

FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Collaboration to Support Students' Success

Chriss Walther-Thomas, Lori Korinek, and Virginia L. McLaughlin

As the new millennium approaches, students and professionals in public schools face complex challenges. Typical discussions in student cafeterias and faculty lounges range from concerns about school violence and personal safety to a mounting sense of pressure stemming from heightened academic expectations and more rigorous performance standards. Research on schools that are effective amid widespread challenges shows that no single factor guarantees both student achievement and professional satisfaction (Goertz, Floden, & O'Day, 1995; Fuhrman, 1993; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1996; Rosenholz, 1989; Stoll, 1991). Instead, many influences combine to support students and professionals (Little, 1982; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Ravitch, 1995; Stoll, 1991).

Supportive features include shared leadership and family involvement, a cohesive school vision, comprehensive program planning, adequate resources, sustained implementation, and ongoing performance evaluation and improvement. Collaboration also is cited frequently as contributing significantly to well-being and productivity in schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Little, 1982; McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997; NCTAF, 1996; Slavin, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Walling, 1994; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Indeed, many current reform initiatives designed to increase student achievement are based on the presumption that effective collaborators will work together to achieve the desired aims (Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Campbell, 1994; Louis et al., 1996; NCTAF, 1996).

In programs for students with disabilities and others with significant problems in achievement, collaboration is particularly important (Cramer, 1998; Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend & Bursuck, 1999). As schools become more inclusive learning communities, effective collaboration is crucial for success (McDonnell et al., 1997; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; NCTAF, 1996; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Recognizing the importance of collaboration to facilitate students' achievement and the support of educators, many professional groups have recommendations for preparation and practice that emphasize the importance of well developed collaborative skills. These include, among others, the Council for Exceptional

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Children (1995, 1998); Council of Chief State School Officers (1996); National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE] (1992); National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion [NCERI] (1995); National Council on Disability (1995); National LEADership Network (1993); National Staff Development Council (1994, 1995).

Most education professionals agree that collaboration is a worthy goal. Collaborative relationships in schools, however, are difficult to develop and even more challenging to maintain because of many factors, such as competing priorities, limited resources, and lack of professional development. In this article, we explore some fundamental features that foster the development of collaborative relationships and, in a broader sense, collaborative communities. We also present effective mechanisms for accessing and improving collaborative support networks. Finally, we address some start-up problems that arise in many schools.

FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a nebulous concept. Friend and Cook (1996) refer to it as a style of direct interaction that characterizes

many types of group processes and projects. Idol, West, and Lloyd (1988) define collaboration as

an interactive process that enables teams of people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to problems. The outcome produces solutions that are different from those any individual team member would produce independently (p. 55).

Similarly, Skrtic, Sailor, and Gee (1996) suggest that effective collaboration is a

multivocal discourse among participants who have different but equal status as they work together in an interdependent fashion (p. 144).

According to Walther-Thomas and colleagues (2000), effective collaboration emerges out of concerns by individuals who are like-minded in some ways and very different in others. Typically, effective collaborators care deeply about the same issues, but their perspectives and priorities are very different from one another. For example, when school teams work together to make their schools inclusive, the roles and responsibilities of team members affect their participation and priorities. Principals tend to focus on schoolwide issues such as achievement trends, financial implications, professional development, student placement, professional schedules, and community relations. Teachers and specialists typically are more interested in classroom issues such as individual and group performance, IEP planning, and new demands on their roles and responsibilities. Added to this complex mix of concerns are the priorities of families, who care most about the potential impact of new initiatives on their children. All of these constituents have to be assured that innovations will enhance their students' success in schools.

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Ultimately, the unique, dynamic, and sometimes problematic differences between team members are what are likely to make collaborative undertakings more effective than efforts of individuals working alone. Sharing different vantage points, knowledge, and strategies facilitates development of more creative and comprehensive solutions to complex problems. Plans that are developed and implemented collaboratively also are more likely to succeed because they have a broader base of support and commitment.

When thinking about collaborative relationships, a few key points are as follows.

1. Collaboration is *not* synonymous with inclusion or with any of the specific formats (e.g., co-teaching, peer consultation) used to facilitate the process.
2. Friendship is *not* a prerequisite for effective collaboration. Although previous experience in working together can help new collaborators feel more comfortable initially and reduce some of the awkwardness of new collaborative relationships, effective and lasting collaboration grows out of mutual trust and respect, equity, expertise in one's domain, willingness to share, and valuing contributions of participants (Cramer, 1998; Friend & Cook, 1996; Walther-Thomas, 1997).
3. Effective collaboration is neither easily nor quickly achieved. Initially it is labor-intensive. Productive partnerships develop from time spent together exchanging ideas, opinions, and information, as well as solving problems together. Time and practice are necessary to build trust and to develop the informal and formal operating procedures that enable teams to work together effectively (Larson & LaFasto, 1989).
4. Participation in collaborative relationships should be voluntary, as it helps solidify each team member's commitment to the effort (Friend & Cook, 1996; Orelove & Sobsey, 1996; Walther-Thomas, 1997). This is not always possible or appropriate. Most schoolwide initiatives require full participation by faculty and staff to ensure successful and lasting implementation.
5. New collaborators might overwork the process unintentionally as they strive to involve each other in important decision making. Teams and individuals have to determine when collaboration is appropriate and when it is not. A genuine commitment to effective collaboration does not mean that every decision must be made in this manner. Clearly, shared decision making makes sense when partners or larger teams are addressing fundamental issues, but it may not be necessary or even desirable to address certain day-to-day professional responsibilities collaboratively.

For example, most effective co-teachers work together to develop a mutually accepted system for grading student work. Together they establish grading rubrics, design appropriate modifications and accommodations for some class members, calculate semester grades, complete report cards, and confer with parents and students regarding progress. Most collaborators do not meet at the end of the day to correct daily assignments together. They are more likely to divide student work and trust the other's judgment to follow the policies and procedures they have established as a team.

CREATING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

Teaching and learning partnerships thrive in school communities where collaboration is the norm. These communities recognize the powerful potential of teamwork to help individuals and groups accomplish their goals (Friend & Cook, 1996; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). These schools believe that all individuals are valuable to the community. Formal and informal support structures are developed to ensure that all participants are successful. In addition, these schools provide opportunities for all members to contribute to the well-being of the community, because every person has skills, talents, knowledge, and experiences to offer that will make the school a better place.

Characteristics of collaborative communities often are manifested through the distribution of professional responsibilities, as well as in accepted decision-making procedures, use of shared resources, and well-developed accountability measures (Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Louis et al., 1996). As Skrtic and colleagues (1996) note, these communities recognize the power of dialogue to foster more effective problem solving and solution finding. Through shared experiences, participants change, resulting in realigned and redefined power relationships (Little & McLaughlin, 1993). Typically these schools are more democratic and less hierarchical. Collaborative communities often reflect openness in discussions, teaching that is personal but not private, clear respect for others' opinions and beliefs, and a healthy sense of belonging to a group and working as a team.

Collaborative communities support ongoing teamwork in many ways. Multiple formats are used to foster knowledge sharing, skill development, and support. Some formats are based on ongoing two-person relationships such as co-teaching (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 1996), peer collaboration (Pugach & Johnson, 1995), and peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1995). Others facilitate ongoing work by larger groups including teacher assistance teams (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989) and various types of school-improvement committees. Finally, some structures are designed to encourage teamwork between children and youth through ongoing

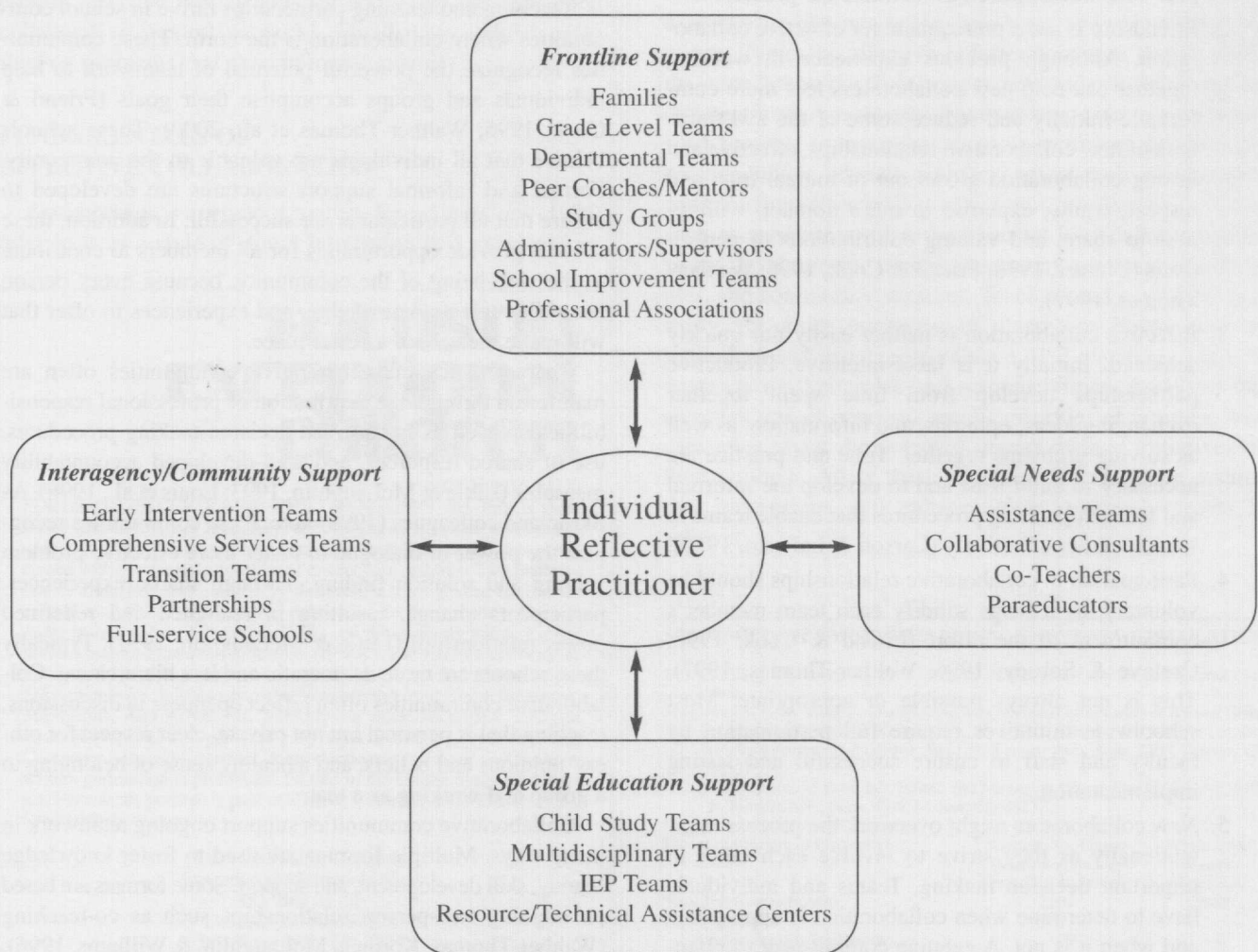
peer tutoring (Utley, Mortweet, & Greenwood, 1997) and cooperative learning (Slavin, 1995). We will examine these structures in greater detail in the following sections.

PROVIDING COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONALS

The ultimate purpose of professional collaboration is to support the ongoing efforts of individual educators to improve student learning. Collaborative opportunities enhance the value of individual professional practice by introducing other perspectives and voices into the processes of reflective planning and problem solving. The basic reflective

processes—planning, acting, and evaluating—are the same whether an individual, a dyad, or a small group applies them. Through collaboration with others, reflection becomes a true “conversation of practice” (Yinger, 1990). The goal for program development, therefore, should be to create a full network of collaborative options that teachers and other professionals can access as needed to support their individual reflective practice. Individuals should be able to access the specific type and amount of collaborative support they need at any point in time.

Figure 1 illustrates a professional collaborative network that incorporates frontline support, special needs support,



Source: Adapted from C. Walther-Thomas, L. Korinek, V. McLaughlin, and B. Williams (2000), *Collaboration for Inclusive Education: Developing Successful Programs*, p. 74 (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon).

FIGURE 1
Professional Collaborative Network

special education support, and interagency support. In actual schools, certain features of these collaborative structures sometimes are blended or combined, and the names for teams and services often are unique to the individual setting. The intent of the discussion here is to provide an overview of the possibilities, not an exhaustive or prescriptive list of collaborative support structures. After each type of collaborative support is introduced, we offer specific suggestions for accessing it.

Frontline Support

Ongoing relationships provide the most immediate or frontline support for professional concerns, and most schools offer numerous opportunities for developing and nurturing these relationships. Frontline support is proactive and preventive, enabling educators to deal with issues before they become serious. Partnerships with students' families are recognized as especially critical. The importance of family-school collaboration has been so strongly and consistently supported by research that it is no longer considered an option but a professional obligation (Corrigan & Bishop, 1997).

Beyond collaboration with families, educators can turn to their colleagues for support. Most schools are organized into departmental or grade-level teams that enable professionals to share ideas, improve school programs, and problem solve issues of common concern (Dickinson & Erb, 1996; Pounder, 1998). As a special source of support for beginning teachers, many districts provide mentors who offer emotional support, information about school policies and procedures, and assistance with professional responsibilities such as curriculum, classroom management, and testing (Ganser, 1996; Halford, 1998; Stedman & Stroot, 1998).

Teachers and other school professionals also might have access to peer coaching opportunities. Peer coaches often are lead teachers with designated responsibilities for assisting their colleagues in improving instructional skills, strategies, and techniques (Joyce & Showers, 1995). In some settings, peer coaches are co-equals with reciprocal support expectations. One specific variation is peer collaboration (Pugach & Johnson, 1995), which involves pairs of general education teachers working together over time as voluntary problem-solving partners. School-level study groups extend opportunities for peer support by providing a less formal forum for in-depth exploration of selected instructional topics (Crowther, 1998). For example, study groups sometimes engage in action research to test interventions in actual classroom settings (Murphy, 1999).

Educators in leadership positions, especially principals, supervisors, and department heads, are critical members of the support network (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Goor, Schwenn, & Boyer, 1997; McDonnell et al., 1997). Dramatic

Accessing Frontline Support

- Identify the various types of support available in the school.
- Participate actively in team meetings; keep the focus on teaching and learning.
- Confer with a supervisor on an instructional issue.
- Volunteer for mentoring or peer coaching programs.
- Join relevant professional associations and get involved in local or state activities.
- Join a study group to investigate issues of interest or common concern.
- Work with others to start a school- or district-based study and support group.

changes in both teaching behavior and student learning are possible when school leaders communicate support and empowerment to their faculties (Ferner et al., 1997). As renewal and accountability are recognized increasingly as community responsibilities, many schools have created school improvement teams to plan, coordinate, and evaluate local initiatives. Individuals might find meaningful support from fellow members of their school improvement teams who are committed to professional and organizational growth.

Affiliations with local, state, and national chapters of professional associations (e.g., American School Counselors' Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council for Exceptional Children, Council for Learning Disabilities) provide excellent opportunities for professionals to stay abreast of significant developments in their fields. Membership helps practitioners develop a better understanding of current issues in ways that are often difficult without connections to a broader professional network. Active involvement also facilitates ongoing knowledge and skill development through conferences, workshops, journals, newsletters, chapter meetings, and leadership opportunities. Many professional organizations provide electronic support through interactive web sites that are updated on an ongoing basis. A sampling of these web sites can be found in the Appendix.

Special Needs Support

The collaborative opportunities described thus far are routinely available to teachers and other school professionals to support them in their day-to-day work with students. When educators want additional assistance to deal with specific academic or behavioral concerns, they might request special support from assistance teams, consultants, co-teachers, or paraeducators. Assistance teams are school-based,

problem-solving groups of peers who can help generate intervention strategies and develop an action plan to meet a specific need (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Whitten & Dieker, 1995). As an alternative, teachers might work with a single colleague or specialist to address their concerns about students' programs. Interactive problem solving that enables individuals with varied expertise to clarify and resolve classroom concerns is described as collaborative consultation (Friend & Cook, 1996; West & Idol, 1990). In general, most assistance from teams or consultants is considered "indirect" support in that professionals tend to work with each other rather than interact directly with students. Teachers maintain primary responsibility for implementing student interventions.

Other structures for addressing special needs extend beyond indirect support to engage collaborators in direct work with students. Cooperative teaching or co-teaching is one such option. Co-teaching typically involves a specialist and a classroom teacher jointly planning, instructing, and evaluating heterogeneous groups of students in general education classrooms (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). By intentionally varying their roles, the co-teachers more fully share responsibility for their classes.

True co-teaching is possible only when partners have comparable professional credentials. Paraeducators however, provide another source of direct support. By definition, paraeducators do not have the professional preparation and licensure to practice independently but, rather, work under the supervision of licensed teachers or specialists. Despite the role differential, paraeducators are important members of

the team. With appropriate preparation, role expectations, and supervision, they can contribute significantly to planning and delivering educational programs and provide much needed collaborative support to teachers and other professionals (French, 1996; French & Gerlach, 1998; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

When professionals have access to these types of collaborative support, they can serve students with a broad range of abilities and skills in inclusive general education classrooms. More extensive support might be necessary when teachers and specialists encounter severe and persistent concerns about student performance, as discussed next.

Special Education Support

Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) does not explicitly mandate prereferral assistance prior to a comprehensive evaluation, all states either require or recommend some level of assistance prior to a full-scale evaluation for a suspected disability (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1995). Many schools have resource or child study teams who oversee this process. Typically, these teams are composed of an administrator, a specialist, and one or more classroom teachers. Effective child study teams function much like assistance teams and provide support to teachers attempting classroom interventions (Hayek, 1987). When performance does not improve after reasonable modifications, the child study team might decide that a full multidisciplinary evaluation is warranted to determine whether the student has a disability.

Multidisciplinary teams plan and conduct comprehensive assessments of students' strengths and needs in all areas of concern. The teams must determine students' eligibility and need for special education services according to the criteria for recognized disabilities specified in federal and state regulations. Multidisciplinary evaluation team reports should provide detailed information to support the development of appropriate instructional programs for students. Like child study teams, these are composed of teachers, specialists, administrators, and parents.

When students are found to be eligible for special education, written individualized education programs (IEPs) must be developed specifying the special education and related services that students will receive. IEP teams include the parents or guardians of identified students, the students themselves, as appropriate, at least one general education teacher, one or more specialists from the multidisciplinary evaluation team, and a representative of the educational agency who will supervise the provision of services. Other participants can be included at the discretion of either the parents or the school. When students demonstrate significant behavioral challenges, IEP teams are involved in

Accessing Special Needs Support

- Find out which types of support are available.
- Learn the procedure for requesting assistance from support providers.
- Talk with colleagues who have used available services.
- Become familiar with the areas of expertise of various teachers and specialists.
- Seek assistance for persistent instructional or behavioral problems.
- Keep detailed records on target behaviors, as well as interventions tried, to facilitate collaborative problem solving as needed.
- Observe experienced collaborators in action.
- Try co-teaching: plan, teach, and evaluate a unit of instruction with a willing colleague.

Accessing Special Education Support

- Know the procedures for making referrals to child study and multidisciplinary evaluation teams.
- Participate actively in the process when students are referred.
- Use special education support teams to plan, implement, and monitor student-specific interventions.
- Identify training and technical assistance centers in the area, services they provide, and ways to access assistance.
- Monitor student performance continuously, especially in areas of concern, and seek help before problems escalate.

functional assessments and behavioral intervention planning as well. Active IEP teams provide invaluable guidance and support to the classroom teachers and specialists who work directly with identified students.

Beyond what is available within a school or district, additional support for teachers, specialists, and administrators is often provided by state or regional resource and technical assistance centers. Services include professional development, onsite and telephone consultations, information searches, lending libraries, newsletters, regional network information, and facilitation of communication among clients, schools, and sponsoring agencies (Ayers, 1991; Brinckerhoff, 1989; Haslam, 1992). Successful technical assistance providers also might work with administrators and decision-making teams to plan and support systems change (Janney & Meyer, 1990).

Interagency Support

The collaborative structures described so far are primarily school-based options. School personnel also might interact closely with professionals from other agencies to address more complex student and family needs. In both early childhood and secondary programs, interagency teams contribute perspectives that are essential for effective transition planning. Even though early childhood transitions involve entry into school programs and secondary education transitions involve exiting from school programs, the roles of these interagency teams are parallel in many respects (Repetto & Correa, 1996). Professionals from health care, employment, social services, recreation, and other fields can become members of the transition teams responsible for development of individualized plans, particularly the required transition components of Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) for preschool children and IEPs for adolescents by age 14.

Interagency teams also are essential when student and family needs extend beyond the capabilities of the schools. Although each locality has its own array of agencies that provide services to youth and their families, most communities have public and private day care, public health, mental health, social services, parks and recreation, vocational rehabilitation, juvenile justice, and United Way information and referral services (Haley, VanDerwerker, & Power-deFur, 1997). Recently, many states have initiated comprehensive services teams that engage professionals from relevant agencies in the development and delivery of a wide array of community-based services tailored specifically to meet the needs of students with severe behavior and emotional disorders and their families (Hill, 1996).

More and more communities are defining closer relationships among professionals in education, health, and human service agencies using a model of school-linked services to streamline the process of accessing support through a more "user-friendly" network (Skrtec & Sailor, 1996; Sullivan & Sugarman, 1996). Some communities are creating full-service schools that provide a broad array of services such as individual and family counseling, after-school tutoring and recreation, child care, health services, and job training and placement. Human-services professionals (e.g., school personnel, nurses, counselors, psychologists), as well as mentors from local businesses, work together to provide students and families with "one-stop" educational and community services (Dryfoos, 1994, 1998). Through extensive and intensive collaboration, professionals in these schools are addressing in a seamless manner a broad range of educational and noneducational issues that have an impact on students and their families.

Accessing Interagency Support

- Identify community programs and agencies most closely involved with students and families.
- Talk with guidance counselors or school social workers about available services and appropriate procedures for contacting service providers.
- Participate on teams that plan and coordinate interagency services for students.
- Visit a full-service school to observe the range of programs offered.
- Involve all students in peer tutoring or peer mentoring programs.
- Work with others to develop partnerships with businesses, churches, civic clubs, and universities to provide additional onsite support for students and professionals.

In addition, educational partnerships that involve businesses, churches, civic organizations, federal agencies, and higher education institutions in support of schools have proliferated in recent years. Among the many services provided through community partnerships are tutor/mentorship programs and school-to-work transition programs often targeted at specific groups of students, such as dropouts, non-college-bound students, and students at risk (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Teachers who work with more challenging students, therefore, often are able to access extra support from the community at large.

Although all of the structures depicted in Figure 1 are not likely to be available in any single school, every school system should offer a range of collaborative support options to help professionals address students' unique needs. The nature and extent of collaborative support that professionals may want at any given point will depend on numerous factors. Common considerations include the complexity and severity of a student's needs; the academic curriculum and setting demands; the teacher's skills, comfort level, and preferences; and the class configuration. School-improvement teams should strive continuously to improve and expand the array of support options available in their communities. In the next section, we will briefly review some frequently used support options designed exclusively for students.

PROVIDING COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Although the focus of this article is professional collaboration, we point out that students, just as school professionals, need a broad array of support structures to be successful. Ideally, school communities provide students with supports that parallel adult support networks. Basic school supports should include positive discipline policies, diversity and disability awareness programs, and special-interest clubs and activities that are open to all students regardless of their academic standing.

In addition, weekly or monthly school themes should focus on topics such as cooperation, peer support, self-discipline, and respect for others. Developing and celebrating school community rituals, traditions, and anniversaries can raise school spirit and help students learn about others. When the development of positive and caring relationships with others is a high priority for student learning, school leaders provide opportunities that facilitate interaction, enrich individual strengths and interests, and help participants develop new skills or refine existing ones.

Some structures are designed to provide support for specific student academic or social needs. For example, cooperative learning groups (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994; King-Sears, 1997) and peer tutoring (Fuchs & Fuchs,

1998; Greenwood & Delquadri, 1995; Utley et al., 1997) are powerful forms of student collaboration that facilitate academic learning. After-school clubs and homework hotlines provide extra help for students. Many schools prepare students to serve as peer mediators to facilitate problem solving and conflict resolution. Groups focused on specific topics can help students cope with challenging situations at home such as divorce, blended families, or the loss of a family member.

Effective student support networks extend beyond the school building to involve families and community members. Organized activities in the community related to scouting, church, and neighborhood recreation groups can provide support and opportunities for developing skills for both academic and interpersonal success. Relationships with adult volunteers from businesses, universities, and churches also are important. Many students volunteer for service projects in which they work in hospitals, retirement facilities, homeless shelters, and other service settings. Other students benefit from business partnerships that provide mentors, tutors, and other types of beneficial relationships with adult role models.

In collaborative cultures, all students consistently receive the message that school is a place where everyone belongs, is cared for, receives needed support, and has much to contribute. School or community service clubs, student representation on all school committees, and peer-tutoring programs are examples of activities that can simultaneously involve and support students. All students, even those with significant support needs, should be involved in providing some type of assistance to others as part of developing a sense of efficacy and responsibility (Downing, 1996).

Programs designed to change the behavior of individual students are most successful when peers also are learning to

Making Student Support Services Accessible

- Make positive peer relationships a priority in planning at all levels—classroom, school, district, and community.
- Work with colleagues, families, and community agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to facilitate the development of positive peer relationships.
- Involve others (school counselors, school psychologists, community agency personnel, families, volunteers, older students) in ongoing classroom activities designed to build better peer relationships.
- Embed ongoing social skills instruction into academic instruction whenever possible.
- Offer students an array of peer support opportunities.

support one another in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect. The classroom social environment significantly affects student attitudes, engagement, and achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Walberg & Greenberg, 1997). If students feel unwelcome or unsafe in schools, they have more difficulty changing inappropriate behaviors or benefiting from academic instruction.

Recent school violence is a sobering reminder of the harm that can result when students feel disconnected and disenfranchised. Networks of student support that parallel structures available for adults help ensure that all students know they are important and valued members of the school community. Student support is an explicit goal in schools that are committed to collaboration. Ongoing modeling, instruction, practice, and feedback help students access available supports and facilitate their participation in assisting and supporting others.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Establishing a collaborative culture to support more inclusive education represents a major shift in thinking for many school professionals. In addition, it means significant changes in team members' roles and in ways that support services are provided. To be successful, this complex endeavor requires six essential elements derived from research on successful organizational change: shared leadership, a coherent vision, comprehensive planning, adequate resources, sustained implementation, and continuous evaluation and improvement (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). These elements of successful innovations provide collaborators with the structure and support needed to modify existing practices, create more collaborative approaches, and maintain them over time. These features are the building blocks of effective schools and form the foundation for collaborative service delivery and appropriate inclusive education. Schools are most successful when they build on existing strengths and systematically address weaker aspects of their programs. The six elements and accompanying questions presented in this section are intended to help school teams assess their current status and progress toward more collaborative programming.

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership means including everyone involved with students in meaningful decision making, either directly or through effective representation. Key participants have input and share information at all phases of planning, implementation, and ongoing evaluation. Leaders at every level (state, district, school) take an active role in mobilizing and motivating participants, establishing direction, supporting

Assessing Shared Leadership

- Do school team members have opportunities for providing input and sharing information at all phases of program development and implementation?
- Are team members clear about their roles and responsibilities?
- Are team members involved actively in decision making?
- What effective collaborative planning and problem-solving dyads or teams already exist onsite?
- What are the logical next steps and next structures to enhance support for students and adults at this school?

changes, and sharing decision making (Krug, 1992; Tindall, 1996). Planning teams address concerns (e.g., regarding resources, assignments, and schedules) in a proactive manner, offering ideas and solutions that are mutually beneficial given input from key participants. Inclusive programs are most effective when shared leadership prevails (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Coherent Vision

A coherent vision refers to a clear, well-defined, and shared view among administrators, teachers, specialists, students, and families of what the school's future should be like—a collective sense of why the school is moving toward more collaborative and inclusive services and what team members are trying to accomplish. Such a vision enables teams to make more informed decisions and facilitates collaboration toward common goals. A well-articulated vision induces commitment among participants and enhances efforts in planning and project management (Miles, 1995; Senge,

Assessing the Vision

- Do teams share the belief that all students can learn and have a right to be educated with their peers?
- Do team members share responsibility for all students in the school?
- Can team members articulate common values and goals to be accomplished?
- Can team members articulate the benefits of working collaboratively?
- Do team members see how their efforts contribute toward common goals, and do they value the contributions of others toward these ends?

1990). It helps team members understand how their individual and collective efforts fit together. But rather than adopting a complete vision at the very beginning, participants are open to the emergence of a shared vision resulting from their teamwork, actions, and outcomes that occur along the way (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Visions for collaborative service delivery and inclusive education typically include a fundamental belief that all students can learn, have a right to be educated with their peers, and are better served when team members work together to support academic, social, and personal growth (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Van Dyke, Pitonyak, & Gilley, 1997).

Comprehensive Planning

Comprehensive planning requires careful consideration of all essential program components in relationship to the vision—goals, student characteristics, curriculum and instruction, program structures and systems, roles and responsibilities, stakeholder involvement, and evaluation. Planning teams, therefore, assess strengths, target problem areas, coordinate initiatives, and determine logical “next steps” for program improvement. Comprehensive plans, in turn, guide resource allocation, professional development, personnel assignments, and student schedules. Plans facilitate information sharing and efficient, effective use of resources. They establish meaningful links between programs and initiatives. In the absence of comprehensive planning, daily implementation and evaluation problems are likely to continue without satisfactory resolution. Haphazard planning leads to duplication of effort, gaps in services, frustration, and cynicism toward change (Fullan, 1993).

Assessing Comprehensive Planning

- Are multi-year plans and timelines in place to ensure that collaboration remains a top priority over time?
- Do planning teams assess strengths, target problem areas or gaps in services, and coordinate initiatives?
- Do comprehensive plans guide resource allocation, professional development, personnel assignments, and student and staff schedules?
- Are districtwide and school-based planning teams available to facilitate and monitor collaborative service delivery?
- Do planning teams regularly provide opportunities offering input and sharing information with key participants affected by program changes?

Adequate Resources

Resources are the tools that implementers need to do the job successfully. Resources typically include administrative support, personnel, professional development opportunities, planning time, materials, and technology. Further, to develop and implement successful collaborative programs, student and teacher schedules, class sizes, and specialist caseloads must be reasonable. Even though programs seldom receive all the desired resources, support must be sufficient to make programs viable. Often this is accomplished by reallocating existing resources and personnel. Without adequate resources, even the most committed advocates become discouraged and enthusiasm for new initiatives quickly wanes.

Assessing Resources

- Do multi-year plans ensure that collaborative initiatives will continue to receive funding support over time?
- Does the district-level administration provide policies, materials, personnel, and other resources to support collaborative service delivery?
- Does the building-level administration provide policies, materials, personnel, and other resources to support collaborative service delivery?
- Are class sizes and specialists' caseloads reasonable to allow for effective collaboration?
- Is common planning time scheduled for professionals to work with colleagues daily or weekly?
- Are daily schedules of professionals and students designed to facilitate ongoing collaboration?

Sustained Implementation

Sustained implementation refers to the ability of program implementers and supporters to stay focused and committed while bringing others on board. Collaborative service delivery to support inclusive education must remain a priority for the long term at every level. All major changes take time and sustained effort (Fullan, 1993; Sarason, 1993; Senge, 1990). Therefore, district and school initiatives must be coordinated and ongoing instead of changing dramatically from year to year. Multi-year plans should guide systematic movement toward more collaborative services supported by professional development opportunities to keep implementers and newcomers on track.

Assessing Implementation

- Are multi-year plans designed to guide systematic movement toward greater collaboration implemented over time?
- Is ongoing professional development provided to keep experienced implementers on track and to give newcomers the skills they need to collaborate effectively?
- Do new district-level initiatives complement and support one another rather than pull personnel and resources in different directions from year to year?
- Do new school-level initiatives complement and support one another?

Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

Ongoing quantitative and qualitative evaluation provides collaborators the information they need to make well-reasoned, data-based decisions about continuing or modifying programs to make them more effective (McLaughlin & McLaughlin, 1993). Evaluation includes detailed descriptions of program efforts to allow for replication and adjustment as well as measures of outcomes for students, families, and educators. It provides supportive evidence for the aspects of collaboration that are working well and those that require adjustment. Ongoing assessment helps stakeholders determine progress and answer questions about intended outcomes, such as the academic performance of students with and without disabilities in inclusive programs (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). This information can help sustain

Assessing Evaluation and Improvement Efforts

- Is student achievement the key feature in decision making?
- Are academic and behavioral outcomes for all students monitored on an ongoing basis?
- Do written program descriptions specify both individual and team behaviors related to collaboration in clear and measurable terms?
- Is ongoing program implementation monitored over time?
- Are program modifications documented to allow for more efficient replication?
- Do school- and district-level evaluation plans facilitate program review, systematic improvement, and replication as appropriate?

the commitment and enthusiasm of program supporters and focus efforts toward continuous improvement.

In summary, collaboration is most productive when it takes place in the larger context of effective program development characterized by shared leadership, coherent vision, comprehensive planning, adequate resources, sustained implementation, and continuous evaluation for improvement. If some elements are lacking in a given setting, planning teams can identify strategies at district, school, and classroom levels for developing them and deliberately moving toward more inclusive and collaborative programs. Though it is no quick or easy task, cultivating the essential elements is the surest path toward successful programs for educators and students alike. In the final section, we will note some common start-up problems related to these features and strategies for addressing them.

COMMON START-UP PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Many school teams experience similar problems as they implement collaborative initiatives (Cramer, 1998; Fishbaugh, 1997; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Commonly mentioned concerns addressed in this section include building administrative support, providing professional development, cultivating staff commitment, creating balanced classroom rosters and manageable specialist schedules, and finding common planning time. These problems often are linked. If one is present, others probably are, too. For example, a lack of administrative support often affects professionals' teaching schedules, caseloads, and availability of scheduled time for collaborative planning.

Some of the suggestions offered here might seem somewhat generic or overlapping. Just as problems are linked, so are solutions. As a result, solving one significant problem might provide relief in other areas as well. Some proposed problem-solving strategies serve only as quick fixes; they will provide temporary relief but not enough support to keep collaborators working together. The most effective long-term solutions require resources and administrative support related to the essential features presented previously. Finally, some readers might question the feasibility of certain suggestions that seem too costly or more "creative" than imaginable in some schools. Nevertheless, all of the suggestions offered here are used in real schools.

Building Administrative Support and Leadership

Clearly, administrative support is a basic factor in effective collaboration (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Larson & LaFasto, 1989). District- and building-level leadership ensures a stronger commitment for new program initiatives and greater support (Fullan, 1993). For example, fiscal

Providing Administrative Support

- Make available an array of professional development opportunities such as tuition for courses, books, video/audiotapes, mentors, coaches, software, and onsite workshops.
- Participate actively with faculty in professional development programs.
- Write grants to secure additional funding sources for classroom and schoolwide projects.
- Schedule collaborators' classes first to ensure common planning time for teams.
- Recognize professional efforts (e.g., handwritten notes, e-mail messages, verbal comments, classroom visits) on an ongoing basis.
- Write individual and team letters of support and commendations for personnel files.
- Compensate staff members for "start-up" work done outside school to support new initiatives with money, time, recertification points, journal subscriptions, or conference registrations.
- Hire faculty and staff members who share a collaborative vision.
- Communicate regularly with teams to discuss progress and address concerns.
- Use e-mail and voice mail to reduce faculty meeting time, and reallocate this time for professional development and collaborative planning.

resources generated at the district level help principals and teachers get the tools they need to implement new efforts successfully. Also, district leadership in planning reduces duplication of effort across schools, facilitates communication within the system and in the larger community, and fosters better cooperation and collaboration among schools (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Finally, leadership at this level helps ensure that potential consequences of proposed initiatives are considered in a comprehensive manner before implementation. For example, if one middle school decides to provide inclusive classroom support for all students with disabilities, district planners have to consider how this decision could affect students, families, teachers, and administrators at other schools in the community.

At the school level, principals play critical roles in the development of collaborative communities (Stoll, 1991). Their efforts to ensure the provision of needed resources—such as professional development, manageable class sizes and specialist caseloads, balanced classroom rosters, and scheduled common planning times—enable individuals and

teams to work more effectively (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Principals find capable teachers and specialists who also are willing to serve as leaders in new collaborative initiatives. Professionals who have worked successfully with others in the past are good candidates for these new efforts. To encourage participation and to recognize the extra time and effort involved, leaders find ways to compensate participants for their work.

Providing Adequate Professional Development

Typical complaints about collaborative initiatives can be traced back to a lack of adequate professional development prior to implementation. When school leaders implement new ideas before teams are prepared adequately for their new roles and responsibilities, problems often develop (Fullan, 1993; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Negative attitudes, poor communication skills, and inadequate team problem solving are just a few of the many difficulties that can be resolved through appropriate professional development.

Traditionally, school professionals are better prepared to work with children and youth than to work with professional colleagues and family members. Despite recent improvements, preservice programs still offer little preparation regarding skills for effective collaboration. Consequently, few beginning teachers and specialists have mastered the basic communication skills needed for effective teamwork—such as active listening, group problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation (Friend & Cook, 1996). In

Professional Development Options to Improve Collaborators' Skills

- Enroll with colleagues in university or district classes on interpersonal communication, collaboration, or inclusive education.
- Start or join a study group on collaboration in the school or in the district.
- Review case studies and role-play potential problem situations with colleagues.
- Watch and discuss videotapes of actual team meetings to improve personal skills and group behaviors.
- Visit model schools with teammates; observe effective collaborators in action.
- With teammates, attend conferences, workshops, or symposia on collaboration.
- Recruit more experienced collaborators to serve as mentors for new teams.
- Surf the Internet to find collaboration-based resources; share your findings with others.

most traditional schools, few professional development opportunities focus specifically on communication and collaboration.

Without adequate skill development before implementation and ongoing encouragement and support during implementation, many fledgling teams give up on collaboration as a viable option for them and for their schools. Other teams continue to work together but never fully achieve the potential of their teaming efforts. Offering a variety of professional development choices allows professionals to select the activities that will be most valuable to them.

As new teams begin working together, regular use of a teaming checklist to assess individual and team behaviors can facilitate communication and target areas in which professional development is needed. In addition to encouraging individual team members to monitor their own behavior and make personal changes as needed, the process helps beginning teams focus on important communication skills as they work together.

Figure 2, the *Teamwork Checklist*, provides teams with a focus for their communication and collaboration. New team members might want to review the checklist items individually before meeting with team members. This allows them to assess their own teamwork behaviors and set individual goals for self-improvement. As teams work together over time, they can use the checklist periodically to monitor their progress in developing effective teaming skills.

Cultivating Staff Commitment

Willingness to make a commitment to work with others over time should be an important part of the selection criteria for participants in new initiatives. Time and commitment are necessary to become an effective collaborator. This enables teams to develop positive working relationships, effective roles and responsibilities, and genuine appreciation for each partner's contributions (Walther-Thomas, Korinek,

McLaughlin, & Williams, 1996). Even thoroughly planned initiatives experience "rocky" times during start-up. Perseverance during this period is critical to long term success. Effective collaborators need time to change their old ways of thinking and behaving.

Individuals adjust to change at different rates. Some level of personal resistance is actually a healthy response to change (Friend & Cook, 1996; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996). Resistance prevents individuals and groups from making hasty decisions that are not well thought out. Most of the resistance to collaborative efforts, such as teacher assistance teams and co-teaching, stems from limited understanding of the processes, lack of prior experience, participation in poorly implemented models, and fear of the unknown. If school leaders recognize that initial resistance is normal, they can use strategies such as phased-in implementation, personalized professional development, and modeling by volunteers to break down barriers effectively (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Despite these efforts, some professionals choose not to participate in collaborative programs because of their strong philosophical beliefs. With sufficient time and support, most individuals will recognize the benefits of collaboration. A few might seek employment in settings where the vision is more compatible with their own.

Creating Balanced Classroom Rosters and Manageable Professional Schedules

Scheduling students appropriately is one of the most important tasks in planning successful collaboration and inclusion. A typical mistake of many well-intentioned teams is to schedule too many students with special needs into a single classroom. This usually is done because placing a significant number of identified students in one room helps to justify additional resources (e.g., consultant time, daily co-teaching, smaller class size) that will be provided for that classroom. Also, placing students with special needs in a limited number of rooms makes specialists' schedules more manageable and allows them to provide more intensive support services. Although these decisions make sense on one level, the result is often classrooms that present more academic and behavioral challenges than even the most skilled and committed collaborators can handle successfully.

In developing classroom rosters, the principle of natural proportions must be kept in mind (Brown et al., 1989). Inclusive classrooms are heterogeneously grouped environments (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). Students with special needs should represent not more than about 20% of the total classroom. Ideally, in a class of 25 students, no more than four or five class members should have identified disabilities in the mild to moderate range or other related

Strategies That Strengthen Collaborative Commitments

- Start new initiatives with voluntary participation.
- Respond to participants' concerns with personalized support.
- Encourage language that emphasizes "our students" rather than "my students/your students."
- Provide comparable material, supplies, and status for all partners.
- Communicate with families and students as a team (e.g., on the first day of classes, at back-to-school-night presentations, in progress reports).

problems that make them at risk of school failure. If the identified disabilities are more severe and necessitate more support, fewer special education and at-risk students should be included in these classroom rolls. The underlying goal in developing classroom rosters is heterogeneity. Although

computerized scheduling software can be a helpful tool, most inclusive classes still must be scheduled by hand to achieve appropriate classroom configurations. Planning teams cannot rely on the random results generated by most computer scheduling programs.

Self-Assessment					
	Needs Work—Satisfactory—Outstanding				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Expression and body language are monitored.					
2. Comfortable eye contact is maintained.					
3. Sufficient rapport is established.					
4. Speaker is given undivided attention.					
5. Speaker's content is paraphrased correctly.					
6. Feelings are reflected when appropriate.					
7. "I messages" are used appropriately.					
8. Questions are asked effectively.					
9. Key ideas/themes are identified accurately.					
10. Checks for accuracy are made frequently.					
Strongest aspect(s) of my communication:					
Specific target(s) for more effective communication:					
Team Assessment					
	Needs Work—Satisfactory—Outstanding				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Members are clear about the task to be accomplished.					
2. Members are clear about their roles and responsibilities.					
3. All members participate actively.					
4. Members stay on-task and on-topic.					
5. Communication is clear and jargon-free.					
6. Members listen openly to diverse perspectives.					
7. Members make supportive comments.					
8. Student problems are clearly identified.					
9. Specific intervention goals are identified.					
10. Brainstorming results in a variety of alternatives.					
11. Specific interventions are selected.					
12. A progress measurement plan is developed.					
13. The team accomplishes the task effectively.					
14. Members follow a clear process for reaching consensus.					
15. Members leave knowing who does what by when.					
Strongest aspect(s) of team problem solving:					
Specific target(s) for more effective teamwork:					

FIGURE 2
Teamwork Checklist

In schools with a high concentration of students with special needs, it is easy to overload classrooms with students who present challenging problems. Typically, it is easier to create balanced classrooms in elementary and middle schools, where mixed grouping is generally the norm. High schools present a greater challenge. Lower-level courses such as Algebra I and Basic English often are filled with students who have learning or behavior problems—most of whom do not qualify for special education services. School teams have to assess student needs and available resources carefully (e.g., co-teaching time, educator time, scheduled planning periods, class size, and specialist caseloads) when making student placement decisions and co-teaching assignments.

For example, in districts where Algebra I is a basic requirement for graduation, to offer co-teaching throughout the day in pre-Algebra and Algebra I courses makes sense. Many students who wait to take this course until high school lack the fundamental skills, ability, and confidence to perform well. By offering several co-taught sections, all students in the school can benefit from the additional support. Multiple sections also allow schedulers to distribute students with disabilities and others with documented math problems in classes across the full school day rather than trying to concentrate them into one or two periods.

In many schools, teams are redefining specialists' roles to facilitate more direct classroom support and make specialists' schedules more manageable. In school systems that use this approach, all specialists (e.g., special educators, gifted education teachers, counselors, psychologists, Title I teachers, English as Second Language and Limited English Proficiency teachers) are required to provide direct support

for a designated number of classrooms. Most work cross-categorically and serve as the case managers for any students with special needs (e.g., special education, gifted, Title I) who are included in the classrooms where they collaborate with general educators.

The specialists meet regularly to discuss the progress of targeted students, problem-solve concerns, and exchange classroom strategies. This arrangement works well in schools that include many students with special needs and a large number of specialists. It also is effective in rural areas as an alternative to having specialists travel long distances to see students on their categorical caseloads.

Scheduling Common Planning Time

Collaborators need common planning time to work together (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995; Friend & Cook, 1996; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Ideally, they should have a minimum of one hour of scheduled common planning time each week for activities such as instructional planning, problem solving, and progress monitoring. Establishing common

Finding Additional Resources to Support New Collaborative Initiatives

- Establish supportive partnerships with community businesses.
- Recruit tutors and classroom assistants through service groups and other community organizations.
- Establish a professional lending library and systematically share reading materials, instructional strategies, and management techniques with colleagues.
- Create professional development school partnerships with universities.
- Encourage involvement of college students in schools.
- Write grant proposals for classroom and schoolwide projects.
- Teach PTA leaders how to recruit and prepare skilled classroom volunteers.

Scheduled Common Planning Time: Short- and Long-term Solutions

- Schedule daily or weekly planning periods.
- Schedule weekly or monthly early-release periods.
- Cover classes with "floating" substitute teachers during planning.
- Allow compensatory time for before-school or after-school planning.
- Replace meeting time with planning periods.
- Use e-mail for planning and communication.
- Plan during lunch time.
- Plan during walk-and-talk sessions before or after school.
- Plan in the classroom during videotapes and practice periods.
- Double-up classes for some activities (e.g., films, library time, speakers).
- Hire and prepare paraeducators to cover teachers' classes once a week for additional planning.
- Create a daily master schedule that uses a time "banking" system (e.g., school day plus 15 additional minutes a day) to create full or partial teacher workdays each month.
- Use "late start" mornings; early dismissal days; and block art, physical education, music, and keyboarding classes together to create longer planning periods.

planning times for collaborators is a challenging task for administrators and teachers. It necessitates thoughtful consideration of the many professional schedules and can be achieved only if it is an administrative priority.

CONCLUSION

Collaborative approaches are gaining popularity to help professionals address students' complex and diverse needs. Though collaboration should not be viewed as an end in itself, collaborative processes can be effective tools for facilitating student achievement. The network of support discussed in this article illustrates the broad range of collaborative possibilities available in many school communities. The focus of the model presented here is on the professional side of collaboration; it describes potential support structures available to assist professionals in their work with students.

Like other innovations, collaborative networks must be built on a firm foundation of shared leadership, coherent vision, comprehensive planning, adequate resources, sustained implementation, and continuous evaluation and improvement. Even with all of these elements in place, problems arise, especially among new collaborators who likely lack the necessary skills and experience needed to work effectively with others.

Typical start-up problems include lack of administrative support, inadequate professional development, resistance to change, imbalances in classroom rosters and specialist schedules, and limited planning time. Many common problems that teams encounter can be linked. Similarly, certain strategic actions may solve multiple problems. Educators have to recognize that collaborative relationships are complex, and they take time to mature into productive support mechanisms. Perseverance and ongoing problem solving will help teams collaborate effectively to promote students' success.

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APPENDIX

A Sampling of Web Sites for School Teams Interested in Collaboration, Professional Development, and Student Achievement

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| Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
www.ascd.org:80 | National Council for Staff Development
www.nsdc.org |
| ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education
www.ericsp.org/ | National Education Association
www.nea.org |
| LD OnLine
www.ldonline.org/ | National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching
www.npeat.org |
| League of Professional Schools
www.coe.uga.edu/lps | New American Schools
www.naschools.org |
| National Board of Professional Teaching Standards
www.nbpts.org | Pathways to School Improvement
www.ncrel.org/sdrs/pathwayg.htm |
| National Center to Improve Practice
www.edc.org/FSC/NCIP | Professional Development Partnerships Project
aed.org/us/index.html |
| National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators
idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/ | |