Chapter 3

It Takes a Whole Village:
The SDP School

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*All children are at risk today. More homes are broken, more are led by single moth-
ers, more have two parents away at work. For children to develop healthily, well-
functioning adults must be available and attentive to them at all times. In the SDP
school, the adults work creatively and enthusiastically with each other and with the
children, setting a powerful model for the children's attitudes toward school, society,
and the future.*

Schools Have Taken a Mechanistic Turn

Scientific and technological advances are, in Comer's (1989a) words, "increasing
the level of development needed to succeed—the highest level ever required in
the history of the world" (p. 127). Children need to learn how to integrate the
tremendous amount of information that is bombarding them due to the advances
in technology, and when to act upon the information (Comer, 1989b, p. 132).
When their climate is psychologically nurturing and educationally exemplary,
schools can help prepare children to succeed in this complex world.

However, schools have taken a mechanistic turn: "Learning has become very
much like the model of the computer, with its input and processing sequences:
We assume that a person has learned when he or she is able to make an output"
(Comer, 1989b, p. 125). The primary question most schools ask when stating their
mission is, "What knowledge and skills do students need to understand?" The cur-
rent school structure is designed with subject matter as the dominant consideration.

Teachers can be replaced by others with the same certification. Students are sched-
uled according to subject matter courses. It does not matter who teaches history,
as the content and processes have been standardized according to subject area
experts. Yet schools organized around content are experiencing difficulties. As
knowledge is increasing, the school's curriculum becomes more dense, more con-
centrated cognitively and academically. The knowledge explosion straps school
resources, and we are left with the paradox of an expanding curriculum that actu-
ally contracts student options.

In order to counteract the mechanistic tendency of U.S. schools, reform ini-
tiatives are looking toward the School Development Program (SDP) for insights.
Donald Cohen (1994), director of the Yale Child Study Center, captures the heart
of the process when he notes:

> The Comer School Development Program has had an enormous influence
> in the contemporary view of the role of schools in the lives of children and
> families. The theoretical perspective of the SDP seems so natural today that
> we can hardly believe how novel it is and the challenges that its founder
> faced as he first presented his ideas. The profound influence of social and
> emotional development in shaping academic success, the role of parents in
> schools, the concept of school atmosphere as a defining factor in school
> reform: these, and other concepts which are part of current theory, are all
> related to the SDP contributions. (p. i)

The SDP school demonstrates three important concepts. The first concept is
based on the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." "It takes
a whole village" of the SDP principal, staff, parents, external change agents such
as the SDP facilitators, and community members to facilitate the highest levels of
development among the students.

The second concept is that a school with a psychologically nurturing and edu-
cationally exemplary climate "permits parents and staff to support the overall devel-
opment of students in a way that makes academic achievement and desirable social
behavior possible" (Haynes, 1993, p. 32). The SDP school is noted for the staff's
steadfast efforts to sustain an academic and social climate that promotes students'
development. Dimensions of the academic climate of the school, such as staff ded-
ication to student learning, the academic focus of the school, achievement motiva-
tion among the students, and high expectations, contribute to the school's academic
climate being classified on a range from "educationally appropriate" to "education-
ally exemplary." The school's social climate can be classified on a continuum from
"psychologically adequate" to "nurturing." The social climate has two notable char-
acteristics: (1) the frequency and quality of interactions among parents, teachers, stu-
dents, the principal, administrators, and adjunct staff; and (2) the feelings of trust
and respect that exist within the school community (Emmons, 1992).

Faithful replication of the SDP improves essential dimensions of the climate in the SDP school. As these dimensions improve, students experience significant positive growth along the six developmental pathways and are at reduced risk for negative outcomes while increasing their probability for positive psychosocial behavioral and academic outcomes. A psychologically nurturing and educationally exemplary school is fertile ground for seeding staff professional development and educational reform initiatives aimed at improving *aspects* of the educative process, such as a math program. Grade-level teachers or the teachers of a department that do not work well together cannot come together as a team and implement a new curricular initiative. Individual teachers by themselves are not able to engage in global *preventive* actions on behalf of the students. Poor-quality relationships between staff members and the students interfere with the educative process. Poor interpersonal relationships among the students disrupt the staff's intentions to promote teamwork among them.

Creating the psychologically nurturing and educationally exemplary school climate requires "reinventing" community in the school, tapping the energy of individuals within the school and in the community, and an organizational structure that decreases the friction, the resistance, and the interference to authentic learning. This climate, conducive to learning, is promoted by the daily practice of the three guiding principles—consensus, collaboration, and no-fault—in all aspects of the educative process.

The third foundational SDP concept is that students' behavior, attitude, and achievement levels are to a large extent influenced by the school climate and a strong instructional program rather than by the students' socioeconomic status and ethnic background.

Children Are Reflections of Their Environments

Vygotsky argued, in Tudge's words, that "in order to determine the nature and path of development, it becomes essential to examine the social environment in which development occurs and the type of instruction provided" (Tudge, 1990, p. 158). We approach child development with the understanding that the child learns from direct exposure to stimulating and challenging experiences and that the most meaningful learning stems from adult mediation. Comer (1989d) writes:

> Because of the extreme dependency on the child and the important role of the caretaker, the attitudes, values and ways of the caretaker greatly influence those of the young child. This allows the caretaker to mediate the child's experiences—to give them meaning and to establish their relative importance. (p. 353)

The child learns from the interactions that occur in the school setting, including interactions among the adults in the building and the connections between

home and school. For example, the treatment of their parents by the school staff, of course, has an impact on how the students perceive the school and education in general. The children's learning process involves the environment in toto, including both the intentional, purposeful interactions and the offhand seemingly inconsequential remark or gesture. Children learn by observing how their peers are disciplined, by overhearing how the adults in the building interact with one another, through contact with written and other cultural products, and especially, through significant adults who take an interest.

With this, we understand, as Vygotsky (1978) discerned, that the higher psychological processes are internalized social relationships. Luria (1976) outlines the higher psychological processes as "the laws of logical thought, active remembering, selective attention, and acts of the will in general which form the basis for the most complex and characteristic higher forms of human activity" (p. 5). Internalization is the process through which the internal plane of consciousness is formed (Wertsch, 1985). In his discussion of the relationship between learning and development, Vygotsky underscored that "static measures assess mental functioning that has already matured, fossilized" while "maturing or developing mental functions must be fostered and assessed through collaborative, not independent or isolated activities" (Moll, 1990, p. 3).

This issue of assessment is at the heart of Vygotsky's theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development: Vygotsky (1978) differentiated between the child's current developmental level and his or her zone of proximal development: "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 87). The basic message of the zone, according to Valsiner, is the "interdependence of the process of child development and the socially provided resources for that development" (Valsiner, cited in Moll, 1990, p. 4). A school climate that interferes with successful teaching and learning disrupts the emergence of student–teacher relations and the students' interpersonal relations, which are essential for adult mediation and student collaboration.

The school has the power to facilitate the students' attainment of the highest levels of development, that is, "the attainment of the well-managed self that is engendered by the strengthening of linkages among all of the developmental pathways" (Haynes and Ben-Avie, 1994, p. iii). Comer (1994) notes that the acquisition of a reasonably high level of cognitive skills in knowledge is most often made possible through whole child development—physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical (p. 11). Content in the SDP school is, therefore, seen through the lens of child development. This is a paradigm shift in thinking about the purpose, function, and structure of schooling.

In the past, educators considered subject area content knowledge to be most worthwhile. Through mastering disciplines such as science and social studies, we

would unlock new knowledge, apply existing knowledge to a wider range of situations, and help ensure a better future for our children. Thus, it is not surprising that our schools were organized by subject areas. Our heavily content-oriented school curriculum is a reflection of this belief. As being prepared for school is now a federal goal for the year 2000, we can assume that we have not met this goal yet, and one of the measures of the success of content-oriented education is lacking. Today the content-weighted curriculum is approaching its own demise because there is too much content.

Comer's response has been to urge curriculum designers and teachers to consider children's mastery of developmental milestones in the first round of deliberations of what to include in the curriculum, not the last round. This call rejects the commonplace practice of designing school curricula solely in cognitive and academic terms and regulating developmental or social processes by discipline codes. Staff that promote students' development of higher psychological processes ensure that the students will actually learn and use the curriculum's content. The school, in Comer's view, is the one institution where children's development can be systematically enhanced.

Development and learning are mediated through social processes and not necessarily through the competitive or individual processes that are embedded in our existing model of school. When we focus on social processes, relationships between students and teachers become the vehicle for instruction and are more important than subject area content. In the SDP elementary school, students and teachers may stay together for more than a year, in order to know each other better. As students get older, they may stay together as a group for several "periods" of a day. When development is taken as primary, then epistemologically, the strength of relationship building will take precedence over the mechanics of teaching. Strong relationships build community whether that community is in the classroom or among the teacher, parents, and students in the community of learners we call the school.

Thus, the central question for the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT), the Parent Team (PT), and the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST) is, "How can we build strong relationships that will encourage the development of our children?" This is indeed different from the question with a subject area emphasis, "What knowledge and skills do students need to understand?" The SDP teams help ensure that a community dialogue is created around how to assist in children's healthy development. A theoretical analysis of the SDP process notes:

> The greater the number and heterogeneity of adults endorsing mutual values, goals, and expectancies for a child, the more likely it is that the child will internalize these same goals as part of his or her own sense of identity. (Anson et al., 1991, p. 74)

It is in the service of child development that staff, parents, and elements of the community such as businesses, social service agencies, and volunteer organizations become partners in SDP schools.

Reinventing Community Through Parental Involvement

> I'm the principal of the K–5, with around 700 students. It is a bilingual program. In the morning, I've asked parents to leave so that they could leave the education of children in the hands of teachers. They want to be there; in some instances you have to say very nicely that they're sort of in the way. (Warner, 1994)

The proverbial village that was once small, simple, and nurturing is now very large, complex, and sometimes insensitive. Agencies that serve children and families are often fragmented and unable to adequately address the psychosocial needs that influence how much and how well children learn and perform in school. Industrialization and urbanization have accorded enormous economic and quality-of-life benefits to some children and families, but they have also brought impoverishment and alienation to many. For these children and their families, rebuilding the community and creating a network of services with schools at the center is an urgent need. In addition, Haynes and Ben-Avie (in press) note that some outcomes of parental involvement in schools are less readily discernible:

1. *Teacher outcomes:* When parents are more involved in the school, teachers learn more about the cultural and ethnic communities served by the school. This knowledge base gives teachers greater understanding of the students in realms ranging from speech patterns to the stresses the children encounter in daily life outside school that have an impact on their learning. This knowledge base leads to an improved classroom climate and, thus, teachers' improved efficacy.

2. *Parent outcomes:* Parents who become involved in the school learn ways to help their children and become motivated to further their own education. Those parents who have been alienated from mainstream culture or have had negative school experiences can perceive the school as a bastion of hope for their children and for themselves.

3. *School outcomes:* The key to sustaining educational change, when the new initiatives are no longer "new," is through encouraging the parents to be advocates of their children; the stake that parents have in their children's school success is a powerful change force when the school's structures harness this energy.

4. *Community outcomes:* When these two primary societal institutions—the family and the school—team up, the school becomes a potent force in the community. Schools can be invaluable in spearheading the community's economic advancement, in repairing its social fabric, and in preparing schoolchildren to continue to improve the community in the future. With family involvement, the school becomes a major center of community life.

The principles of parent involvement are based on the three-level approach developed by Comer and his colleagues as part of the SDP and discussed in substantial detail elsewhere (Haynes and Comer, 1990). The levels are shown in Figure 3-1. At the first level, all or most parents support the school's program by attending parent–teacher conferences, reinforcing learning at home, and participating in the school's social programs. At the second level, a significant number of parents are actively engaged in the daily life of the school by being present on-site and constructively involved in supporting the authentic learning activities. At the third level, a group of parents that is truly representative (e.g., socioeconomic levels, race, ethnicity, gender) participates in collaborative decision making with school staff, students, and other identified persons on the SPMT. Parents in the SDP school serve in various capacities in different locations within and outside the school, and of course, at home. Verdell Roberts, formerly principal at Lincoln Bassett School in New Haven and presently on special assignment to the New Haven Public Schools' Central Office, described the difference between parent programs in an SDP school and a non-SDP school:

> The parent program gave structure to what one might want to do in the school. Ordinarily parents come to school to pick up report cards. When parents become a part of the Comer process, they want to be involved in the School Planning and Management Team. Oftentimes, schools say they don't have parents. They assume parents just know what you do in school. You should never assume that they don't care or they don't have time.
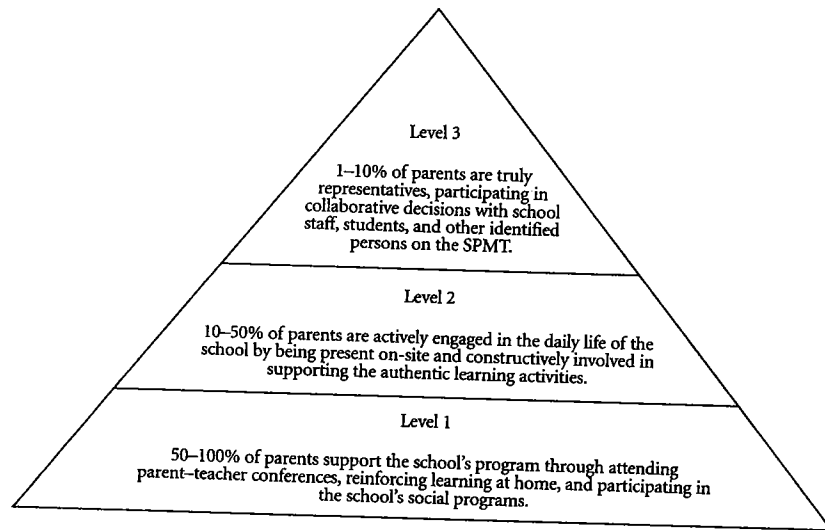

Figure 3-1. Pyramid of collaboration: Levels of parent involvement in the SDP school.

It is up to us to make some connection with people; it's up to us to reach out. The School Development Program gives the parents a framework to work in. There are structures and parent training sessions. Not every parent is expected to do everything, so you also have to know your parents. You start to connect with them: you start to build relationships with them. Those parents become a part of the school.

Parents serve in the libraries as aides; in classrooms as teacher aides; in the hallways as monitors and/or mentors; in the lunchrooms as servers or monitors; in the main office as administrative support personnel; on the playground as mentors, monitors, and coaches; in the music room or computer room as support personnel; and in the parent centers, where they exist, as hosts and guides to new parents, staff, and other guests. Mrs. Ennis, the mother of a former student from a New Haven school, described her involvement:

> I would sit in each classroom and see what it was all about and the teachers would come to me and they would tell me what is going on in the school and what they plan on doing, which is good. And most of the time the parents...used to be involved. When [my older children] were going to school, it was not like that. Before the Comer process we would only hear from a teacher when there was a problem with the child, like when they didn't do their homework or something.

In the community at large, parents serve as links to volunteer groups and organizations, service agencies, businesses, and other parents. At home, parents provide the nurturing, support, and reinforcement necessary to strengthen the bond between home and school and to increase the chances of success for their children.

Parental involvement on the teams—the SPMT, SSST, and PT—are the hallmark of the SDP. As Charles Warner, former principal of Jackie Robinson Middle School and Hill Central Elementary School in New Haven and now supervisor for curriculum and instruction for the New Haven Public Schools, noted:

> I think as administrators and educators we have a tendency to tell parents what we want rather than having parents with our guidance say what they would like to design for their schools. When you get parents to design programs around your school, plan materials that your classrooms need, and teachers need, then it's something that they want to do—it's not what you want them to do.

Parents bring an understanding of the broader community and of the social development needs and strengths of their children. This understanding contributes to Comprehensive School Plan development and influences the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Jan Stocklinski, the supervisor of SDP implementation in Prince George's County, Maryland, stated:

We try to think "family involvement" rather than "parent involvement." Getting parents to be partners with us started because parents and families are the most committed and have the greatest interest in their children. In our particular case, it's been our parents and our families that have helped turn around how school people looked at children and our families, and that's pretty much been the history in our county. The administrators come and go, superintendents come and go, sometimes staff come and go, but the parents and the children are always there.

In the SDP school, parents from every socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural group are involved and empowered to participate and contribute meaningfully. We address the influence imbalances that often arise among parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds and educational experiences. We seek to give equal voice to all parents through openness, respect, full participation, and opportunities for growth. We seek to encourage fathers and mothers to become engaged, tuned in, and turned on to the excitement of teaching, learning, and growing in an SDP school.

Across the country we have found that the majority of school staff and overwhelmingly large numbers of parents are eager to increase the level and enhance the quality of parental involvement in schools. Often, however, the questions are, "How do we do it?" "What are the strategies and the steps?" "Are there some caveats?" The answer to this last question is "Yes" and we discuss these caveats as we address the strategies and steps that follow.

Build Trust

Basic to any attempt to reach and involve parents—especially the least affluent and educated—is a climate of trust and openness to ideas. Parents sometimes avoid schools because they feel inadequate, unwelcome, threatened, or insecure due to their own past educational experiences and their children's present difficulties. In SDP communities, we seize every opportunity to break down the barriers of distrust by reaching out to parents in their communities through home visits (with appropriate provisions in high-risk neighborhoods); regular and positive telephone calls and memos; and networking through such institutions as churches, synagogues, mosques, community groups, and support services agencies, all of which enjoy some degree of rapport and attachment with many families. Making use of the changing technological environment is important. One SDP elementary school, for example, sent videotapes home with the children to inform parents about school events and activities. The following vignette demonstrates how trust was established between parents in a housing project and the staff at an elementary school in Connecticut.

Northside School is located in an isolated, low-income, drug-infested, and physically decaying section of a midsize urban city. Most of the families live in low-rise projects and are very poor; most are on public assistance. Violent crimes are

common and associated with a bustling illegal drug trade in the streets not far from the school. The nascent SPMT at the school included only one parent, who had been recruited by the principal during a friendly conversation. The SPMT decided to embark on a bold course of action to show the parents and children in the community that they really cared. They enlisted the willing and valuable support of the parent to arrange for them to hold some SPMT meetings in the basement of a low-rise project. After some weeks of negotiating and preparation, including some provisions for safety, many meetings were held. Parents' interest soared, as did their visits to the school and volunteer activities. The school now has six parents on the SPMT and has one of the best attended and most successful parent involvement programs in the school district. In addition, student achievement has been consistently high with only minor fluctuations. For the past 2 years, fourth-grade students have won the national Dynamath competition, which involves using the kind of creative, inquisitive, and self-propelled learning and problem-solving skills that the SDP school seeks to nurture.

Plan Well

For parent involvement to be effective and successful it must be carefully planned and coordinated to avoid confusion, anxiety, and disaster. School staff must be adequately represented on the SPMT. Their direct input is often essential, for example, when a parent is paired with a teacher or assigned to work with a staff member. Staff and parents must collaborate with administration in making decisions about which parents serve in what capacities in the school. This process of collaborative planning helps to reduce or obviate tension and creates a climate of mutual respect and support.

Empower Parents

Parents in SDP schools participate fully, including planning and making decisions about the academic and social agenda, through their role on the SPMT and in helping develop the Comprehensive School Plan. They have a voice in deciding how the school shapes the minds and hearts of their children. They also have the opportunity to continually grow and develop and to reform their own habits of mind, heart, and work.

Continually Monitor, Assess, and Modify as Necessary

School communities value informed decisions based on ongoing, careful documentation of processes and activities. This is true as well for our parent involvement activities. We monitor how parents are serving in our schools; we assess the benefits and liabilities to students, staff, and parents themselves related to this involvement; and we modify activities as necessary in response to what we discover.

Parents also benefit from being meaningfully involved. The SDP has documented cases in which parent volunteers who had dropped out of school were

motivated and encouraged to return to school. Some obtained their GEDs, and some continued, gaining associate, baccalaureate, and advanced degrees. Some became educators and joined the faculty at their schools. Listen to a former volunteer, now a faculty member in an SDP school on the West Coast:

> It was for me the opportunity of a lifetime to work with a group of people who genuinely cared enough to take the time to encourage me and give me the boost in my self-confidence I needed. Now, here I am trying to do for other parents what my friends did for me.

Even parents who do not pursue more formal education speak of SDP's unquantifiable benefits. One parent explains:

> Every morning I wake up feeling good about being able to come here [to the school] and give something of myself, my time, and wisdom to these precious children. Had it not been for the people here, I mean the staff whom I respect so much, I would not be able to do this.

The SDP school demonstrates that home and school need not be worlds apart. School climate is positive and healthy, children learn and perform well, and staff feel supported and recognized (Haynes, Comer, and Hamilton-Lee, 1988, 1989). When parents are involved, children tend to be more on task in the school, and parents and the school then develop a true camaraderie (Emmons, 1994).

Building Community Through Community Involvement

Schools or parents alone, or *together alone,* cannot provide all sustenance, services, and support that children need to thrive and develop well in this increasingly complex society. The entire community of significant others and services must work together to strengthen and prepare our children well for their present and future lives. Nancy Klein (1994), associate dean at Cleveland State University, writes, "According to the African proverb, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child,' we have many outstanding participants in our village who are contributing substantially to the way children in SDP schools in Cleveland are being educated. Truly the Cleveland partnership is a 'village' affair and the partners are enjoying their work together" (p. 8). The Cleveland partnership consists of the Cleveland Public Schools, Cleveland State University (CSU), Cleveland Child Guidance Center, and the Harvard Business School Club. Klein describes the contributions of the latter:

> One unique aspect of the Cleveland Partnership has been the active role played by several members of the Harvard Business School Club (HBSC), an alumni organization. Four members of the HBSC have been associated with each of the four schools, and have worked diligently with businesses surrounding the school to foster interest in, and

support for, the schools. One member, who is retired, has involved a second businessman in the school and is now working with a CSU faculty member on a handbook for productive parental involvement. The specific roles of each person vary from school to school and have included activities such as getting paint and equipment donated so that the community, parents and teachers could paint the school ("It takes a village to paint the school," to paraphrase the African proverb), providing funds for principals and faculty to attend training in New Haven, and raising money from local businesses to provide materials for teachers. They attend SPMT meetings, steering committee meetings and provide support and reflection to the team and principal (p. 6).

The community groups, organizations, and institutions benefit in the short run by becoming more visible to the community. In the long run they benefit by helping to produce healthy, well-educated, intelligent, creative, and productive citizens who become members of the labor force, community leaders, business executives, and responsible heads of households. Indeed, the whole community and entire country benefit from a coordinated and integrated approach of service and education to children and families.

When children, families, educators, and community groups and agencies participate as full partners in the educational enterprise, there are direct and indirect benefits to children. The benefits to students include expanded learning opportunities, a coterie of caring adults, development of leadership skills through internships and apprenticeships, increased motivation to stay in school, and desire and efforts to pursue higher education. The benefits to families include increased access to social services and increased ability to network with child development experts and other parents. Educators benefit by having a network of services and support for children's learning.

One illustration of this network is the Comer-Zigler (CoZi) project, a combination of the SDP school and Edward F. Zigler's "School of the 21st Century" (21C). Zigler, former director of the federal Office of Child Development and currently Sterling Professor of Psychology at Yale and the director of the Yale Bush Center, envisions 21C as:

> a comprehensive set of child care and family support services based or linked to the public school setting which include an outreach program for parents of children ages 0–3, full day care for children ages 3–5, before and after school care for school age children, an information referral service for families, and support for family day care providers in the school neighborhood. (Stern and Flood, 1994, p. 1)

Many 21C schools add other components based on a needs assessment such as health, nutrition, and adult education. In 1991, a program officer at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a supporter of the SDP and 21C, suggested developing a plan to integrate the SDP and 21C. The integrated project, named CoZi in honor of its founders, "reconceptualizes the school as a base of family support; that is,

in addition to its traditional educational mission, the school offers services that children and families need to thrive" (Stern, 1995, p. 1). In March 1992, the Carnegie Corporation awarded a grant to explore the feasibility of combining the two models in Norfolk, Virginia's Bowling Park School, an SDP school located in a public housing community. In this school, more than 75% of the children are considered to be at risk. In 1994, Barbara Stern and Lorraine Flood wrote in their description of Bowling Park School, "The school is considered a beacon of light in the community and the principal and staff enjoy a very positive relationship with the parents of their students" (p. 3). During the summer after the first year of Bowling Park's operation as a CoZi school, the Yale Bush Center conducted a process evaluation. Among the findings, Stern and Flood write:

> Perceived benefits for parents included: less stress related to child care; stronger connection to the school community; increased knowledge of child development; and improved knowledge of services available in the community and in the school ... 81 percent of the staff said that feelings about their jobs had become more positive since CoZi began due to the changes in atmosphere in the school, increase in parent involvement and the prevailing sense that the school was reaching out to families to promote the healthy development of children. (p. 4)

In 1995, Herman D. Clark, Jr., principal of the school for 14 years, and Bowling Park were acclaimed when *Redbook* magazine named Bowling Park one of the top 50 schools in the United States for its overall excellence. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education recognized the school as an exemplary Chapter I school (Savo, 1995, p. 3). In response to the enthusiasm of parents and staff, CoZi has expanded to another site in Norfolk, to sites in Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut, and to St. Louis, Missouri (Stern, 1995, p. 5).

Community involvement entails expanding the focus of education beyond the walls of the school building to embrace and include groups and organizations in the community that are willing and able to support the total development of children. This is a two-way process: Community resources are brought into schools, and students and staff in the SDP schools travel into the community to provide services, to learn, and to receive services. Within the SDP framework, the broader community is defined on two levels. The first level includes those community groups, organizations, institutions (such as universities and particularly schools of education), agencies, and businesses in the immediate area. Community resources are relatively easily accessible, and children, school staff, and families interact with them regularly. At the second level, community is defined to include more distant resources that have an impact on the teaching, learning, and assessment processes. For example, large corporations or philanthropic foundations that contribute to SDP's work are members of this extended community. As distance learning and teleconferencing become integrated into the SDP authentic learning environment, other schools and universities in the United States and abroad will also become part of the extended SDP community.

To support the total development of children in SDP communities, the broader communities must be continuously involved. Klein (1994) describes the involvement of the Cleveland Child Guidance Center in the Cleveland partnership:

> In response to the informal survey of principals in the four SDP schools that additional mental health resources were vital in order to fully implement the SDP program, the Cleveland Child Guidance Center (CCGC), which provides mental health services to children and families throughout the greater Cleveland area, was contacted. With support from local foundations, CCGC assigned a clinician to each of the four schools for one day per week. These clinicians provide mental health consultation to teachers, attend the mental health team meetings, and provide direct service to children and families where such intervention is required. In many cases, their discussions with teachers are a professional development experience as the teacher and clinician plan together on behalf of the child. These clinicians have provided excellent services and have contributed markedly to the successful implementation of the SDP in the Cleveland Public Schools through their consultation, training and service. (p. 5)

Some organizations may be called on as needed, such as the Department of Children and Youth Services, whereas others must be involved on a daily basis, such as universities that prepare educators to serve in SDP schools, businesses that provide material and human resources such as mentors, and community health clinics that provide daily health services to children and families, in schools or in the community.

Assembling and Sustaining Community Through the SDP Teams

Comer (1989c) writes: "We observed a direct connection between inadequate organization and management, difficult staff–parent–student relationships, and difficult student behavior" (p. 269). The SDP teams are charged with the responsibility of making the school child centered, which is expressed in the team meetings by: defining the roles of each team member; creating a clear mission statement that guides the tasks; having each team member discuss his or her preferences for how the team should work together on behalf of the children; and creating a strategy for collecting data, solving problems, brainstorming, handling conflicts, making decisions, and assessing the work of the team. On collaborative teams, all members are active. The members control what happens during meetings. Members contribute ideas, insights, opinions, and suggestions, and give feedback about both the tasks (the content of the meetings) and the process (how the team works together). The SDP facilitator, the SDP change agent in the field, pays attention to the process of the discussion: Who talks? For how long? Who is not so active? Where there are differences or conflicts? Has each side of a conflict been heard completely? The facilitator primarily ensures that the team focuses on the children rather than on the concerns of the adults. In most school districts the facilitators have been experienced and well-regarded employees of the school system (Payne, 1994). The

model is flexible: In Chicago, the facilitators are staff members of Youth Guidance, a local social work agency that has been school based since the early 1970s (Payne, 1994). The SDP facilitator's aim is to assist the group in becoming an autonomous cooperative of individuals who can identify their own problems, develop their own solutions, and create their own process for successful problem resolution (Joyner, Haynes, and Comer, 1994, p. 19). In an ethnographic study of the implementation of the SDP, Joyner, Haynes, and Comer (1994) write:

> The successful implementation of the SDP program within a particular school depends on (1) convincing the principal, school staff, and parents that the program will achieve its stated outcomes; (2) developing within the staff an understanding of the model, its key components, structures, and operations; and (3) gaining a commitment from the principal to lead the process in a collaborative, no-fault manner. Much of the responsibility for establishing these pre-conditions for success rests on the shoulders of the facilitators. (p. 18)

The SDP facilitator has multiple roles:

- *Organizational development facilitation on the change process:* A facilitator of a team meeting is part of the team and helps both tasks and processes to move forward. The facilitator must listen, give feedback, clarify issues, and ask questions well, ensuring a balance of participation and, most important, modeling consensus, collaboration, and no-fault.
- *Process consultant for team meetings:* A process consultant is not part of the team but observes the dynamics of the meeting. The focus is exclusively on process and the goal is to give feedback so the team can better understand its own process.
- *Coach:* A coach helps either a team or an individual become better at a particular skill. An SDP facilitator may coach a principal on more collaborative behaviors, coach a team on giving feedback, and coach a teacher on how to see his or her students more in terms of their development than in terms of behavior or grades.
- *"Whatever it takes:"* A key element of good facilitation is the development of strong relationships. Since schools are such busy places, SDP facilitators often pitch in to do the task at hand.

The SDP facilitator is committed to the notion that "As I strengthen people, I empower." To this end, the facilitator takes responsibility along with the team for tasks, relationships, decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution with the aim of fostering interdependence. As the team evolves, there is less need for clearly delineated roles among the members because all members become responsible, to some degree, for communicating with the group they represent (i.e., the parents, staff, students); asking others continuously for input (and listening!); using the information to help set the agenda and also guide the direction of the

team; and communicating and clarifying (communication within the team and between team members and the rest of the school population.)

The Three Guiding Principles

When community is "reinvented" in the school and when education promotes effective human relations, staff become dedicated to their students' learning and the motivation to achieve. In the SDP "village," whether the adults work on a particular team, focus primarily on the classroom, or are a part of the larger school community, their frame of reference is the three guiding principles: consensus, collaboration, and no-fault. How the student relates to the teacher, how the teacher views the potential of the student, and the expectations the student and teacher bring to each interaction are all guided by this ethos. The way the classroom environment is structured (for example, competitive or collaborative) is a reflection of the way the stakeholders structure their interactions.

No-Fault

The intent of this principle is to focus on problem solving and to operate on the premise that other people's mistakes result from misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or miscommunications and not a deliberate attempt to offend. Accountability is accepted by the team, but time and energy are not wasted in acts of blaming. Individuals need to express their emotions: dissatisfaction, anger over another's behavior, a painful experience. Blaming occurs when individuals feel unsafe or uncomfortable bringing these types of feelings to either a team or another individual. By blaming, the team avoids self-reflection and, thus, the ability of the team to work collaboratively is undermined.

J. Patrick Howley, an SDP project manager and implementation coordinator, offers the following example:

> I was working in a school district that was suffering from the result of much blaming and gossiping. As a result, everyone, especially children in the school, were the losers. Some very fine people who could make significant contributions to school change were paralyzed by the conflict.
>
> To break this cycle of mistrust, I began by individually interviewing the four primary people involved in the conflict. By agreeing to the interview, each person was also agreeing to sit down the following day with me and the other three people directly involved in the conflict in order to talk openly about the issues. In the individual interviews, I focused on several questions: What were they experiencing inwardly? What had they observed? What were they most concerned about? What did they need from the other team members? How did they themselves contribute to this conflict? What did they need to become more open with the other mem-

bers of the team in order to resolve this conflict? My questions were meant to focus the energy within and sustain a no-fault atmosphere.

The following day, the five of us met as a group for most of the day. Our conversation was totally focused on process, on our relationships, on trying to understand one another, on what we were trying to do in behalf of the children. It was a difficult but productive day for all of the parties involved. By addressing the process issues head on, we were able to move to problem solving. By not only acknowledging but also dealing with the conflict and emotions directly, the conflicts could be resolved. Both the individuals and the team were, in fact, transformed.

Three major tensions evolve from the struggle to engage in no-fault behavior. First, the tendency to focus on persons rather than to focus on the work creates tensions. Teams have work that must be done, and spending time on relationships seems to be wasteful. Yet, not to focus on the process issues inevitably results in the content issues becoming increasingly more difficult to resolve. As teams focus on persons, a second tension develops: the tendency to make judgments about persons rather than to give nonjudgmental, descriptive feedback. Teams must be taught to suspend judgment and simply describe the behavior that led to particular emotions. The first two tensions often lead to a third: the tendency to blame others rather than to engage in self-reflection that can result in finding one's own errors or lack of devel-

SDP national staff members J. Patrick Howley and Edna Negron at the SDP Principals' Academy
Photo by Laura Brooks.

opment. At the same time, these tensions allow for enormous potential, if they are channeled by an external change agent such as the SDP facilitator. The process of self-reflection begins by recognizing and naming the tensions being felt. No-fault does not mean that we withhold our honest thoughts and feelings. Rather, no-fault is about providing a safe environment in which we can share our thoughts and feelings directly with the individuals and teams that have provoked the feelings.

Consensus and Collaboration

Another guiding principle, decision making by consensus, is a process in which every stakeholder has input and "winner–loser" feelings are avoided. Energies are invested in achieving consensus rather than in voting. There are four major challenges in trying to achieve consensus:

1. Everyone on the team must be heard.
2. Team members must convey to the speaker that they have fully listened to and respect the viewpoint of the speaker, regardless of what it is.
3. Team members must transcend their own viewpoints so that they can not only live with the decisions that the team makes but also support them.
4. The team must achieve consensus despite time restrictions.

The following vignette, narrated by Howley, illustrates the process of consensus as well as collaboration.

An SDP facilitator was asked to meet with a principal and a professional development committee to help them with the first stages of creating an SPMT. The committee had met for half a year but was paralyzed with fear, indecision, and conflict. Committee members had a high level of trust in the principal and his extensive experience. Now, however, the principal was suggesting that his power be shared among a team of decision makers. The committee perceived the staff as resistant and not ready for this bold move. Each staff member had grown accustomed to his or her independence, and although they worked well with the principal, they could not or would not work together. The principal backed off at first, then slowly prodded his committee to request that an SDP facilitator conduct a workshop with the entire staff of the school.

(Our procedure at the SDP is to work collaboratively *with* a school.) First meeting with the committee, the facilitator developed the theme "Leaders Working Together Collaboratively." The facilitator's design for the workshop was discussed thoroughly with the committee. The committee repeatedly reminded the SDP facilitator that their school staff would need a lot of support. In the first workshop, the school staff had the opportunity to do many unthreatening community-building activities that brought them together in new ways. The design helped them to begin small group discussions of what the school could become. They learned listening skills, and they left the workshop planning to visit each other's classrooms to discuss what teachers were trying to accomplish in other

grades. The day ended by looking at and discussing the roles people engage in when working on a collaborative team.

The committee met immediately afterward to debrief and discuss the design for the next workshop. Consensus and collaboration were modeled even as these principles were taught. They slowly made decisions by consensus as the principal and the SDP facilitator worked with the Professional Development Committee, and as the committee worked with the school staff.

Now the committee and the facilitator felt that it was time to take a bold move and design a brief roundtable discussion with the full staff of the school. We wanted to demonstrate how good discussion and dialogue lead to collaboration. Following a brief presentation on SDP research, the facilitator helped the staff members to listen to one another despite their differing viewpoints as they discussed the implications of the research. A number of similar hour-long sessions were held during the next month. As people became committed to listening deeply to one another over the course of the year, they grew to tolerate the tensions stirred by their differences. It was becoming safe to disagree and to learn from one another.

The workshops culminated in the establishment of an SPMT at the school. A representative from each grade level met with the principal and the facilitator. After a 20-minute discussion, the grade-level representatives, the principal, and the facilitator met in a "fishbowl" so that the entire staff could listen to the SPMT discussion. The nascent SPMT decided to charge the representatives with meeting again in grade-level groups to generate a list of the next steps. By experiencing the SPMT process directly and openly, the school staff began to understand, trust, and support a collaborative process. The SPMT that was forged at this school was a diverse team with much potential for conflict. But they also had the potential for creativity and learning from one another. The parents on the SPMT contributed by bringing in their perspectives of the children, gleaned from observing them and teaching them in other settings. The social worker, with her specialized knowledge, and the cafeteria worker, who sees the children in a different social setting, brought additional perspectives.

As this school's implementation of the SDP proceeded over the course of 5 years, with the continued support of the facilitator, the teams emerged and the guiding principles imbued the educative process. The functioning of the teams and the improved climate in the school showed the school staff and the stakeholders that a positive social climate is the primary agent of all educational change (Anson et al., 1991, pp. 56–82), and that the key to sustaining educational change, when the new initiatives are no longer new, is by reinventing community in the school.

▨▨▨▨ *The Student and Staff Support Team*

The Student and Staff Support Team (SSST), formerly known as the Mental Health Team (MHT) in the SDP model, distinguishes the SDP from every other school reform initiative. Joanne Nancy Corbin, an SDP implementation coordinator who focuses on

training SSST teams and working with children, parents, and families at the Yale Child Study Center as a social worker, describes the SSST in the following composite vignette.

The SSST of the middle school meets weekly on Tuesdays for 1½ hours. The school principal chairs the team meeting, and the school social worker functions as the facilitator for the meeting. Other members of the team include the guidance counselor, school nurse, school psychologist, and school-based health clinic representative. The team has a standard agenda that is used to ensure that important areas are addressed. The standard agenda includes school climate, global school issues, individual student concerns, and if time remains, a chance for group members to share information pertaining to their work.

This morning an announcement is made over the PA system that the SSST will begin at 10 o'clock, which is in 15 minutes. The principal begins the meeting by discussing the school climate. This gives the team a chance to reflect on the context of the school and how this context affects the students. The guidance counselor begins by discussing concerns over the level of violence that has been occurring in the neighborhood. She says that children are very anxious about traveling to and from school due to the presence of gangs and that some students and teachers are concerned about the presence of gang members within the school. The principal echoes concern and refers to a school survey on students' concerns about violence and safety that has recently been completed. This survey indicates high levels of anxiety among students regarding student conflicts, availability of weapons, domestic violence, and personal safety. The school psychologist indicates that many teachers are hesitant to discuss their concerns about personal safety, although this is a realistic concern. Because the team members are not prepared to discuss the specifics regarding violence in the school, the facilitator suggests that the team members review the summary of the survey and come prepared to discuss the situation further during the next team meeting. The principal suggests that the current school-year data on student suspensions, detentions, and expulsions for violence be reviewed; she will review these statistics herself.

The principal is still addressing global issues on the agenda. She asks if anyone has further concerns. One counselor presents the issue that the fifth and sixth graders are much more immature and younger acting than the seventh and eighth graders and activities that incorporate all students are not well suited for the fifth and sixth graders. She asks if there is anything the school can do about this. Other team members indicate they have noticed the same pattern of behavior. The team members acknowledge the developmental changes that occur as children move into adolescence, and they determine that they need to look at the differences in the developmental stages and change some of the practices in the school to be more developmentally sensitive. One suggestion is that perhaps the fifth and sixth graders should not change classrooms for each period as is currently done, as they appear to be more difficult to settle down after each class change, and it may be more important for the students to develop a relationship with one teacher, rather than trying to relate to a number of teachers. Another suggestion is that since gym classes

for the seventh and eighth grades do not consider the developmental needs of adolescents entering puberty, perhaps single-sex gym classes would be more appropriate. This discussion is building increasing interest, and for the sake of time, the facilitator suggests that a subgroup meet to further identify areas of developmental differences with possible resolutions. This global issue will be revisited in 2 weeks. After the SSST has reviewed this issue, the concerns and recommendations will be presented to the School Planning and Management Team.

The psychologist raises the issue of a fire that destroyed an apartment building in the neighborhood overnight. His concern is for the several children attending the school who lived in that building. He asks if anyone on the team has heard from the families or knows whether the children are in school today. No one on the team has additional information about the status of the families. Through a brief discussion it is decided that the team should get more information in order to address the impact of this situation on the children's education. The social worker volunteers to take this lead.

The next item on the agenda is individual student referrals. These referrals are students who are experiencing some difficulties not previously addressed by special education. During this team meeting, five children have been referred by their teachers for discussion. One child is described as a fifth grader from Trinidad whose father has been harshly punishing him for poor schoolwork. The teacher has already mentioned this to the school psychologist. The psychologist's perception is that as punishment continues the child has begun to withdraw in class and is more reluctant to participate in the group work. Input from other team members includes the recent relocation of the family from abroad and no significant contact between the parents and the school. The discussion touches on the cultural differences regarding child discipline. The social worker also raises the concern that if abuse by the parent is suspected, then a referral to the child protective agency is required. It is suggested that someone make the effort to contact the child's parents and talk with them about the school and their concerns about their son's schoolwork. The principal's position of authority and the social worker's knowledge of family functioning make them the best choices to begin this discussion with the parents. The goal of this discussion with the parents will be to build the parents' view of the school as a resource and to identify alternative ways of supporting the child's work in school that are not as harsh.

Another child's situation is presented to the SSST. A seventh grader has been referred by the homeroom teacher because of recent changes in her behavior. She is regularly coming to school late, is pulling away from her usual peer group, and is provoking conflicts with others including the teacher. Her grades are still satisfactory; however, because of her conflicts in the classroom, she has received several detentions. The teacher wants to intervene in a different way before the situation escalates. The team members know the child, but have not been aware of the recent changes. The team suggests that the social worker meet with the class-

room teacher to determine the scope of the problem and whether the community mental health counselor can meet with the student.

The facilitator reminds the team that there needs to be an update regarding a student previously discussed. The school-based health clinic representative has taken the lead in this case. She states that she has contacted the student's parents regarding the health concerns of the child. The parents have agreed to let the school-based clinic manage the child's health issues. The team is satisfied with this resolution and decides this student no longer needs to be reviewed by the team.

The final item for the team is to give the SSST members a chance to brief the team on events of various programs. The school nurse indicates that cold and flu season is upon them and that children are usually not feigning sickness but are actually ill. The guidance counselor discusses the upcoming testing that will affect the fifth graders. The social worker discusses the mentoring program for the students, which is sponsored by the school's corporate partners, and encourages the team to seek out other students who might benefit from this program.

▨▨▨ The SDP School Focuses on the Academic and Social Climate

The following narrative about the birth of an SDP school, told by the school's first principal, Edna N. Negron, highlights the themes of this chapter. The narrative underscores the collaborative efforts and energy of the staff, parents, and community members to work on behalf of the children. The narrative calls to mind that the SDP is a way of building community since children are dependent on the adults in the community to help them to attain the highest levels of development. Behind the SDP model are deeply committed people employing the model to improve their relationships so that the children will have the finest education that we can provide for them, regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background.

▨▨▨▨▨ Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances Elementary School

The Betances school population is approximately 85% Latino (mostly Puerto Rican), 13% African-American, and 2% Asian and Caucasian. It is located in Hartford, Connecticut, the fourth poorest city in the United States. Connecticut, on the other hand, is the richest state in the country, with the highest per capita income in the nation. The area is a port of entry for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos coming to the mainland for the first time; therefore, the school has a comprehensive bilingual/bicultural education program. Eighty-five percent of the students are in bilingual programs, and 85% of the staff in the school (including custodians, secretaries, and professional staff) are bilingual in Spanish and English. The staff includes African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans, and White/European-Americans. About 15% of the staff are men, a higher percentage than in most other elementary schools in the city.

Almost 100% of the school population qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school district has one of the highest homicide rates in the state. More than 60% of the students come from one-parent homes. The incidence of drugs is staggering. About 50% of the entering kindergarten class suffer from being born of substance-abusing mothers. Although there is a stable core of students, over 50% of the children enter or leave every school year. Most of the city's homeless shelters and soup kitchens are close to the school.

The Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances School opened its doors in 1985. At first, it was called the "Old Kinsella School" because it had been closed down when the new Kinsella School was built. For 12 years, the building had been allowed to fall into disrepair. The decision to reopen the school was made because an increase in enrollment had reached crisis levels at the new school. The decision was made effective on July 1 for a September school opening. All purchase of furniture, materials, and textbooks, hiring of staff, redistricting, informing parents and community, and making the school presentable and safe for children had to be done in those 2 months.

To make matters worse, I had never been a principal or an assistant principal. It helped that I had been coordinator of bilingual education for the Hartford Public Schools for 9 years and, therefore, had a thorough knowledge of all curricular areas. I had also worked with every department and with every school in the system. I had participated in the hiring and evaluation of staff in most schools, was expert in the budget process, and had been a part of most of the textbook acquisition decisions made in those 9 years at the central office. I did not, however, have any experience in running a school.

The challenge and the opportunity we faced was the ability to create our own school. The new staff came with a clear understanding of the difficulties we faced. Several were seasoned veterans who looked forward to working with me and with each other. Most of them had a track record for dedication and commitment to the involvement of parents and the larger community in the educational process. Many of them had lived or were still living in the school district. For several years, I lived across the street from the school myself. Even before we met Dr. Comer, we were a close-knit family unit. There was a high degree of cultural and linguistic competence among us.

The school itself, however, is in the downtown area buffered by Main Street from the neighborhood where the students reside. Within a four-block radius, the school is surrounded by the State Capitol, the Bushnell Theater, the Wadsworth Atheneum, the Hartford Library, City Hall, the Hartford Federal Court, the Travelers and several other insurance and banking institutions, historic churches of all denominations, the site of the Charter Oak Tree (where the Connecticut Charter precursor to its constitution was hidden), the Charter Oak Culture Center, Hartford Hospital, and most of the Latino social service and advocacy agencies in the city. Some of the staff, myself included, have been members of volunteer boards in those agencies for many years. Two convents are near the school, and

one of our third-grade teachers is a nun who resided in one of them. Small businesses in the school district are on an upsurge. There were a lot of *potential* support systems available.

Our first priority was to become an integral part of the community. Since we had had so little preservice time, the staff came together to develop a comprehensive schoolwide discipline plan, including individual classroom objectives. Teams were formed to ensure that the first day of school went smoothly, despite the fact that the students would not know who their teachers were and all new registrations had been deferred until the first day of school due to the massive summer clean-up activities at the school. All students and parents were met outside that day, and the welcoming teams instructed them where to go. Inside the school, the registration team had the flow of registration down to a science. Although our main office and school records were still in boxes, parents did not feel that their new school was not well organized. They were openly welcomed, and the classrooms were brightly decorated and immaculate.

The Parent Team formed almost immediately and included some of the movers in both the Latino and African-American community. The first open house they helped to organize in the third month after the school year opened invited sister schools, all community agencies, and the elected Board of Education to a feast the parents and staff had prepared. More than 400 people attended. Students and staff staged a very professional performance. Elections for PTA officers were held, and we actually established an all-volunteer PTA committee. No one who wished to serve was denied a role. Their first order of business became the renaming of the school.

Both African-American and Latino parents chose Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances. He was a Puerto Rican patriot, abolitionist, and physician who won the French Legion of Honor in Paris, where he was exiled, for his medical contributions in France. He was a role model of whom everyone could be proud. Our parents carried their request to the Hartford Board of Education. Unlike all other such requests, not only did the resolution pass, but the board made it effective immediately, rather than hold to the 1-year wait usually required. It was a very emotional victory for the school community, reaffirming their need for a strong cultural identity and their power to effect change.

Then La Casa de Puerto Rico, one of the local agencies, launched a fund-raising campaign to commission a bronze relief of Dr. Betances to hang over the portico of the school. The funds were raised and the subsequent year, the bronze—the first piece of public art depicting a Puerto Rican in the state of Connecticut—was installed at our school. Federal Judge Hon. José Cabranes gave the keynote address on that day, and over 300 parents, students, and members of the community were present to celebrate and break bread together. We were no longer the "Old" Kinsella. We were the proud, elegant, new Betances.

The school had undergone massive renovations to bring the magnificent old plant up to the new State of Connecticut building codes. Although we had had to survive the impact of jackhammers inside the school, major demolition, and

construction while still trying to teach, the experience had in fact brought all of us closer together and made us even more determined to establish the very best educational programs for our children.

During this time, then Connecticut Senate President Pro-Tem John Larson had launched a series of initiatives to support families and children. One of them was Connecticut's version of Dr. Zigler's School of the 21st Century: the Family Resource Center (FRC). With Senator Larson's help, Betances became the first urban FRC in the nation. It was also the first FRC to provide services in both Spanish and English. With the addition of day care, before- and after-school care, parenting programs, adult education, and family referral services to our school, parents who would otherwise be too overwhelmed to participate fully in their children's education became more and more involved in the school.

It was at this time that I met Dr. James Comer. We were on a panel together. He was explaining the development of SDP, and I was talking about the impact of the FRC in our school community. It seemed like such a natural combination that I immediately presented our staff with the information. Over 85% of the staff at Betances agreed that the principles of the SDP not only validated what they believed in but would enable the school to move forward in a much more cohesive and proactive manner. There *were* those who felt that it would be a lot of work and therefore preferred the status quo, especially since there were active, representative teams already in place and we had a very strong parent component. Nonetheless, Betances parents and staff embraced the SDP in 1990.

As the school had become more known in the Hartford community and more programs and new initiatives were started, the governance and management of the school had become unwieldy and overwhelming for me as the school's sole administrator. Over the next 2 years, as the school's SPMT and SSST developed and became functional, my role changed to one of support. I was no longer the ultimate decision maker for everything. It became clear to all stakeholders that their input was not only welcome but necessary in order to move our school forward.

The school's head custodian is a prime example of the cohesive teamwork that developed. Before becoming a member of the SPMT, he had been reluctant to discipline the children. As he grew more confident, he and his staff established a plan to monitor the lunchroom. They developed a reward system for good behavior that allowed students to help in the maintenance of the school. This same idea was utilized as an alternative to suspensions. Students were required to provide community service to the school under the supervision of the custodial staff. The custodians became our "reality check" to ensure that our plans met with safety requirements and did not interfere with the smooth running of the building.

Additionally, they came in on Saturdays and Sundays so that neighborhood groups could use the school, and they donated their overtime pay for student activities. They worked for free on evenings and weekends when school activities were taking place. They bought uniforms with the school name embroidered on their

shirts and jackets, which they proudly displayed on their errands to other schools and departments. They were our best public relations agents. They knew everyone of the students by name and were loved and respected.

Since many of our parents were not literate and felt uncomfortable in leadership roles, teachers paired as mentors with the members of the executive committee and played a support role so that effective parental participation would not be impaired. Dr. Comer's emphasis on the importance of meaningful home–school communication was not lost on us. Meetings were held in parents' homes as well as in school. As a matter of fact, a large percentage of the teachers at Betances visited student homes regularly. All our meetings were conducted in Spanish and English, and all school notices were also in both languages. Because of our high rate of mobility, however, every year new parents would come into the process, requiring constant training and support.

As far as I'm concerned, SDP saved my life. Given the linguistic, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors affecting our students, I really needed to be freed to do aggressive outreach for funding, special programs, and additional resources. As our SPMT, SSST, and PT became more and more sophisticated, I was able to spend more time in outreach pursuits. The director of the FRC and the parent trainer already were part of the SPMT, and that integrated those services into the fiber of the school community.

One of the critical issues raised by our SSST was the abysmal health of most of our students. The greatest health problem at Betances was not asthma, although that was astronomical. It was childhood depression. Our students received their health care in emergency rooms. Teachers were battling to infuse students with a sense of hope and to energize them. We had already established a breakfast program to feed all our students in our first year because teachers had noticed extreme lethargy due to hunger. But, how do you teach an unhealthy child effectively?

Then the city moved to another site a community drop-in senior center that was located in the school, opening up three classrooms. Through the combined efforts of Hartford Hospital, the school, and funding from the Travelers, Betances was able to open a beautiful, school-based clinic in those classrooms that provides all preventive and follow-up care for its students and hopes to extend services to the community. The "I Believe in the Children" clinic is open year-round. All Betances students are fully immunized. The clinic provides the services of a child psychiatrist, a developmental pediatrician, a psychiatric social worker to work with families, and full-time nurses, on-site. The partnership with Hartford hospital includes sharing of records and connects care given at the hospital with that being given at the clinic.

The clinic staff visit classrooms, interact with teachers and students, seek and give advice, and influence the classroom curriculum to promote healthy behaviors in students and their families. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a wellness program that will prepare students and parents to engage in healthy behaviors. Members of the clinic staff sit on the SSST and the SPMT.

Prior to the existence of the "I Believe in the Children" clinic, entering kindergarten students lost as much as 2 months of school if they were unable to get the immunizations and physicals required by the State of Connecticut. This was also true of out-of-state students who did not have the necessary health information. If a hospital is unable to verify immunizations, children have to be immunized again. I have often been asked why our parents didn't simply take their children to a doctor. There is a distressing lack of information about the realities poor children face in the United States. Most of the children at Betances did not have a pediatrician. The majority received their care in emergency rooms after their illnesses had become chronic. The existing clinics were overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the need for medical care. Most children only received their immunizations and physical examinations because they would otherwise not be able to enter school, creating a bottleneck at the clinics in September when a huge number of children required services. The health care issue was one of the most emotionally devastating for me as a new principal. With the advent of the clinic, all students were able to begin school immediately upon arrival. All Betances students are fully immunized.

We still had one more critical issue that had not been addressed: dental health. The majority of our students suffered from caries. Some had lost important permanent teeth at a very early age. We were able to get a grant from the Hartford Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) to establish a beautifully equipped dental clinic with the services of a dentist and a dental hygienist. The efforts of the Betances dental hygienist, who struggled for years to get better dental services for the children, cannot be overstated. Dental hygienists have been a part of the health education program for the Hartford Public Schools for over 50 years. Dental health is an integral part of the curriculum. The additional benefit of full dental treatment was welcomed by parents and staff. It prevented students from having to take a day off from school to visit a dentist. The dentist is scheduled in concert with teachers, thus minimizing the impact on the students' academic program.

What does any of this have to do with schooling? Did we go off on a tangent and develop a social service agency rather than a functioning educational institution? While all these activities were taking place, the SPMT reviewed some very sobering achievement data in our Comprehensive School Plan. It became obvious after gathering information from classroom teachers, special education staff, and parents that the textbook used in the math program, and our English reading program, were actually *interfering* with the learning process!

The curriculum committee launched a search and pilot mission over a 2-year period to look at alternatives and gather information on materials best suited to our children's learning styles and developmental, linguistic, and cultural needs. Members of the staff served on systemwide committees, visited other school systems, and attended staff development activities to enhance their understanding of the problem and to learn new methodologies, and they piloted those materials that appeared best suited to our population.

The year I left Betances—in 1993, after 9 years at the school—the SPMT had received recommendations from the curriculum committee for a new, whole language reading series in the primary grades and for the expansion into the second grade of the literature-based program that one of our sixth-grade teachers had developed over a 5-year period. In addition, the curriculum committee recommended a new math series that had textbooks in Spanish and English for the intermediate grades (the teachers in the primary grades had been trained and were successfully using the "Math Their Way" program in that subject area).

These recommendations were brought before the full staff and were unanimously adopted and fully supported by our PT. The fact that so many of our parents were classroom volunteers greatly aided their understanding of the issues involved. That year, we decided to spend our entire textbook account to implement these initiatives. Because we were the only school in Hartford to purchase the new reading series, the company gave us enough free material to articulate the program through the second grade. They also gave us a substantial amount of science and math supplementary materials for all grades. Since we had bankrupted the textbook account, this was very important.

As I left Betances that year, I had a feeling that my child had grown, gone to college and graduate school, and gotten married and was now in the position to give *me* advice on how to grow and develop! I came to realize that being an SDP principal means being able to cope with the fact that, ultimately, your school doesn't *need you* in order to continue its mission. A successful SDP school develops the ability to renew itself, heal, maintain a high degree of engagement at all levels and in all relationships, and keep the focus on children and their needs while maintaining an unwavering vision for the future.

The ultimate test was the process of choosing a new principal when I retired. The SPMT developed a profile of the qualities they wanted to see in a new principal, with input from all staff. The Hartford Public School Human Resources Department included teachers, parents, and me on the interviewing panel. We were a majority vote, as a matter of fact. The person we unanimously recommended for the principalship had worked at Betances for 6 years as a reading consultant, was SDP trained, and had come in as the top candidate not just in our school's panel but in several other schools as well. She was, in fact, appointed as the new principal of Betances. The process does work!

I miss my school, the community it serves, my children, staff, parents, and above all, the overwhelming feeling of being part of a very special, loving family that faces adversity *every day* and reaffirms *every day* that the next day will be better for all. The hugs, the kisses, the food, the music, the smiles, the tears, the joys, the pain, the disappointments, the successes, the failures, all come together in a magnificent collage that is a tribute to human endurance, to children's amazing resiliency and strength, and to the power that is brought to bear when the whole village is engaged *for children's sake.*

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