



Parental Shared Leadership®

Phillip Schuyler School
Albany, New York

Philip Schuyler School: Parental Shared Leadership® in Action

The Philip Schuyler School case study, demonstrates the power and efficacy of Shared Leadership when parents are accorded respect, meaningful roles, and “audible voice” in the process of designing and implementing programs to improve socio-scholastic outcomes for their children. Philip Schuyler is an elementary school located in an economically depressed, downtown neighborhood in Albany, New York. The school's leadership is provided by two co-principals, who are innovative and open to new ideas to increase academic achievement and improve student conduct. The school is located across from the School of Social Welfare at SUNY Albany. The school's innovative Dean, Kathy Briar-Lawson, was interested in engaging this school with her graduate students.

Family Support America, a national leader in the Family Support movement had started to develop a collaborative among providers in the Albany area to foster more strengths-based, family-focused models of care. At the local level, this effort was championed by the United Way of Northeastern, New York. Through this collaborative, several groups of interested people began to support the effort to improve outcomes for neighborhood children in a number of areas. They included increased parent engagement and family support strategies. As a result, the Schuyler School developed the following programs and strategies to support the children and families in this community:

- Focus groups and forums to learn more about parent leadership and training opportunities
- A Family Support Center was woven into the fabric of the school. Parent-run, it provides opportunities for parents to meet and learn more about their children, the school environment, and important issues that directly impact their families.
- Institution of the Time Dollar program--which allowed children to volunteer during school hours and receive time dollars. These dollars could be used by students to purchase items from the school store. Parents and children put the program in place and helped students identify volunteer roles - e.g. -policing the play ground, tutoring younger children. Church groups donate items on a regular basis for the store.
- Direct work of graduate students with the parents to understand their issues -- someone was listening. This process leads to advocacy, social capital building, and in some cases – civic engagement.

Children and parents were the primary beneficiaries of this program as parents learned they had the attention and respect of school officials and other community stakeholders. The entire community has begun to reap the residual benefits of parents that are, not only more involved in *their* children's socio-scholastic growth, but actively pursue positive youth outcomes community-wide. Results and lessons learned:

- Principals and teachers must “buy-into” the Shared Leadership process
- Parental Shared Leadership requires an on-going, collaborative effort. Parents and school personnel must work in tandem to achieve mutually agreed upon, student-centered outcomes.
- Opportunities for parent engagement, participation, and leadership must be fostered by a school's leadership and embrace participation of other community stakeholders.
- Parents and their children must be engaged and included at *all* stages and given regular opportunities to express their ideas, concerns, and views

RESULTS SUMMARY -- The number of children sent to the principal's office was reduced from 30 children to 3 per day. Parents visit the school more frequently and are more involved overall. Children are more engaged in their learning and the faith community has adopted and supports this school.