



NATIONAL NETWORK OF  
**Partnership Schools**  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

## **SPECIAL REPORT**

# **2009 DISTRICT UPDATE DATA**

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**February 2010**

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# SUMMARY

## 2009 DISTRICT UPDATE DATA

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National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)  
Johns Hopkins University

February 2010

This report summarizes results of the *2009 District UPDATE* survey on program development for the 08-09 school year. YOU can use this report to assess and discuss progress on family and community involvement in your district.

- Use this summary to compare the responses on your district's *UPDATE* with others in NNPS to identify how you are progressing and ways to improve your program this year and to write plans for 10-11.
- Use this report along with the summary *2009 School UPDATE Data* to compare schools in your district with all schools in NNPS. Use the information to reflect on how well your office is facilitating schools with their work on partnerships and to plan your next steps.
- If your district has 8 or more schools in NNPS, you will receive a *customized summary* from NNPS of your schools' 2009 *UPDATE* data to examine the schools' progress and needs. Plan to "scale up" your program until *all* schools are in your **local partnership schools network** and are members of NNPS. This will ensure that you have the best data that we can provide.
- Use the *UPDATE* summaries to report progress in developing and evaluating your district and school partnership programs to your Superintendent, School Board, and others. Outline plans for on-going improvements.

### SAMPLE

In 2009, 108 district leaders for partnerships reported *UPDATE* data to NNPS. Respondents included full-time and part-time leaders in small and large districts located in diverse communities in 31 states and 2 Canadian provinces.<sup>1</sup>

- Districts reported working with between 0 and more than 200 schools.
- The districts in the sample had been members of NNPS from 1 year to 13 years, with about half (48%) joining after 2005.
- Leaders for partnerships worked an average of 17.4 hours per week on partnership program development.
- Most leaders (about 85%) reported that at least one colleague worked with them (full- or part-time) on improving district and school-level partnership programs.
- 91% of the district Key Contacts to NNPS in 2009 expected to continue their leadership in the 09-10 school year.

### OVERALL PROGRAM QUALITY

The *2009 District UPDATE* included a "portrait" measure of the overall quality of districts' partnership programs. Leaders selected one of six portraits of increasingly advanced district leadership for partnerships that best matched their stage of development. Figure 1 shows that very few districts rated their program quality *low* (about 9.5% were in a "planning year" or "just beginning"). Over half the districts rated their program as *average* (60% had a "good start" or "good program"), while the remaining districts reported their partnership program quality as *high* (30.5% had a "very good" or "excellent" program).<sup>2</sup>

As in past years, a near-normal curve emerged in 2009 on the quality of partnership programs. The range in quality reflects the districts' varied starting points when they joined NNPS and the different investments in time, funds, and human resources across districts.

Figure 1: District Leaders Reporting Overall Partnership Program Quality in 2009

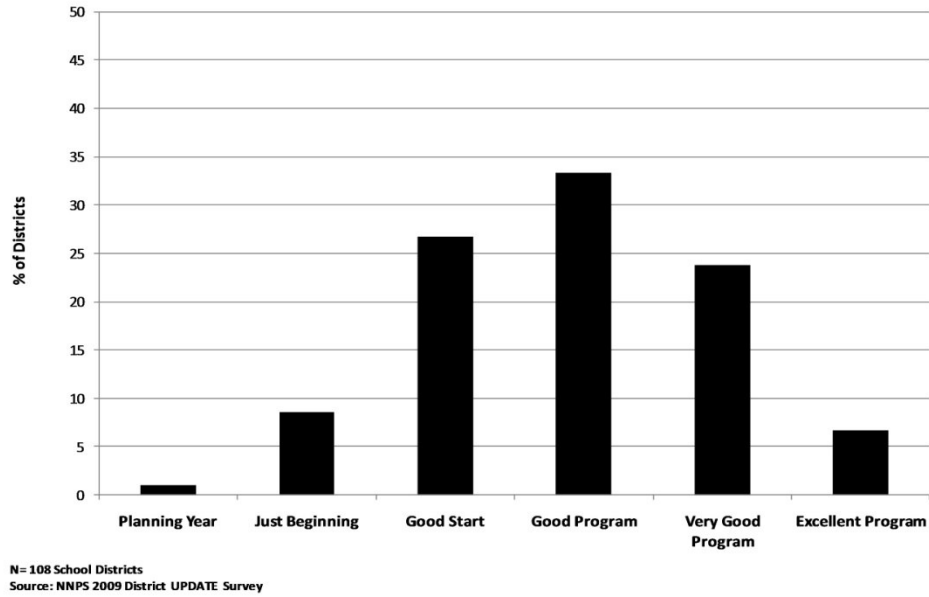
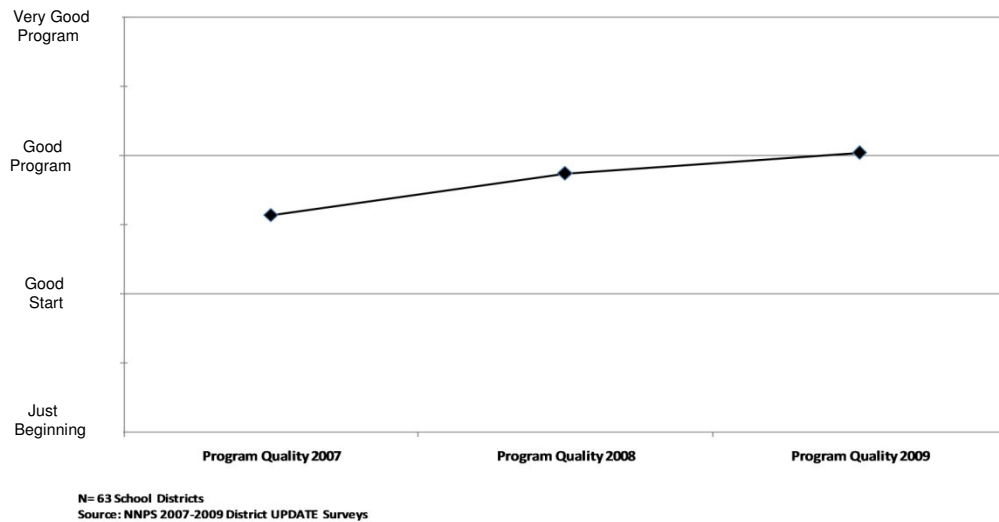


Figure 2 shows how program quality, on average, has changed over the past three years. Sixty-three district leaders provided *UPDATE* data in 2007, 2008, and 2009. The figure shows that districts in NNPS over the past three years have been improving their programs at a steady, if modest, pace.

Figure 2: Change in District Program Quality 2007-2009



An *excellent* portrait requires that a program will be sustained even if leaders changed. Partnership programs still are fragile and depend on leaders, priorities, and budgets. Across three years, few leaders—under 10%—reported that their programs matched the portrait of excellence. However, as a whole, the longitudinal sample of districts is moving in the right direction.

### THE “BASICS” OF PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

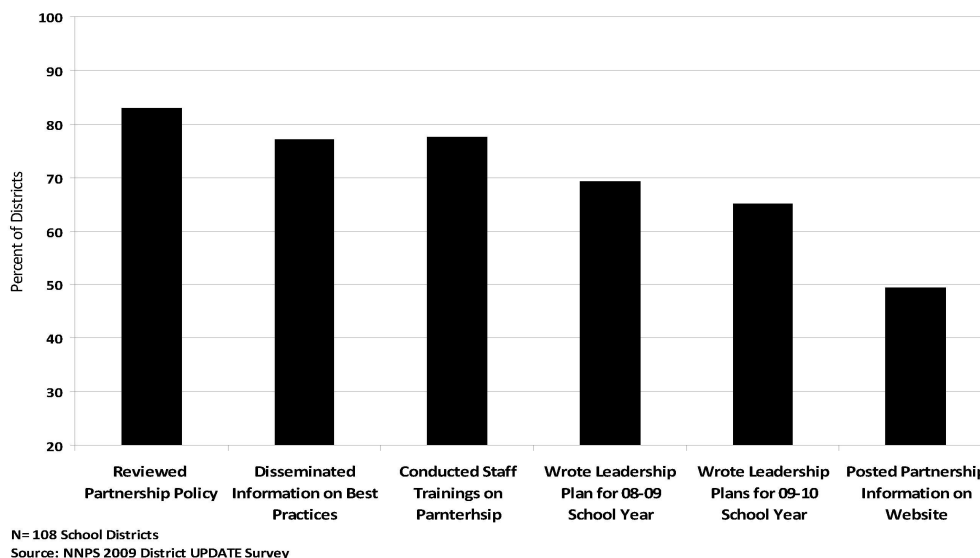
All districts in NNPS want to improve family and community involvement, but leaders vary in how quickly and how well they organize their offices and implement actions to help schools develop high-quality programs. The following sections show how, in 2009, district leaders addressed some of the “essential elements” that were shown in NNPS studies to improve programs over time.

## DISTRICT-LEVEL LEADERSHIP ON PARTNERSHIPS

Figure 3 summarizes six items from a 14-item scale ( $\alpha = .76$ )<sup>3</sup> that measured the extent of district leadership on partnerships. In 2009, leaders conducted an average of 9.3 leadership actions to organize their work at the district level. Most conducted basic leadership actions recommended by NNPS as they reviewed or developed a district policy on partnerships (83%), established a budget (84%), and shared best practices of partnerships across schools (77%). Most conducted training workshops for schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (67%) and other staff development on partnerships with various district audiences (78%). About 69% of district leaders wrote formal Leadership Action Plans in 08-09. Two-thirds of the districts indicated they had already written leadership plans for the 09-10 school year (65%), and a significant percentage (31%) intended to write a 09-10 leadership plan.

Many district leaders for partnerships indicated that, during the 08-09 school year, they reach out to district colleagues to plan, discuss, and support school, family, and community partnerships. More than two-thirds of district leaders reported that they met with the district superintendent (69%) and more than three-quarters (79%) of these leaders stated that they had connected with other district leaders and colleagues in order to coordinate district-wide partnership plans. These leaders are doing the important work of ensuring support for partnerships within their districts, and integrating work on partnerships into other school improvement initiatives. These strategies are important for developing and sustaining excellent district partnership programs.

Figure 3: District Leadership on Partnerships  
% District Leaders Who Conducted Selected Actions in 2009



## DIRECT FACILITATION OF SCHOOLS ON PARTNERSHIPS

Figure 4 summarizes 6 items from an 18-item scale ( $\alpha = .96$ ) that measured how well district leaders directly assisted individual schools' Action Teams for Partnerships to strengthen their own school's program of partnership linked to school improvement goals. NNPS emphasizes six strategies for district leadership and facilitation of partnership programs in schools: *Creating Awareness, Aligning Program and Policy, Guiding Learning and Program Development, Sharing Knowledge, Celebrating Milestones, and Documenting Progress and Evaluating Outcomes*. Only 8% of the district leaders reported giving *no direct assistance* to schools in 08-09. These districts included some just starting their work on partnerships and some that had worked with NNPS for over 10 years, but were constrained for various reasons in assisting schools directly. On average, leaders reported that they were just *OK* or *needed to improve* how they guide their schools, with items averaging 2.60 on the 4-point ratings of quality of direct assistance.

On average, district leaders conducted 13.5 facilitative actions during the 08-09 school year. The activities shown in Figure 4 represent a selection of activities district leaders conducted to directly assist their schools' partnership program development.

Figure 4: District Leaders' Reports of Facilitation to Schools

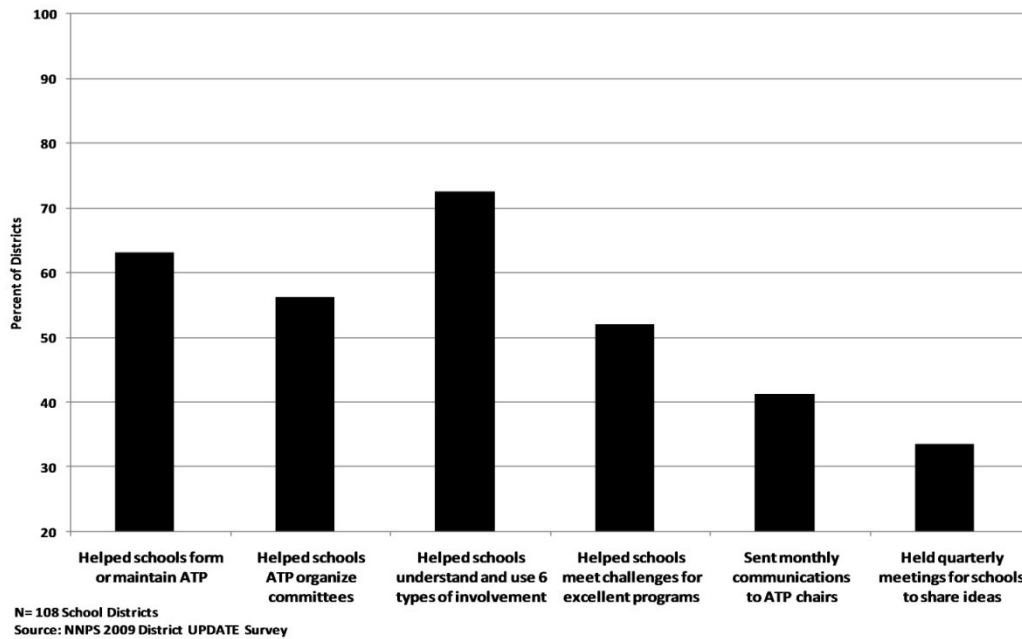
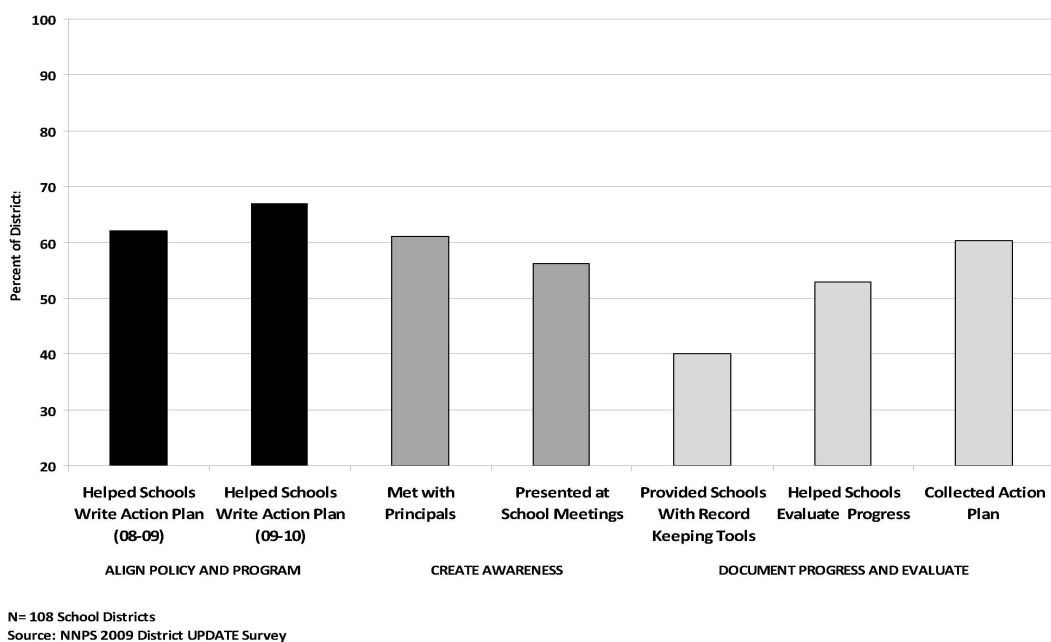


Figure 5 shows district reports of three other types of facilitation: Aligning partnership policies and program, creating awareness about partnerships, and helping schools document progress and evaluate their programs. Over 60% reported that they helped schools write Action Plans, that they collected these Action Plans, and that they met with principals to discuss implementing strong partnership programs at the school. Only about 40% of district leaders, however, provide their schools with tools to help schools document progress or evaluate outcomes of school, family, and community partnerships. Studies indicate that when district leaders help schools evaluate the quality and results of their partnership programs, the schools improve the quality of their programs over time (Epstein, et al., 2009; Sheldon, 2009).

Figure 5: District Leaders' Reports of Program Facilitation



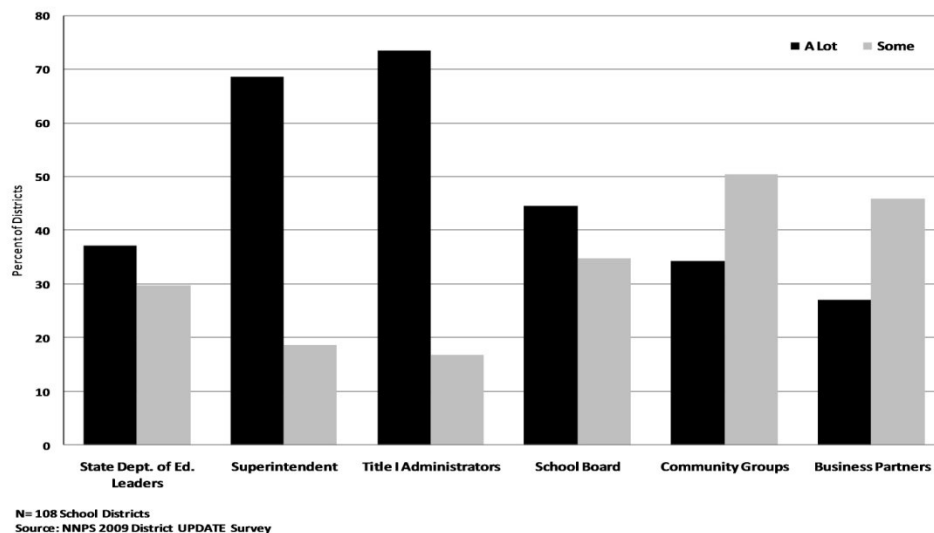
Over the past two years, leaders improved the quality of assistance to schools on several items. Between the 2008 and 2009 school years, district leaders reported improvements in helping schools organize Action Teams for Partnerships, helping schools meet challenges for involving families, regularly visiting schools, and helping schools replace ATP members who are leaving. At the same time, on average, district leaders gave less assistance in helping school teams write action plans, meeting with school principals on partnerships, sending out monthly communications to ATP chairs, and helping schools implement their planned activities. The differences may be due to district leaders' time and responsibilities and to school teams' requests and needs. The patterns suggest that district leaders for partnerships must continue to improve their actions to assist and support all schools in strengthening their plans and practices of partnership.

## SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Figure 6 summarizes six items from a 12-item scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ) that measured how much support district leaders for partnerships reported receiving from colleagues in their district offices, schools, and communities. Scored 1-4 for *no support*, *a little*, *some*, and *a lot of support*, district leaders averaged 3.2, indicating strong support from many colleagues and weak support from a few. The measure of support is important because NNPS studies and fieldwork indicate that district leaders for partnerships did more to help their schools when they had strong support from their colleagues (Epstein, Galindo, Sheldon, & Williams, 2007; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Figure 6 shows that most district leaders reported strong support for partnerships from their superintendents (69%) and Title I administrators (74%). Many district leaders for partnerships are supported by Title I funds to help schools meet requirements for parental involvement in NCLB. About equal percentages reported “a lot” and “some” support from principals, but weaker support from individual teachers and community partners (not shown). District leaders reported the least support for partnerships from community groups and business partners, suggesting that some district leaders for partnerships may find it difficult to organize and sustain community support. Other data, reported in Figure 7, indicate that district leaders are working to increase and improve community and business partnerships in school-based partnership programs.

Figure 6: District Leaders' Reports of Support for the Partnership Program



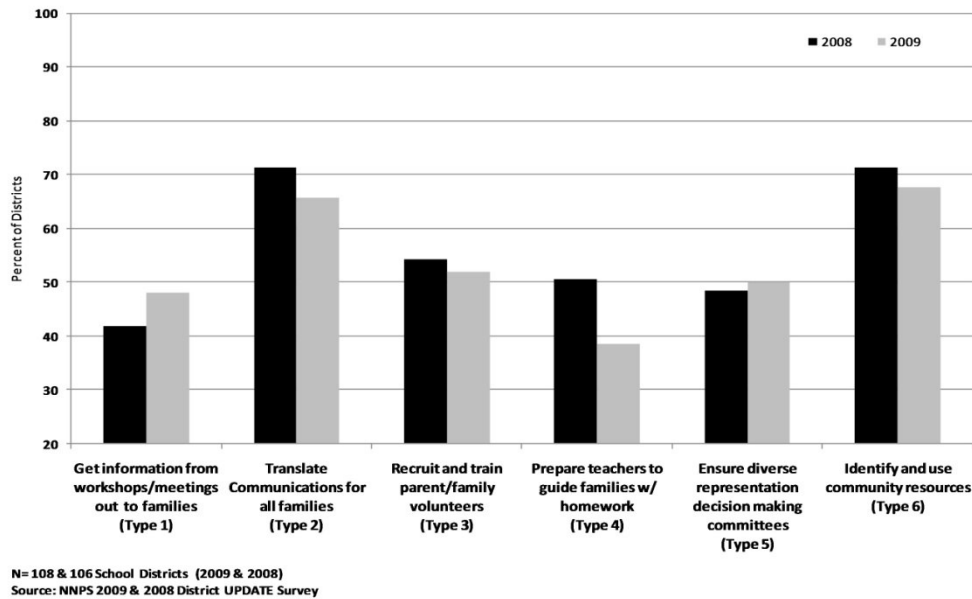
## ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOLS TO SOLVE CHALLENGES TO INVOLVE ALL FAMILIES

In NNPS, district leaders are expected to help schools' ATPs solve serious challenges to involve all families. Figure 7 shows the 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .61$ ) that measured whether district leaders for partnerships guided schools to meet challenges to involve all families or left these challenges up to schools to solve on their own.

Most district leaders for partnerships reported helping schools find ways to communicate with families who did not speak English at home (66%). NCLB and many district policies require schools to welcome and

communicate with all families in ways that help students succeed. Many districts employ translators for printed materials, interpreters at school meeting, and encourage schools to use volunteers to involve non-English speaking parents at school and in the community.

Figure 7: District Support to Schools for Partnership Challenges



District leaders also have been working to increase community and business partnerships to improve school programs and students’ experiences (Sanders, 2005). This year, two-thirds (67%) of the district leaders reported assisting schools in finding community resources and partners to improve their programs.

Figure 7 compares the percentage of districts that worked to help their schools meet partnership-related challenges in 2009 to the 2008 cohort of NNPS districts. The graph shows overall consistency in districts’ assistance to schools to solve various challenges. Some districts, however, ask schools to solve particular challenges on their own. For example, nearly half (48%) of the districts left it up to schools to figure out how to provide information from workshops and meetings to parents who could not attend. An even larger percentage of district leaders (39%) left it up to the schools to guide teachers in helping families support students on homework – about a 12% decrease in district support to schools on homework from the previous year.

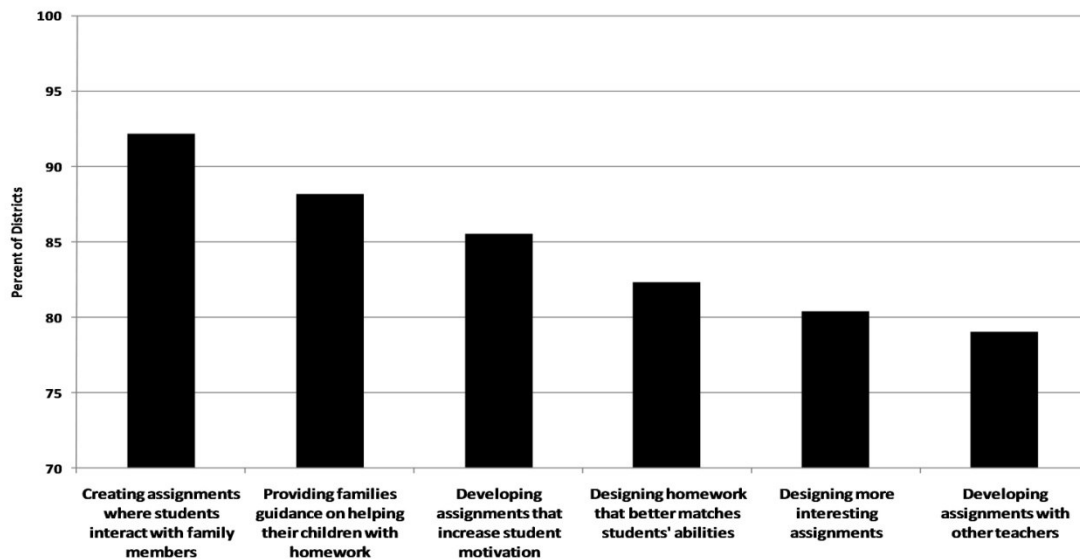
Although these are school-specific issues (i.e., information to parents from workshops and guidance of parents on homework), district leaders can encourage schools to share best practices to solve these challenges. Moreover, as indicated in the next section, district leaders know that teachers would benefit greatly from additional support on improving the homework process and on guiding parents’ involvement with students on homework.

## SPECIAL FOCUS: IMPROVING HOMEWORK

Almost one-quarter of NNPS district leaders reported that, to date, their offices have not offered teachers professional development on the design and use of homework. Most district leaders indicated, however, that professional development on homework would benefit a large proportion of their teachers. Figure 8 shows that no less than 77% of district leaders reported that many or most teachers need professional development on homework, particularly on designing homework that facilitates interactions between students and family members. It may be that district leaders for partnerships need to work on this topic with colleagues in their curriculum and instruction departments, or need guidance from external sources. NNPS, for example, offers professional development training and resources on *interactive homework*, and has conducted research

demonstrating the efficacy of these materials (Van Voorhis, 2003, in press; and see the TIPS section on the NNPS website, <http://www.partnershipschools.org>).

Figure 8: Percent of District Leaders Who Believe that Professional Development on Homework Would Benefit “Many” or “Most” Teachers

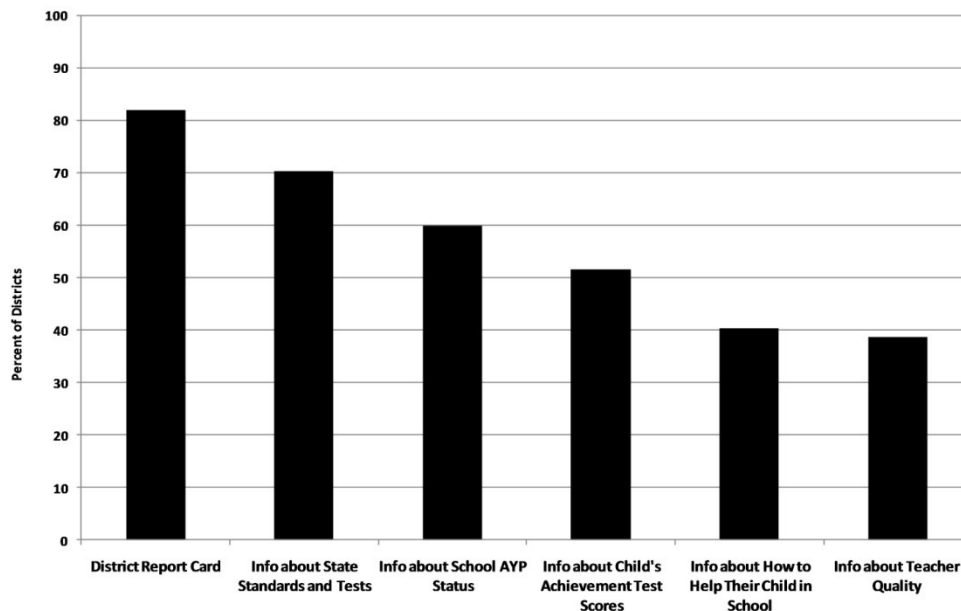


N= 108 School Districts  
Source: NNPS 2009 District UPDATE Survey

## NCLB REQUIREMENTS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act lists several partnership-related actions that schools and districts *must* conduct as part of Title I funding requirements. On the 2009 District *UPDATE* survey, we asked district leaders to what extent their offices were performing these tasks and the extent to which their offices helped schools involve families in ways specified in NCLB. Figure 9 shows variation in whether or not districts were performing federally mandated outreach to families.

Figure 9: Percent of Districts Addressing NCLB Requirements for Information to Families



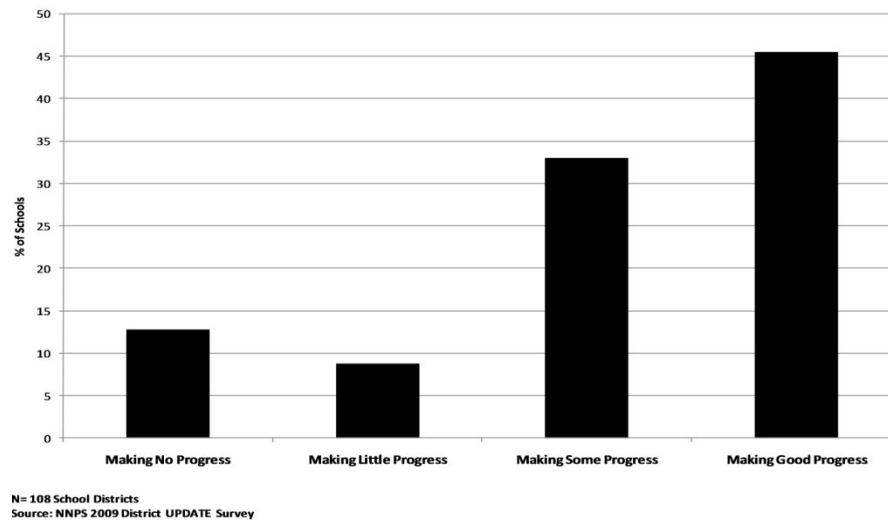
N= 108 School Districts  
Source: NNPS 2009 District UPDATE Survey

The vast majority of district leaders reported that families were sent a district report card (82%) and information on the state’s standardized achievement tests (71%). Most reported that families were provided information on schools’ Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) (60%) and on their children’s performance on standardized achievement tests (51%). The fewest district leaders reported that families were provided information on teacher quality and on how to help support their children’s academic achievement. Ultimately, requirements for information for parents and involvement in children’s education must be fulfilled for districts and schools to be “in compliance” for Title I funding.

## SCHOOLS’ PROGRESS ON PARTNERSHIPS

Figure 10 summarizes district leaders’ reports of whether their schools were making *little*, *some* or *good progress* on partnerships in the past school year. In 2009, district leaders reported that they assisted over 2400 elementary, middle, and high schools to help them develop stronger, goal-linked programs of partnership. Ratings indicated that about 46% of these schools were making good progress on partnerships; 33% of the schools were making some progress; and 9% were making little progress in developing effective partnership programs. Overall, the graph shows that district leaders, generally, feel confident in their efforts to help schools improve their programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Figure 10: District Reports of School Program on Partnership Programs



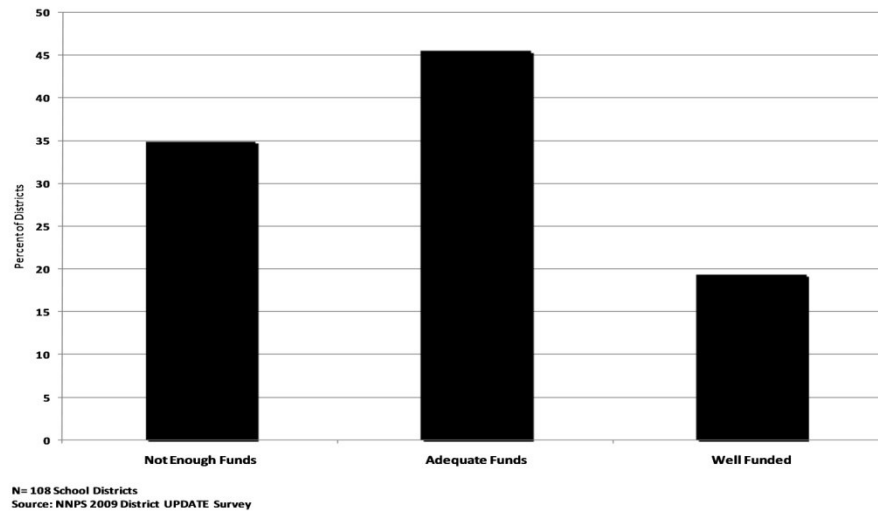
## ADEQUACY OF FUNDING FOR PARTNERSHIPS

A single item on the 2009 *District UPDATE* asked leaders whether their partnership program was *unfunded*, *poorly*, *adequately*, or *well funded*. Because districts vary greatly in size and student and family needs, NNPS uses a rating of adequacy of funding in each location to assess funding, rather than particular dollar amounts.

Figure 11 shows that over half (65%) of the district leaders reported that they were adequately or well funded – more than in leaders’ reports in 2008. Nevertheless, there continues to be a significant number of districts in NNPS for whom inadequate funding is limiting their work and progress on partnership program development.

District leaders must actively negotiate for adequate or increased funds to support district-level and school-based activities to improve partnership programs each year. Title I funds were the primary source of funds for partnership programs reported in 2009 in about 50% of the districts. Other major funding came from other federal programs (e.g., Title II, III, IV) and from general, district, and local funds.

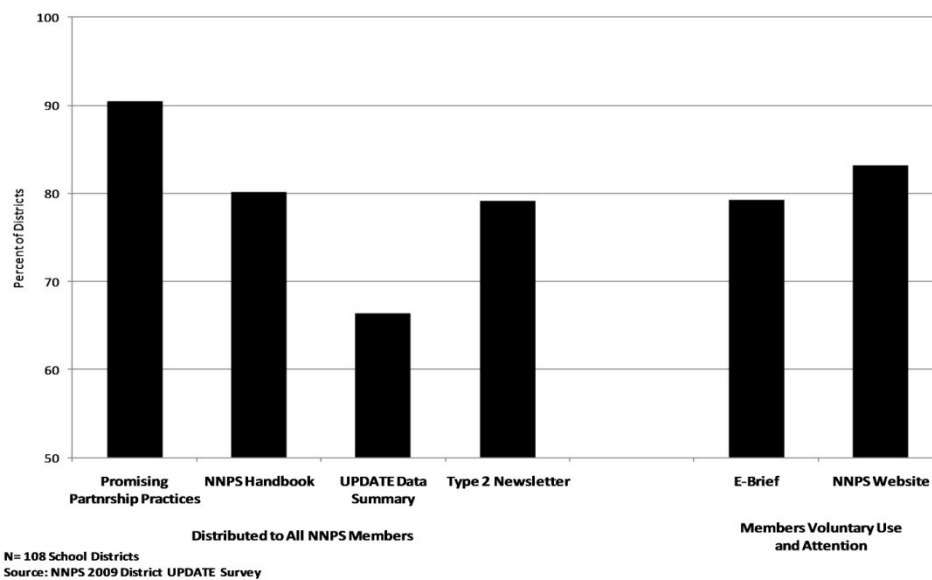
Figure 11: District Reports of Funding for Partnership Program



## USE OF NNPS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT MATERIALS

Figure 12 summarizes items from a 9-item scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ) that measured how district leaders for partnerships rated the usefulness of major NNPS tools and materials. All NNPS items – manual, newsletters, conferences, consulting, and more – are designed to help district leaders increase the quality of their leadership and their work with schools’ ATPs. In general, most district leaders rated the NNPS resources available for members as helpful or very helpful. NNPS publications were rated as especially helpful. About 90% of district leaders rated the annual book of *Promising Partnership Practices* as helpful and 80% rated the NNPS *Handbook for Action* as helpful. NNPS services that required scheduled time or financial investments (i.e., attending NNPS conferences, web conferences, and long-distance calls for “on-call” consulting with NNPS facilitators) were used by fewer members (less than 50%), but were rated as having some or a lot of value for at least 75% of those who attended.

Figure 12: District Ratings of NNPS Resources as Helpful



## USE OF NNPS EVALUATION TOOLS

About 65% of district leaders reported that they evaluated some aspects of their districts’ partnership programs, the same percentage as was reported last year. In 2009, however, 73% of district leaders reported that they evaluated some aspects of their schools’ work on partnerships, an 11% increase from the 2008

UPDATE reports. Presently, many district leaders use their own assessments, often linked to Title I record keeping and monitoring for compliance.

Many district leaders used NNPS *UPDATE* surveys to assess the quality of key components of their district and school partnership programs. This makes good sense because districts and the schools must complete *UPDATE* to renew their membership in NNPS. When *UPDATE* indicators are tracked from year to year, district leaders can document progress systematically and graphically.

**Other Assessments.** District leaders noted the various tools they used to evaluate the district and/or school partnership programs. Some reviewed schools' Action Plans for Partnerships. Some collected monthly reports or an annual survey of parents on their satisfaction with the schools.

At the school level, many district leaders (39%) guide ATPs to use the *End-of-Year Evaluation* in the NNPS *Handbook* (now called *Annual Evaluation of Activities*) to assess the quality of each involvement activity that is implemented throughout the school year and to gauge needed improvements. Districts also reported using the *Starting Points* and the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships* tools to help them evaluate schools' partnership programs. All of these evaluation tools are in the NNPS *Handbook for Action, Third Edition*.

## **DISTRICT LEADERS' COMMENTS ON PROGRESS**

The measures in *UPDATE* show how districts are progressing in improving their leadership and programs of partnerships. In addition, district leaders commented on their progress and challenges.

### **Reported Change**

Almost all district leaders (92%) addressed the question "What changed most?" in their programs of family and community involvement in the 08-09 school year. A few who made little or no progress noted that there had been changes in district leaders and budgets. The vast majority of comments reported positive program developments, as in the following typical comments:

*All schools had partnership teams and were trained in the SFCP model by the district partnership coordinator as well as a state representative.*

*Confidence level of ATP increased – able to function more independently; increased number of ATPs*

*Parents report high levels of satisfaction with the information they receive from schools/district, and level of service from school.*

*Schools took a more active leadership role in developing plans (ATP) connected to school improvement.*

*Teachers came together to plan and carry out activities for reaching [out] – bringing community together.*

*Increased empowerment of parents in their school's parent partnership. Teams more established as part of the school.*

*NNPS school communities created the atmosphere of cohesiveness and working towards a common positive goal.*

*A strong effort to encourage families to reinforce student learning in the home.*

## Areas for Improvement

District leaders also listed specific goals for improving district and school partnership programs in the 09-10 (current) school year. Several themes emerged concerning district leaders' perceptions of their programs' weaknesses. Many district leaders noted the need to improve:

<b>Leadership Topic</b>	<b>Improvements Needed</b>
<b>District Facilitation:</b>	Increase the amount and quality of assistance and training they provide to schools
<b>Scale-Up:</b>	Expand the number of schools working systematically on partnerships
<b>District Leadership:</b>	Build support and understanding among district level colleagues for the NNPS program and, more generally, for partnerships.
<b>Family Engagement:</b>	Increase outreach to, and the engagement of, diverse and underserved families throughout the district.
<b>Evaluations:</b>	Improve evaluations of partnership programs at both the district and school levels.

## SUMMARY and DISCUSSION

Districts in NNPS are guided to organize district-level leadership on school, family, and community partnerships *and* to assist all elementary, middle, and high schools to develop and sustain school-based programs of family and community involvement linked to their own school improvement goals for student success. The 2009 District *UPDATE* data indicate that just about all district leaders in NNPS are working to implement key program components, though some are making more progress than others.

The longitudinal patterns of district leaders' actions are informative and encouraging. District leaders who continued to work on partnerships for at least two years:

- Reported consistent improvements in the overall quality of their districts' partnership programs. Leaders moved from "start up" stages to "good program" by organizing their offices and by assisting some schools with their site-based partnership programs.
- Reported higher levels of facilitation of school programs for all six district leadership strategies:

*\*Creating Awareness*

*\*Aligning Program and Policy*

*\*Guiding Learning and Program Development*

*\*Sharing Knowledge*

*\*Celebrating Milestones, and*

*\*Documenting Progress and Evaluating Outcomes.*

- Reported higher levels of support from other district leaders and colleagues.

The 2009 *District UPDATE* data confirm results of prior analyses that showed that district leaders who sustained their attention to partnerships from year to year improved their own leadership activities and assisted their schools in more and different ways (Epstein, 2008; Epstein, Galindo, and Sheldon, under review; Sheldon, 2008).<sup>4,5</sup> It is clear that developing excellent programs of school, family, and community partnerships is a continuous process.

The 2009 data also showed that most district leaders must continue to improve their work on partnerships. Three topics stood out as needing major attention.

District leaders **must write annual Leadership Action Plans for Partnerships**. For the past three years, over 60% of district leaders reported writing annual plans, but 100% need to do so. District leaders may use the Leadership Action Plan for Partnerships template in the new edition of: *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition* and on the CD that comes with the book. Writing a leadership plan helps district facilitators organize their time, conduct district level and school-based activities, evaluate their progress, and discuss their work with other district and school leaders.

District leaders **must plan to “scale up” the number of schools that form Action Teams for Partnerships, write action plans, implement activities, and evaluate their work**. Some district leaders are already guiding *all* schools in their districts to work systematically on partnerships, whereas others are guiding *none*. Many district leaders need to increase the number of schools in their local network and help those schools join NNPS to receive the manual and other research-based publications and tools, and to see that they are part of a national agenda, working along with other schools on improving their partnership programs for student success.

District leaders **must assist teachers to improve the homework process so that more families can connect with their children in positive ways on homework assignments**. This includes the use of **interactive homework** as a partnership strategy to increase student achievement. The 2009 *UPDATE* data on district leaders’ views about the need for professional development on homework revealed that districts leaders in NNPS see this as an area of great importance and an area of need. Research shows that more than “regular” homework, interactive homework engages families in their children’s learning, that family members and students enjoy these activities, and that they can help improve student achievement (Van Voorhis, 2003; in press). This suggests that district leaders for partnerships, working with their colleagues in curriculum and instruction, should look into this area.

Visit the NNPS website, [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

- Read research summaries. (Click on Research and Evaluation.)<sup>6</sup>
- Register for professional development conferences or for web-conferences
- See all editions of *Type 2* newsletters (Click on Publications and Products.)
- Find good ideas in the annual collections of *Promising Partnership Practices* (Hutchins, et al. 2009) (Click on Success Stories.)
- Send an e-mail to an NNPS Facilitator with questions about YOUR next steps at the district level and in scaling up your assistance to schools. (Click on Meet the Staff.)
- Lots of other good information!

## NOTES

- 1) In 2009, data are from NNPS districts in 32 states and two Canadian provinces: AK, AZ, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, KY, LA, MD, MI, MN, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, and WV, and in Alberta and Ontario, Canada.
- 2) The portrait of an “excellent” program specifies that the district’s partnership program is well developed with annual written leadership plans, many activities at the district level, direct facilitation of most or all schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships, adequate funding, strong collegial support, and evidence that the program would be “permanent” even if leaders changed.
- 3) The *internal reliability* ( $\alpha$  or alpha) of a scale indicates whether the items represent a common construct. Reliability coefficients of .6 or higher indicate that the items are related and consistent and that the scale is useful.
- 4) NNPS researchers use *UPDATE* data in analytic studies to learn how specific actions affect the quality of district and school programs. For summaries of recent reports using *UPDATE*, click on the *Research and Evaluation* section of the NNPS website, [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).

- 5) States and organizations in NNPS also are sent the summaries of school and district 2009 UPDATE data. There are too few states and too diverse organizations in NNPS to summarize their UPDATE data systematically. NNPS will continue to review the annual UPDATE surveys from states and organizations and tailor individual assistance to these members as they develop partnership policies and programs.
- 6) For past year's summaries of UPDATE data, visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org). Click on the section Research and Evaluation, and follow the path to Prior Years. Or connect to: [http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/Research/NNPS\\_Eval\\_Prior.htm](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/Research/NNPS_Eval_Prior.htm)

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