) establishing a mechanism for planning, implementing, and evolving programmatic activity; (2) creating strategies for Welcoming and initially involving new students and their families (for example, information and outreach to new students and families. A school wide welcoming atmosphere. a series of specific new student and new parent orientation processes); (3) providing social supports and facilitating involvement (for example, peer buddies or personal invitations to join relevant ongoing activities); and (4) Maintaining support and involvement, including provision of special help for an extended period of time if necessary.

Establishing a Program Mechanism

Planning, implementing, and evolving programs to enhance activities for welcoming and involving new students and families requires institutional organization and involvement in the form of operational Mechanisms such as a steering committee. For a program to be effective at a school, it must be a school program and not an add-on or special project, and there must be a group designated and committed to its long-term survival. In the case of efforts to enhance the welcoming and involvement of new students and families, a useful mechanism is a Welcoming Steering Committee. Such a committee is designed to adapt new strategies to fit in with what a school is already doing

and to provide leadership for evolving and maintaining a welcoming program over the years.

The initial group usually consists of a school administrator (for example, principal or assistant principal), a support service staff member (for example, a dropout counselor, Chapter I coordinator, or school psychologist), one or two interested teachers, the staff member who coordinates volunteers, an office staff representative, and possibly one or two parents. A change agent (for example, an organization facilitator) is useful in helping initiate the group and can serve as an ex officio member. Eventually such a group can evolve to deal with all school-related transitions.

The first tasks involve clarification of the specific role and functions of the group and identification of possible additional members. activities already in place at the school for welcoming students and their families, activities carried out at other schools (for example, extended welcoming activities support for at-risk students, use of volunteers, parent involvement), and minimal structures necessary to ensure there is a focus on welcoming new students and families (for example, a planning group, budget for welcoming activities, evaluation procedures regarding enhancing- welcoming). Based on the information gathered, a needs assessment walk-through of the school can be carried out with a view to what new students and families see and experience. The specific focus is on such matters as front office welcoming messages and support procedures: Are appropriate welcoming materials used? Is there a need for other languages to communicate with families? Are there tour procedures for new parents and students? Are there appropriate welcoming and social support procedures for a student in a classroom (for example, peer greeters and peer buddies and special welcoming materials

for newcomers)? Are there appropriate procedures for introducing parents to their child's teachers and others? After completing the needs assessment, the committee can plan for introducing new strategies.

Introducing Major new programs into a school usually involves significant institutional change. In such cases, a change agent may be a necessary resource. The Early Assistance for Students and Families Project has found that such an organization facilitator can help establish the mechanisms needed at the site, demonstrate program components and facets, and provide on-the-job in service education for staff who are to adapt, implement, and maintain the mechanisms and program

Creating Welcoming and Initial Home Involvement Strategies.

It is not uncommon for students and parents to feel unwelcome at a new school. The problem can begin with their first contacts. Efforts to enhance welcoming and to facilitate positive involvement must counter factors that make the setting uninviting and develop ways to make it attractive. This task can be viewed as the welcoming or invitation problem. From a psychological perspective, the welcoming problem is enmeshed with attitudes of school staff, students, and parents about involving new students and families. Welcoming is facilitated when attitudes are positive, and positive attitudes seem most likely when those concerned perceive personal benefits as outweighing potential costs.

A prime focus in addressing welcoming is on ensuring that most communications and interactions between school personnel and students and families convey a welcoming tone. This is accomplished through formal communications to students and families, procedures for reaching out to individuals and informal interactions. The following are some general strategies for making initial contacts

welcoming:

- * Set up a welcoming table (identified with a welcome sign) at the front entrance to the school, and recruit and train volunteers to meet and greet everyone who comes through the door.

- * Plan with the office staff ways to Meet and greet strangers (by smiling and being inviting). Provide them with welcoming materials and information sheets regarding registration steps (with translations as appropriate). Encourage the use of volunteers in the office so that there are sufficient resources to take the time to greet and assist new students and families. It helps to have a designated registrar and even designated registration times.

- * Prepare a welcoming booklet that clearly says "Welcome" and provides some helpful information about who's who at the school, what types assistance are available to new students and families, and tips about how the school runs. (Avoid using this as a place to lay down the rules; this can be rather an uninviting first contact.) Prepare other materials to assist students and families in making the transition and connecting with ongoing activities.

- * Establish a student welcoming club (perhaps train the student council or leadership class to take this on as a special project). These students can provide tours and some orientation for new students, including an initial introduction to key staff at the school as feasible.

- * Establish a welcoming club consisting of parents and volunteers to provide regular tours and orientations for new parents, including an initial introduction to key staff at the school as feasible. A welcoming video can be developed as useful aid.

- * Dedicate a bulletin board somewhere near the entrance to the school that says "Welcome" and includes such things as pictures of school staff, a diagram of the

school and its facilities, pictures of students who entered the school during the past one or two weeks, information on tours and orientations, special meetings for new students and families, and so forth.

- * Each teacher should have several students who are willing and able to greet strangers who come to the classroom. Recent arrivals often are interested in welcoming the next set of new enrollees.

- * Each teacher should have a plan for assisting new students and families in making a smooth transition into the class. This plan should include a process for introducing the student to the others in the class as soon as the new student arrives. Some teachers may want to arrange with the office specified times for bringing a new student to the classroom. An introductory welcoming conference should be conducted with the student and family as soon as feasible. A useful welcoming aid is to present both the student and the family member with welcoming folders or some other welcoming gift such as coupons from local businesses that have adopted the school.

- * In addition to the classroom greeter, the teacher should have several students who are willing and able to be a special buddy to a new student for a couple of weeks and hopefully a regular buddy thereafter. This buddy can provide the type of social support that allows the new student to learn about the school culture and to become involved in various activities.

- * Establish a way for representatives of organized student and parent groups to make direct contact with new students and families to invite them to learn about activities and to assist them in joining in when they find activities that appeal to them.

- * Establish groups designed to help new students and families learn about the community and the school and to allow them to express concerns and have them addressed.

Such groups also allow new students and families to connect with each other as another form of social support.

* Develop a variety of ways students and their families can feel an ongoing connection with the school and classroom (for example, opportunities to volunteer help, positive feedback regarding participation, letters home that tell all about what's happening).

An early emphasis in addressing the welcoming problem should be on establishing formal processes that convey a general sense of welcome to all and extend a personalized invitation to those who appear to need something more. In this respect, communications and invitations to students and their families come in two forms: (1) general communications (for example, oral and written communications when a new student registers, classroom announcements, Mass distribution of flyers or newsletters) and (2) special, personalized contacts (for example, personal conferences and notes from the teacher).

For those who are not responsive to general invitations, the next logical step is to extend special invitations and increase personalized contact. Special invitations are directed at designated individuals are intended to overcome personal attitudinal barriers, and can be used to elicit information about other persisting barriers.

Providing Social Supports and Facilitating Involvement

Social supports and specific processes to facilitate involvement are necessary to address barriers, to sanction the participation of new students and families in any option to the degree each finds feasible (for example, legitimizing initial minimal degrees of involvement and frequent changes in area of involvement), to account for cultural and

individual diversity, to enable participation of those with minimal skills, and to provide social and academic supports to improve participation skills. In all these facilitative efforts, peers (students and parents) who are actively involved at the school can play a major role as welcomers and mentors.

If a new student or family seems extremely reluctant about school involvement, exceptional efforts may be required. In cases where the reluctance stems from skill deficits (for example, an inability to speak English or lack of social or functional skills), providing special assistance with skills is a relatively direct approach to pursue. However, all such interventions must be pursued in ways that minimize stigma and maximize positive attitudes. About half of those who enter late in the school year seem especially isolated and in need of very personalized outreach efforts. In such instances, designated peer buddies reach out and personally invite new students and parents who seem not to be making a good transition; they arrange to spend time with each individual introducing him or her to others and to activities in the school and community.

At some sites, newcomers are offered a mutual interest group composed of others with the same cultural background or a mutual support group (for example, a bicultural transition group for students or parents [Cardenas, Taylor, & Adelman, 1993] or a parent self-help group [Simoni & Adelman, 1993]). Parent groups might even meet away from the school at a time when working parents can participate. The school's role would be to help initiate the groups and provide consultation as needed. It is important to provide regular opportunities for students, families and staff to share their heritage and interests and celebrate the cultural and individual diversity of the school community.

Maintaining Involvement. As difficult as it

is to involve some newcomers initially, maintaining their involvement may be even a more difficult matter. Maintaining involvement can be seen as a problem of providing continuous support for learning, growth, and success, including feedback about how involvement is personally beneficial, and minimizing feelings of incompetence and being blamed, censured, or coerced.

Case Examples

Prototype

Jose and his family came to enroll at the school in March. His family had just moved into the area. As Jose and his mother entered the building, they were greeted at the front entrance by a parent volunteer. She was seated at a table above which was a brightly colored sign proclaiming "Welcome to Midvale St. School" (the words were translated into other languages common in the community). On hearing that the family was there to enroll Jose, the volunteer gave them a welcoming brochure with some basic information about the school and the steps for enrollment. Jose's mother indicated she had not brought all the documentation that the brochure said was needed, such as evidence of up-to-date immunizations. The volunteer worked with her to identify where to obtain what she lacked and gave her some of the registration material to fill out at home. A plan was made for them to return with the necessary material.

The next day Jose was enrolled. He and his mother were introduced to the principal and several other school staff, all of whom greeted them warmly. Then Jose was escorted to his class. The teacher also greeted him warmly and introduced him to the class; she asked one of the designated welcoming buddies to sit with him. This peer welcomer explained about the class and told Jose he would show him around, introduce him to others, and generally

help him make a good start over the next few days.

Meanwhile, back in the office, Jose's mother was talking with a parent volunteer who was explaining about the school, the local community, and the various ways parents were involved at the school. She was encouraged to pick out an activity that interested her, and she was told someone else who was involved in that activity would call her to invite her to attend.

Over the next week, Jose and his family received a variety of special invitations to be part of the school community. After a few weeks, Jose and his family were contacted to be certain that they felt they had made a successful transition into the school.

Importance of Follow-up

The case of Jessica illustrates the role of welcoming follow-up strategies in helping establish the need to address significant social and emotional problems interfering with school adjustment. When a follow-up interview was conducted with Jessica, she indicated that the other children were picking on her. She also said she was having trouble with reading. A check with her teacher confirmed the situation; Jessica was seen as sad and depressed. It was decided that a trained volunteer supervised by a social worker would be assigned to provide additional support with a specific focus on social and emotional concerns.

As Jessica warmed to the volunteer, she began to tell about how she, her mother, and her younger brothers had all been physically abused by her father. She had also witnessed his drug dealing and finally his murder. The volunteer informed her supervisor, who made an independent assessment and concluded there was a clear need for therapeutic intervention. The social worker made a

referral and coordinated a plan of action between the therapist and the involved school staff. A priority was placed on ensuring that Jessica would have a safe, supportive environment at school. Over the ensuing months, Jessica came to feel more secure and indicated she felt that way, those working with her agreed. As the volunteer working with her put it, Jessica was now "shining-looking brilliant."

How Follow-up Changes Perspective

Another poignant example is seen in the case of a family recently arrived from Mexico. The mother was a single parent trying to support two sons. Both boys had difficulty adjusting at school, especially Jaime, who was in the sixth grade. He had little previous schooling and could not read or handle school task expectations. Follow-up indicated that he -was frequently absent. His teacher felt the mother was not committed to getting the boys to school. "I understand they go to the beach!" the teacher reported with some affect.

The principal decided that the problem warranted a home visit from a school social worker. The family lived in cramped quarters in a "residential hotel" about six blocks from the school. During the visit, the mother confided she was ill and would soon have gall bladder surgery. She also explained that Jaime went to the beach to search for aluminum cans as a source of family income.

With awareness of the family's plight, the perception of the school staff, especially Jaime's teacher, shifted. No one now believed the family did not care about schooling, and proactive steps were introduced to provide assistance. The school called on the Parent Teacher Association and a local merchant to provide some food and clothing. The social worker assisted the mother in making plans for the boys' care during her hospitalization.

Volunteers were recruited to assist the boys with their classroom tasks. Both boys were enrolled in the after-school program, where they made new friends during play activities and also received assistance with homework. Subsequent follow-up found significant improvements in attendance and performance. Toward the end of the year, a counselor worked with the middle school Jaime would be attending to ensure there would be continued support for him and his mother during this next major transition.

Special Focus on Home Involvement

A critical element in establishing a positive sense of community at a school and in facilitating students' school adjustment and performance is the involvement of families in schooling. Parent involvement in schools is a prominent item on the education reform agenda for the 1990s (Comer, 1984; Haynes, Comer, & HamiltonLee, 1989; Jackson & Cooper, 1989; Marockie & Jones 1987; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). It is, of course, not a new concern. As Davies (1987) reminded us, the "questions and conflict about parent and community relationships to schools began in this country when schools began" (p. 147).

A review of the literature on parents and schooling indicates widespread endorsement of parent involvement. As Epstein (1987) noted,

the recent acknowledgments of the importance of parent involvement are built on research findings accumulated over two decades that show that children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities.... The evidence is clear that parental

encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account. (pp. 119-120)

With respect to students with school problems, parent involvement has been mostly discussed in legal terms (for example, participation in the individualized education plan process). There has been little systematic attention paid to the value of and ways to involve the home in the efforts to improve student achievement. The terms "parent involvement" and even "family involvement" are too limiting. Given extended families and the variety of child caretakers, involvement of the home is the minimum required.

To involve the home, a staff member must reach out to parents and encourage them to drop in, be volunteers, go on field trips, participate in publishing a community newsletter, organize social events, plan and attend learning workshops, meet with the teacher to learn more about their child's curriculum and interests, and establish family social networks. It is imperative that the only contact with parents not be when they are called in to discuss their child's learning or behavior difficulties. Parents who feel unwelcome or feel scolded cannot be expected to view the school as an inviting setting.

In keeping with the increased focus on enhancing home involvement in schools and schooling, project staff have worked to expand understanding of the concepts and processes involved in doing so (Early Assistance for Students and Families Project, 1993b; also see Adelman, 1994). Figure 1 provides a graphic outline of major facets dealt with in this area. As is illustrated by the

figure, schools determined to enhance home involvement must be clear as to their intent and the types of involvement they want to foster. Then, they must establish and maintain mechanisms to carry out intervention phases and tasks in 2 sequential manner.

Conclusion

The intervention described in this article was developed in a multi-disciplinary effort that included social workers, educators, and psychologists, along with parents and students. Throughout the process, however, great care has been taken to avoid conveying any sense that development and implementation of such programs requires special personnel. Helping students and their families make a new start at a new school is the responsibility of every one at the site, and the task of ensuring that programs are in place can be carried out by a variety of school staff. Social workers, of course, are uniquely equipped to lead the way.

How well a school addresses the problems of welcoming and involving new students and families is an important qualitative indicator of program adequacy and staff attitudes and, thus, is a probable predictor of efficacy. Programs and related mechanisms and processes for addressing these problems can be viewed as essential to any effort to restructure schools.

Interventions to enhance welcoming and home involvement are as complex as any other psychological and educational intervention. Clearly, such activity requires considerable time, space, materials, and competence, and these ingredients are purchased with financial resources. Basic staffing must be underwritten. Additional staff may be needed: at the very least, teachers, specialists, and administrators need "released" time. Furthermore, if such interventions are to be

planned, implemented, and evaluated effectively, those given the responsibility will require instruction, consultation, and supervision.

The success of programs to enhance welcoming and home involvement is first and foremost in the hands of policy-makers. If these programs are to be more than another desired but unachieved set of aims of educational reformers, policy-makers must understand the nature and scope of what is involved. A comprehensive intervention

perspective makes it evident that although money alone cannot solve the problem, money is a necessary prerequisite. It is patently unfair to hold school personnel accountable for yet another Major reform if they are not given the support necessary for accomplishing it. In an era when new sources of funding are unlikely, such programs must be assigned high priority and funds must be reallocated in keeping with the level of priority. To do less is to guarantee the status quo.

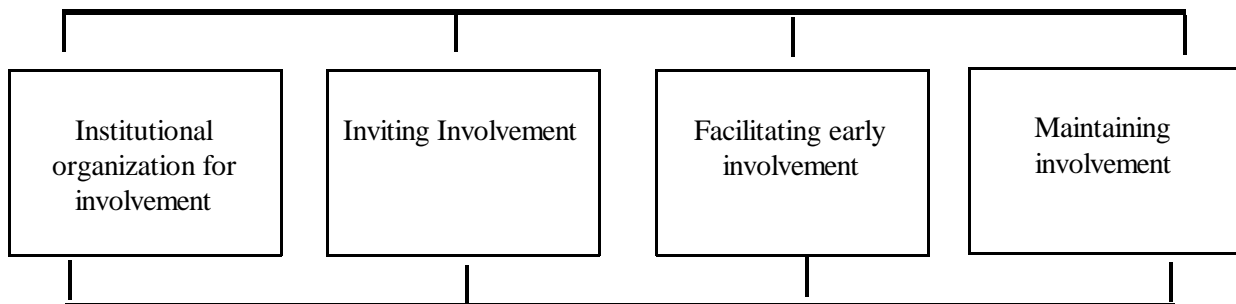
Figure 1

Enhancing Home Involvement: Intent, Intervention Tasks, and Ways Parents and Families Might Be Involved

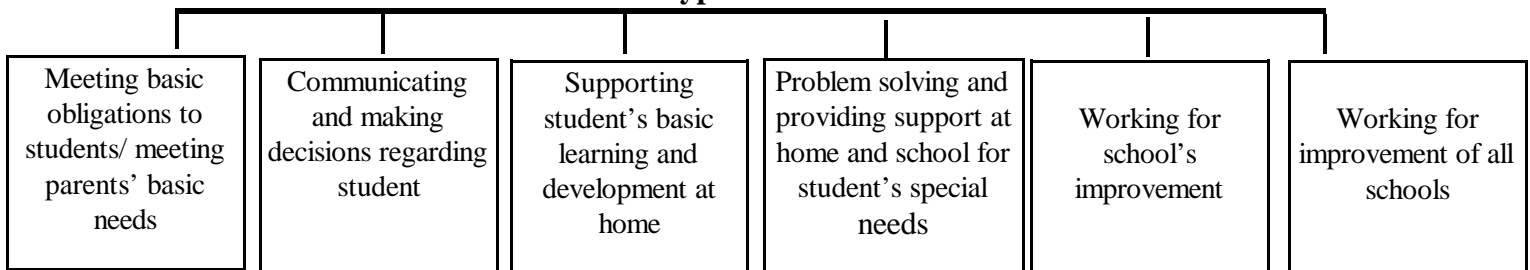
Agendas for Involving Homes

- socialization
- economics
- political
- helping

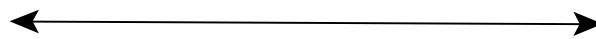
Major Intervention Tasks



Continuum of Types of Home Involvement ^b



Improve individual functioning
Functioning



Improve system

Source Adelman, H. S. (1994). Intervening to enhance home involvement in schooling. *Intervention in Schools and Clinics*, 29, 285-300. 1994. PRO-ED, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

*Although the tasks remain constant, the breadth of intervention focus can vary over three sequential phases: (1) broadband contacts focused on those who are receptive, (2) personalized contacts added for those who need a little inducement, and (3) intensive special contacts added for those who are extremely unreceptive.

*besides participating in different types of home involvement, participants differ in the frequency, level, quality, and impact of their involvement.

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