Levels of Leadership: Effects of District and School Leaders on the Quality of School Programs of Family and Community Involvement

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**Introduction**

This study examines the impact of district and school leadership on community involvement, family involvement, and program quality. These impacts are tested using sociocultural and organizational learning theories. 24 districts were surveyed, and results showed that principal support and district assistance are the most important factor in the quality of school programs. Implications for policy design are discussed.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

This study utilizes three theoretical perspectives on leadership and partnership to formulate its research questions. These perspectives are as follows:

1. *Theories of Leadership Development: Sociocultural Learning Theory and Organizational Learning Theory:* Sociocultural learning theory examines how the relationships among colleagues affect the entire organization. Organizational learning theory proposes that leaders actions improve their organizations.

2. *Theory of Partnership Program Development: Overlapping Spheres of Influence:* This theory introduces the idea that the main contexts for children’s development (school, home, and community) are interconnected, and therefore better collaboration between these settings is beneficial for children.

3. *District and School Partnership Program Development:* Strong support from principals and district leaders leads to higher quality programs and increased community and family involvement.

**Methods**

Schools were surveyed for nested data within districts and longitudinal data. The three research questions are as follows:

1. How do school factors affect the implementation of school-based programs and outreach activities?

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3. What are the long-term effects of good leadership on school-based partnership programs?

The first two questions were addressed with survey data from 24 school districts (407 schools in 15 states). Dependent variables were the quality of basic program implementation and advanced program outreach. Independent variables were principal support, school reports of district support, district leadership and facilitation, and background measures (demographic variables). Data were analyzed using HLM 6.

**Results**

Results indicated that principals’ support and district assistance were significant factors in successful basic program implementation and advanced outreach. These factors increased family involvement and improved the quality of school programs. Schools with exemplary district leadership take more action to improve partnerships on a long-term basis.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

1. A district leader should be designated for partnerships. This will help schools improve partnerships and programs.

2. District leaders should have skills training so they can facilitate partnerships with their schools.

3. Principals’ support for partnerships should increase.

4. Shared leadership should be defined.

5. Monitoring schools for compliance with federal funding requirements is not enough. We must facilitate program partnerships.

**Conclusion**

Quality leadership is essential for successful educational programs and partnerships. Specifically, principal and district support are necessary. This is strong support for the use of sociocultural and organizational theories for improving schools and policies.

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