Community involvement:
Do more and do it better

Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

When Joyce Epstein (1997) delineated six aspects of family involvement, I was surprised to find among the six — collaboration with the community. Involving parent support for the learning of their children seemed like a big enough task let alone engaging the community. Yet, there are many advantages when schools collaborate with the community — real-world applications, mentoring, role models, increased services and enrichment activities result (www.ncrel.org).

I recently worked with a character education program, developed by Shyam Kumar, an IT employee at General Electric in Louisville, Ky. The program provides character education lessons to local middle school students in Louisville, Ky., and also engages over 40 company volunteers to teach those lessons. The assistant principal was wildly supportive of the whole project for many reasons — a major one was that these employees became role models for her students and helped these adolescents see that there were many types of jobs that they could aim for in their adult lives. The volunteers also seemed to have a growing appreciation about the difficulty of teaching — especially at that age (Educare, 2007).

One of the areas that principals need to learn about is how to **develop partnerships among teachers, families, and community stakeholders** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 108). These powerful partnerships take conscious and intentional effort to develop and can take on many different formats and structures. Schools can **offer after-school programs for students with support from community businesses, agencies, or volunteers.**

Family Involvement: Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately.

Many resources are available through libraries, neighborhood churches, YMCA and YWCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club. The principal can also encourage the faculty to create community service programs conducted by students. Community service programs not only forge the connection between school and community needs but benefit students by helping them understand the relationship between learning and the world of work.

The principal can also **work with local businesses, industries, and community organizations to develop programs that enhance student skills and talents.** Well-implemented community partnership programs have been found to increase student attendance, achievement, and report card grades; a sense of greater security; fewer behavioral problems; and an increase in positive attitudes about school and homework (www.thirteen.org).

The principal can also ensure that information about community activities are disseminated that link to student learning skills and talents. Many local civic organizations build and sustain activities to support student learning; they also provide access to the Internet. All of these tasks can be accomplished not only through the principal's efforts but by **developing an ongoing school committee that focuses on family and community partnerships.** "When families and community members volunteer their time and talent in the schools, both schools and students increase their capacity to do more and to do it better" (DeKanter, Ginsburg, Pederson, Peterson, & Rich, 1997).

**Learn more about NSDC's standards:
www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm**

REFERENCES

DeKanter, A., Ginsburg, A., Pederson, J., Peterson, T.K. & Rich, D. (1997). *A compact for learning: An action handbook for family-school-community partnerships.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/Compact/intro.pdf.

Educare Leadership Team. (2007). *Educare.* Lousiville, Ky: General Electric.

Epstein, J. (1997). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Roy, P. & Hord, S. (2003). *Moving NSDC's staff development standards into practice: Innovation configurations, Volume I.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.