
THE ILLINOIS STORY

Illinois State Board of Education

Chicago, Illinois

In the summer of 1998, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) offered training to representatives of several schools in East Central Illinois as the first big step towards getting word of the six-type framework out to the education community of the state. This training preceded a year-long pilot project designed to test an Illinois version of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* by Epstein, J.L., et. al. The pilot project tested the training methodology and the forms compiled and developed by Laura Bercovitz of the Adult Learning Resource Center (ALRC) under a special grant from ISBE.

The pilot project eventually involved 9 schools in 5 districts all belonging to the counties overseen by Regional Office of Education (ROE) No. 11 in the Charleston area. Each school had a designated facilitator, and the ROE also provided a regional facilitator and other support for school, family, and community partnerships. On a regular basis during the 1998-99 school year, the various facilitators met with Bercovitz, ROE staff, and ISBE representatives. The team discussed the new forms in the order of use, and eventually established: *Current Practices of School, Family and Community Partnerships*, *Three-Year Outline*, *One-Year Action Plan*, and *End-of-Year Self-Assessment Form*.

ISBE created an advisory council to identify barriers and aids to the spreading of this training and information across the state. The council recommended trying a pyramid approach, focusing on the already-existing professional development staff in each of the 56 ROE/ISC (Intermediate Service Center) offices. In this plan, ISBE would provide training for the ROE/ISC staff, and they in turn would train Action Teams from interested schools and districts. Since the *Illinois Partnership Framework*, as this tool became known, had no funds behind it, this use of an existing structure was the most cost-effective way to achieve the widest possible dissemination. The Council also brought an offer from a university to house both a best practices web page and a partnership listserv to support the work statewide.

ISBE and ALRC staff continued to make presentations about the framework of six types of involvement and the development/implementation process of Action Teams at state conferences and

workshops in order to keep awareness high and build interest towards participation in future trainings on school, family, and community partnerships.

By mid-summer 1999, we had a plan for dissemination, an identified audience, and the materials for an *Illinois Partnership Manual*. The manual itself is intended to be the tool for trainers of trainers rather than the tool of the local school facilitator, though it can also serve that function. Adapted from the *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, Epstein, J.L., et. al., *The Illinois Partnership Manual* is a loose-leaf binder with dividers to mark off the various sections containing background and general information about the framework and the related process, its tie to School Quality Assurance, copies of the forms and of PowerPoint slides, best practices (including information on how to submit these to best practices website), a resource section, and information on how to connect with the National Network of Partnership Schools. In addition, electronic copies of forms and slides were available on a disk included with each binder. One copy of the binder was given to each participant in the training of trainers workshops.

Three training of trainer sessions were held in the northern, central, and southern parts of the state in February and March 2000. Representatives from 20 Regional Offices of Education attended as well as other ISBE staff and people from individual districts and specialized programs—a total of 63 people. Illinois Partnerships lacks direct funding and a legislated mandate within or beyond ISBE. The Illinois state leaders for partnerships in the National Network feel that the interest and participation across the state bodes well for further dissemination of the framework and the development of school-based programs of partnership.

Currently both the Governor's Office and ISBE are looking at Illinois Partnerships and exploring ways of promoting school, family, and community involvement. For example, there are important links of partnerships with families in the current Reading Excellence Act proposal submitted by ISBE, which features professional development in the Illinois Partnerships' framework and process in its project design.

Gary Greene, *Principal Consultant*
(312) 814-3606