

“Families as Contractual Partners in Education”

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Abstract: The educational achievements of the young depend on both family and school, but are much more dependent on the former than the latter. While educational policy has established an extensive set of legal and contractual obligations for schools, the only contractual obligation for families is to meet compulsory education requirements. The establishment of "performance expectations" or "contracts" between families and society may be an effective way to enhance educational outcomes. This Article investigates the need for, feasibility of, and possible content of such "performance expectations" by suggesting the construction of metaphorical contracts for families to provide for the education of their children. We begin by documenting the overwhelming ties between socioeconomic status (SES) and student educational results. We then look at the research literature on what families do that improves educational results for their children-that is, what is it that SES reflects? Next, we consider what a comprehensive family contract that embodied these behaviors would look like. Finally, we add greater specificity to such a family contract by asking:

(a) What can families do on their own if properly informed, even low-income families? (b) What can families do with training and support? (c) What gaps in the contract must be filled by other service providers? Answers to these questions are important for education reforms that seek to capitalize on parental efforts and energies within the context of privatization.