

Signature Assignment: Stakeholders in Education

TESP 504

Ariel Arsac-Ellison

Azusa Pacific University

Part I: Introduction of School Systems

Pacific Beach Middle School is located in the heart of San Diego's Pacific Beach neighborhood, and is home to 672 students. This 6th-8th grade middle school is part of the San Diego Unified School District. The neighborhood itself is composed mainly of families, college students from the local universities, and workers in the service industry. Although its proximity to the affluent La Jolla community attracts many wealthy homeowners, the Pacific Beach community is socioeconomically diverse. According to Pacific Beach Middle's 2020-2021 SARC data, 35.6% of the student population is socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 3.1% are homeless. That same report reveals that 43.8% of the student population are white, 34.7% are hispanic, 3% are African-American, 4.9% are Asian, 11.6% are two or more races, and only 1.2% are Filipino or Pacific Islander. Of those 672 students, 6.7% are English Learners (EL), and 11.8% have disabilities. Although data from the California School Dashboard website indicates that Pacific Beach Middle had issues with chronic absenteeism and suspensions in 2019, its 2020-2021 SARC data suggests that the school is academically sound. During that year, 77.4% of the total student population performed at or above grade level on the ELA FAST aReading assessment, and 94.1% of students performed at or above grade level on the District Essential Math Indicators assessment.

Pacific Beach Middle is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School. Over the next few years, they plan to redesign their IB units as they shift from California State Standards towards Common Core standards. The heart of the IB curriculum is built around relevant inquiry based learning experiences that engage students with real world issues, and utilize authentic assessments (pbmiddle.sandiegounified.org). In the fall of 2021, the students were welcomed back to school with a brand new state-of-the art classroom building as part of an effort to

modernize the campus. The new building provides larger classrooms, and multiple collaborative learning spaces for students to work on projects. These new modern amenities should help facilitate an inquiry and project-based curriculum, and exponentially improve the students overall learning experience.

Part II: Collaborating with Families

Creating a positive learning environment for students begins with developing a sense of community. Traditionally, schools and home life have remained separate, and students rarely observed any connection between the two. Progressive educational philosophers of the early twentieth century such as John Dewey recognized the importance of school systems that emphasized the vital link between school and society, and encouraged students to interact with their local communities (Gutek, 2013). One step towards achieving this goal is to involve parents in the school environment. Other than their peers, a student's parents are often the biggest influences in their lives. When parental values conflict with classroom expectations, students struggle to positively participate in their learning experience, and may find it difficult to achieve academic success. Research has shown that parental cooperation and collaboration with school faculty leads to increased student achievement, improved classroom conduct, and better parent and teacher morale (Borich, 2017).

One example of how I plan to involve parents in their child's learning experience is by sending regular newsletters about upcoming units, assessments, and projects. A majority of parents are genuinely interested in what their children are working on, and want to support their academic success. Sending regular communications to families is a simple way of opening the window for parents into their child's work, so that they can strengthen their personal

relationships and create a connection between their school and home. It can also be a useful way of establishing common values. Student accountability improves when parents are aware of classroom expectations and upcoming assignments. Parents can establish norms and expectations at home that are conducive to their child's learning experience, and support their teachers' instruction.

Another communicative strategy I learned while teaching middle school French and Spanish was to send two positive emails to parents once a week. The idea is to randomly select two students in a class, and send an email to their parents to discuss what they do well in class, or something that you appreciate about them. The email should conclude by asking the parents to share the aforementioned praise with their child. This type of communication has two functions: demonstrate to parents that you value their child, and demonstrate to the student that you recognize their worth. Generally speaking, parents only receive direct communications about their students when something wrong has happened. Sending positive messages makes parents understand that I am on their side, which helps alleviate tensions when I need to send a negative email. Additionally, the student feels seen, and will be more motivated to perform well in the classroom.

A third strategy I can employ in the service of parental involvement is to provide them with opportunities to volunteer. Volunteering is the third type of parental involvement listed by Dr. Joyce Epstein (sps186.org, 2022). When parents volunteer their time for school work and events, they move from passive participants to active members of the school community. This can make them feel more welcomed by the school, help them understand teachers' jobs, strengthen the connection between school and home life for students, and ultimately improve parent-teacher relationships (sps186.org). For example, parents can be recruited to lend their

skills for events such as Art Night, where student projects are displayed around the school. This will require parents to get organized amongst themselves with help from school faculty and staff in order to work towards a common goal. Students will benefit from seeing their work displayed, and parents will solidify their roles as members of the school community.

Part 3: Collaborating with Community Partners

Schools and communities are a single unit, and just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to raise a school. Schools cannot rely on state and federal resources alone to provide meaningful and impactful learning experiences for their students. Authentic community connections and actions help reinforce values, prepare students for civic responsibilities, and address the needs of the community. Partnerships with businesses and local community groups in public schools enable students to expand their worldview and learn about potential career opportunities (Kemp, 2017). Effective community partnerships have the power to transform a school. Research shows that community partnerships with schools improve academic achievement, elevate student motivation, decrease truancy rates, and lead to higher rates of students pursuing higher education opportunities (O’Keefe, 2011). When teachers, students, parents, and community groups work together, tangible positive outcomes can be achieved for all stakeholders.

As a teacher, I can promote these types of collaborative community relationships by helping to create an “action team”. The role of the action team is to seek out partnerships with local businesses, learning centers, libraries, museums, and other community groups. These teams can include parents, teachers, administrators, and even alumni. Their goal is simply to reach out to various organizations in order to determine what type of learning opportunities they could

provide for students. For example, as a member of an “action team”, I could reach out to the local aquarium to set up an educational field trip for my class. Students may be given special behind the scenes access to the inner workings of the aquarium in order to learn about the different roles involved in maintaining specific environments for the animals.

A second step I can take towards reaching this goal is to develop a community resource map. Mapping out the community and the various skills that individuals possess can help me determine community needs, and which community resources are available. I can also include project materials that can be provided for free or at discounted price by local businesses. These maps can then be shared with community groups and individual members in order to raise awareness regarding student needs and educational opportunities, as well as promote collaboration.

Within the classroom, it will be imperative that I connect the curriculum with real world experiences. Students will want to know why they are learning something, and how they can apply what they have learned in their lives outside of the classroom. This can be achieved by developing project-based learning opportunities in collaboration with local nonprofits and community centers. For example, students in my English class could learn about copywriting skills and marketing strategies. I could then partner with a local environmental group, and have my students apply those skills to promote an environmental campaign regarding an issue they have deemed important.

Part IV: Collaborating with School Support Staff

Maximizing the learning experience for all students requires internal collaboration between teachers and support staff. Teachers alone do not have the capacity to address all the

needs of each and everyone of their students. Schoolwide systems must be implemented to help support behavior management, social-emotional learning, and academic achievement (Chenoweth, 2016). Teaching assistants, speech therapists, school psychiatrists, reading specialists, and counselors are a few of the essential support staff roles that contribute to the social and academic success of students. These team members can help with the implementation of Common Core Standards, Responses to Intervention (RTI), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines (Ellis, 2013). An ideal school culture is one which encourages and facilitates collaboration amongst teachers and these school professionals. Teachers must understand how each support role can be utilized in different situations, and seek to build collaborative relationships with them.

As a new teacher, the first thing I can do is research my school and classroom demographics in order to determine which students may need additional support. I would then reach out to the school's paraprofessionals and other support staff to get a sense of the resources available at my school that can be used to meet our students' needs, and which is the best way to access them. Through conversations, we would establish a set of tools or routines that work well for specific students with disabilities, and I would ask them which UDL practices would best accommodate my students with disabilities. After coming up with a set of strategies and implementing them, we would continue to communicate as we make adjustments and adapt to new challenges.

Within the classroom, I will need to develop a positive relationship with any teaching assistant that may work alongside me to support students with disabilities or ELs. I can get to know them through conversations about their personal backgrounds and discussing their career goals. Together we can develop ideas for classroom objectives, behavioral expectations, and

lesson plans as we work towards a common mission. I can ask them to help with the implementation of specific UDL strategies, to re-teach previously taught lessons, or to help organize a physical classroom environment that facilitates access for students with disabilities. These paraprofessionals will likely have skills and experience beyond my own competencies, so it is essential that our relationship be built on mutual respect, teamwork, and shared goals.

There may be times when I may need the help of multiple support staff roles in service of a student's needs. For example if I notice that a student is academically or socio-emotionally declining, I will reach out to the school counselor and other relevant partners of the student success team (SST). The grade-level counselor collects additional evidence, and will communicate with teachers, the student, and their parents about what can be done. The SST and RTI coordinator will then formulate a plan using appropriate academic and behavioral systems, and I will oversee its implementation in the classroom. Once the RTI has been implemented, I will continuously monitor the student's progress through observation and the collection of data, and then communicate this information to the SST.

Part V: Collaborating with Teachers

A common misconception held by new teachers is that they have to do all the work alone. Approaching teaching from this perspective makes an already difficult job nearly impossible. Successful teachers understand that building relationships and collaborating with their colleagues not only helps with the implementation of efficient instructional strategies, but also provides the necessary mental support to persevere through the daily challenges of their educational career. Teacher collaboration diffuses conflicting adult dynamics while reinforcing a collaborative culture that makes student learning a top priority (Minero, 2015). Positive teacher to teacher

relationships are essential to providing the most meaningful and impactful learning experiences for all students. Research shows that students demonstrated increased levels of academic achievement in schools where teachers reported frequent conversations and feelings of mutual trust amongst their peers (Jones, 2018).

One way to foster a collaborative environment is to build positive relationships with other teachers. I can achieve this at my own school by participating in team building activities, getting to know my peers through casual conversations, and offering my support when needed. I should also reach out to other teachers when I need support. Being open about my struggles, and lending an ear when other teachers need to get something off their mind or are facing challenges will demonstrate to my peers that I am trustworthy. For example, if I notice that a teacher is having trouble designing a unit around a topic that I am well versed with, I can share my resources and provide suggestions for activities they could lead in class. In that same vein, I should use planning time to collaborate with other teachers in my subject area.

Another way to promote collaboration amongst my fellow teachers is to share work responsibilities. The best teacher teams comprise teachers who complement one another. Dividing the workload based on our various competencies and interests will make planning more efficient, and alleviate stress for everyone involved. It also provides us with an opportunity to learn from each other as we reconvene and finalize plans for units, lessons, or activities. Applications such as Google Drive can be used to make this process more efficient by creating easier access to work products and resources.

Similarly, working with teachers across subjects to develop interdisciplinary units and plan activities is a form of teacher collaboration that will improve the learning experience for all students. Department leaders and teachers in various subject areas can work together to create

project-based learning opportunities where students are presented with authentic assessments. As an English teacher, I could collaborate with both a science teacher and a photography teacher so that our students combine multiple skills to design a product. For example, students could use what they have learned about copywriting along with their knowledge of photography and environmental issues to produce an informational pamphlet about an environmental problem affecting their community. This pamphlet could then be shared throughout the school as part of an environmental campaign. Not only will this provide students with a relevant learning experience, it will also promote a stronger sense of community.

Part VI: Importance of Administration

When all is said and done, it is school administrators who set the tone for establishing a sense of community and a collaborative environment. In the same way that teachers model classroom expectations for their students, administrators model school wide expectations for teachers and support staff. Their vision should inspire students and teachers, and move the school in a positive direction. It is their responsibility to provide needed resources and professional development opportunities, ensure that the program is being implemented faithfully, monitor classroom performance levels, and work with committees (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). They should also use scheduling to provide teachers with ample time to collaborate and communicate about certain issues. Furthermore, in order for a school to succeed, administrators must put in place a system of accountability where teachers monitor student growth, school leaders monitor teacher growth, and district leaders monitor individual principal growth (Chenoweth, 2017). Ultimately, administrators aim to make decisions informed by the needs of their students and teachers.

Administrators cannot do their jobs properly if teachers do not communicate with them. I plan to collaborate with my school administrator by regularly communicating with them about student performances and resources I need to provide effective instruction. I can share data collected from assessments, along with any observational notes I have taken on student morale and behaviors. For example, if I notice that a majority of my students are performing below grade level expectations in reading tasks, I will inform my administrator and provide evidence that confirms my observations. Together, we could analyze the data to diagnose the issue and focus on areas for improvement.

School leaders need teachers to help them implement the goals and values of the school program. Therefore, I can support my administrator by advocating the culture they are attempting to establish. It is important that I be on board with the vision they have for the school, and that my instructional methods are reflective of common goals. When I was working at the International School of the Peninsula, the school was in the process of transitioning into an International Baccalaureate program. This meant that curriculums had to be redesigned, and new standards were to be followed. Many of the teachers that had been at the school for a while found the process tedious and were reluctant to change their instructional practices. However, I was a new teacher, and welcomed this change as an opportunity to improve the learning experience for my students.

I can also support my administrators by volunteering my time for project and event planning, student support teams, and by joining committees. This form of collaboration helps to alleviate the burden of administering school systems through the delegation of tasks and responsibilities. While at the San Diego French-American school, I joined the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC). My role in the DEIC was to research and discuss ways our

school could promote diversity and inclusion in a manner that benefited students, faculty, and staff. We would share ideas and resources, and then make decisions based on current research. As a team, we worked together on projects to improve accessibility for students with disabilities, support ELs and French Learners, and provide mental health services.

Part VII: Conclusion

In order for any school system to move in a positive direction, collaboration is required from multiple stakeholders. Community groups, administrators, parents, support staff, and teachers must work together, and leverage their assets to optimize learning opportunities and school environments that will catalyze student achievement. Community groups can provide students with unique real world experiences that may inspire their career choices. Parents and teachers working cohesively connects school life to home life. Administrators provide support and resources that teachers need for their classrooms. Collaborating with support staff and other teachers ensures that the specific needs of all students are being. Only when an entire community is invested in reaching a common goal such as improving learning outcomes for students, can everyone involved will reap the benefits.

References

- Borich, G. (2017). *Effective Teaching Methods: Research-Based Practice, Enhanced Pearson eText with Loose-Leaf Version -- Access Card Package (What's New in Curriculum & Instruction)* (9th ed.). Pearson.
- Chenoweth, K. (2017). *Schools That Succeed: How Educators Marshal the Power of Systems for Improvement*. Harvard Education Press.
- Ellis, B. C. (2013). Classroom Partners: How Paraprofessionals Can Support All Students to Meet New Standards. *Educator's Voice*, 6, 20–27.
- Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement*. (2022). Springfield Public Schools.
<https://www.sps186.org/downloads/table/13040/6typesj.epstien.pdf>
- Gutek, G. L. (2017). *Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Education: A Biographical Introduction* (Rev. ed.). Pearson Educacion.
- Jones, L. (2018). *The Power of Teacher Collaboration*. Teaching Channel.
<https://www.teachingchannel.com/blog/teacher-collaboration#:~:text=Successful%20collaborations%20happen%20when%20teachers,into%20a%20cohesive%20lesson%20plan.>
- Kemp, S. M. (2017). The importance of school, community partnerships. *The Daily Journal*.
https://www.smdailyjournal.com/opinion/guest_perspectives/the-importance-of-school-community-partnerships/article_0320fcf4-cb3b-11e7-a8ee-83f57369e16c.html
- Mastropieri, M., & Scruggs, T. (2018). *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Differentiated Instruction* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Minero, E. (2015). *Keeping the Door Open to Collaboration*. Edutopia.
<https://www.edutopia.org/practice/teacher-collaboration-matching-complementary-strengths>

O’Keefe, B. (2011). *5 Steps to Better School/Community Collaboration*. Edutopia.Org.

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/school-community-collaboration-brendan-okeefe>

Pacific Beach Middle. (2022). Pacific Beach Middle, San Diego Unified School District.

https://pbmiddle.sandiegounified.org/academics/about_our_academics/common_core