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Home-school collaboration : strategies for improvement

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HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION:

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

A Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Educational Specialist

Kelly O'Bryan

University of Northern Iowa

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ABSTRACT

Home-school collaboration, the manner in which overt partnerships among schools, families, and the community are established, has been shown to be beneficial to all parties involved. Although the benefits of collaboration are known, empirical strategies to accomplish these benefits remain lacking in the literature. The current study examines the specific types of school practices occurring at the secondary level, as gathered through the 2003 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey, and whether those practices predict involvement. Although parent education, parental work hours, personal notes from school, and memos from school were significant predictors of parent attendance at school activities, they accounted for a small amount of the variance. Implications and future research needs are presented.

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7/8/08

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 created many changes for the field of education. One of these changes mandates schools create and enhance parental involvement. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that schools actively cultivate methods of fostering parental involvement in their child's education. The active promotion of methods to advance the learning environment of the school is an additional requirement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Home-school collaboration is a means schools can employ to fulfill these legal requirements.

History of Home-School Collaboration

Home-school collaboration is the process of establishing overt partnerships between and among schools, families, and the community. Efforts at developing home-school collaboration have existed throughout history. Historical roots of familial involvement date back to Egyptian culture in 1580 B.C. with the first exposure to education coming from the home. Current methods of collaboration in American schools are founded upon the ideas of seventeenth century European writers (Berger, 1991). These writers stressed the importance of creating a home-school connection and building a framework for education founded upon goals that these two domains shared. Despite this historical interest in home-school collaboration, a concrete model of familial involvement did not fully emerge in America until the 1870s. It was during this period that a tangible model was introduced by Fredrich Froebel (Brosterman, 1997).

Froebel's kindergarten education plan contained three components; the third encompassed working closely with the family. Froebel believed that the provision of a family setting within the school environment would allow children optimal circumstances for interaction within a socially informal domain (Brosterman, 1997). This concrete approach was a milestone in programs encouraging parental involvement.

The late 1800s and early 1900s sparked an increase in parent involvement programs. For example, The Congress of Parents and Teachers, also known as the PTA, was founded in 1897, and the University of Chicago founded the first parent cooperative in America. Unfortunately the initial efforts of such programs favored the middle-class majority and focused on modifying parenting practices rather than encouraging parental involvement in the education of their children (Berger, 1991).

Collaboration efforts declined in the 1950s as school administrators adopted a more authoritative role and parental involvement was cast aside (Berger, 1991). Interaction between parents and the school became limited. Topics of discourse were restricted to child-rearing techniques, school participation activities were designated by the school and centered on classroom involvement, and the majority of participants were mothers (Lewis & Forman, 2002).

The 1960s spawned major changes for collaboration efforts. Federal programs such as Head Start were initiated. These programs placed strong emphasis on parental inclusion in education and empowered parents by including them in the decision making process. Several public laws were written in the 1970s that specified the importance of parental inclusion in education. At this time, laws were passed that mandated parental

participation on school boards, and parents of students with disabilities were given legal rights granting their participation in the planning of their children's individualized education plans (Berger, 1991). Several programs designed to assist schools in increasing parental involvement were also developed during this decade. The majority of these programs, however, were designed for middle-class majority families, and held the assumption that these families needed assistance in preparing their children for school. Parental involvement programs adopted the viewpoint that schools were the experts in education and had much to offer families (Berger). The notion that families could significantly contribute was not addressed.

Benefits of Home-School Collaboration

The 1980s saw the largest increase in collaboration efforts. Federal and state agencies offered information to the public on how to increase collaboration. Research was conducted on the effectiveness of collaboration, and collaboration awareness and implementation rapidly grew. Collaboration efforts continued in the 1990s through research and strategy implementation. Schools began experimenting with the effectiveness of community collaboration and the significance of collaboration efforts was no longer scrutinized (Berger, 1991).

Home school collaboration has been shown to be beneficial to students, parents, teachers and the school (Cochran & Henderson, 1986; Epstein, 1991, 1995). Student benefits include increased academic achievement, increased school attendance rates, higher grades, higher graduation and post-secondary education enrollment rates, and increased self-esteem (Epstein, 1991). Parental benefits include a heightened quality of

parenting skills, more positive school perceptions, and increased participation in policies affecting the education of their children (Cochran & Henderson). Benefits for teachers and the school include higher staff morale and an increase in job satisfaction (Epstein, 1995). Although research has indicated the benefits of home school collaboration, empirical strategies to accomplish these benefits are lacking in the literature.

<div align="center">Strategies to Increase Home-School Collaboration</div>

A number of articles on strategies and techniques for collaboration are currently in existence, yet empirical evidence of their effectiveness is limited. The existing empirical evidence suggests a number of components that positively affect home-school collaboration. These components include the level of formal and informal communication (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Epstein, 1986; Minke & Anderson, 2003), appreciation for quality of involvement over quantity of involvement (Adams & Christenson; Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspow, & Fendrich, 1999), and the enactment of problem-solving teams (Adams & Christenson; Dinnebeil, Hale, & Rule, 1999). It is also important that the behavior and attitudes of school staff (Aston & Cairney, 2001; Bruckman & Blanton, 2003; Dinnebeil et al.; Epstein; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Lewis & Forman, 2002), grade level of the students (Adams & Christenson; Epstein & Dauber, 1991), and the level of parental disillusionment (Westergard & Galloway, 2004) be considered when developing strategies for home-school collaboration. This review will discuss the current empirical evidence on strategy success in enhancing home-school collaboration efforts.

Communication

At the frontier of data collection on the connection between teacher collaboration efforts and parental attitudes was Epstein's 1986 study of parental reactions to teacher practices. Parental understanding of teacher efforts, familiarity with the curriculum and school climate was examined, and a parental evaluation of education staff was conducted. Parents of 3rd through 5th grade students in 82 Maryland classrooms received surveys. Epstein found that parents wanted more information from the school and would prefer the communication received to be less one-way. Approximately 60% of parents responded that they had never received a phone call from a teacher, 37% reported never receiving a hand-written note from the school, 20% reported never having spoken with the teacher before or after school, and 16% reported never receiving a memo from the school. The study indicated that parents would be more receptive to the teacher's education goals if the school made a concerted effort to inform parents of the curriculum and inform parents of the general theme of the school climate.

In examining trust as a predictor of familial involvement, Adams and Christenson (2000) identified increased communication efforts between home and school as a means for enhancing trust. Parents and teachers from a Midwestern suburb received surveys on enhancing trust in the family-school relationship. Respondents to the questionnaire reported communication between home and school as an essential tool for these programs. Respondents indicated that effective communication allowed them to be viewed as "key decision makers for their children" (p. 22). Students spend up to 70% of

their K-12 years outside school walls (Christenson & Buerkle, 1999). Thus efforts to increase communication while students are in school are imperative.

Another approach to increasing communication involved the implementation of a new parent-teacher conference method. Minke and Anderson (2003) reported an increase in communication and information exchange after the execution of a parent-teacher conference method that involved student participation. This method was carried out in a suburban elementary school. Students were asked to identify their current academic strengths, weaknesses, needs, goals, and problem-solving strategies and then presented this information to their parents during the conference. Following this conference, parents were given questionnaires concerning the extent to which they felt that student participation was helpful. Parents reported that the increase in communication and the student-led method of information exchange was beneficial in creating overt efforts to building bridges between home and schools. This method provided a means by which students could communicate to parents typical school occurrences on a more personal level. This approach differs from traditional approaches in that students' involvement is required for the program to work properly.

Parental involvement extends beyond the classroom and is an additional area in the collaboration process that has been extensively examined (Epstein, 1986). Recognizing and examining types of parental involvement and building on this information have proven to be an effective strategy for advancing home-school collaboration efforts (Epstein). Many parents do not actively participate in classrooms, but remain actively involved in their children's education in the home. Epstein surveyed

parents of 3rd through 5th graders and requested feedback on parental perceptions of teacher collaboration efforts. Roughly 70% of parents reported never assisting in the classroom, on field trips, or with fundraising activities yet 80% of these parents reported a strong desire to assist their children with instruction at home if shown specific learning activities (Epstein). This study demonstrated that the number of parents who have never assisted in the classroom or other school related activities is roughly proportional to the percentage of parents who possess a strong desire to assist their children at home if given the proper tools.

Grade Level

The impact of student grade level has also been shown to affect levels of parental involvement and should be a consideration when planning collaboration attempts (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Research has demonstrated that parental involvement, both in and out of the classroom, varies by the grade level of the school (i.e. elementary, middle, or high school). While assessing current methods of increasing parental involvement and the school's level of support for parental involvement, Epstein and Dauber administered questionnaires to teachers in urban Maryland schools. Teachers from five elementary and three middle schools received questionnaires. Middle school teachers cited fewer involvement and collaboration attempts made by both parents and teachers. Elementary school teachers reported higher rates of communication, higher rates of observed parental volunteering at school, and higher rates of home learning opportunities. The noted "involvement gap" that emerges between elementary and middle school should be

addressed so parental involvement throughout the entire educational experience can be sustained.

Grade level has also impacted the level of perceived trust between families and the school. Adams and Christenson (2000) found that levels of parental trust declined as students progressed from elementary to high school. This decline in trust resulted in less parental involvement. These researchers posit that the decline in trust is due to students possessing multiple teachers as they progress through high school. Teachers in secondary schools see a greater number of students and as a result, have more families with which to keep in contact. Additionally, students in these settings are more frequently held accountable for their own behaviors and actions. As a result, teachers tend to address concerns directly with students and parents are inadvertently left out of the line of communication. Further research is needed to (a) examine the drop in involvement and collaboration efforts as students progress through higher grade levels and (b) to explore possible remedies to these problems.

Attitudes and Behavior of School Staff

The attitudes and behaviors of school staff have also been shown to greatly impact levels of parental involvement. Teacher attitudes and behaviors are especially important factors affecting involvement. Respondents to the Dinnebeil et al. (1999) questionnaire cited teacher behaviors, especially those exhibited toward parents and students, as an important aspect in collaboration efforts. Respondents to the questionnaire included parents of infants and toddlers with special needs. These parents reported that teachers "whose behaviors and actions reflected a family-centered

approach" (p. 16) were significantly easier to work with and increased the frequencies of parental involvement in educational settings.

This perspective was also found when Epstein (1986) asked the principals of 82 Maryland schools to identify teachers who made overt attempts at involving parents. Teachers possessing higher rates of overt attempts were classified as "leader-teachers." Perceptions of these teachers were then compared to teachers who possessed fewer involvement attempts. Parental reports of the "leader-teachers" cited more requests for parental involvement in the classroom and higher frequencies of home based educational strategies being offered. They also reported that the types of involvement strategies offered by teachers were realistic regardless of socioeconomic status or parental education level. Parental reports of the other teachers cited fewer requests for involvement and fewer home learning strategies being offered. The evidence suggests that a teacher's attitudes and practices greatly impact parental involvement efforts (Epstein).

Grolnick et al. (1997) cited teacher attitudes as the main determinant of parental involvement. Parents, students, and teachers were interviewed and also completed surveys and questionnaires concerning home-school collaboration efforts. Teacher characteristics yielded the greatest indication of school involvement. Educators that believed parents had little to contribute incurred lower rates of involvement. Conversely, teachers who made more frequent attempts at involving parents yielded greater rates of parental involvement. Grolnick et al. posit that parents are more likely to become involved if the educator manifests a belief that each parent has something to contribute to

his or her child's education. Additionally, if educators are willing to listen to parental concerns and encourage parental involvement in the child's education, the teacher will receive more parental interest. A negative attitude displayed by an educator can greatly discourage parents from becoming involved. The attitude and character traits of educators indeed play an important role in how parents choose to become involved and how parents come to view the teacher and should be considered when implementing collaboration efforts.

Bruckman and Blanton (2003) also examined the effect of educational staff attitudes on involvement rates when they conducted interviews with five mothers of Head Start students. Head Start is a federally funded child development program that provides educational, social, and health programs for low income families (Iowa Head Start Association 2003, 2003). These researchers investigated the mothers' perceptions on the school's collaboration efforts. These mothers reported that being respected by the Head Start staff greatly increased their levels of school involvement (Bruckman & Blanton). Parents who feel they have the respect of the school are more likely to be involved. To be treated as equals and be treated as important pillars of their child's educational foundation greatly impacts the levels of involvement in which parents engage (Bruckman & Blanton).

Ethnographies demonstrate the importance of staff attitudes on collaboration efforts as well (Aston & Cairney, 2001; Lewis & Forman, 2002). Lewis and Forman examined informal and daily home-school collaboration efforts at two schools. One of the schools reported significantly higher rates of encouraging parental involvement

among teachers (Lewis & Forman). The involvement encountered however, was teacher structured and guided. These same teachers reported that parental participation was viewed as an attempt to assert control over their classrooms. Researchers found teachers and parents "struggling over ownership of school space" (p.70). Parents at this school had little control over activities and any activities in which parents did engage were perceived as threatening by teachers. The perceived threats felt by teachers negatively impacted their home-school collaboration attitudes and hindered effective collaboration efforts. The other school did not report higher rates of encouraging parental involvement because little encouragement was needed. The climate of the school was one which fostered involvement from parents, teachers, and administrators. For example, the school principal would step in for teachers if a parent needed to converse with a teacher for a few minutes (Lewis & Forman). Additionally, parents were regularly welcomed into the school and volunteered their time because their efforts were valued and respected by the staff.

Aston and Cairney (2001) also examined the effects of staff attitudes when they investigated the discrepancy between a school's collaboration policy and the actual amount of parental involvement. The actual amount of visitation allowed by school staff was significantly less than the policy suggested. One example of discouraging parental involvement was scheduling monthly parent meetings during times when the majority of parents were unable to attend. A second example involved parents receiving an inadequate or lack of correspondence in response to their questions and concerns.

Incidents such as this frequently occur in schools and relay the message that parental

involvement is valued, but upon school terms only (Aston & Cairney).

Encouraging Quality Involvement

Encouraging high quality involvement over frequent involvement is a technique

researchers have suggested for boosting involvement rates. Survey data demonstrate

schools that engage in quality involvement possess higher parental involvement rates

(Adams & Christenson, 2000; Izzo et al., 1999). Adams and Christenson surveyed both

parents and teachers of K-12 students in a Midwestern suburban school district.

Researchers inquired as to the frequency and nature of parent-teacher interactions at

school. The nature of the interaction (i.e. quality) was cited as more important than the

frequency of interaction. The existence of a positive relationship between parents and the

school is one example of a quality interaction. An increased amount of interaction is not

as important to parents as utilizing such time properly. Often, parents of these students

may have difficulty engaging in frequent involvement due to limited financial and time

resources. Therefore, it is imperative to make the most out of the interactions in which

these parents engage.

Izzo et al. reported similar findings in their longitudinal survey of parents and

teachers in urban school settings. The change of parental involvement over time and its

impact on the social and academic functioning of students were examined. Correlational

analyses were computed and demonstrated a strong relationship between quality of

parent-teacher interactions and school participation. A weak correlational relationship

was observed between the frequency of parent-teacher interactions and school

involvement. Focusing on meaningful interactions in lieu of frequent interactions will assist in heightening parental involvement and increase effective collaboration efforts.

Teams

      The enactment of problem solving teams and partnerships has also been shown to be an effective strategy for enhancing home-school collaboration efforts. These teams and partnerships foster trust which lays the groundwork for successful team building. Studies examining the effectiveness of problem-solving teams and partnership frequently employ survey and questionnaire data collection methods (Adams & Chirstenson, 2000; Dinnebeil et al., 1999). Problem-solving teams involve parents and school staff working in a collective manner and arriving at mutual agreements on student problems and school policy procedures (Dinnebeil et al., 1999, p. 225). In problem-solving teams, all parties' opinions and actions are respected and valued. Adams and Christenson administered surveys to parents and teachers of elementary through high school students in a suburban school district about increasing trust between home and schools. Both parents (33.3 %) and teachers (24.6%) indicated that home-school partnership efforts would enhance levels of trust and assist in creating mutual partnerships. Additionally, both parents and teachers were willing to treat their relationship as a partnership (Adams & Christenson). Holding the view that both parties joined the relationship for the purpose of educating the child assists in building trust, which serves as the foundation for building partnerships.

      Dinnebeil et al. specified that a collaborative relationship incorporates the viewpoint of parents as vital decision makers in their children's lives and promotes mutual partnerships with parents. The extent to which this occurred at an Early

Intervention Program was investigated using four open-ended survey questions and a questionnaire (Dinnebeil et al.). All respondents specified that a "family-centered philosophy" (p. 7) was important to them and that measures taken to demonstrate this were sufficiently displayed. Parents expressed a strong interest in participating in teams. This team approach was especially favored when parents' contributions were considered and appreciated. Respondents further stated for collaboration efforts to be successful, an egalitarian relationship among all involved in the education process must first be established (Dinnebeil et al.).

Student Involvement

Minke and Anderson (2003) surveyed parents, teachers, and students after implementing a new parent-teacher conference method in which students discussed their current academic standing. Approximately 80% of parents reported that the thing they were most fond of in this process was the newly acquired student participation. All involved reported having the students discuss various aspects of their education assisted in reducing the pressure associated with prior conferences. Reduced pressure leveled the playing field and minimized pre-existing collaboration barriers.

Reducing the levels of parental disillusionment is another method of fostering home-school collaboration efforts. Disillusionment is a parental impression that the existence of a cooperative partnership between the home and school is unattainable (Westergard & Galloway, 2004). A Norwegian study on parental disillusionment was conducted in which parents of 5th through 10th grade students across 20 districts were surveyed. Rural, small town and large town schools were included in this survey.

Researchers found a significant negative correlation among perceptions of cooperation, confidence in teachers, and parental disillusionment. Less cooperation was significantly related to higher levels of disillusionment. Moreover, significant positive correlations were found between perceptions of cooperation and confidence in teachers. Thus, high levels of cooperation between home and school corresponded with higher levels of parental confidence in teachers and higher levels of parental involvement.

<u>Summary</u>

Home-school collaboration efforts have existed throughout history. Earliest records of familial involvement are found in Egyptian culture and current methods trace their roots back to the musings of seventeenth century writers. Concrete models of collaboration were introduced by Friedrich Froebel's kindergarten education plan, and collaboration efforts remained ever changing until the turn of the twenty-first century. The limited research on collaboration efforts examines the effectiveness of implemented strategies and program ideologies. In this current review of the literature several themes were identified and all themes centered on equality. The literature suggests that employing techniques to enhance communication, address staff behaviors and attitudes, emphasize quality, and involve parents and students will lead to effective collaboration efforts. It is the author's opinion that the types of school practices offered to involve and support families will significantly impact the levels of familial involvement incurred.

The current study will examine the specific types of school practices offered throughout the nation as gathered through the 2003 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003) and whether

those practices significantly increased levels of familial involvement. Other predictors
will be explored.

METHOD

Data from National Household Educational Survey -Parent and Family

Involvement in Education Survey (2003) were analyzed to evaluate the various types of

school practices offered to students grades 6th through 12th and the levels of familial

involvement incurred at the schools (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003).

Data were collected from January 2 to April 13, 2003 (Hagedorn, Montaquila, Vaden-

Kiernan, Kim, & Chapman, 2004). For more detailed information see the National

Household Education Surveys of 2003 Data File User's Manual, Volume 1 (Hagedorn et

al.).

Participants

Telephone numbers were chosen through a random digit dial process.

Interviewers completed a screener with individuals to determine if they would complete

the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey 2003 (PFI), the Adult Education

for Work-Related Reasons Survey (AEWR), or both surveys. The population for the PFI

2003 survey were students in Kindergarten through 12th grade in a comprehensive school

setting or home schooled. The population for the AEWR survey were individuals 16 or

older who were not enrolled in school, twelfth grade or below, not currently active in the

military, or residing in an institution (Hagedorn et al., 2004). This study examines only

those respondents of the PFI 2003 survey whose children were in sixth through twelfth

grade.

The screener for the PFI 2003 determined if the telephone number dialed was a

residential telephone number, gathered demographic information to determine which

children would be the interview subjects, and selected the appropriate respondent. A

respondent was eligible to answer screener questions if they considered themselves to be

a member of the household and were 18 years of age or older. A respondent was eligible

to answer the PFI 2003 survey if they considered themselves to be the adult in the home

who felt they possessed the most knowledge regarding the child's educational career and

basic care needs. Up to two interview subjects could be selected. Respondents were to

list the first names and ages of all children living in the household beginning with those

whose birthday was closest to December 31, 2002. If more than one child resided in the

house, the two children whose birthdays were closest to the December 31, 2002 date were

selected as interview subjects (Hagedorn et al., 2004).

Participants were 6,581 parents or guardians of students in sixth through twelfth

grade. Only students who attended a comprehensive school setting were selected for data

analysis. Students who were in the 12th grade made up the smallest proportion of the

sample (See Table 1 for percentage of sample in 6th through 12th grade).

Table 1

Percentage of Sample in 6th through 12th Grade

Grade	N	Percent
6th	934	14.2
7th	968	14.7
8th	981	14.9
9th	972	14.8
10th	945	14.4
11th	903	13.7
12th	878	13.3
Total	6581	100.0

Over half of the children in the sample were male (51.2%) and 48.8% were female. A majority of the children in the sample were white (67.8%) (See Table 2 for race and ethnicity of children).

Table 2

Race and Ethnicity of Children

Race/Ethnicity	N	Percent
White	4461	67.8
Black	917	13.9
American Indian or Alaskan Native	50	0.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	191	2.9
Some other race	962	14.6
Total	6581	100.0

Over three-fourths of the 6,581 respondents were mothers (75.7%) and almost

20% were fathers (See Table 3 for respondents' relationship to child). Most of the

respondents (79.2%) were female. Over 87 % of the total mothers surveyed indicated

they were biological birth mothers. The remaining 12.6% were adoptive mothers,

stepmothers, foster mothers, or other parent/guardian. Of the total fathers, 63.3% were

biological birth fathers. The remaining 36.7% were adoptive fathers, stepfathers, foster

fathers, or other parents/guardians.

Table 3

Respondents' Relationship to Child

Relationship	N	Percent
Mother	4982	75.7
Father	1301	19.8
Brother	19	0.3
Sister	27	0.4
Grandmother	128	1.9
Grandfather	17	0.3
Aunt	47	0.7
Uncle	23	0.3
Cousin	5	0.1
Other Relation	13	0.2
Non-relation	15	0.2
Same Sex Parent	1	0.0
Girlfriend/Partner of the Child's Parent	3	0.0
Total	6581	100.0

Over 86% of the total respondents and 90% of the children spoke English in the home (See Table 4 for primary language spoken in the home). Respondents who reported that the child spoke Spanish in the home made up 9.2% of the sample and those

individuals who spoke Spanish and English equally made up 1.4% of the sample. The

remaining 3% spoke English and another language equally or another language.

Table 4

Primary Language Spoken in the Home

	Child		Respondent	
Language	N	Percent	N	Percent
English	5947	90.4	5688	86.4
Spanish	345	5.2	603	9.2
Span. & Eng. Equally	188	2.9	95	1.4
Eng.& another Lang. Equally	19	0.3	46	0.7
Another Language	82	1.2	149	2.3
Total	6581	100.00	6581	100%

Over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their child was

challenged at school, over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their

children and teachers respected one another, and over 80% of respondents agreed or

strongly agreed that the school made it easy for parents to be involved (See Table 5 for

percentages of parental views of school and school practices).

Table 5

Percentages of Parental Views of School and School Practices

Views	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Child challenged at school	27.6	59.2	10.8	2.3
Child enjoys school	32.6	53.5	10.3	3.7
Students/tchrs respect each other	31.0	57.4	8.7	2.9
School makes involvement easy	34.1	56.0	8.1	1.8

Over 75% of respondents indicated that their children received mostly A's or B's (See Table 6 for children's grades across all subjects). Approximately 15% of respondents indicated that the school had contacted them about behavioral problems, 26% of respondents indicated the school had contacted them about academic or school work problems (See Table 7 for reasons school contacted parents).

Table 6

Children's Grades across all Subjects

Grades	N	Percent
Mostly A's	2548	28.7
Mostly B's	2478	37.7
Mostly C's	1112	16.9
Mostly D's or Lower	262	4.0
School does not give grades	181	2.8
Total	6581	100.0 %

Table 7

Reasons School Contacted Parents

Reason for contact	Yes	No
Behavioral problems	17.6	82.4
School work problems	26.0	74.0

Approximately 39% of respondents indicated that their child was enrolled in advanced or gifted programs at the school and 11% reported that their child had repeated a grade (See Table 8 for additional classes and retention percentages).

Table 8

Additional Classes and Retention Percentages

Classes	Yes	No
Gifted or Advanced Classes	39	61
Child has repeated a grade	11	89

Materials

The Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey 2003 (PFI) questionnaire consisted of 424 questions. These questions gathered demographic information such as the age of child(ren) in the household, the relationship of the

respondent to the child(ren), and the language spoken in the home. Other information gathered about the child(ren) included current school status, health and disability of the child(ren), child race, and country of origin.

Information gathered about the respondent and family included parent characteristics (i.e. marital status, state in which the individual was born, first language spoken, current language spoken, race or ethnicity, level of education, and number of hours worked weekly), participation in free or reduced lunch programs, level of involvement of a non-residential parent, and household characteristics. Information gathered about household characteristics included whether the respondent owns their home, non-residential telephone numbers such as cell phones or fax numbers, computer access in the home, internet access in the home, household income level, participation in federal or state public assistance programs in the past three years, and number of times the family has moved in the past three years.

The survey also included a number of questions about the child(ren)'s school. Questions concerning school characteristics, student experiences, family or school involvement practices, family involvement in schoolwork, and family involvement outside of school were included.

The PFI questionnaire gathered information in a forced choice format, Likert rating scale format, and open ended continuous format in which respondents stated numerically the number of hours spent engaged in an activity or the number of events attended. The variables used in this analysis included forced choice and continuous variables.

The following variables were used to answer the research questions: School-initiated phone calls; personal notes and emails from school; and school-wide memos, newsletters, and notices; hours worked weekly by parents; whether parents graduated from high school; whether parents obtained a post-secondary degree; and number of school meetings or events and activities attended by parents.

Number of School Meetings, Events, or Activities Attended

Parents were asked how many times they attended school meetings or events during the course of the present school year. This was an open ended question (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003).

Communication from School

Information was also gathered about whether respondents received phone calls, personal notes or emails, and school-wide memos, newsletters, or notices from the school. These questions included a forced choice rating scale response format. Respondents were told that the interviewers were interested in gathering information about the school initiating communication or contact with parents (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003). Respondents were to indicate "yes" "no" and then "one to two times" or "three or more times" for receiving a phone call from the school, receiving personal notes or emails, and receiving memos, newsletters, or notices sent to all parents (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003).

Number of Hours Worked

Additional information was gathered about the number of hours worked by the mother for pay and the number of hours worked by the father for pay. To gather

information about the number of hours worked by the child's mother, respondents were asked if the child's mother worked for pay during the past week. Respondents were asked the total number of hours worked weekly for income. Interviewers told respondents to average the number of weekly hours, if weekly hours varied. Identical questions were asked of the child's father (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003).

Parent Education

To gather information about the level of education of each parent, respondents were asked to state the highest grade or year of school completed. Respondents were given the following options: up to 8th grade, 9th-11th grade, partial completion of 12th grade without receiving a diploma, completion of high school or equivalent, partial completion of a vocational or technical program without receiving a diploma, completion of a vocational or technical school with a diploma, some college without obtaining a degree, completion of an Associate's degree program, completion of a Bachelor's degree program, partial completion of graduate or professional school without obtaining a degree, completion of a Master's degree program, completion of a Doctoral program, or completion of a Professional degree beyond Bachelor's degree (medicine, dentistry, law etc.). Respondents were also asked to state the highest grade or year of school completed for the child's other parent (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003). For the current analysis, the responses were recoded as either "yes" or "no" for having a high school diploma and "yes" or "no" for having a college degree.

The question gathering information about how often respondents attended school meetings or events was an open ended question in which respondents told interviewers the number of times during the current school year they had attended meetings and events or participated in activities at the school (National Household Education Surveys 2003, 2003).

Procedure

To collect data, computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted by Westat, a research firm that gathers data in the social sciences field. Two hundred ninety four interviewers were trained by the National Household Education Survey project. Forty interviewers were bilingual and spoke English and Spanish. As a part of training all interviewers viewed a videotape at home, practiced interviewing techniques using the CATI system, practiced interviewing other trainees using scripts, and were required to pass two tests on procedures prior to live interviewing. The bilingual interviewers received training in English, but were to conduct interviews in Spanish (Hagedorn et al., 2004).

RESULTS

Respondents indicated an average attendance of seven school meetings or events since the beginning of the school year ($M=7.27$, $SD=11.485$, $Mdn=4$). Less than half (40.4%) indicated receiving a phone call from the school and less than half (44.4%) received personal notes or emails from the school. A majority of parents (87.9%) indicated they received school wide memos. Respondents indicated an average of 26 weekly work hours for the mother ($M=26.17$, $SD=20.108$, $Mdn=35$) and an average of 32 weekly work hours for the father ($M=31.98$, $SD=23.467$, $Mdn=40$).

Bivariate correlation analyses indicate a significant relationships between receiving a personal note, receiving a school wide memo, the number of weekly work hours of the mother, the number of weekly work hours of the father, whether the mother graduated from high school, whether the father graduated from high school, educational level of the mother, educational level of the father, and attending school meetings or events. Receiving a personal phone call from the school was not significantly correlated with attendance of school meetings or events. (See Appendix for bivariate correlation analysis for parent and communication and number of meetings or events attended results).

To gather information about the influence of school communication, parent education, and parent work hours on parent involvement, a hierarchical regression was conducted (See Table 9 for hierarchical linear regression results). Parents' education level (whether the mother graduated from high school, mother's college completion, whether the father graduated from high school, and father's college completion) and

parent work hours were entered in the first block because these are variables the school can not alter. Communication methods, including personal phone calls from the school, personal notes or emails from the school, and memos from the school were entered in the second block to determine if they were able to predict parent attendance after the other variables were included.

The hierarchical regression indicated that the variables in Step 1 had predictive value. The combined variables in Step 1 predicted 3.6% of the variance in school meetings and events attendance. In Step 2, memos and personal notes predicted additional variance of 0.4 percent. Memos and personal notes contributed to the model and phone calls did not (Table 9).

Table 9

Hierarchical Linear Regression Prediction Parent Attendance at School Events by Parent Variables and School Contact Variables

Steps	Model with Parent Variables Only			Model with Parent and School Variables		
	b	SEb	β	b	SEb	β
Step 1 (Parent Variables)						
Mother college degree	2.091	.261	.083***	2.012	.260	.080***
Mother HS completion	2.739	.298	.091***	2.536	.299	.084***
Father HS completion	.722	.312	.030*	.661	.311	.027*
Father college degree	1.280	.279	-.050***	1.247	.278	.049***
Mother work hours	.020	.005	.036***	.020	.005	.035***
Father work hours	-.015	.006	-.031**	-.015	.006	-.031*
Step 2 (School Contact)						
Memo				1.791	.370	.044***
Personal notes				.805	.216	.036***
Phone call				.290	.217	.013

Note. 1 = no; 2 = yes for college degree, high school completion, memo, personal note, and phone call. $R^2 = .036$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .004$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$).

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that communication methods (personal phone calls, personal notes and emails, school wide memos), parental work hours, and educational attainment of parents would be strong predictors of parental involvement as defined by attending school meetings or events. Previous studies have shown that increased communication methods lead to increased parental involvement levels (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Epstein, 1986; Minke & Anderson, 2003). It was hypothesized that parental work hours and educational attainment of the parents would affect involvement with longer work hours lending to lower attendance at school meetings or events. Educational level was examined because it was thought that those parents with degree attainment on the extremes (no high school diploma or equivalent or completion of post bachelor degree program) would incur lower levels of involvement due to longer working hours. The data has not demonstrated clinical significance in terms of impacting the number of activities attended on a practical level.

The literature indicates that shared communication between the school and family has positively impacted the levels of parental involvement incurred and is a strategy schools can employ to bolster involvement levels (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Epstein, 1986; Minke & Anderson, 2003). However, the communication methods examined in these analyses (phone calls from the school, personal notes or emails, and school wide memos) accounted for only 0.4% of the variance observed beyond the effects of parent education and work hours. Memos from school and personal notes from the school were significant predictors, but personal phone calls were not.

In this study, parent work hours and education level accounted for 3.6% of the variance in school activity attendance. Although statistically significant, the analyses provide the author with little information as how to clinically impact the number of events or meetings attended by parents of 6th through 12th grade students. From a statistical standpoint sending parents personal notes and emails, sending school wide memos, the number of weekly work hours incurred by parents, and the educational attainment of parents predicts only 4% of the variance in the levels of involvement incurred at school. However, this information does not offer clinical significance as these predictors have a small impact on the number of events attended by parents.

Previous research has shown that involvement rates drop as students enter middle school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Although these analyses indicate that some communication methods (personal notes and emails and school wide memos) and parental work hours are related to the number of meetings or events attended at the school, these variables account for a small amount of variance. Thus, other factors could be related to parental involvement in secondary school.

The limited predictive power of the variables (personal phone calls, personal notes and emails, school wide memos, number of weekly work hours of each parent, and the education attainment of each parent) may have been affected by characteristics of the sample. For example, over 80% of respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that the school makes involvement easy (Table 5). It is not known if this positive response from respondents is typical in the population.

Respondents may have wanted to make a positive impression on the interviewer and may not have been truthful with the interviewers. Over 80% of respondents stated that their child(ren) received As or Bs and 39% of respondents stated that their child(ren) were in gifted or advanced classes (Table 8). Again, it is difficult to determine if these responses are typical in the population.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study must be noted. First, the representativeness of the sample was a limitation. The sample was limited to those households with a residential phone number that was not used for a computer. As a result, households without phone service were not represented. The sample was also limited to those individuals who were willing to participate in a survey over the phone.

The analysis in this study was also limited by the variables included in the survey and the way responses were coded. In this study, there were a limited number of questions pertaining to whether respondents were satisfied with the school and the school practices. No information was gathered on whether respondents felt parental involvement was important and no questions gathered information on ways to increase involvement.

Finally one must consider the possible influence of respondent bias in which respondents wanted to make a positive impression on the interviewer and may not have been entirely truthful. Over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school made it easy for parents to be involved. It is difficult to determine if this opinion is representative of parents of 6th through 12th graders across the nation. The data gathered

reflects a sample that feels the schools have made it easy for parents to be involved and thus may attend more meetings and events as a result.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The current analyses show that memos and personal notes or emails do affect the number of school meetings or events attended by respondent, although these actions account for a small amount of variance. Prior research suggests communication is an effective tool to increase involvement, but this study suggests there is a limited impact at the secondary level. Prior research also suggests that the type of communication (communication that enhances trust and builds trusting relationships) increases involvement levels over communication that does not enhance trust or build trusting relationships. Other types of communication should be explored in future studies.

Research has demonstrated the positive impact of parental involvement on education and a marked decrease in involvement occurs at the secondary level. Prior research has also demonstrated that quality involvement is more beneficial than high frequency involvement rates alone. Additional research is needed to determine effective methods of increasing involvement in the education of secondary students.

The questionnaire used in this study contained a limited number of questions on overall satisfaction with the school. Additional questions regarding specific practices of the school may lend to a better understanding of why parents are satisfied with the school and which practices contribute to higher satisfaction levels. The questionnaire also contained a limited number of questions on how the school involves parents and overall feelings about the involvement practices offered by the school. Additional questions

regarding the specific school practices would provide insight on which practices provided the greatest amount of involvement.

The PFI defined involvement as participation in three or more events at the child's school and participation in at least four learning activities outside of school (Hagedorn et al., 2004). Analyses might have been more beneficial if parents could have been grouped as no involvement, somewhat involved, moderately involved, and highly involved. Cross comparisons could then have been made between groups of involved parents and comparisons could have been made between those parents who are not involved and those who are. Differences between and among each of these groups could also be observed. These differences were not examined in the present study due to the manner in which involvement was defined.

In the present study the number of school meetings or events attended by parents since the beginning of the school year was used to measure involvement. However, employing the PFI measure of involvement or another measure of involvement in analyses may have yielded different results.

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Simple Correlation Analysis for Predictor Variables and Number of Meetings or Events Attended

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Meetings/Events Attended	--									
2 Phone Call	.183*	--								
3 Personal Notes	.000	.000	--							
4 Memo	.000	.000	.000	--						
5 Mom Work Hrs	.000	.439	.138	.000	--					
6 Dad Work Hrs	.000	.000	.095	.000	.000	--				
7 Mom Degree	.000	.124	.000	.000	.000	.000	--			
8 Dad College	.000	.004	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	--		
9 Mom HS	.000	.022	.022	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	--	
10 Dad HS	.000	.000	.006	.000	.010	.000	.000	.000	.000	--

Note. $(p < .001)$, *$p < .05$