

Family Leadership Key to Community Leadership

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Just imagine a neighborhood where everyone knows everyone on their block, helps identify neighborhood issues and works on solutions in concert with others — a neighborhood where everyone volunteers at the schools, participates in neighborhood clean-ups and other activities, values the talents and skills of youth, single adults, and older residents, and welcomes newcomers.

Would you want to live in a school neighborhood where over 90 people — children, their parents and others show up to a book review party on *Harry Potter*?

It's happening in Lincoln.

Communities Can Help Families and Vice Versa

Within communities there are many resources — human, economic, material and social — that can support and enhance families and schools. Likewise communities can benefit from the assistance of families, students and schools. Community resources can be mobilized to help schools, families and students — and educators, parents and children can be organized to help their communities.

Family leadership is the key to strong communities and it is at the family level community leadership begins. Key to any vibrant community is a commitment by families to be partners in the decisions that effect their well-being. We all desire a world where children are well educated, safe and nurtured and active involvement from all members of the community is the best way for that to happen.

What is Family Leadership?

The West Virginia Family Leadership Project discusses family leadership in these terms: "Families are the key to strong communities. Families need to

be partners in the decisions that affect them and their communities. When families are involved, decisions are more likely to reflect their best interests. By promoting family leadership, family members are encouraged to share their experiences as well as the knowledge gained through those experiences."

Family leaders are those who represent their family's rights in

Social Networks Help Youth Development and Learning

In educational research, it has been found that children with well-developed social networks have more positive educational outcomes than children without them. "The greater a youth's social support, the greater the likelihood

exploring their neighborhoods to learn more about the individuals and institutions around them;

- **Decision making** — involving parents in school governance and providing them with tools such as leadership training so they can become more effective representatives in the schools and community;
- **Collaborating with community** — student and school involvement in support of community activities. Connections between schools and communities should be two-way.

Lincoln's Neighborhood Communities

The Community Learning Centers (CLC's) Schools and Neighbors Action Committees (SNACs) and Neighborhood Organizations are excellent ways in Lincoln to become involved in your neighborhood.

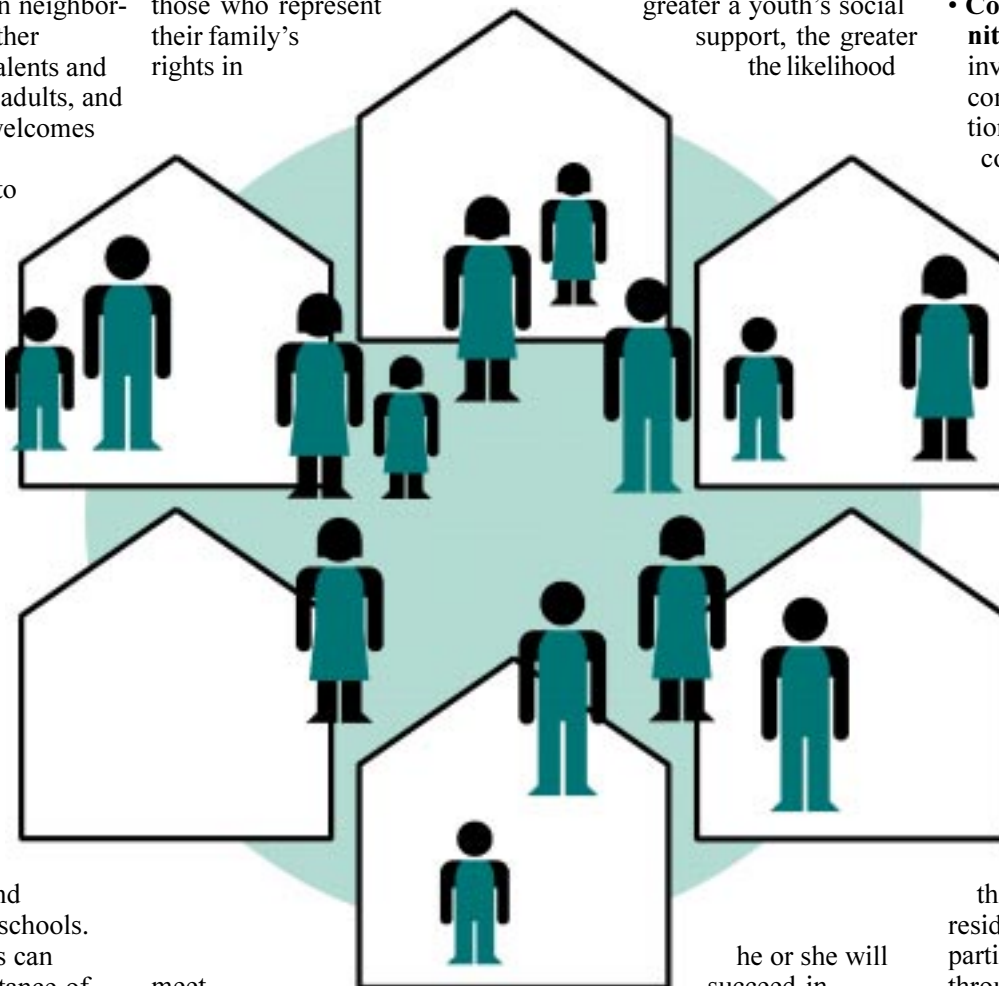
Each of these organizations are anxious to empower parents and other community residents to become involved in ways

that help neighborhood residents grow comfortable with particular issues and each other through discussion and activities that provide mutual support. The *Harry Potter* book party mentioned above is just one of the things happening in a Lincoln neighborhood as a result of community, school, family partnerships.

Finding ways to encourage participation is one of the biggest challenges facing communities. Encouraging anyone to attend yet another meeting is not always an easy task.

Most mighty movements, however start small and begin to build when the energy and commitment of a few fire up the imagination of a few more. Sometimes it's as simple as asking someone to become involved and valuing the commitment they bring to the table, no matter how small, that makes the difference.

Strong family leadership, after all, is the key to community growth and vitality and schools where children learn and develop their full potential.



he or she will succeed in school."

meetings that affect them, bring together families with similar problems to work on solutions, advocate for better services for families and the community, speak publicly and privately to help solve problems, serve on a board, task team or committee at the local, regional, state or national level or hold an office with an organization.







Many policies and services are developed to help families. However, if families aren't partners in the process, it is difficult to be sure the decisions made will ultimately meet family needs. Input and advocacy by the families who will be impacted by these decisions are critical to their success.

The role of the parent must be continually validated through encouraging an environment that welcomes and empowers parents to learn from one another in a non-threatening, supportive environment.

Epstein (1995) identified six types of school-family-community involvement that are important for student learning and development. These include:

- **Parenting** — helping families establish home environments that support children as students and helping schools understand families;
- **Communicating** — designing and conducting effective forms of two-way communication about school programs and children's progress;
- **Volunteering** — recruiting and organizing help and support for classrooms, school functions and student activities;
- **Learning at home** — helping families learn how to help students at home with academic decisions, homework and curriculum related activities and providing activities such as interactive homework that also includes the community, i.e. exercises that require

In this issue...

-  **Horticulture** —page 2
-  **Environmental Focus** —page 3
-  **Farm Views** —page 4
-  **Urban Agriculture** —page 5
-  **Food & Fitness** —page 6
-  **ANNUAL REPORT** —special pull-out section
-  **Family Living** —page 7
-  **4-H & Youth** —pages 8-9
-  **Community & Home Living** —page 10

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