



HEARTS  
PARTNERSHIP  
PLAN  
TOGETHER  
FAMILY IMPLANT  
SCHOOL  
SUCCESSFUL  
DISCUSSION  
COMMUNITY  
EVALUATION  
SUCCESS  
ACTION  
MOBILIZATION  
EXPLORE  
PROJECT  
GOALS

**CRUCIAL CONDITIONS  
FOR SUCCESSFUL  
SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIPS**

SCHOOL - FAMILY - COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

*cœur* **action**

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The Centre de transfert pour la réussite éducative du Québec (CTREQ) is a not-for-profit organization tasked to help improve academic success rates by stimulating educational innovation and assisting communities of practice in putting these innovations to work through knowledge transfer, support for practical experience, and monitoring, liaison and networking.



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#### Crucial Conditions for Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships

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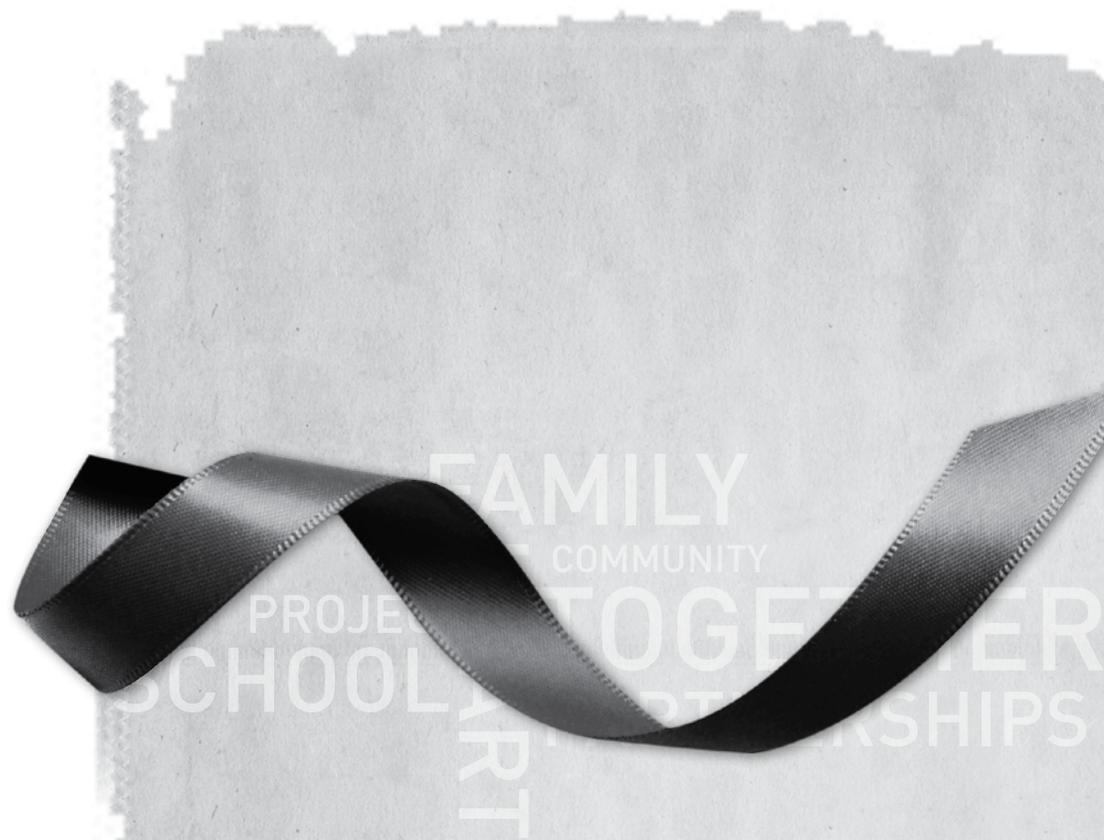
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Linguistic revision: Colleen Bilodeau  
Design and computer graphics: Bissonnette Communications Impact  
Cover design: Bissonnette Communications Impact

This document was made possible through financial support from the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the Secrétariat à la jeunesse.



ISBN: 978-2-923232-07-2  
Legal deposit: 2nd quarter 2010  
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec  
Library and Archives Canada

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## FOREWORD

This document is a scaled-down version of a science-based document whose goal was to identify the conditions needed for successful partnerships between the school, families and the community (S-F-C). The appended bibliography contains a set of references for those interested in the complete background for the research conducted.

In this document, the expressions "crucial conditions" or "winning conditions" refer to two types of conditions—attitudes or human factors such as mutual respect among partners; and methodological aspects such as the need for planning and evaluation of the action undertaken. It bears pointing out that the fact that there is an S-F-C project in a community does not necessarily make that milieu a community school. Such a designation covers a much more complex reality.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed description of community schools, see Deslandes, R. and Rousseau, M. "L'école communautaire et le rôle du travailleur social." *Intervention. Revue de l'Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux du Québec*, 126 (2007): pp. 84-94.

# WINNING CONDITIONS

## FOR THE EMERGENCE AND SUCCESS OF SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY (S-F-C) PARTNERSHIPS

School, family and community are the three core components in a form of collaboration crucial to the success of students in school.

This collaboration is based on equality and mutual respect among partners and on solidly planned action consistent with the school's educational project.

### An indisputable fact

Research shows that schools have much to gain by calling on families and the community to help them carry out their mission.<sup>2</sup>

This has become such an indisputable fact that Education, Recreation and Sports Minister Michelle Courchesne refers directly to it in the introduction to her action plan for combating dropping out: "It has become clear that schools alone can no longer assume the entire responsibility

**"Parents' commitment to their children's schooling is a determining factor in students' success."**

for helping students to stay in school and succeed: the reasons students leave school are often outside the school, and it is impossible to make progress without close

cooperation from parents, the community and the working world."<sup>3</sup>

After stating that, historically, changes to our school system have been based on sociological ideals and research, the document goes on to say that "helping students stay in school and succeed is central to the concerns of a great many researchers. Their recommendations represent impor-

tant avenues for planning the actions of the government of Québec. There is general agreement on three recommendations: recognition of the importance of parents and the community in promoting education and providing support for young people [...]. Everything must be done to involve parents in school life and to

make them key partners in their children's success in school."<sup>4</sup>

This last statement meshes perfectly with the thinking stemming from the report on community schools drafted further to the Generations Forum held in December 2004. This document, published in June 2005, describes the advantages in calling upon families and communities to help schools carry out their mission.

Providing students with better structure and supervision, parent participation, greater support for teaching staff, more commitment by the community—these are among the conditions that produce improved success rates.

<sup>2</sup> The benefits of this collaboration were studied extensively in Québec by Rollande Deslandes, a researcher and professor at UQTR, whose list of publications includes numerous articles on this subject (see References).

<sup>3</sup> MELs. I Care About School. All Together for Student Success. (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2009), p. 5 (PDF version).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



COLLABORATION  
COMMUNITY  
PROJECT PARTNERSHIP  
SCHOOL SUCCESS  
FAMILY

## A Win-Win Situation

Statistics on academic success are not the only indications that the introduction of projects that bring together the school, families and the community pay off. The students themselves, their parents and teachers, along with the community at large (community, cultural, municipal, and government organizations and economic partners), reap sizable benefits too.

The impact on students is particularly important. Numerous researchers have identified the added value of S-F-C partnership—increased persistence in school, more time spent on homework, improved learning and academic results, less absenteeism, enhanced well-being, and better social, emotional and physical development.

Parents benefit because they gain better knowledge of their children's development and acquire better tools for interacting with and helping them. Participation sometimes

serves as an incentive for parents to become more active in the community or gives them easier access to support services for housing, transportation or employment.

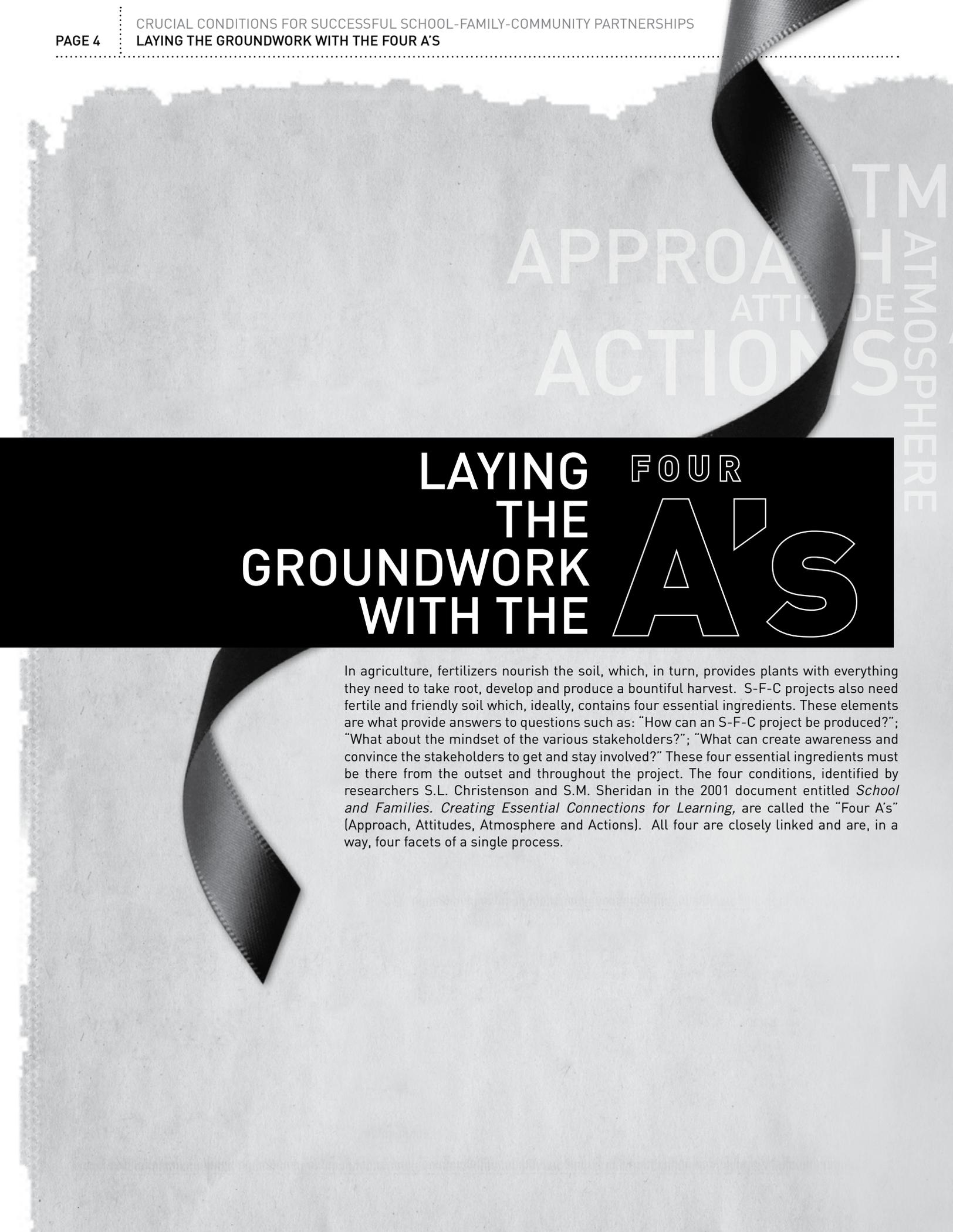
S-F-C projects often mean a more positive attitude by teachers towards parents' abilities and involvement by community representatives. Better yet, teachers exhibit a more positive attitude towards their own school and the instruction they provide.

Lastly, the advantages for the community are many—community organizations can reach children and their families more easily and this makes these agencies more efficient. Society as a whole is bettered when students graduate and are fully rounded individuals.

In short, it would appear that introducing and implementing school-family-community projects is highly advisable. But what is desirable is not always easy to achieve, especially given that the projects hinge on a smooth blend of human and organizational factors.

This is why the conditions for successful school-family-community projects must be identified. This process in itself can be one of the keys to success or, at least, an advantage, because identification can be used as a cross-link and therefore improve the odds of the projects succeeding.

**“it would appear that introducing and implementing school-family-community projects is highly advisable.”**



APPROACH  
ATTITUDE  
ACTIONS  
TM  
H  
DE  
S  
ATMOSPHERE

# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK WITH THE FOUR A'S

In agriculture, fertilizers nourish the soil, which, in turn, provides plants with everything they need to take root, develop and produce a bountiful harvest. S-F-C projects also need fertile and friendly soil which, ideally, contains four essential ingredients. These elements are what provide answers to questions such as: "How can an S-F-C project be produced?"; "What about the mindset of the various stakeholders?"; "What can create awareness and convince the stakeholders to get and stay involved?" These four essential ingredients must be there from the outset and throughout the project. The four conditions, identified by researchers S.L. Christenson and S.M. Sheridan in the 2001 document entitled *School and Families. Creating Essential Connections for Learning*, are called the "Four A's" (Approach, Attitudes, Atmosphere and Actions). All four are closely linked and are, in a way, four facets of a single process.

# OSPHERE ACTIONS ATTITUDES APPROACH

SEEN FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF EDUCATION PARTNERS, WE WOULD HAVE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS WHO:

- recognize that families and the community can also contribute to achievement of the school's mission and that, together, all partners share a unique and essential role in attaining a collective goal;
- concretely acknowledge and value the opinions and observations of families and community representatives;
- create an enjoyable working atmosphere for all partners;
- take genuine steps to make education partners a real part of the project.

▶ Approach

▶ Attitudes

▶ Atmosphere

▶ Actions

Clearly, energy and resources are required in not only carrying out the projects, but also in fostering the psychological conditions that make them possible. The basis for collaboration is equality among the partners. This will to act as equal partners leads to real-life action tailored to the culture and characteristics of each community. The following are a few examples of the countless possibilities available:

- Ensure a harmonious and pleasant work atmosphere by scheduling meetings at times convenient to all partners or by reserving a room in the school for S-F-C project meetings;
- Create opportunities that foster the development of trust among partners;
- Establish procedure and protocol for regular transmission of essential information to every partner.

Most of the time, the school principal, who is fully aware of the inherent difficulties of the school's mission and who is well positioned to reach out to parents and organizations in the community, initiates the project and lays the groundwork. However, once the process is underway, all the partners must also make the Four A's standard practice.



# ACTIONS

EXPLORE ▶ INITIATE ▶ PLAN ▶ IMPLEMENT ▶ EVALUATE

When it comes to social change, there are various theories and intervention methods. Depending on the case, authors identify four, five, six or seven steps or conditions needed for change to occur. The differences, at least as far as S-F-C project development goes, are not due as much to the nature of things as to how things are approached. What one author includes under “Explore” might be subdivided into two steps (such as discussion and understanding) by another.

Be that as it may, the model chosen here is the one presented in recent reports by the Community Learning Centre, an organization that studies the short- and long-term interactions between families, the school and the community. This model, inspired by the theory of change of the American company Organizational Research Services, has five steps: Explore, Initiate, Plan, Implement and Evaluate.

1

## ▶ Explore

Depending on the nature of the social environment, the history of interrelations between the school and the community, and the problems to solve and goals to reach, the school approaches parents and community representatives to form an action team. This exploratory phase is the time when the school must be loud and clear about its school-family-community cooperation “credo,” namely, that partners play a unique and essential role in attaining a common goal.

The psychological outcome of this credo is that individuals are encouraged to cultivate positive attitudes and behaviours such as mutual respect, trust, flexibility, shared responsibility, forwarding of pertinent information to partners, acceptance of the abilities of others, and setting aside of prejudices.

**“Partners play a unique and essential role in attaining a common goal.”**

## 2

## ▶ Initiate

After putting together an action team and providing it with the necessary funds and tools, this team can get down to work. Logically, the first step is to analyze the situation and determine the targeted outcomes, not only for the year underway but also for the next three years, for example. The following guidelines can be used fully or partially.

## ▶ ASSETS OR LACK THEREOF

Has there been any school-family-community collaboration in the past? Are there community organizations already showing leadership in this field or, if none so far, are any likely to want to become involved? Are parents open to participating with the community? Will there be any financial and human resources for undertaking action in partnership? If not, how can this obstacle be overcome? Which existing partnerships currently work well for the entire school or in a particular grade?

Consequently, which practices should be adjusted or discontinued?

## ▶ GOALS TO ATTAIN

Better integration for children from various cultural communities? A lower drop-out rate? Zero tolerance of bullying or drug use? Improving the school's physical environment? Reducing the failure rate in a particular subject?

To avoid spreading efforts too thinly, these goals (requiring certain concrete measures) must be bound to the school's educational project or success plan.<sup>5</sup> This way, the collaboration program will become a priority for the school.

## ▶ MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS

What do teachers expect of families and community partners? What are the families' expectations of teachers and school staff?

What do students expect of families and teachers?

## ▶ OBSTACLES AND MEANS TO OVERCOME THEM

Which families seem to have little interest in their children's education and are, therefore, difficult to reach? What could be done to communicate with them and motivate them to get involved in their children's education?

## ▶ THE BASES FOR RIGOROUS PLANNING

Goals to be reached, actions to carry out, responsibilities to be determined, costs, and methods for evaluating the action undertaken and the programs implemented.

This step precedes detailed planning of the team's actions and serves as a basis for it.

## 3

## ▶ Plan

Once a commitment has been made to move ahead, the project has to be implemented. Rigorously. Studies show that general planning should cover three years and that detailed action plans (see boxed text) should have a 12-month timeline.

When planning is completed, two important stages remain: implementation and evaluation.

## THE DETAILED ACTION PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Results of the evaluation of needs from the preceding step;
- List of the goals to attain;
- List of activities to be either maintained, adjusted or implemented, along with identification of the people or committees responsible for follow-up;
- Creation of a timeline as well as a monthly or quarterly calendar covering the tasks to be carried out. This step can obviously include setting up meetings for evaluating or changing the work underway;
- Identification of the available resources needed in order to achieve the predetermined goals;
- Drafting of a supervision process or mechanism for supporting the various committees;
- Drafting of a process or mechanism for analyzing the final results obtained, including mandatory indicators or criteria used to evaluate outcomes;
- Drafting of a process or mechanism for assessing whether the action undertaken should be maintained, adjusted or discontinued.

<sup>5</sup> This is one of the conclusions of a Québec experiment analyzed by Rollande Deslandes in *La collaboration de l'école, de la famille et de la communauté à l'apprentissage* (Montreal: ACFAS), p. 219: "Clearly, school-family-community collaboration must go beyond the 'project' phase and be an integral part of the educational project and success plan of every elementary and secondary school in Québec." [translation]

## 4

## ► Implement

Implementing the plan is done according to markers set during the planning process (calendar, action to carry out, follow-up meetings, etc.). It might be tempting to assume that a well-designed and well-planned process that brings together a team of highly motivated participants will run smoothly once it is off the ground. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, especially if the actions span a long period interrupted by things such as holidays that tend to break the pace. Experience shows that it is best to take it for granted that certain difficulties will arise and to be prepared accordingly. "To be defeated is excusable, to be taken by surprise is inexcusable," said Napoleon, who was keenly aware of the need to know one's enemies, to take weather into account, and to be familiar with the lay of the land. This military genius was often able to foresee potential pitfalls and, therefore, could indeed overcome or avoid them. Of course, here we are not talking about battles, but about difficulties which, according to numerous authors, should be seen as challenges to be addressed. What are these challenges?

Here are a few that surfaced during an action-research experiment on S-F-C projects conducted in two elementary schools and two secondary schools between 2001 and 2005.

Note that not all the participants experienced these challenges:

- Life's normal contingencies (retirement, death, departure, re-assignment, etc.) resulting in unavailability or reduced availability;
- The existence of many other projects in the school;
- Resistance to change;
- Loss of synergy, motivation or enthusiasm;
- Meetings held too far apart: When too much time elapses between meetings, it is just as detrimental as when there is an overload. When this happens, the initial momentum is lost and motivation peters out.

However, the solutions to these challenges seem fairly obvious. In interviews with participants, other solutions also came to light.

**HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF FACILITATING CONDITIONS:**

- Hold reasonably spaced meetings to maintain the level of motivation;
- Promote the partnership within the school on an ongoing basis (to defeat resistance to change and keep the flame burning);
- Maintain leadership by the school principal and S-F-C action group members;
- Enlist parents and external collaborators who know the education system. However, parents and community representatives must nonetheless be kept properly informed about the school and the education system;
- Have a member of the S-F-C action group on the Governing Board;
- Keep written records of the action undertaken.

# 5

## ► Evaluate

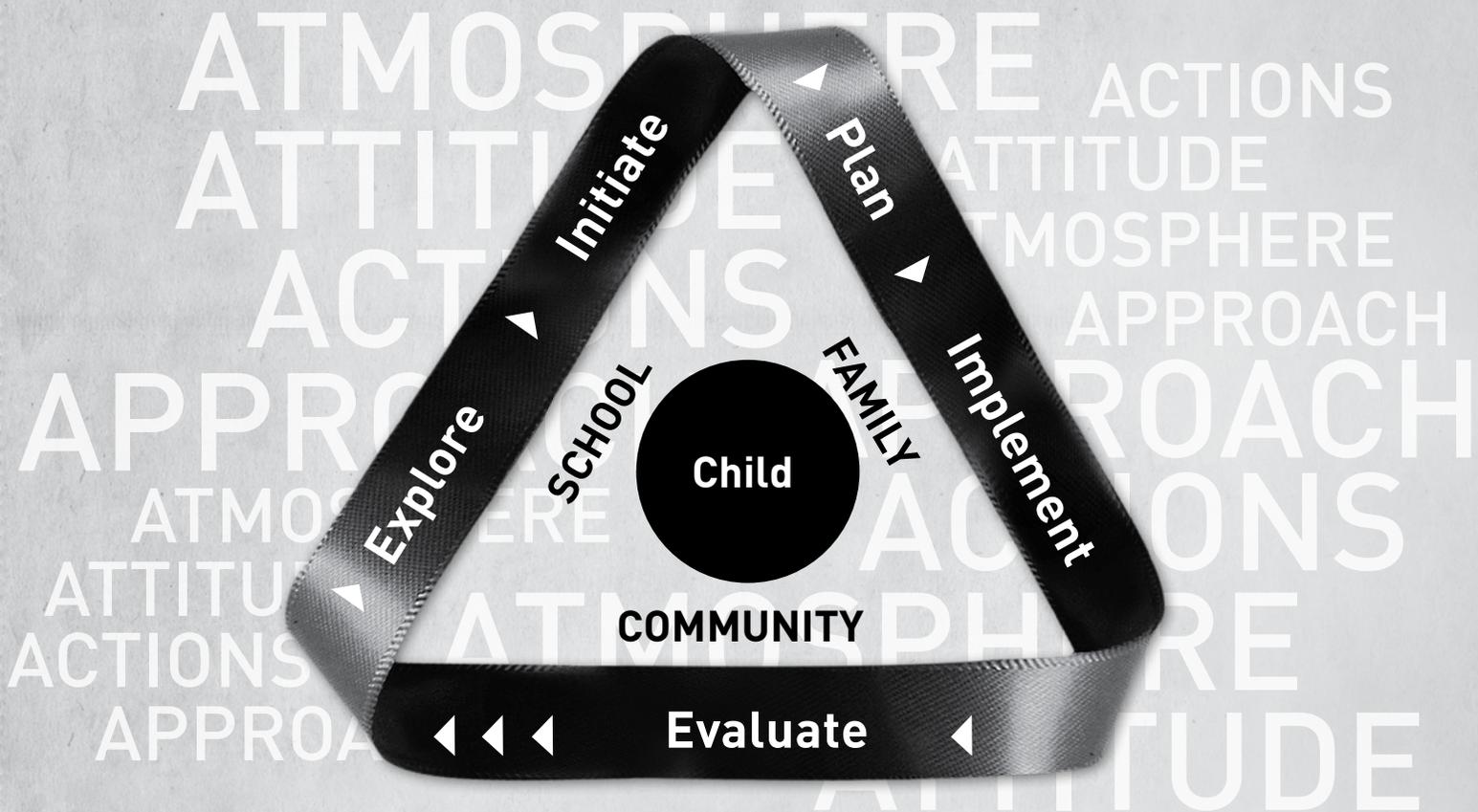
Lastly comes the evaluation phase which, depending on the nature of the project, will be social, educational, environmental, economic, etc. The criteria chosen will depend on the case. Here are a few examples of criteria likely to be used in the case of a S-F-C partnership: cost/benefit analysis; quality of life; trends in academic results; impact on families (greater, lesser, identical, etc.); student well-being; and changes in the school drop-out rate. Each project must be evaluated appropriately.

### EFFICIENT EVALUATION IS BASED ON CRITERIA THAT ARE:

- Simple but stringent so that every participant can at the very least, understand, if not use, them;
- Related to the elements (goals, working methods) for which an evaluation was planned from the outset;
- Transparent and sound. The evaluation process must include a description of its characteristics, and strengths and weaknesses, etc.;
- Reliable so that they are accepted by all and so that the evaluation process is credible;
- Objective and therefore independent from the personal or collective interests of participants or groups of participants;
- Practical. The evaluation process must enable stakeholders to continue with business as usual or, if required, to adjust their work methods or behaviours.

# SYNTHESIS

## Winning conditions for successful school-family-community (SFC) partnerships



### Steps in forming partnerships and in partnership action

#### 1. Explore

The school reaches out to partners (family and community) and proposes an equal partnership within which each stakeholder plays a unique and necessary role.

Key concepts for this exploratory venture:

- Mutual respect;
- Trust;
- Shared responsibility;
- Forwarding of pertinent information to partners.

#### 2. Initiate

The team proceeds with the following actions:

- Analyzing the situation;
- Identifying assets;
- Verifying mutual expectations;
- Identifying obstacles and means to overcome them;
- Selecting goals;
- Launching the planning process.

## AN INDISPUTABLE FACT

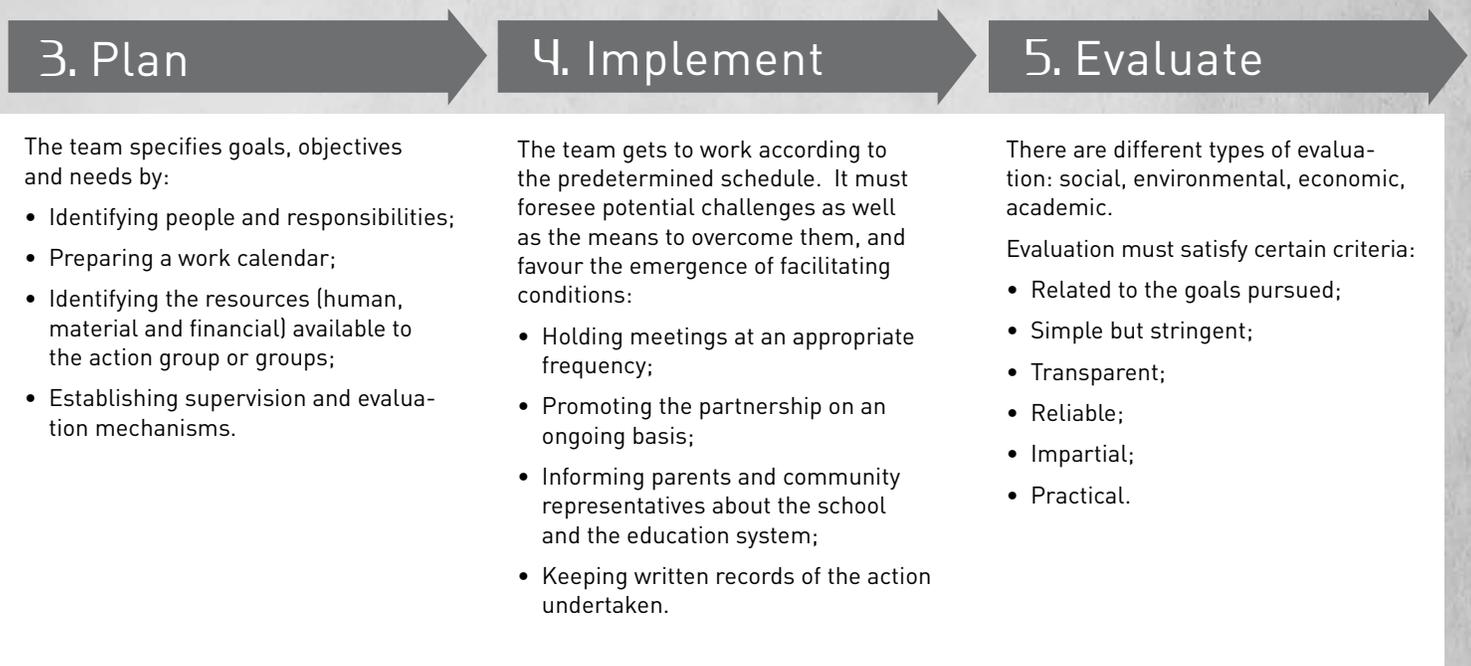
Research shows that schools have much to gain by calling on families and the community to help them carry out their mission aimed at student success.

## GENERAL AND SPECIFIC POSITIVE IMPACTS OF S-F-C PARTNERSHIPS

Children	Parents	Teachers	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater perseverance and less absenteeism</li> <li>• Improved learning and academic results</li> <li>• More time spent on assignments/homework</li> <li>• Enhanced social, emotional and physical development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved knowledge of their children’s development</li> <li>• Better tools for interacting with and helping their children</li> <li>• Often become more active in the community</li> <li>• Easier access to services in the areas of housing, transportation or employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More positive attitude towards parents’ abilities and involvement by community representatives</li> <li>• More positive attitude towards their school and the instruction they provide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community organizations gain easier access to students and their families, thus becoming more efficient</li> <li>• For society at large, fewer drop-outs and more well-rounded individuals.</li> </ul>

## THE “FOUR A’s” OR THE KEY FACTORS SCHOOLS MUST PROMOTE, ANNOUNCE AND SHARE

Approach	Attitudes	Atmosphere	Actions
Recognize that other education partners can contribute to achievement of the school’s mission, and that every partner has a unique and essential role to play.	Acknowledge and value these partners’ opinions and observations.	Create an enjoyable work atmosphere for all partners.	Take genuine steps to strengthen relations with families and the community.



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