Appendix A
Starting and Maintaining Programs

Good ideas and missionary zeal are sometimes enough to change the thinking and actions of individuals; they are rarely, if ever, effective in changing complicated organizations (like the school) with traditions, dynamics, and goals of their own.

Seymour Sarason

There is no lack of good ideas for improving schools. And there have been exciting demonstration projects showing the promise of many ideas. But, it has proven to be an extremely difficult task to go beyond simply disseminating ideas and project descriptions.

The establishment and maintenance of new school programs require the joint effort of all who may be affected or hope to benefit. As Seymour Sarason has stressed, a fundamental principle in developing new programs in schools is that: “those who are affected by the change should have some part in the change process because only through such involvement can they become committed to the change. They...come to see the change as theirs.”

Of course, more is involved. A considerable amount of organizational change research and practice in schools, corporations, and community agencies support the value of (a) high level of policy commitment that is translated into appropriate resources (leadership, space, budget, time); (b) incentives for change, such as intrinsically valued outcomes, expectations for success, recognitions, and rewards; (c) procedural options from which those expected to implement change can select those they see as workable; (d) a willingness to establish that adopts ways to improve organizational health; (e) use of change agents who are accomplishing change in stages and with realistic timelines, (g) providing feedback on progress; and (h) institutionalizing support mechanisms to maintain and evolve changes and to generate periodic renewal.

A Working Framework

Significant program changes at a school involve substantive systemic changes at multiple levels. For this to happen, a complex set of interventions is required. For this to happen effectively and efficiently, the interventions must be guided by sophisticated system change models. Such models address the question “How do we get from here to there?” Whether focused on one or many settings, the process can be conceived in terms of four overlapping phases: (1) creating readiness – by enhancing a climate/culture for change, (2) initial implementation – where the new program is installed in stages using well-designed guidance and support mechanisms, (3) institutionalization – accomplished by ensuring there are mechanisms to maintain and enhance productive changes, and (4) ongoing evolution – through use of mechanisms to improve quality and provide continuing support.

Table 1 and Figure 1 highlight specific tasks during each phase form the perspective of pursuing comprehensive school reforms. A few points related to each phase is discussed below. (For a more detailed discussion, see Adelman & Taylor, 1997).
Table 1
Major Phases and Tasks in Intervening to Establish New Approaches

Phase I. Creating Readiness: Enhancing the Climate/Culture for Change
Designated staff

1. Disseminates the prototype to create interest (promotion and marketing)
2. Evaluates indications of interest
3. Makes in-depth presentations to build stakeholder consensus
4. Negotiates a policy framework and conditions of engagement with sanctioned bodies
5. Elicits ratification and sponsorship by stakeholders

Designated staff works with organization leadership to account for new approaches by

6. Modifying the organizational and programmatic infrastructure
7. Clarifying need to add temporary mechanisms for the change process
8. Restructuring time (the school day, time allocation over the year)
9. Conducting stakeholder foundation-building activity

Phase II. Initial Implementation: Adapting and Phasing-in the Prototype with Well-Designed Guidance and Support
Designated staff works with organization leadership to

10. Establish temporary mechanisms to facilitate desired changes
11. Design appropriate adaptations of new approaches
12. Develop a site-specific plan for phasing-in new approaches

Designated staff works with appropriate stakeholders to

13. Plan and implement ongoing stakeholder development/empowerment programs
14. Facilitate day-by-day implementation of new approaches
15. Establish formative evaluation procedures

Phase III. Institutionalization: Ensuring the Infrastructure Maintains and Enhances Productive Changes
Designated staff works with organization leadership to

16. Institutionalize ownership, guidance, and support
17. Plan and ensure commitment to ongoing leadership
18. Plan and ensure commitment to maintaining mechanisms for planning, implementation, and coordination
19. Plan for continuing education and technical assistance to maintain and enhance productive changes and generate renewal (including programs for new arrivals)

Phase IV. Ongoing Evolution
Designated staff continues to work with organization leadership to

20. Facilitate expansion of the formative evaluations system (in keeping with summative evaluation needs)
21. Clarify ways to improve new approaches
22. Compile information on outcome efficacy
Figure 1.

**Phase I**
Creating Readiness:
Enhancing the Climate/Culture for Change

1. Disseminates the prototype to create interest (promotion and marketing)
2. Evaluates indications of interest
3. Makes in-depth presentations to build stakeholder consensus
4. Negotiates a policy framework and conditions of engagement with sanctioned bodies
5. Elicits ratification and sponsorship by stakeholders

**Phase II**
Initial Implementation:
Adapting and Phasing-in the Prototype with Well-Designed Guidance and Support

6. Redesign the organizational and programmatic infrastructure
7. Clarify need to add temporary mechanisms for the scale-up process
8. Restructure time (the school day, time allocation over the year)
9. Conduct stakeholder foundation-building activity

**Phase III**
Institutionalization:
Ensuring the Infrastructure Maintains and Enhances Productive Changes

10. Establish temporary mechanisms to facilitate the scale-up process
11. Design appropriate prototype adaptations
12. Develop site-specific plan to phase-in prototype
13. Plans and implements ongoing stakeholder development/empowerment programs
14. Facilitates day-by-day prototype implementation
15. Establishes formative evaluation procedures

**Phase IV**
Ongoing Evolution

16. Institutionalize ownership, guidance, and support
17. Plan and ensure commitment to ongoing leadership
18. Plan and ensure commitment to maintain mechanisms for planning, implementation, and coordination
19. Plan for continuing education and technical assistance to maintain and enhance productive changes and generate renewal (including programs for new arrivals)

Designated *Staff* continues contact with *Organization Leadership*

20. Facilitates expansion of the formative evaluation system (in keeping with summative evaluation needs)
21. Clarifies ways to improve the prototype
22. Compiles information on outcome efficacy

Designated staff works at site with *Organization Leadership* to

Designated staff works with appropriate *Stakeholders*

Organization Leadership works with *Stakeholders* in evolving the prototype
Permeating every task is the reality that processes must reflect sound intervention fundamentals, with special attention to the “problem of the match” (sometimes called the “problem of fit”). The essence of all intervention is an effort to match an appropriate relationship between the current system, such as an individual or organization, and the processes used to produce desired changes (cf. Adelman & Taylor, 1994). Complex interventions, of course, seldom are implemented in a completely planned and linear manner. The many practicalities and unforeseen and uncontrollable events that arise require a flexible, problem-solving approach. Articulation of a model can guide planning, but those facilitating the process must be prepared to capitalize on every opportunity that can move the process ahead.

Phase I – Creating Readiness: Enhancing the Climate for Change

One somewhat naive approach to comprehensive change is simply to mandate program restructuring and impose accountability. Mandates alone, however, often lead to change in form rather than substance. In organizations, comprehensive cultural shifts evolve slowly in transaction with establishment of specific organizational and programmatic changes. Early efforts to alter an organization’s culture emphasize creation of an official and psychological climate for change, including overcoming institutionalized resistance, negative attitudes, and other barriers to change. New attitudes must be engendered. New working relationships must be established. New skills must be learned and practiced. Negative reactions and dynamics related to change must be anticipated and addressed. And, as the excitement of newness wears off and the demands of change sap energy, the problems of maintaining vigor and direction arise and must be countered.

Creating readiness for new approaches involves tasks that produce fundamental changes in a school’s culture. Substantive change is most likely when high levels of positive energy among stakeholders are mobilized and appropriately directed over extended periods of time. Thus, one of the first concerns is how to mobilize and direct the energy of a critical mass of participants to ensure readiness and commitment. A sound approach to creating readiness proceeds in ways that establish and maintain an effective match with the motivation and capabilities of involved parties. Such an approach is built around understanding of the organization and its stakeholders, involves stakeholders in making substantive decisions and redesigning structural mechanisms, emphasizes personal relevance when identifying potential benefits of change, elicits genuine public statements of commitment, and uses processes that empower and create a sense of community. In this respect, it is worth noting importance of (a) leadership that is inspiring, talented, shared, and committed to both setting and members, (b) a belief system that inspires growth, is strength-based and focused beyond the self, (c) an opportunity role structure that is pervasive, highly accessible, and multifunctional, and (d) a support system that is encompassing, peer-based, and provides a sense of community.

To convey a sense of what is involved in creating readiness, we offer a brief discussion of three key topics (1) vision and leadership for change, (2) policy direction, support, and safeguards for risk-taking, and (3) mechanism redesign.

Leading the Way

The process begins with a vision of desired changes and an understanding of how to achieve them. One without the other is insufficient.
Talking about new ideas rarely is a problem for educational and community leaders. Problems arise when they try to introduce new ideas into specific locales and settings. In effect, leaders have a triple burden as they attempt to change schools. The first is to ensure that substantive ideas are considered; the second is to build consensus for change; finally, they must pursue effective implementation – including specific strategies for financing, establishing, maintaining, and enhancing productive changes.

A thread running through all this is the need to stimulate increasing interest and general motivational readiness among a sufficient number of stakeholders. To clarify the point: In education a new idea or practice almost always finds a receptive audience among a small group. Many more, however, are politely unresponsive and reluctant to change things, and some are actively resistant. Successful change at any level of education restructuring requires the committed involvement of a critical mass of policy makers, staff, and parents. Thus, an early task confronting leaders is that of enhancing motivational readiness for change among a significant proportion of those who are reluctant and resistant.

Enhancing interest in adopting new ideas involves an appreciation of promotional and marketing strategies. From this perspective, change efforts are viewed as beginning with “market research.” The point is to learn enough about the existing motivation and capabilities of potential adopters so that introductory presentations and beginning strategies are designed in ways that create an effective “match”.

Examples of key objective at this stage include (a) clarifying potential gains without creating unrealistic expectations, (b) delineating costs in a context that clarifies how benefits outweigh costs, (c) offering incentives that mesh with intrinsic motive, and (d) conveying the degree to which the prototype can be adapted while emphasizing that certain facets are essential and nonnegotiable.

### Forms of Introductory Activity

Because it is so complex to convey a promising but realistic picture of a comprehensive prototype to various stakeholder groups, a series of on-site introductory presentations usually are necessary.

All of the following can be used to create interest and begin a dialogue.

- Orientations sessions (introductory personal and media presentations)
- Follow-up written material distributed over a period of weeks (e.g., brief as well as extensive descriptions of the prototype; official and media reports)
- Graphic representations to be posted and circulated for information and to stimulate discussion and questions (e.g., charts, illustrations, photos, graphs, figures, tables)
- Interactive question and answer forums for various stakeholder groups (including use of e-mail)
- Focus group workshops
Policy Direction, Support, and Protection

One reason so many programs come and go in schools is that new approaches often are introduced and funded as special projects. Activities are “added-on” until funding ends, then dropped. Substantive and lasting system change requires a process that ensures informed commitment, ownership, and on-going support on the part of policy makers. This involves strategies to create interest and formalize agreements about making fundamental changes. We find three steps essential: (1) building on introductory presentations to provide indepth information and understanding as a basis for establishing consensus, (2) negotiation of a policy framework and a set of agreements for engagement – including a realistic budget, and (3) informed and voluntary ratification of agreements by legitimate representatives of all major stakeholders.

**Indepth interactive presentations to build consensus.** Substantive changes are unlikely without adoption of new policies at all relevant jurisdictional levels. Appreciation of this need arises from indepth understanding of both the new approach and the processes involved in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing productive changes. In selling new ideas, it is tempting to accentuate their promising attributes and minimize complications. School policy makers frequently are asked simply for a go-ahead rather than for their informed commitment. Sometimes they assent to get extra-resources; sometimes they agree because they want their constituents to feel they are doing something to improve schools.

Indepth understanding requires more than information that can be acquired form an initial overview presentation. Informed commitment and consensus building evolve from active exploration of fundamentals and specific practices. In our work at schools and district-wide, the core of the activity is a series for personalized sessions for small groups of stakeholders using an interactive format that builds on introductory presentations in ways that generate spiral learning. Such sessions spell out the nature and scope of new approaches – including the benefits and costs of using them and of the processes by which the prototype is installed. Sessions are tailored to address relevant differences among stakeholder groups through personal and media presentations, use of written and graphic materials, question and answer sessions, and focus groups.

**Negotiating a policy framework and conditions for engagement.** There is little reason to engage in the work at starting a new program if the end product is likely to be only its form and not its substance. For any new program, there are principles, components, elements, and standards that define its essence. These aspects should not be negotiable and agreements about these matters should be a first condition for engaging in systemic change activity. One of the most perplexing facets to negotiate is the time frame. The more complex the changes, the longer they take and the costlier it is to implement and evaluate them. Adopters usually want quick processes and results and, of course, rarely can afford costly innovations. Compromises are inevitable here, but must be arrived at with great care not to undermine the substance of proposed changes.

Informed commitment is strengthened and operationalized through negotiating formal agreements at each jurisdictional level and among various stakeholders (see Figure 2). Policy statements articulate the commitment to substantive changes. Memoranda of understanding and contracts specify agreements about funding sources, resource appropriations, personnel functions, incentives and safeguards for risk-taking, stakeholder development, immediate and long-term commitments and timelines, accountability procedures, and so forth.
Examples of mechanisms for enhancing communication and collaboration include use of
(1) commissions, (2) task forces, (3) roundtables, (4) planning councils,
(5) coordinating councils, (6) consortiums, (7) organization analysts and facilitators

Activities for such groups encompass
(1) Broad-based, time specific studies, analyses, and recommendations
(2) Information dissemination, advocacy, and consensus building
(3) Policy shaping
Ratification and sponsorship by stakeholders. The process is aided when the decision to adopt new approaches is ratified by sanctioned representatives of enfranchised stakeholder groups. Developing and negotiating policies, contracts, and other formal agreements is a complex business. We find that addressing the many logistics and legalities requires extensive involvement of a small number of authorized and well-informed stakeholder representatives. Thus, in pursuing these tasks, our commitment to including all stakeholders moves from a town hall approach to a representative democratic process.

At first, endorsement is in principle; over time, it is manifested though sustained support. When ratification reflects effective consensus building, change efforts benefit from the broad base of informed commitment, ownership, and active sponsorship. These attributes are essential in ensuring requisite support and protections for those who must bear the burden of learning new ways and who risk dips in performance and productivity while doing so.

Although formulation of policy and related agreements takes considerable time and other resources, their importance cannot be overemphasized. Not taking the time more often than not results in major misunderstandings and poor results. Failure to establish and successfully maintain new approaches in the educational and social service arenas probably is attributable in great measure to the inadequate was in which these matters are addressed.

Stakeholder Foundation-Building

Stakeholder development is conceived as spanning four stages: orientation, foundation-building, capacity-building, and continuing education. Some aspects at each stage are for all stakeholders; other aspects are designed for designated groups and individuals. Initial orientation is accomplished through indepth interactive presentations for building consensus. Foundation-building begins when structural mechanisms are redesigned. The objectives at this stage are to enhance prototype assimilation by all stakeholders, as well as increasing their understanding of and ability to cope with the problems of organizational change. This strengthens and maintains a broad base of informed commitment, active sponsorship, and collaboration. Foundation-building also strengthens the skills of those responsible for various structural mechanisms – including the administrative team, planning and implementation teams, lead personnel, and participating parents. Because of “turnover” among stakeholders, strategies must be developed to provide new arrivals with appropriate orientation and foundation-building experiences.
Phase II – Initial Implementation

Initial implementation involves adapting and phasing-in new approaches with well-designed guidance and support. This requires working with the organization’s leadership to steer and phase-in the new approach and providing stakeholders with guidance and support for change. Throughout this phase, formative evaluation procedures are established to provide feedback for program development. Key mechanisms include (1) a site-based steering mechanism to guide and support the changes, (2) a change agent and change team, and (3) mentors and coaches (see attached Exhibit).

Phase III – Institutionalizing New Approaches

Maintaining and enhancing changes is as difficult as making them in the first place. Even when prototypes are implemented, they often are not sustained over time. Institutionalizing new approaches entails ensuring that the organization assumes long-term ownership and a blueprint exists for countering forces that erode progress. The aim is to sustain and enhance productive changes and generate renewal. Institutionalization, however, is more than a technical process. It requires assimilation of and ongoing adherence to the values inherent in the prototype’s underlying rationale. Critical in all this are specific plans that guarantee ongoing and enhanced leadership and that delineate ways in which planning, implementation, coordination, and continuing education mechanisms are maintained.

Phase IV – Ongoing Evolution and Renewal

The ongoing evolution of organizations and programs is the product of efforts to account for accomplishments, deal with changing times and conditions, generate renewal, and incorporate new knowledge. Properly designed continuing education consolidates new approaches and fosters further change through exposure to new ideas. Ongoing evolution and renewal also are fostered by evaluation designed to document accomplishments and improve quality.
Exhibit

Temporary Infrastructure

Steering

At each jurisdictional level, a mechanism is needed to guide and support the replication process. Such a mechanism might take the form of an individual but it usually involves a committee or team of 2-4 persons (including representatives of the prototype developers). To create a direct interface between this group and a given organizational infrastructure, a representative of the steering group can be elected to the organization's governance body during the developmental period.

Change Agent and Change Team

During replication, there must be a primary and constant focus on addressing daily concerns. In terms of mechanisms, a full time agent for change (e.g., an Organization Facilitator) who operates within the context of a change team can play a critical role in minimizing problems and increasing stakeholder intrinsic motivation and competence for handling extra demands and problems. Such a change agent goes on-site to help form a change team which then operates until the prototype is institutionalized.

A change team blends an outside agent with internal agents for change. The team members are to function as catalysts, problem solvers, and overall managers of the change process.

They work with those at the site to develop linkages among resources, facilitate redesign of the established infrastructure, develop the temporary infrastructure, and enhance readiness and commitment for change.

As problem solvers they not only respond as problems arise but take a proactive stance in designing strategies to counter anticipated factors that can interfere with replication of the prototype (e.g., negative reactions and dynamics related to change, common barriers to effective working relationships, system deficiencies).

After the initial implementation stage, they focus on ensuring that the institutionalized mechanisms take on functions that are essential for prototype maintenance and renewal.
One way to ensure that the change team interfaces effectively with the organizational infrastructure is to link it with the coordination and integration team.

A change team logically consists of persons whose role and ability enable them to address daily concerns (e.g., personnel representing specific programs, administrators, union leaders, professionals skilled in facilitating problem solving and mediating conflicts).

The role team members play requires that each fully understands the prototype and the change process and is committed to working each day to ensure effective replication. That is, they must comprehend the "big picture" and have the time and ability to attend to details. They also must understand the local culture.

Recent work has outlined a staff position designated as an Organization Facilitator. An Organization Facilitator is a professional specially trained to facilitate replication of new approaches to schooling. (If the individual is chosen from within the ranks of the organization, s/he is more an internal agent for change than an outsider.) Minimally, the individual is trained to understand the processes and problems related to organizational change, how to establish collaborative working relationships for accomplishing desired changes, and the specific activities and mechanisms required for establishing and maintaining a comprehensive prototype.

Mentors

During the initial implementation phase, the need for mentors is acute. Instructors are required to carry out scheduled stakeholder development activities. Special demonstrations of certain program elements call for individuals with appropriate experience. And there must be a cadre of mentors who are regularly accessible as stakeholders ask for help.

Every stakeholder is a potential mentor for somebody. In the initial implementation phase, mentorship is a particularly important function for those who come to a site to share their expertise regarding the prototype. Those who bring technical support are another source. Indigenous mentors also need to be identified early, starting with those who provide daily leadership for the instructional, enabling, and management components of schooling. Other stakeholders are recruited as volunteers to offer peer assistance.
Some Relevant References


Miles, M.B., & Louis, K.S. (1990). Muster ing the will and skill for change: The findings from a four-year study of high schools that are experiencing real improvement offer insights into successful change. *Educational Leadership*, 47, 57-61.


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Appendix B

School-based Mutual Support Groups
(For Parents, Staff, Older Students)

This appendix is a technical aid packet prepared by the Center’s Clearinghouse
A Technical Aid Packet on

School-Based Mutual Support Groups

(For Parents, Staff, Older Students)
Preface

Mutual support groups in schools can be developed as part of strategies providing assistance for parents or other family members, students, or school staff. These groups also can be used to provide support for newcomers or others undergoing periods of transition. Of course these groups offer a useful strategy for enhancing home involvement with a school.

This technical aid describes the process as used with parents; however, the procedures described can readily be adapted for use with others (e.g., students, staff).

Jane Simoni prepared this technical aid based on her work in developing and implementing the ParentTalk and PadresHablan groups at several schools. In doing so, she benefitted from training and materials from the California Self-Help Center as well as from the close working relationship between our university-based project and the Los Angeles Unified School District. Additional financial support for development of the work came from the UCLA Graduate Division, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education. Special thanks go to the many parents and staff in the participating schools, the School Mental Health Project staff members, and the many UCLA students who are working so hard in the interest of youth, families and communities.
This aid focuses on steps and-tasks related to establishing mutual support groups in a school setting. A sequential approach is described that involves (1) working within the school to get started, (2) recruiting members, (3) training them on how to run their own meetings, and (4) offering off-site consultation as requested. The specific focus here is on parents; however, the procedures are readily adaptable for use with others, such as older students and staff.

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SCHOOL-BASED MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS: AN OVERVIEW

On the experience of a parent in a mutual support group:

_There is the exhilarating feeling that one is no longer alone--that all parents are in the same boat, whether they can row it or not (p. 48)._  

Brown, 1976

What are Mutual Support Groups?

Essentially, mutual support groups are "composed of members who share a common condition, situation, heritage, symptom, or experience. They are largely self-governing and self-regulating. They emphasize self-reliance and generally offer a face-to-face or phone-to-phone fellowship network, available and accessible without charge. They tend to be self-supporting rather than dependent on external funding" (Lieberman, 1986, p. 745).

Mutual support groups assume various forms, from the highly structured daily meeting format of the 12-Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous to the more informal diurnal gatherings of friends and co-workers. Among other variables, mutual support groups differ according to size, longevity, structure, technology, level of development, purported goals, public image, and relationships with other mutual support groups and community service systems (Borkman, 1990; Powell, 1987). The form of mutual support groups is limited only by the needs and ingenuity of their members.

What are the Benefits of Mutual Support?

Summarizing the benefits of mutual support, authors of the training manual for group starters produced by the California Self-Help Center (CS-HC) state that "groups of people with common concerns start with a potential for mutual understanding and empathy which helps build trust, openness and a feeling of belonging, which in turn, enhances coping, problem solving and self-empowerment."

For the socially isolated, mutual support groups reduce the sense of aloneness, offering a new community of peers that can be supportive both during and between group meetings. In addition to receiving emotional support and empathic understanding, members acquire practical advice and information from individuals in similar predicaments or life circumstances. Mutual support groups also provide the opportunity for optimistic peer comparisons, as members realize with relief that their problems really are not so extraordinary and that others with similar problems are working toward their resolution. Finally, members of mutual support groups benefit from what Reissman (1965) has called the helper-
therapy principle. According to Reissman, helpers often benefit more than the helped. Helping others purportedly (a) increases feelings of independence, social usefulness, interpersonal competence, and equality with others, (b) begets social approval, and (c) results in personalized learning and self-reinforcement (Gartner & Reissman, 1977).

**Why Introduce Mutual Support Groups Into the Schools?**

Perhaps the most compelling reason for introducing mutual aid interventions into the schools is that present attempts to serve parents from within the public school system are inadequate. Many schools address the needs of parents by offering parent training sessions (e.g., Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1985). These programs are often targeted at lower SES and ethnic minority parents, who are seen as lacking "appropriate" child rearing skills and as not adequately involved in their children's schooling (Ascher, 1988; Ascher & Flaxman, 1985, Herman & Yeh, 1983). Powell (1988) describes the rationales for such parent education programs as resting on one of two premises: (a) parents are ignorant of new research in child development that would be beneficial to them or (b) parents need to be taught how to relate to their children. These interventions typically consist of a professional providing several lessons and leading a related discussion. Toward the end of such programs, parents often indicate a desire to continue meeting with each other as a resource for ongoing social support (Fritz, 1985). However, without proper training, such groups tend to be short-lived (e.g., Leon, Mazur, Montalvo, & Rodriguez, 1984).

In contrast to the traditional parent educational model, which aims primarily at imparting information, Powell (1988) describes the support-centered discussion group, which emphasizes the supportive relationship among group members. According to Powell,

In support groups, discussion is a means of developing ties with other individuals, enabling members to increase the size and resourcefulness of their social networks. Group discussion also serves a social comparison function, allowing members to realize that their parenting experiences and feelings may be similar to others. It is assumed that these group processes lead to a *supported* parent . . . (whereas) a traditional parent education group (leads to) a *well-informed* parent. (p. 112)

Mutual support groups constitute a potentially beneficial supplement to current parent training programs, with several advantages. First, the groups are cost effective, involving only minimal initial professional consultation. Additionally, they constitute a nonpathologically focused approach which aims to capitalize on existing strengths rather than remedying "deficits" based on external standards. Because of their self-led nature, mutual support groups for parents also provide an opportunity for self-efficacy and personal empowerment. By drawing parents into the school, the groups may also lead to enhanced parent involvement in their children's schooling. Moreover, a well-structured group could bestow all the benefits of traditional parent training (by inviting in guest lecturers, for example), while also offering all the advantages of a parent-led group based on an empowerment model.


QUALITIES OF A GOOD GROUP STARTER

A good group starter is a catalyst not a leader. She or he will guide, direct, advise, and model in a way that gives parents confidence in their own abilities. A good starter is self-assured and effective enough to get a group going, yet is not so attached to being in control that he or she does not let the members "own" their group. No specific training or schooling is required.

It is best to begin a group with a co-starter, as working in pairs provides the starters with the support needed to persist. Ideally, a starting pair might consist of one person who works at the school and one parent who is a regular volunteer or who is already involved at the school in some way. If parents are too timid to take on the role of co-starter, they should be encouraged to help in other ways. For example, parents may be able to recruit new members at PTA meetings or help with child care the first few meetings.

SELECTING A TIME AND PLACE

You may wish initially to survey interested parents regarding their preferred times to meet. Two convenient times for most parents are early in the morning when they drop their children off at school (i.e., around 8:15 AM) or in the evening after work and supper (e.g., 7 PM). Offering two groups, one in the evening for working parents and one in the morning for other parents is a good idea if feasible. In an ethnically diverse school, groups conducted in different languages usually are necessary.

Initially, have parents meet at the school, a central, neutral location. Later parents may opt to meet in each other's homes. Within the school, warm and inviting room such as the school library is best. The auditorium can work for bigger groups or if no other rooms are available.
MEMBER RECRUITMENT

There are various ways to spread the word about a new parent group. Many schools have a monthly newsletter which is mailed to all parents, an ideal forum for an announcement. Sending flyers home through the children is another inexpensive way of inviting all parents. (See Exhibits A-C for examples of flyers and Exhibit E for a sample letter to teachers.)

Although flyers are a convenient way of reaching a large number of parents, personal contact can be more compelling. Try approaching parents as they drop their children off at school or calling potential participants. The school may have lists of names and numbers of parents from attendance sheets of previous parent meetings or from PTA enrollment. Interested parents can help spread the word.

Parents respond well when group starters describe the advantages of the group. Mutual Support Groups are a place to:

- get parenting ideas and advice
- join with other parents to give themselves more power in their lives and within the school
- have fun
- meet new friends
- share ideas
- just listen

Recruitment does not always end when the meetings begin. Typically, new members will be welcomed for the first few weeks. Toward this end, a recruitment flyer such as the one displayed in Exhibit D can be distributed by group members. One of the more artistic members may be able to make a poster for prominent display in the school lobby.
PARENT TRAINING

A meeting-by-meeting procedure for training parents on how to run their own groups is outlined on the following pages. In essence, the group starters meet with the group for four weeks, explaining the concept of mutual aid and instructing the parents in a format they can use to run their own group. At the fifth meeting, parents are encouraged to meet on their own to practice their new skills and gain confidence in their own autonomy. At the sixth meeting, the starters return for a final time to encourage the group and to say good-bye. Thereafter, they serve as off-site consultants at the members' discretion.

GETTING STARTED CAN BE FRUSTRATING.

REMEMBER:

1. BE PATIENT
   It can take time to get the word out about a new group. In the beginning, several dedicated parents are all you need.

2. BE FLEXIBLE
   Group size and membership may vary from week to week. Be ready to help newcomers get going.

3. GIVE AWAY YOUR POWER
   Forming mutual support groups is a way of empowering parents, so let them play a leading role from the beginning. For example, let parents help set up the room if they get there early. When asked a question, encourage other members to respond.
Meeting #1: Introductions and Guidelines

Preparation

• Make contact with partner
• Recruit someone to look after the children (an older student may be available)
• Check that the school has reserved the room for you
• Come early to prepare coffee and refreshments and set up the room
• Get name tags for parents
• Call the parents who have expressed an interest to remind them to come

Procedure

• Greet members as they arrive and give them a name tag to fill out
• Serve refreshments
• Sit in a circle
• Go around the circle having members say name and children's names and ages
• Make the group presentation (see below)
• Group discussion time
  Members take turns saying what they would like from the group
  General discussion
• Wrap-up
  Members each say what they learned or liked about the group
• At the end
  Ask for a volunteer for refreshments for next meeting
  Ask members to bring a friend, neighbor, or spouse next time

Presentation

A. - Concept of mutual support: Parents helping parents
   - Parents can support each other.
   - We think you have a lot of knowledge to share.
   - You are all experts at something.

B. - The role of the group starters
   - We are group starters, not group leaders.
   - We will help the group get started.
   - We will teach you how to run the group.
   - We will teach you how to take turns leading the group so that no one does all the work.
   - Afterwards, parents will run the group.
   - We will help out only when you want us to.

C. - The schedule of the group
   - We will all meet together for four weeks.
   - The group will meet on their own without the starter (meeting #5).
   - The group starter will come back for meeting #6.
   - The group starter will then be available by phone.

D. - Guidelines (distribute and discuss "Guidelines" handout)
Meeting #2:  
The Four-Part Format

Preparation

- Make contact with partner
- Call to remind parent who volunteered to bring refreshments
- Recruit someone to look after the children (an older student may be available)

Procedure

- Greet members as they arrive
- Make a name tag for each if there are many new members
- Refreshments served
- Sit in a circle
- Go around the circle saying name and children's names and ages
- Make the group presentation (see below)
- Lead the group in the 4-part format
- At the end
  Select a leader and timekeeper for the next meeting

Presentation

A. Briefly review introductory presentation
   1. Parenting helping parents
   2. Role of the group starters
   3. Group schedule

B. Briefly review "Guidelines" handout--see if members can remember them
   1. Time
   2. Attendance
   3. Confidentiality
   4. No cross-talk

C. Distribute and discuss 'Meeting Format" handout
Meeting #3:
Parents' Turn

Preparation

• Make contact with partner,
• Call to remind leader to bring refreshments and timekeeper to bring toys or another person to care for the children

Procedure,

• Greet members as they arrive
• Refreshments served
• Go around circle, checking in
• Make the group presentation (see below)
• The group leader and timekeeper chosen last time run the meeting according to the 4-part format
• Announce that the group starter will try to remain quiet but will be available for questions
• At the end:
  - Discuss what it was like for the group leader and timekeeper
  - Make sure group leader and timekeeper are chosen for the next meeting
  - Be sure to praise the timekeeper and group leader and reinforce the group for running the meeting by themselves
  - If necessary, ask for volunteers to recruit new members either by calling or distributing handouts

Presentation

A. Review introductory presentation
   1. Parenting helping parents
   2. Our role
   3. Group schedule

B. Review "Guidelines" handout--see if members can remember them
   1. Time
   2. Attendance
   3. Confidentiality
   4. No cross-talk

C. Review "Meeting Format" handout
   1. 4-part format
      Announcements
      Check-in
      Group Discussion
      Wrap-up
   2. Roles of leader and timekeeper
Meeting # 4: "W.I.S.E. Advice"*

Preparation

- Make contact with partner
- Call to remind leader to bring refreshments and timekeeper to bring toys or another person to care for the children

Procedure

- Greet members as they arrive
- Go around circle, checking in
- Make group presentation
- The designated group leader and timekeeper run the meeting according to the 4 part format.
- Announce that the group starter will try to remain quiet but will be available for questions.
- At the end:
  - Discuss what it was like for the group leader and timekeeper
  - Make sure group leader and timekeeper are chosen for the next meeting
  - Be sure to praise the timekeeper and group leader
  - Reinforce the group for running the meeting by themselves
  - Ask members if they would like a list of their names and telephone numbers to be distributed at the meeting #6
  - Remind the group that they will be meeting on their own next time

Presentation

A. Review "Guidelines" handout--see if members can remember them
   1. Time
   2. Attendance
   3. Confidentiality
   4. No cross-talk

B. Review 'Meeting Format' handout
   1. 4-part format:
      - Announcements
      - Check-in
      - Group Discussion
      - Wrap-up
   2. Roles of leader and timekeeper

C. Introduce the topic of advice giving
   1. General discussion of good vs. bad advice - solicit examples
   2. Distribute and discuss 'W.I.S.E. Advice' Handout
   3. Practice with a sample problem

* W = Does the person want to hear advice?
  I = Are you informed about what the person has already tried?
  S = Has the advice you want to give been successful for you?
  E = Are you trying to be empathetic and caring as well as helpful?
Meeting #5:
On Their Own

Preparation

• Make contact with partner
• Call to remind leader to bring refreshments and timekeeper to bring toys or another person to care for the children

Procedure

• Parents meet on their own
Meeting #6: Consolidation and Good-byes

Preparation

• Make contact with partner
• Copy the list of parent names and phone numbers if parents requested it

Procedure

• Go around circle, checking in
• Find out how the meeting #5 went
• Announce that this is the last time the group starter will be present during the group but emphasize that the starter will call to check how things are going and can be contacted at any time (be sure to leave an address and telephone number at the office)
  (*Also, see below*)
• Remind group of options available to them, such as meeting biweekly or monthly, inviting speakers in, making announcements at PTA meetings, etc.
• Make group presentation
• The designated group leader and timekeeper run the meeting according to the 4-part format
• Announce that the group starter will try to remain quiet but will be available for questions as usual

• At the end:
  - Distribute list of members' names
  - Encourage the group in their independence
  - Good-byes

Presentation

• Two last pieces of advice:
  1. Learning to Listen - sometimes you can be most helpful to a group member by listening empathically without interrupting.
  2. Disclosure - one way to be supportive to another group member is to disclose a similar experience. By saying, "Me, too!" you can show the other person that you understand how he or she feels.

***Note: Some groups may not be ready to meet on their own after only six weeks. It is important to wait until there is some degree of group cohesion and there is a core group of regulars that can provide a support structure (for a discussion and examples, see Simoni and Adelman, 1993. It is up to the individual group members to determine if the group is ready to meet on their own.***
OFF-SITE CONSULTATION

After the sixth meeting, the group starters' contact with the group will be limited to consulting at the members' request. Although the separation may be tearful for both sides at first, it is essential to the empowerment model to allow the parents to continue on their own. The process of actively participating in and leading their own group can be as beneficial to parents as what they learn from the content of the meetings.

Typical Reactions to the Starters' Departure

After the groups starters leave as active participants, two extreme reactions may occur: (1) the members never attempt to make contact with the group starters or (2) the members continually contact the starters, trying to convince them they cannot continue on their own. The former situation should be seen as a victory. The group members who do not contact the starters have learned to function on their own. (Ironically, although this is the desired outcome, the group starter may feel sorrow at no longer being needed!) At the other extreme, a group whose members can not separate from the starters, requires some additional intervention. Be patient and supportive. Some groups take longer to trust their own power and ability. If necessary, the group starters can come back and visit the group after the members have run several meetings on their own. At this point, the starters should contribute only as participants and should not direct the meeting.

Common Consultation Requests

In contrast to both these extreme reactions, most groups will continue on their own with only an occasional call. Typical concerns members raise are how to recruit new members or what to do with a troublesome member. As in all contacts with the group, the starters should strive to empower the parents. Often parents can resolve their dilemmas once they are given permission to trust their own abilities. In the case of recruiting, the starter can urge the members to use the strategies employed initially. The structure of the meetings, with rotating roles for group leaders and timekeepers, will help lessen the negative effects of controlling or inactive members. In the event that some members are disruptive, the starters can help the members problem solve among themselves or can make appropriate referrals.

A FINAL WORD

A mutual support group will not be the answer for every parent, so expect some drop outs. And some groups may not survive at all. However, do not underestimate the impact of the group. Even in a few short meetings, parents may have learned something important.
## EXHIBITS

A. Flyer Announcing Mutual Support Groups for Parents
B. Flyer Announcing Mutual Support Groups for Parents (Spanish Version)
C. Flyer Announcing Mutual Support Groups for Parents (In Spanish and English)
D. Recruitment Flyer (In Spanish and English)
E. Cover Letter to Teachers Accompanying Flyers
F. "Guidelines' Handout for Distribution to Members
G. "Guidelines" Handout for Distribution to Members (Spanish Version)
H. "Meeting Format' Handout for Distribution to Members
I. "Meeting Format" Handout for Distribution to Members (Spanish Version)
J. "W.I.S.E. Advice’ Handout for Distribution to Members
K. "W.I.S.E. Advice" Handout for Distribution to Members (Spanish Version)
Exhibit A: Flyer Announcing Mutual Support Groups for Parents

You are invited to attend Parenttalk - a new parent support group!

WHAT IS PARENTTALK?

Parents talking to parents in small weekly discussion groups.
- Talking about raising children, discipline, school, gangs, drugs or anything else
- Sharing experiences
- Receiving advice and support
- Making new friends
- Having fun!

WHO IS THE GROUP FOR?

You! The group is FOR and will be run BY parents. With some initial help from a group trainer, parents will learn how to run the meetings. Parenttalk is a way for parents to help parents, not for professional to tell parents what to do.

HOW DO I JOIN?

Fill in the form below and send it back to school in the envelope attached!

***CHILD CARE WILL BE PROVIDED AT THE MEETINGS***

EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO ATTEND, PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THE FORM.

CHECK ONE:

☐ NO, I am not interested in a parent-led group.

☒ YES, please send me more information.

The best days of the week for me are (circle):

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday

The best times of the day for me are (circle):

8 9 10 11 Noon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Child care will be provided at the meetings.

Child’s Name: ________________________ Child’s Teacher: ________________________

Your name: ________________________

Home Phone #: ________________________ Work Phone #: ________________________

Best times to call: ________________________

Is it OK if we call you? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Get Next Section
Esta Usted Invitado Asistir a PadresHablan
-un nuevo grupo de apoyo para padres!

¿QUE ES PADRESHABLAN?

Padres platicando con padres en pequeños grupos semanales.
- Hablando sobre criar niños, disciplina, escuela, pandillas, o cualquier otra cosa.
- Compartiendo experiencias
- Recibiendo apoyo y consejos prácticos
- Haciendo nuevas amistades
- Divirtiéndose

¿PARA QUIEN ES EL GRUPO?

Usted! Profesionales ayudaran a comenzar el grupo y ayudaran a los padres a dirigir las juntas. Regresaran cuando ayuda sea necesaria. Sin embargo, el grupo es PARA y sera manejado POR los padres.

¿COMO ME INGRESO?

Llene la forma que esta abajo y regresela a la escuela en el sobre incluido!

***CUIDADO DE NINOS SERA DISPONIBLE EN TODAS LAS JUNTAS***

AUNQUE USTED NO PUEDA ASISTIR, POR FAVOR LLENE Y DEVUELVA LA FORMA.

MARQUE UNA:

____ NO, no estoy interesado en el grupo de padres.

____ SI, por favor mandeme mas información.

Los mejores dias de la semana para mi son (encircule):

Lunes Martes Miércoles Jueves Viernes Sábado Domingo

Las mejores horas del día para mi son (encircule):

8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Cuidado de niños sera disponible en todas las juntas.

Nombre del niño: __________________________

Su nombre: ______________________________

Número de casa: __________ Numero del trabajo: __________________________

Mejor tiempo para llamar: __________________________

Esta bien si le llamamos? _____ SI _____ NO
You are invited to attend
ParentTalk
- a new parent support group!

Parents talking to parents in small weekly discussion groups.

* Talking about raising children, discipline, school, gangs, drugs, or anything else
* Just listening to other parents
* Receiving advice and support
* Making new friends
* Having fun!

CHILD CARE WILL BE PROVIDED AT THE MEETINGS.

TUESDAY MORNINGS 8:15 TO 9:45AM
THURSDAY EVENINGS 7:00-8:30PM

Esta Usted Invitado a Asistir
PadresHablán
- un nuevo grupo de apoyo para padres!

Padres platicando con padres en pequeños grupos semanales.

* Hablando sobre criar niños, disciplina, escuela, pandillas, o cualquier otra cosa
* Solamente escuchando a los otros padres
* Recibiendo apoyo y consejos prácticos
* Haciendo nuevas amistades
* Divertidose

CUIDADO DE NIÑOS SERÀ DISPONIBLE EN TODAS LAS JUNTAS.
Habrá un grupo para las personas que hablan español.

MARTES 8:15-9:45AM
You are invited to attend

ParentTalk

- a new parent discussion group!

Parents talking to parents in small weekly discussion groups.

* Talking about raising children, discipline, school,
gangs, drugs, or anything else
* Just listening to other parents
* Receiving advice and support
* Making new friends
* Having fun!

CHILD CARE WILL BE PROVIDED AT THE MEETINGS.

Esta Usted Invitado a Asistir
PadresHablan

- un nuevo grupo de platicas para padres!

Padres platicando con padres en pequeños grupos semanales.

* Hablando sobre criar niños, disciplina, escuela,
pandillas, o cualquier otra cosa
* Solamente escuchando a los otros padres
* Recibiendo apoyo y consejos prácticos
* Haciendo nuevas amistades
* Divertiéndose

CUIDADO DE NIÑOS SERÁ DISPONIBLE EN TODAS LAS JUNTAS.
Habrá un grupo para las personas que hablan español.

CHECK ONE/MARQUE UNA:

____ NO, I am not interested in a parent-led group.
NO, no estoy interesado en el grupo de padres.

____ YES, please send me more information.
SÍ, por favor mande más información.

Child’s Name/Nombre del niño: ____________________________

Your name/Su nombre: ____________________________

Home Phone #/Número de teléfono de casa: ________________

Work Phone #/Número de teléfono del trabajo: ________________

Is it OK if we call you? ______ YES ______ NO Esta bien si le llamamos? ______ SÍ ______ NO

TUESDAYS / LOS MARTES 8:15AM

19
Dear Teacher:

We will be giving parents the opportunity to join support/discussion groups here at the school.

For the program to be a success, we need to make certain that the attached flyers are given to the students and that they are encouraged to take them home to their parents.

As you can read in the flyer, we are asking parents to fill out the flyer, put it in the attached envelope, and have their children bring it back to you. There is a big box in the office where all the envelopes are being collected. Please just drop them off as they come in.

The new parent groups are called "ParentTalk/PadresHablan." There will be a group for English-speakers and a group for Spanish-speakers. We are going to help the parents get the groups going and then the parents will meet on their own.

We are going to tally all the responses and then call the parents to let them know when the first group will be meeting.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact ________________.

Thank you for continuing efforts to make the school a better place for parents.
PARENTTALK

GUIDELINES

1. Time Limits
   The group starts on time and ends on time.

2. Attendance
   Try to come to every meeting, especially in the beginning. New members are always welcome.

3. Confidentiality
   Do not gossip.

4. No Cross-Talk
   Do not interrupt other people.
Exhibit G:  
“Guidelines” Handout for Distribution to Members  
(Spanish Version)

PADRESHABLAN

REGLAMENTOS

1. Limites de Tiempo
   El grupo comienza a tiempo y se termina a tiempo.

2. Assistencia
   Tratar de venir a cada junta, especialmente a las primeras juntas. Nuevos miembros siempre son bienvenidos.

3. Confidencialidad
   No chismes.

4. No Hablar al Mismo Tiempo
   No interumpe a otra gente.
PARENTTALK

FOUR-PART MEETING FORMAT

1. Announcements
   - Any news or upcoming events.

2. Check-in (go around the circle)
   - Hello, my name is _______
   - I am feeling _______ today.
   - I would like to talk or hear about ________________.

3. Grout, discussion time
   - Everyone gets a chance to talk.
   - Remember, no cross-talk!
   - Just listening is OK, too.

4. Wrap-up (go around the circle)
   - Thank you for helping me with
   - See you next time!

LEADER AND TIMEKEEPER

1. Leader
   - Brings refreshments
   - Greets new members and explains the group to them
   - Reviews guidelines at beginning of meeting
   - Makes sure everyone gets a chance to talk
   - Chooses a leader and timekeeper for next meeting

2. Timekeeper
   - In charge of child care
   - Makes sure meeting starts on time
   - Announces when it’s time for the wrap-up
   - Makes sure meeting ends on time
**LAS CUATRO PARTES DEL GRUPO**

1. **Anuncios**
   - Alguna noticia o eventos

2. **Oue Tal** (go around the circle)
   - Hola, mi nombre es ____________.
   - Hola, yo me siento __________ hoy.
   - Me gustaría hablar o escuchar algo acerca de ________________.

3. **Tiempo Para Discusión**
   - Todas tienen una oportunidad de hablar.
   - Acuerdanse de no hablar al mismo tiempo.
   - Solamente escuchar esta bien.

4. **Dar Cierre** (go around the circle)
   - Gracias d ayudarme.
   - Nos vemos para la próxima junta.

**LIDER AND GUARDATIEMPO**

1. **Lider**
   - Trae refrescos
   - Saluda a nuevo miembros y les explica el grupo
   - Revisa los reglamentos al comienzo del la junta
   - Asegura que todos tengan oportunidad de hablar
   - Escoge al líder y al guardatiempo para la siguiente junta

2. **Guardatiempo**
   - Esta encargo del cuidado de niños
   - Asegura que la junta comience a tiempo
   - Anuncia cuando es hora de "Dar Cierre"
   - Asegura que la junta termine a tiempo
Exhibit J:
"W.I.S.E. Advice" Handout for Distribution to Members

PARENTTALK

W.I.S.E ADVICE

W - Does the person want to hear advice?

I - Are you informed about what the person has already tried?

S - Has the advice you want to give been successful for you?

E - Are you trying to be empathetic and caring as well as helpful?
PADRESHABLAN

COMO Y QUIEN LO D.I.C.E.

D - Esta la persona dispuesta a ar sugerencias?

I - Estas informada de lo que ya ha tratado de hace la persona?

C - Estas tratando de comprender y ayudar?

E - Las sugerencias que has dado han sido un éxito?
Additional Resources

Some National Self-Help Clearinghouses and Websites that are Relevant to Mutual Support Groups

Some Data
Some National Self-Help Clearinghouses and Websites Relevant to Mutual Support Groups

Following is a list of some national clearinghouses that provide information and technical assistance on starting and running support groups. Many of these agencies have materials and publications that may be helpful in for organizing and running mutual support groups, as well as information on the issues that may be of concern for support group members.

**American Self-Help Clearinghouse**
Maintains database of national self-help headquarters and model one-of-a-kind groups. Provides referrals to self-help clearinghouses nationwide. Offers assistance to persons interested in starting new groups. For handout on starting groups, send a self-addressed stamped envelope. Publishes directory of national support groups.
Write: American Self-Help Clearinghouse, Northwest Covenant Medical Center, 25 Pocono Rd., Denville, NJ 07834. Call (201)625-7101; FAX: (201)625-8848; TDD: (201)625-9053; E-Mail: ashc@bc.cybernex.net; Web Site: http://www.cmhc.com/selfhelp

**National Self-Help Clearinghouse**
Information and referral to self-help groups and regional self-help clearinghouses. Encourages and conducts training of professionals about self help; carries out research activities. Publishes manuals, training materials and a newsletter.
Write: National Self-Help Clearinghouse, CUNY, Graduate School and University Ctr., 25 W. 43rd St., Rm. 620, New York, NY 10036.
Call: (212)354-8525; FAX: (212)642-1956.

**National Mental Health Consumers Self-Help Clearinghouse**
Consumer self-help resource information geared towards meeting the individual and group needs of mental health consumers. Assistance in advocacy, listings of publications, on-site consultations, training, educational events. Funded by Center of Mental Health Services.
Call: 800-553-4-KEY
FAX: (215)735-0275.

**National Empowerment Center**
Consumer-run center that provides information on local self-help resources and upcoming conferences. Also provides networking, conference calls and workshops.
Write: National Empowerment Center, 20 Ballard Rd., Lawrence, MA 01843.
Call: (508)685-1518 or 800-POWER-2-U;
FAX: (508)681-6426;
TTY: 800-889-7693.
Resource Clearinghouses

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)
NCADI is the largest repository of substance abuse treatment and prevention information in the country. NCADI has over 450 items including fact sheets, booklets, posters, videotapes, audiotapes, monographs, and magazines on all aspects related to alcohol and other drugs of abuse. This clearinghouse also has information that is particularly geared toward developing prevention programs in the community, and can provide information for those interested in forming mutual support groups that address prevention issues, obtaining resources, and implementing prevention programs.
Contact: P.O. Box 2345, Rockville, MD, 20847-2345
Call: 800-729-6686; 301-468-2600
Website: http://www.health.org/

The Wisconsin Clearinghouse: Prevention Resources
The Wisconsin Clearinghouse has been providing educational and training materials, information and services nationally for more than 20 years. The mission of the Wisconsin Clearinghouse is to help schools, families, and communities to lead healthy, productive lives. The clearinghouse offers materials for youth workers, communities, parents and educators. Many of these materials are free or can be obtained at a low cost.
Contact: 1552 University Ave. Madison, WI 53705
Call: 800-322-1468; or 800-248-9244
Fax: 608-262-6346
Website: http://www.uhs.wisc.edu/wch/

The Self-Help Interest Group
The Self-Help Interest Group is an international organization of researchers, self-help leaders, and policy makers that promotes research and action related to self-help groups and organizations.
For more information, contact: Keith Humphreys at 415-617-2746
Email: D6.F52@forsyth.stanford.edu
Websites

Mental Health Net’s Self Help Page: The Self Help Sourcebook Online
http://www.cmhc.com/selfhelp/

The Self-Help Sourcebook Online is a searchable database that includes information on approximately 700+ national and demonstrational model self-help support groups, ideas for starting groups, and opportunities to link with others to develop new groups. This website also has documents on many of the psychosocial issues that are of concern for participants in mutual support groups (e.g., alcohol and drug use, diseases, violence, equal rights, etc.). Included is information about agencies (organized by state and community) that can provide technical assistance and guidance on a variety of self-help and group management issues. Most of this information can be obtained directly by contacting the American Self-Help Clearinghouse.

Parents Involved Network (PIN)
http://libertynet.org/~mha/pin.html

Parents Involved Network is a state-wide (Pennsylvania), parent-run, self-help advocacy, information and referral resource for families of children and adolescents with emotional or behavioral disorders. PIN provides families with an opportunity to share common concerns, exchange information, identify resources, and influence policy issues affecting children and adolescents who have behavioral disorders.
Journal of Community Psychology
Volume 21, July 1993

**Latina Mothers' Help Seeking at a School-Based Mutual Support Group**

Jane M. Simoni
University of California, Los Angeles

Low-income Latino parents constitute a vulnerable population who are underserved by traditional mental health services but difficult to recruit to more culturally sensitive community interventions. In order to identify factors that may facilitate participation, a cognitive-motivational framework was employed to study help seeking at a school-based mutual support group (MSG) for low-income Latino parents. Phone interview data from 75 Latina mothers generally supported hypothesized differences between nonattenders and attendees. Specifically, attendees initially reported (a) greater parenting stress, (b) less confidence in parenting abilities but comparable psychological coping resources, (c) less satisfaction with and greater need for social support, (d) less negative attitudes toward help seeking, and (e) more previous school involvement. A discriminant analysis revealed that need for parenting advice and prior school involvement accounted for 34% of the variance between attenders and nonattenders. Implications for enhancing program utilization are discussed.
School-Based Mutual Support Groups for Low-income Parents

Jane M. Simoni and Howard S. Adelman

School-based mutual support groups (MSGs) are proposed to enhance the school involvement of parents from lower socioeconomic and ethnic minority backgrounds. We present a school-based MSG format, findings from a survey regarding parent interest, and discussion of a pilot demonstration implementation in three urban elementary schools.

A review of the literature on parents and schooling indicates widespread endorsement of parent involvement, with consistent reports of positive effects for students (Comer, 1988; Davies, 1987, 1991; Dye, 1989; Epstein, 1987, 1990; Goldenberg, 1987, 1989; Hawley and Rosenholtz, 1983; Henderson, 1987). Summarizing research findings, Epstein (1987) concludes, "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" (p. 120).

Equally well documented are the relatively low levels of school involvement among parents from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds (Ascher, 1988; Ascher and Flaxman, 1985; Davies, 1988; Herman and Yeh, 1983; Lareau, 1987; McLaughlin and Shields, 1987). To enhance school involvement and improve child-rearing skills among these groups, many schools offer time-limited parent-training sessions typically consisting of lessons and discussions led by professionals (e.g., Myers, Alvy, Arrington, Richardson, Marigna, Huff, Main, & Newcomb, 1992). Nieto (1985) views these efforts as often flawed by paternalism, opportunism, manipulation, insensitivity to cultural and class realities, and fear among school staff of losing control. Others stress that most school-dominated parent programs fail to empower parents and lack a sustained and coherent strategy for increasing their involvement in schooling (Mannan and Blackwell, 1992).

As an alternative approach, we have begun to explore the feasibility of school-based mutual support groups (Simoni, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Simoni and Adelman, 1991a, 1991b). This strategy builds on a growing body of work related to community-based mutual support groups (see reviews by Jacobs and Goodman, 1989; Katz and Bender, 1976; Lieberman and Borman, 1979; Powell, 1987, 1990). Efficacy studies report improvements in several aspects of social and psychological functioning among MSG attendees (Lieberman, 1986). With respect to low-income parents, MSGs are seen as capable of bolstering self-esteem, self-confidence, and such values as individuality, self-worth and respect (Leon, Mazur, Montalvo, and Rodriguez, 1994).
Discussion of Interview Findings

Among this sample of low-income parents, the interviews underscored a reasonable amount of support for the idea of parents running their own groups (60% of the Repliers endorsed the concept). At the same time, it must be recognized that 40% of the Repliers did not endorse parent-run groups. We suggest this finding may have reflected the extent to which they had been disempowered and were convinced that they lacked competence.

Most striking about the reported obstacles to school involvement was the large number that were removable. For example, the need for child care, convenient scheduling, and groups in languages other than English seemed relatively easy to address.

With respect to analyses comparing the Replier and Nonreplier groups, the most prominent finding was that the parents interested in MSGs reported more extensive social and psychological coping resources (i.e., greater social networks and higher life satisfaction). Although the correlational design precludes causal conclusions, this finding may indicate that the Repliers were accustomed to establishing useful social networks and that their superior resources facilitated interest and involvement (see Telleen, 1990). Parents who have comparable, or greater need but lack the necessary resources for attendance are likely to be among the most difficult to recruit.

The analysis involving English proficiency have relevance for reports of greater school involvement of English-proficient parents. Our findings indicate that the Latino Repliers who spoke English possessed as well other resources that might facilitate involvement (i.e., higher socioeconomic levels, fewer obstacles to school involvement, and larger social networks). However, despite their relative lack of resources, the non-English-speaking Repliers had equally high levels of interest in involvement, reported more frequent use of informal social networks, and indicated a greater desire to discuss personal problems in the groups. Based on these findings, we do not anticipate that differences in English proficiency will be predictive of MSG attendance.

Discussion of the Pilot Demonstration

In summary, although most parents, especially monolingual Spanish-speakers, were initially reluctant to take on the responsibility of running their own group, they eventually demonstrated significant interest and ability to maintain parent-led groups over a reasonable period of time. This was the case for parents with and without English-proficiency, even though the latter group reported more obstacles to involvement. Overall, the demonstration provides preliminary evidence of the feasibility of school-based MSGs.

From the perspective of increasing parental involvement in schools and schooling, the findings run counter to stereotypes that depict low-income and non-English-speaking parents as uninterested. Moreover, they suggest that interventions such as MSGs are worth pursuing as a part of efforts to enhance school involvement within this population.

Equally important, the experiences indicate the types of difficulties that should be expected and suggest ways to improve subsequent implementation. First, there is a need for more powerful recruitment strategies. A direct mailing or invitation by computerized telephoning techniques, although costly, probably would reach more parents. Personalized invitations (e.g., parents recruiting other parents, approaching parents as they drop their children off at school) have
proved here and elsewhere (Klimes-Dougan, Lopez, Nelson, & Adelman. 1992) to be a highly successful strategy.

Second, further efforts are needed to remove obstacles to parental involvement. Clearly, many parents could attend only as long as child care was provided. Other barriers to be addressed include scheduling, transportation, and accommodation of a variety of languages. Although efforts were made to schedule groups conveniently, the times were not good for many parents. Others might have come if carpools had been arranged. And, of course, some parents did not attend because groups in languages other than English and Spanish were not offered.

Third, groups should be implemented early in a school year. The groups that disbanded when the school year ended probably would have built greater group cohesion and would have continued if they had been meeting together from the beginning of the school year. In addition, training may need to be longer. The California Self-Help Center (1985) prescribes a 12-week training period.

Finally, a critical mass of group members seems necessary for group success. The consultant might consider delaying the training phase until a core group of 8-12 members has committed. With reference to the most successful group, we have already suggested a few reasons for its longevity. Future research needs to assess contextual variables and implementation parameters such as school and neighborhood characteristics (see Bauman, Stein, & Ireys, 1992). Once factors leading to group longevity are more fully understood, future research can begin determining the effects of participation in school-based MSGs and how widely useful such groups may be. In this event, the usual range of questions about group composition and transactions will need to be studied (see Lieberman & Bond, 1979).

Conclusion

Our work thus far indicates that low-income parents with and without English proficiency demonstrate interest and ability with respect to leading their own MSGs in the schools. These findings lend support to the utility and feasibility of such groups. The data also contradict generalizations suggesting that low-income parents are hard to reach or uninterested in participating in such groups or in becoming involved at school. Indeed, the work represents another instance (see Davies, 1988) where attempts to involve low-income or non-English-speaking parents appeared to yield positive benefits as long as the activity was of interest and addressed institutional, cultural, class, language, and personal barriers.
We hope you found this to be a useful resource.

There’s more where this came from!

This packet has been specially prepared by our Clearinghouse. Other Introductory Packets and materials are available. Resources in the Clearinghouse are organized around the following categories.

**Systemic Concerns**

- Policy issues related to mental health in schools
- Mechanisms and procedures for program/service coordination
  - Collaborative Teams
  - School-community service linkages
  - Cross disciplinary training and interprofessional education
- Comprehensive, integrated programmatic approaches (as contrasted with fragmented, categorical, specialist oriented services)
- Issues related to working in rural, urban, and suburban areas
- Restructuring school support service
  - Systemic change strategies
  - Involving stakeholders in decisions
  - Staffing patterns
  - Financing
  - Evaluation, Quality Assurance
  - Legal Issues
- Professional standards

**Programs and Process Concerns**

- Clustering activities into a cohesive, programmatic approach
  - Support for transitions
  - Mental health education to enhance healthy development & prevent problems
  - Parent/home involvement
  - Enhancing classrooms to reduce referrals (including prerereferral interventions)
  - Use of volunteers/trainees
  - Outreach to community
  - Crisis response
  - Crisis and violence prevention (including safe schools)
- Staff capacity building & support
  - Cultural competence
  - Minimizing burnout
- Interventions for student and family assistance
  - Screening/Assessment
    - Enhancing triage & ref. processes
    - Least Intervention Needed
  - Short-term student counseling
    - Family counseling and support
    - Case monitoring/management
    - Confidentiality
    - Record keeping and reporting
    - School-based Clinics

**Psychosocial Problems**

- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Depression/suicide
- Grief
- Dropout prevention
- Gangs
- School adjustment (including newcomer acculturation)
- Pregnancy prevention/support
- Eating problems (anorexia, bulimia)
- Physical/Sexual Abuse
- Neglect
- Gender and sexuality
- Self-esteem
- Relationship problems
- Anxiety
- Disabilities
- Reactions to chronic illness
- Learning, attention & behavior problems