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## Getting By With a Little Help From Our Friends

### Ohio Department of Education Columbus, Ohio

Many state agencies must link themselves with other organizations to best accomplish their goals. Therefore, the state of Ohio's Department of Education worked to find other people with a similar purpose and passion about family and school partnerships to best strengthen family and school partnerships at the school, district, and state levels. Some of these partners include the Ohio P.T.A., the Ohio Parent Information and Resource Center, and the Governor's Family and Children First Initiative.

To encourage family and school connections at the school level, the Department of Education submitted a proposal called the "Family and School Partnership Initiative" to the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation in Cleveland. The Foundation approved the proposal, and the bulk of those funds are given to schools as \$500 planning grants. The following represent the three steps for receiving the funds. First, the Department of Education mails announcements of the availability of funding to all Ohio public school principals and P.T.A. presidents. Next, schools send teams of parents and educators to a workshop where they learn about the six types of partnership practices that they may use in the development of their family/school involvement plans. Sixteen of these meetings were held around the state last year; this year, a "rally" was held in Columbus, featuring Joyce Epstein as the keynote speaker. Four other regional workshops are being offered as alternatives. Finally, members of schools who attend the workshop receive \$500 after they write a one-page description of how they will use the \$500 grant.

This past year, many schools used the small grant to provide food and child care for community meetings. Some covered the cost of substitute teachers so that classroom teachers could attend the initial training. The plan that is developed can then be submitted for a competitive review that could possibly lead to a \$3,000 implementation grant. Originally that \$3,000 was to come from the foundation grant, but the Department recently dedicated a portion of its federal Goals 2000 grant to cover the implementation grants.

In the first year of this initiative, 239 schools joined the Partnership Network, 177 sent teams to orientation (614 persons), 154 received planning grants, and 70 received implementation grants!

The biggest challenge within the Department has been establishing a new grant-making program while also attempting to accomplish broader initiative goals - with one consultant assigned full-time responsibility. This is where the partnership has been invaluable. When sixteen workshops were scheduled around the state last spring, the organization partners served as facilitators. When it was time to negotiate with grant applicants, the organization partners helped. The partners serve on the steering committee that plans most initiative activity.

The challenge in the field is to assist teams of parents and teachers to engage in collaboration at each step of the plan development and implementation. The partners desire to help schools focus first on collaboration and then on creation of activities.

At a recent steering committee meeting, the Department's coordinator asked the other members if they ever felt taken advantage of, being pressed into the service of this initiative. The unanimous response was that we all benefit from families, schools, and communities working together as equal partners supporting the education and achievement of Ohio's children.

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