



NATIONAL NETWORK OF
Partnership Schools
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

SPECIAL REPORT

SUMMARY 2006 UPDATE DATA FROM DISTRICTS IN NNPS

Kenyatta J. Williams, Joyce L. Epstein, and Steven B. Sheldon

January 2007

SUMMARY

2006 UPDATE DATA

FROM DISTRICTS IN NNPS

Kenyatta J. Williams, Joyce L. Epstein, and Steven B. Sheldon

National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University

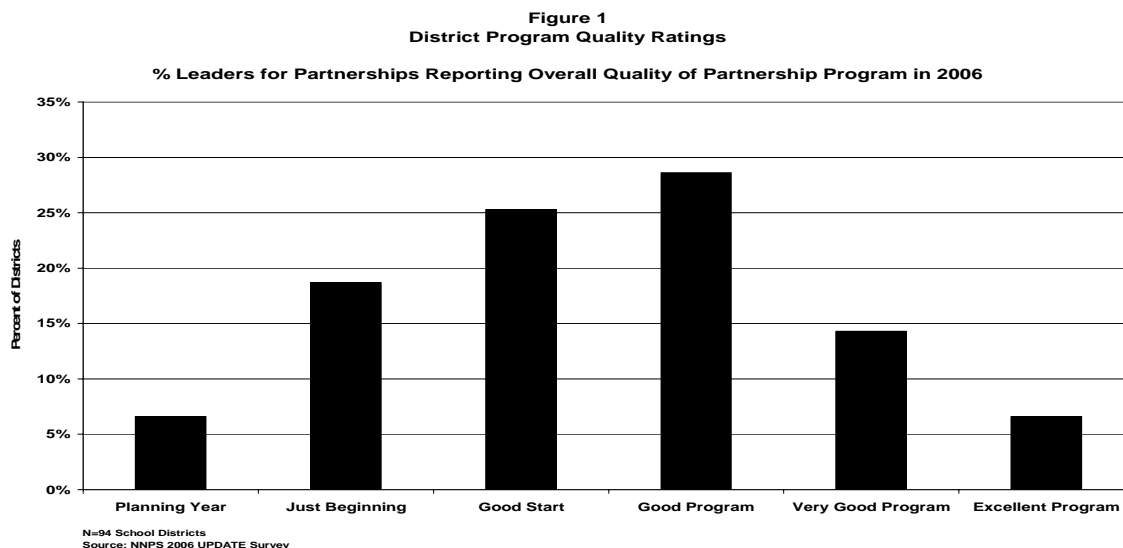
January 2007

This report summarizes results of the *2006 District UPDATE* survey on program development in the 05-06 school year. NNPS researchers will use these indicators to study districts' progress in developing leadership for partnerships and in facilitating schools' program development. District leaders also receive a summary of the *2006 School UPDATE* data. Districts with 8 or more schools in NNPS that returned *UPDATE* also will receive a customized summary of their own schools' data.¹

In 2006, 94 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 28 states and two Canadian provinces.² Leaders for partnerships averaged 15.4 hours per week in their work on partnership program development. Most leaders (85%) reported that they had at least one other full- or part-time colleague who worked with them on improving district and school-level partnership programs. The districts had been members of NNPS from 1 to 9 years. Eighty-nine percent of the Key Contacts to NNPS in 2006 expected to continue their positions in the 06-07 school year.

OVERALL PROGRAM QUALITY

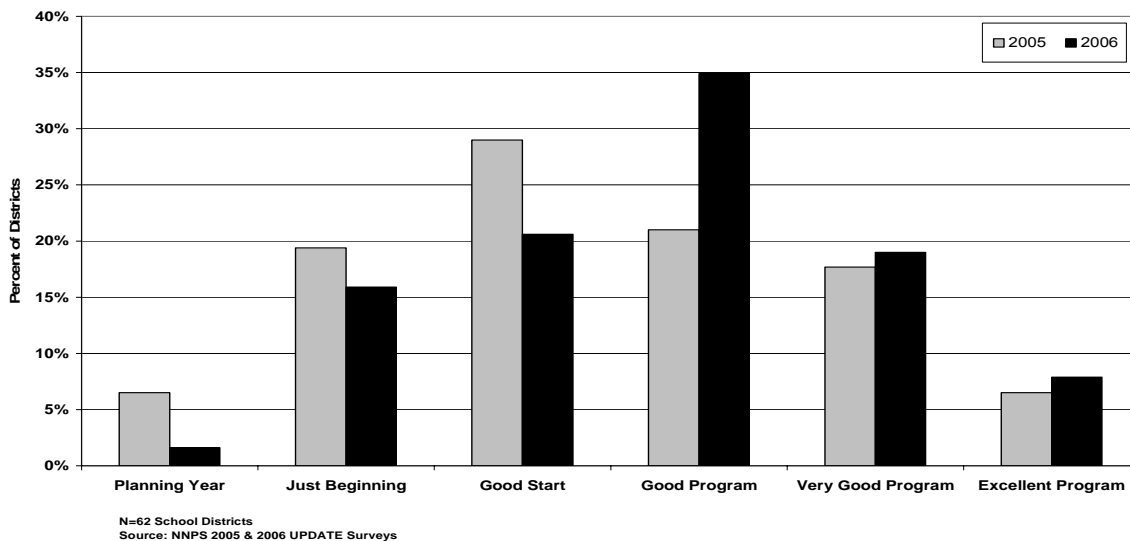
2006 District UPDATE measured the overall quality of districts' partnership programs in the form of a "portrait." Six portraits were painted of increasingly advanced district leadership for partnerships. Respondents matched their progress with the steps in program development. Figure 1 shows that the district leaders reported that their programs ranged in quality from *low* (about 25% were in a planning year or just beginning), to *average* (54% had a good start or good program), to *high* (21% had a very good or excellent program).³



As in the past, a near-normal curve emerged in 2006 on the quality of partnership programs. The variation in program quality reflects (a) districts' starting points on partnerships when they join NNPS and (b) the specific efforts and investments that district leaders make in organizing and improving key components of district leadership and school programs of family and community involvement.

Figure 2 shows that progress was made by 62 districts that provided data on program quality in 2005 and 2006. Fewer leaders were planning or just beginning their work. More leaders were making progress toward good, very good, and excellent programs. Not all districts move up a full category in program quality in one year. Nevertheless, incremental progress is clear as district leaders improve their leadership and increase their assistance to schools from year to year.

Figure 2
Change in Ratings of District Program Quality from 2005 to 2006



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

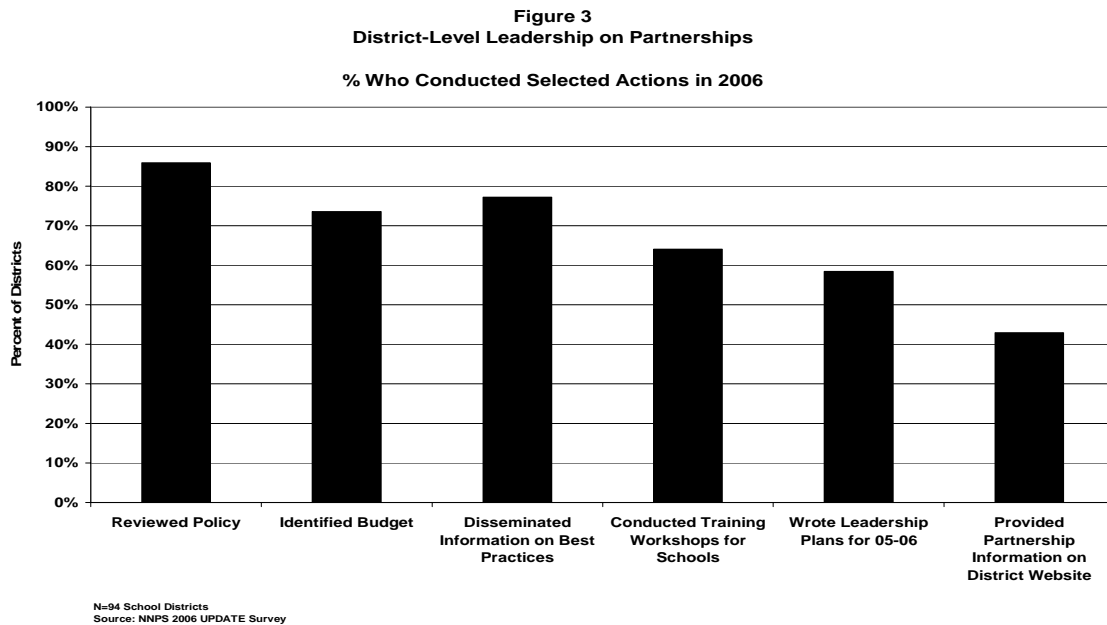
All districts join NNPS to improve family and community involvement, but leaders vary in how quickly and how well they organize their offices and implement actions for high-quality programs. The following measures show how district leaders were addressing several “essential elements” that have been shown in previous studies to improve partnership programs from year to year.

District-Level Leadership on Partnerships

Figure 3 summarizes six items from a 13-item scale ($\alpha = .74$)⁴ that measured the organization of district leadership on partnerships. In 2006, leaders conducted an average of 7.7 leadership actions. A large majority of district leaders conducted many of the basic leadership actions recommended by NNPS to organize their work on partnerships. Most reviewed or developed a district policy on partnerships (86%), established a budget (74%), and shared best practices of partnerships across schools (77%). Somewhat fewer (64%) conducted training workshops for schools' Action Teams for Partnerships. This may be because, in 2006, some districts were still in a planning phase, not ready to conduct team training, and some others had conducted team training in prior years.

About 58% wrote formal leadership plans for the 05-06 school year. By contrast, about 65% of district leaders who remained active in NNPS for the past two years wrote formal leadership plans in 2006. This is a good trend, but indicates that many leaders still must attend to this basic program requirement.

The fewest district leaders said they provided information on partnerships on the district website (43%). This was a higher percentage than last year when about 35% worked on website postings. Increasingly, more districts are using their websites to communicate with families and educators.



In written comments, district leaders reported that they conducted other leadership activities on partnerships, including training sessions and conferences for parents, supervising parent and community advisory councils, paying for new schools’ membership in NNPS, and conducting other staff development for parent liaisons, volunteers, new principals, and others.

DIRECT FACILITATION OF SCHOOLS ON PARTNERSHIPS

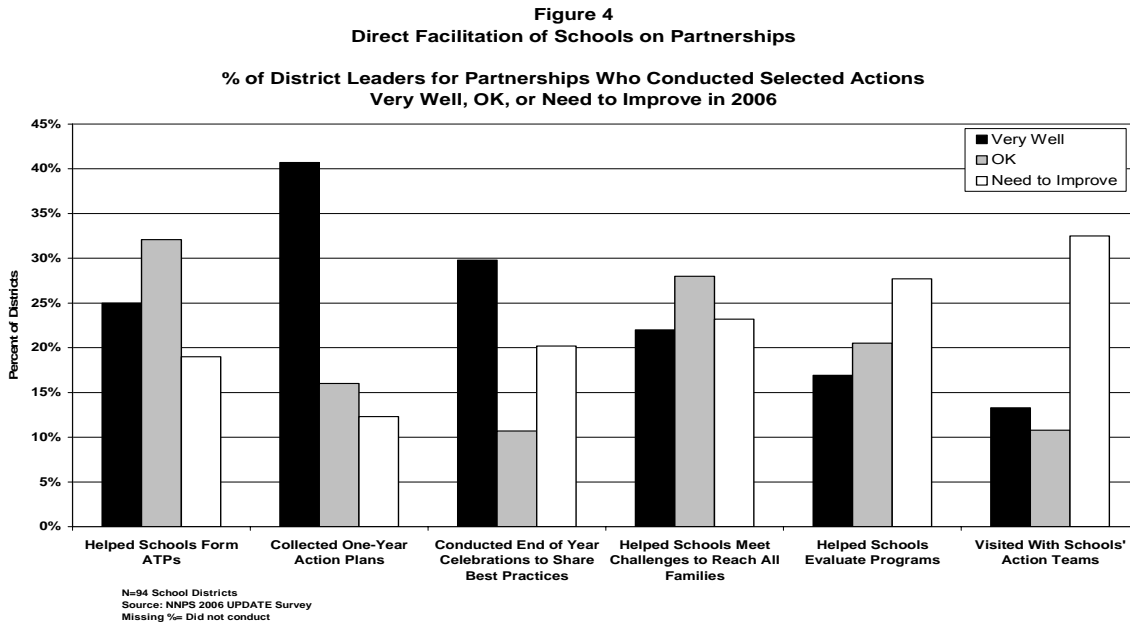
Figure 4 summarizes 6 items from an 18-item scale ($\alpha = .96$) that measured how extensively and how well district leaders directly assisted individual schools to develop their school-based programs of partnership linked to school improvement goals. District leaders conducted an average of 11.4 facilitative actions.

There was considerable variation in the number of actions and the quality of assistance to schools. Some districts reported working “very well” to assist schools, others “OK,” and still others said that they “need to improve” the quality of their direct assistance. About 20% of the district leaders provided no assistance to schools in the 05-06 school year. Many of these were districts new to NNPS. On average, leaders ratings show they believe the Need to Improve or are Just OK, with a mean of 2.36 on the 4-point scale of quality of direct assistance.

The actions varied in amount of time and expertise required of district leaders. Many district leaders reported doing very well or OK (56%) in collecting One-Year Action Plans from their schools. It is relatively easy for district leaders to collect and check schools’ plans. A large number also reported doing very well or OK (65%) in helping schools understand the six types of involvement in the NNPS framework and a similar percentage reported helping schools write their

Action Plans. These are harder tasks, but they are basic first steps that all schools need to master. Many district leaders also reported doing very well or OK (41%) in helping schools share best practices and celebrate progress on partnerships at the end of school year. By contrast, more district leaders reported that they need to improve their visits to schools and how they help Action Teams evaluate their programs.

Effective district leaders help school teams meet serious challenges to involve all families. Figure 4 shows that about 50% of the district reported doing very well or OK in helping schools address challenges, whereas the rest either need to improve or were not yet actively facilitating schools on solving these problems (see section on challenges, below).

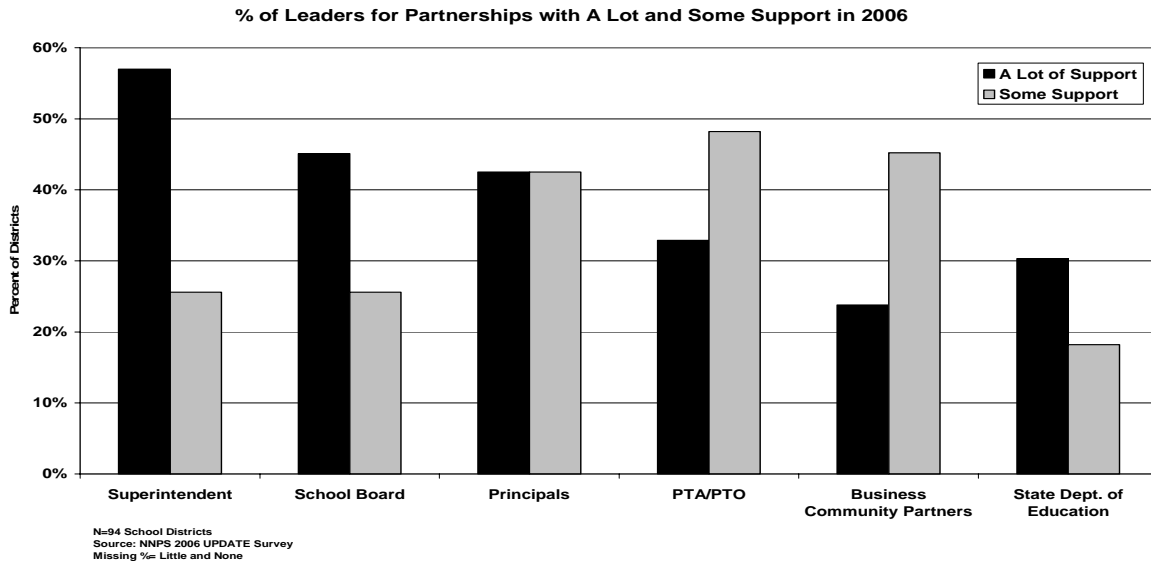


Of the districts reporting *UPDATE* data for two years, more leaders were helping schools on all six indicators in Table 4 and on 17 of the 18 items in the facilitation scale at an acceptable level (OK or Very Well) in 2006 than in 2005. For example, 60% of these leaders assisted schools to meet serious challenges in 2006, compared with 53% who assisted with challenges at all in 2005. About 46% conducted end-of-year celebrations at an acceptable level in 2006, compared to 34% at any level in 2005. Many more collected schools' One-Year Action Plans (65%) compared to last year (48%), indicating not only that schools are writing plans, as required, but that district leaders are paying attention to them. The patterns for two years show that, although a small number of leaders still lag behind – giving little direct help to schools, most leaders who continue their work over time give more attention in more ways to assist schools with school-based partnership programs.

SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Figure 5 summarizes 6 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*, districts averaged 33.9 out of a possible 48 points. Most district leaders reported that they had strong support from some colleagues and weaker support from others.

Figure 5
Support From Colleagues for Partnerships



For example, nearly 60% of the district leaders in NNPS in 2006 reported strong support from their superintendents and school principals for work on partnerships, but less support from business and community partners. Though still low, the percentage of district leaders reporting strong support from their State Department of Education doubled in the past year. For district leaders who worked in NNPS for at least two years, there were large gains from 2005 to 2006 in support from state leaders; small gains in support from district, school, family, and community partners; and less support in 2006 from school boards.

The jump in state support is instructive. Several districts in NNPS are from Maryland, whose State Department of Education published and publicized new recommendations in 2006 for family and community involvement. State leaders in Maryland, California, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and a few other states in NNPS worked with their PIRCs in 2006 to encourage districts and schools to develop partnership programs. Some stated encouraged membership in NNPS, conducted workshops on NNPS approaches, and provided on-going support for district leaders and their schools. Most states still have considerable work to do to identify state-level leaders for partnerships and to encourage districts and schools to develop research-based partnership programs.

Prior NNPS analyses of *UPDATE* data showed that district leaders for partnerships flourished when they had strong support from their colleagues. Those who felt appreciated were more likely to conduct more actions to help all schools develop their programs of family and community involvement.

ASSISTANCE TO SCHOOLS ON KEY CHALLENGES TO REACH ALL FAMILIES

Figure 6 summarizes the items of a 6-item scale ($\alpha = .68$) that measured whether district leaders for partnerships took leadership in guiding schools to meet challenges to involve all families or left these challenges up to schools to solve on their own. The districts guided schools on an average of 2.8 challenges in 2006.

Figure 6
% District Leaders for Partnerships Who Guide Schools to Address Key Challenges to Reach All Families in 2006

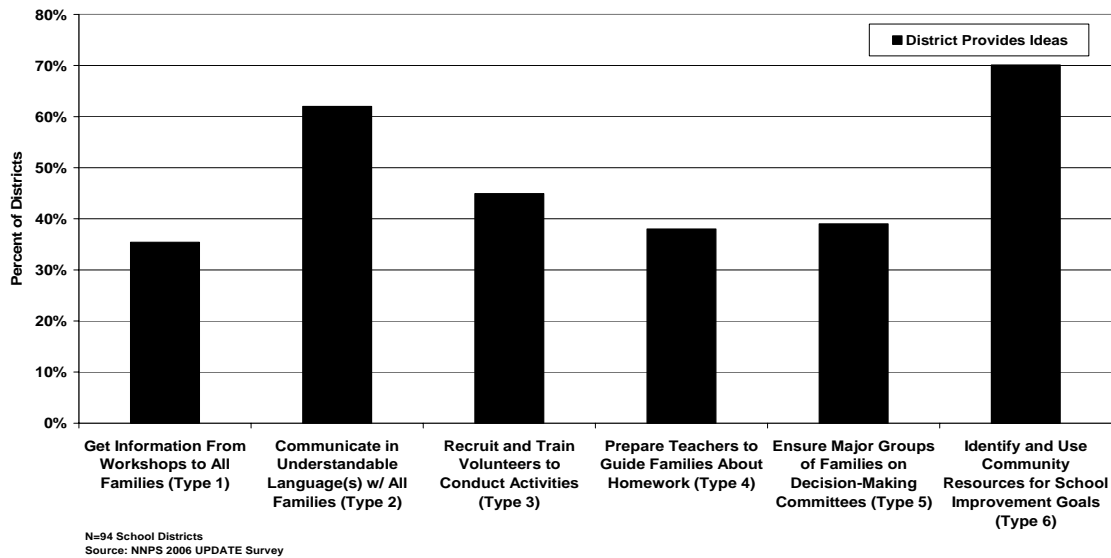


Figure 6 shows that most district leaders helped schools find ways to communicate with families who did not speak English at home (60%) and to connect with community partners and resources (70%). Many districts provide translators to assist schools in producing communications that are sent home to families in multiple languages and in preparing material for websites in multiple languages, and interpreters who assist parents and teachers at school meetings. District leaders also have been working to increase community connections and business partnerships to improve school programs and students’ experiences (Sanders, 2005).

Other challenges were most often left to the schools to solve on their own. Some district leaders for partnerships, however, helped schools find ways to get information from workshops to parents who could not come (35%), recruit volunteers (45%), find diverse parent leaders for school committees (39%), and work with teachers to guide families about homework (38%).

Prior NNPS studies of *UPDATE* data indicated that district leaders who actively helped schools address key challenges reported that their schools made more progress on partnerships than reported by district leaders who left schools on their own (Epstein, in press). As district leaders learn about the challenges their schools face and gather examples of promising practices to resolve the challenges, more district leaders should be able to help schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships involve all families, including those who are hardest to reach.

DISTRICTS’ WORK ON NLCB REQUIREMENTS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

District leaders were asked whether their schools wrote One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships and collected “pledges” signed by parents to work as good partners. They also identified which of these documents was used as the *school-parent compact*, which is required by NCLB.

In most districts, schools used both documents – a written action plan for partnerships and a signed pledge from parents. Most district leaders reported that they still use “parent pledges” as the *school-parent compact* (67%). This is unfortunate because the One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships are more complete documents that fulfill NCLB’s definition of a *school-parent compact*. The legislation notes that the compact must outline “*the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve.*” Most pledges simply list ways families may be involved. By contrast, One-Year Action Plans specify and schedule involvement activities that help schools and families work together on goal-oriented partnerships during each school year.

In 2006, district leaders were asked about their responsibilities for NCLB’s requirements for parental involvement (Section 1118). Key Contacts to NNPS fell into three groups. A large group of district leaders for partnerships are located in the Title I or Federal Programs Office and must account for all NCLB requirements for parental involvement. Typical comments explained:

“We are responsible for implementing all requirements of Section 1118 of NCLB and coordinating the school and district initiatives, including all audits.”

“NCLB requirements are embedded in each school’s NNPS Action Plan for Partnerships.”

“Through our Title I funding, we are required to meet the requirements for parental involvement in NCLB. NNPS is a fine fit (for this county’s) goals and objectives.”

A second group of district leaders for partnerships is located in other offices or departments. They explained how they try to link to their Title I colleagues and guide attention to NCLB’s requirements for parental involvement.

“We work in collaboration with the Title I director to help identify special needs (for family involvement) and then coordinate efforts within the schools to fulfill those needs.”

“Our office has no specific NCLB responsibilities, but we do provide support and encouragement for parental involvement activities and programs.”

A third group of district leaders is not connected to colleagues who are working on NCLB requirements. The family involvement work is separate from Title I and NCLB. These leaders explained:

“NCLB requirements are conducted by our Title I Office.”

“Sadly, there is very little collaboration or communication with my supervisor addressing NCLB requirements.”

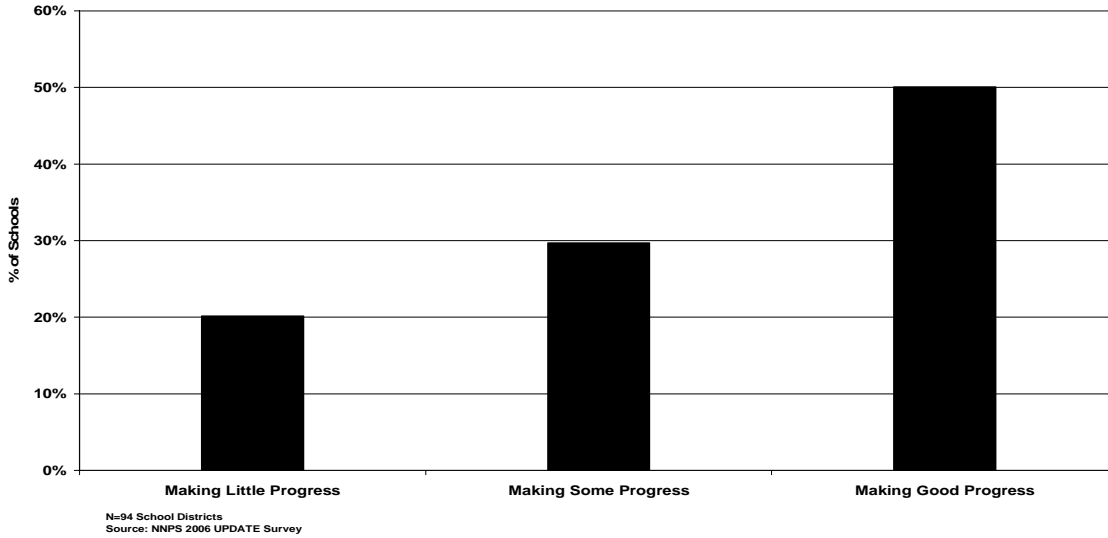
From NNPS’s view, all Key Contacts, regardless of their departmental home, are responsible for guiding schools to strengthen their programs of family and community involvement. This includes schools that receive Title I funds and those that do not. To do this, leaders for partnerships often must co-lead and collaborate with colleagues in Title I, curriculum and instruction, assessment, student services, federal programs, and other departments. By working together, district leaders across departments can ensure that all schools develop plans and practices for partnerships focused on student achievement and success in school

SCHOOLS’ PROGRESS ON PARTNERSHIPS

Figure 7 summarizes district leaders’ reports of whether their schools were making *little, some or good progress* on partnerships in the past school year. In 2006, district leaders reported that they directly assisted over 2100 elementary, middle, and high schools to develop stronger, goal-linked

programs of partnership. Their ratings indicated that about 50% of these schools made good progress on partnerships; 30% of the schools made some progress; and 20% made very little progress.

Figure 7
% of Schools Reported by NNPS Districts
Making Little, Some, or Good Progress in 2006

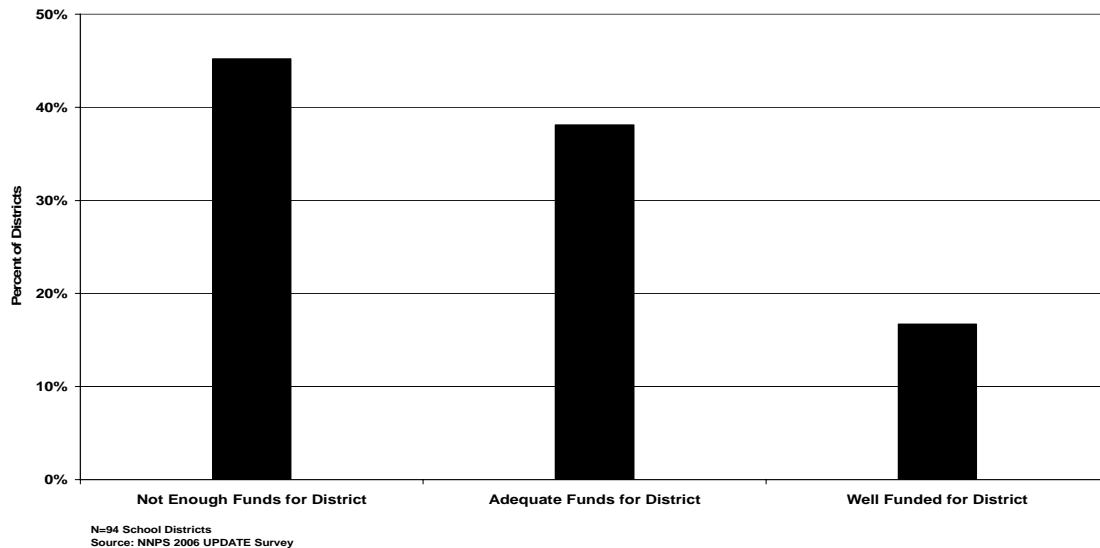


District leaders estimated that over 275,000 families were involved in the activities conducted by these schools in 2006. The numbers of schools and families assisted will increase as districts “scale up” the number of schools and the quality of programs to involve all families.

ADEQUACY OF FUNDING FOR PARTNERSHIPS

A single item on the *2006 District UPDATE* asked leaders whether their partnership program was *poorly*, *adequately*, or *well funded*. Figure 8 shows that 54.8% of the district leaders said they were adequately or well funded, whereas the rest reported inadequate funds for district-level partnership program development.

Figure 8
District Leaders' Reports of
Adequacy of Funding for Partnerships in 2006



Because districts in NNPS vary greatly in size (from 1 school to over 250 schools in 2006), it is not possible to compare the dollar amounts spent on partnerships across districts. Prior NNPS studies indicated that leaders' estimates of the *adequacy* of funds were more important than the actual dollar figure. (See information on average costs and sources of funds for partnership programs in the NNPS *Handbook for Action, Second Edition*, Epstein, et al., 2002, p. 270.)

USE OF NNPS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT MATERIALS

Figure 9 summarizes items from a 9-item scale ($\alpha = .82$) that measured how district leaders for partnerships rated the usefulness of NNPS tools and materials for program development. Scored 1-4, from *not helpful* to *very helpful*, districts averaged 21.77 points out of a possible 36 points. Over 80% of district Key Contacts found the NNPS tools for program development *helpful* or *very helpful*. Others (17%) noted that the tools were “a little helpful,” and a few (1.3%) rated the materials as *not helpful* to them. A small percentage did not yet use NNPS materials.

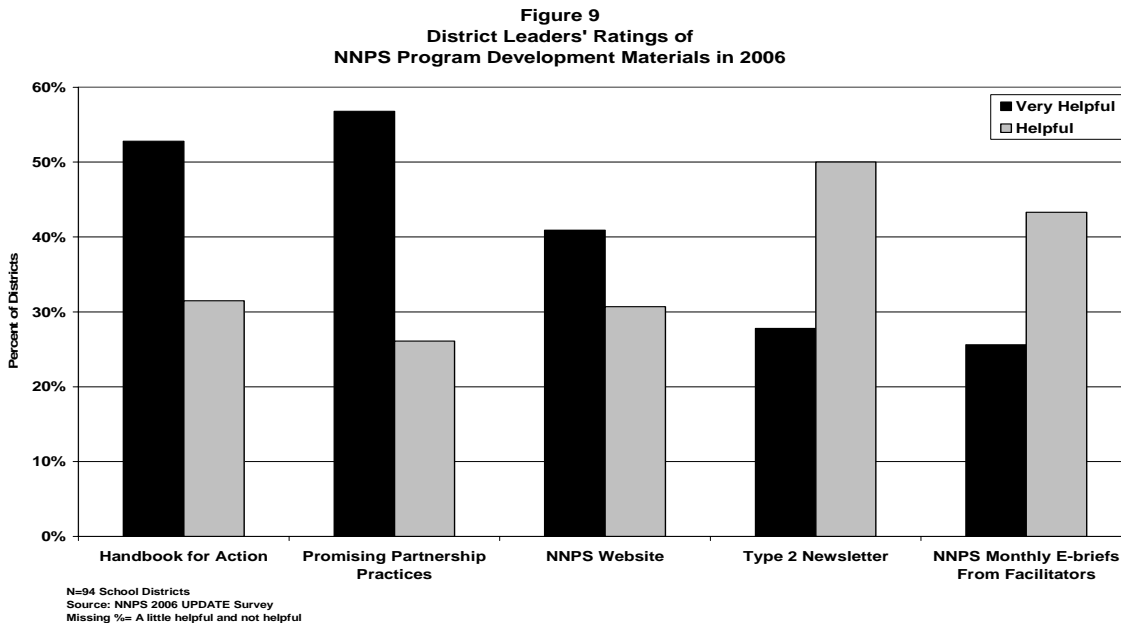


Figure 9 shows that district leaders gave their highest ratings of helpfulness to the NNPS *Handbook for Action*, collections of *Promising Partnership Practices*, and website (www.partnershipschools.org), followed by the newsletter, *Type 2*. More district leaders rated monthly *e-Briefs* from NNPS staff as helpful or very helpful in 2006 (69%) than a year ago (60%). NNPS has noted that more district leaders have e-mail addresses and are becoming aware of these communications.

Some NNPS services are selectively activated by district leaders (not in table). For example, not all district leaders call or email the NNPS staff, but, 94% of those who did in 2006 reported the direct contacts with NNPS staff were helpful or very helpful. Of those who attended an NNPS conference or institute for district leaders, over 90% rated the training workshops as helpful or very helpful. The summary report on *UPDATE* data, initiated last year, was given high ratings by 85.3% of the district leaders who received it.

USE OF NNPS EVALUATION TOOLS

Over 60% of the district leaders reported that they evaluated their district's partnership program, and over 70% said they evaluated their schools. Some used the NNPS *UPDATE* surveys for districts and schools (36%) to assess their programs. At the school level, some (32%) used the *End-of-Year Evaluation* in the NNPS *Handbook* to help Action Teams for Partnerships assess the quality of all activities implemented and to gauge needed improvements. Although just about all district leaders recognize the importance of evaluating their work, and wrote questions (such as "What is the most effective way to monitor the partnership program?"), most are not using NNPS or other specified evaluation tools.

This is an important area for attention. District leaders are checking their schools by collecting products (e.g., schools' action plans) or by reviewing lists of participants at workshops, volunteer hours, parent satisfaction on general surveys, and involved parents. Although these documentations are important, district leaders must move on to use pointed measures to assess the quality of programs and practices at the district level and in their schools.

Because all districts and schools in NNPS send in *UPDATE* surveys to renew membership for the next school year, *UPDATE* provides an easy way to monitor district and school program changes from year to year. And, because the *End-of-Year Evaluation* is in the *Handbook*, district leaders could guide schools to use it to reflect on the quality of each activity in their One Year Action Plans after it is conducted (see pp. 353-364 to find the correct evaluation form that matches the format of the One-Year Action Plan). The *Handbook* also includes the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships* (pp. 330-334) that can be used annually to chart progress on meeting challenges and addressing the six types of involvement.

Once basic assessments of program quality are in place so that progress can be charted from year to year, district leaders can address more difficult evaluation questions about whether and how the quality of their schools' partnership programs is linked to changes in student achievement and other outcomes.

DISTRICT LEADERS' COMMENTS ON PROGRESS

Over 90% of the district leaders provided answers to the question "What changed most?" in their programs of family and community involvement in the 05-06 school year. Of these, about 4% noted that they made little or no progress due to changes in leaders, illness, and the effects of Hurricane Katrina. The vast majority wrote about positive program developments, such as the following typical comments.

Improved School Programs

"More school Action Teams are aware of the NNPS model and have developed one-year action plans."

"We have a new job description for the parent who is Co-Chair of the Action Team. This is now available for the entire district."

"Improved the involvement of schools impacted by the military."

Increased Collegial Support and Collaboration

"We brought 4 district departments together to plan and work. In our district, this is BIG!"

"School Site Councils are working better."

“The district passed state and federal monitoring and received several commendations.”

Involved More Diverse Families

“We increased our ability to reach parents from poverty—but we still have a lot of work to do.”

“Involved more Latino and Spanish speaking parents.”

“Increased community enthusiasm.”

Improved Activities for Specific Types of Involvement

“Increased the number of volunteers at every elementary school.”

“We progressed from 16 family involvement workshops for kindergarten only to 58 workshops this year in k-high school.”

Increased Involvement Activities to Boost Student Achievement

“Involvement activities focused more on improving student achievement.”

“Our theme was ‘joining hands for successful partnerships’ . . . and all stakeholders (worked on) improving learning for all students in the district.”

Over 90% of the district leaders also listed specific goals they have for the 06-07 (current) school year. They aim to improve all aspects of district and school programs described in this report, including providing more training to school teams, increasing collegial support, reaching out to involve more families, and increasing the use of systematic evaluations. These are good goals that should lead to useful information in the next *UPDATE* survey at the end of this school year.

SUMMARY

NNPS guides districts to organize their leadership on school, family, and community partnerships and to assist all elementary, middle, and high schools to develop their school-based programs of family and community involvement linked to school improvement goals. The *2006 District UPDATE* data indicate that most of the district leaders in NNPS are working hard to implement key program components. There were some notable advances in the 2006 *UPDATE* data.

- District leaders conducted many activities to connect with community partners in 2006.
- District leaders acknowledged more support for partnerships from their state departments of education in 2006 than in 2005.
- District leaders who continued their work in 2006 conducted more actions than in 2005 to directly facilitate schools in developing their partnership programs and improved the overall quality of their program, with fewer districts in planning stages and more districts reporting good, very good, and excellent programs.

The data indicate that there still is work for district leaders to do to bring their programs up to par and to meet NNPS expectations for research-based programs and practices.

- All district leaders should write annual, detailed, leadership plans for partnerships. Regardless of the stage of program development, annual leadership plans enable district leaders to focus clearly on goals for improving partnerships and balancing their work on district-level activities and direct assistance to schools. (See the template for district leadership plans in the *NNPS Handbook for Action, Second Edition*, p. 280 or request a electronic copies of alternative forms developed at the NNPS District Leadership Institute from an NNPS Facilitator.)

- All district leaders need to improve and increase attention to school-based Action Teams for Partnerships. Over time, all elementary, middle, and high schools should be guided to form a team and receive “basic training” in planning and implementing goal-linked partnership programs. (See chapters 3, 4, and 5 in the *Handbook* for information and guidance on team training.) After basic training, district leaders must continue to provide assistance to help schools improve the quality of their programs, address challenges to involve all families, share best practices, and focus involvement on important improvement goals for student success.
- More district leaders need to institute targeted and useful evaluations of their own programs and their schools’ work on partnerships. NNPS evaluation tools should help.

District leaders may compare the data in this report with their own responses on the *2006 District UPDATE*. Leaders should take pride in their efforts that strong, compared to others. District leaders are invited to share their best practices with NNPS in the 2007 collection of *Promising Partnership Practices*. Ideas are due May 15, 2007 and can be submitted at any time at www.partnershipschools.org in the section Success Stories, click on Submit a Practice/Online.

District leaders also may work with colleagues and schools to improve the aspects of their work that fall below NNPS averages or that do not reflect the expectations for excellent programs. The 2006 data and NNPS analyses over the past decade indicate that districts and schools that sustain their work on partnerships from year to year improve their programs, outreach, and results of family and community involvement.⁵

With work well underway in the 06-07 school year, district leaders will have more to report on the next *UPDATE* at the end of this school year.

NOTES

- 1) States and organizations in NNPS also are sent the summaries of school and district *2006 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.
- 2) Districts in 2006 were located in 28 states and two Canadian provinces: CA, CT, FL, GA, ID, IL, KY, LA, MA, MD, MI, MN, NC, NE, NJ, NV, NY, OH, OK, RI, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, WV, Alberta, and Manitoba.
- 3) 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 of “permanence,” even if leaders changed.
- 4) The (α or alpha) reports the *internal reliability* of a scale, indicating whether the items are correlated and represent a common construct. Reliability coefficients of .6 or higher indicate that the items are consistent and that the scale is useful.
- 5) NNPS researchers analyze *UPDATE* data in analytic studies to learn how specific program features affect the quality of district and school programs. For a summary of data collected over the past five years, click on the *Research and Evaluation* section of the NNPS website, www.partnershipschools.org.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Brownstein, J. I., Maushard, M., Robinson, J., Greenfeld, M. D., & Hutchins, D. J. (2006). *Promising partnership practices 2006*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. (See annual collections of practices at www.partnershipschoools.org in the section Success Stories.)
- Epstein, J. L. (in press). Research meets policy and practice: How are school districts addressing NCLB requirements for parental involvement? In A. Sadovnik, J. O' Day, G. Bohrnstedt, and K. Borman (Eds.). *No Child Left Behind and reducing the achievement gap: Sociological perspectives on federal educational policy*. NY: Routledge.
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R., & Van Voorhis, F. L., (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, second edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Sheldon, S. B. (in press). Getting families involved with NCLB: Factors affecting schools' enactment of federal policy. In A. R. Sadovnik, J. O' Day, G. Bohrnstedt, and K. Borman (Eds.). *No Child Left Behind and reducing the achievement gap: Sociological perspectives on federal educational policy*. NY: Routledge.
- Sheldon, S. B. (2005). Testing a structural equations model of partnership program implementation and family involvement. *The Elementary School Journal*. 106, 171-187.
- Sanders, M. G. (2005). *Building school-community partnerships: Collaboration for student success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Visit NNPS's website, www.partnershipschoools.org, for:

- Research summaries (in Research and Evaluation)
- Professional development conference registrations
- All editions of *Type 2* newsletters (in Publications and Products)
- All collections of *Promising Partnership Practices* (in Publications and Products)
- Send an e-mail to NNPS Facilitators with questions or comments
- Lots of good information to use and share!