PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS TO CONDUCT PROGRAMS OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

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A teacher’s “happy life” is affected by the knowledge and skills s/he brings to the classroom, including expertise on family and community involvement (Epstein, 2011) and by the collaborative climate that develops when all teachers and administrators in a school work with families and community groups as partners in children’s education (MetLife, 2010). A student’s “happy life” is affected by relationships with teachers and peers and by support from parents and other family and community members who value and enhance student learning and development. These prerequisites for teachers’ and students’ success require changes in teacher education to provide courses that prepare future educators to engage families and communities in their schools and in students’ education.

For decades, researchers have concluded studies of family and community involvement with a call to improve preservice education on the topic. Still, most new teachers graduate from college without skills to understand and work with diverse families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). This presentation will provide teacher-educators with an overview of research “readings,” classroom discussion topics, and activities to use in various courses that prepare future teachers (and administrators) to work more productively with students’ families and communities. Using the new edition of School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools (Epstein, 2011), we will discuss topics, discussions, and projects that professors of education may use in new courses of family and community involvement or “infuse” in the syllabi of existing courses (e.g., contemporary issues in education, education policy studies, educational administration, counseling, methods of teaching specific subjects/homework design, and others).

Future teachers and administrators should learn the difference between terms of parental involvement and school, family, and community partnership program development; definitional advances in the framework of six types of involvement compared to prior typologies; the goal of promoting school-like families and family-like schools; the importance of the multiplication vs. division of labor; the emergence of new definitions and designs for homework; and the differences between studies of what is vs. what might be for issues of equity of involvement and student learning.

With up-to-date discussions of these and other new concepts, professors of education may correct the strong stereotypes that many college students bring with them to their education courses about families with diverse socioeconomic, linguistic, cultural, racial backgrounds—often assuming, erroneously, that families do not value or care about their children’s education. These new directions address the urgent need to
improve schools of education and teacher quality (Levine, 2006) and to fix the “cracks in the ivory tower” (Farkas and Duffett, 2010) that prevent teachers from working effectively with today’s students. This session will enable teacher educators to update their courses so that future teachers and administrators understand that family and community involvement helps boost student learning and, therefore is part of every teacher’s professional (and happy) life.

Keywords:
Teacher training, Family-community involvement, student success in school.