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ABSTRACT

The resurgence of interest in parent involvement in education comes at a time when the traditional roles of both the school and the family are under great stress. The contemporary concept of parent involvement refers to parents initiating learning activities at home to improve their children's performance at school. Used most broadly, parent involvement includes all the ways in which home life socializes children for school. Underlying all definitions is the need for continuity between the home and the school. Poor and minority parents have complained that the schools are not run to benefit their children; educators complain that the parents of those students who tend to be the lowest achievers are so burdened by their own lives that they are of little help. Efforts must be made to decrease parent alienation and to strengthen the parent school relationship. Some analysts suggest that the home and the school must be supported by wider cooperative arrangements with community organizations. A four-page list of references is included. (FMW)

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Office of Educational Research and Improvement

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Carol Ascher

Parents and Schools--A Brief Introduction

Of all education issues, parent involvement is one of the vaguest and most shifting in its meanings. Parent involvement may easily mean quite different things to different people. It can mean advocacy: parents sitting on councils and committees, participating in the decisions and operation of schools. It can mean parents serving as classroom aides, accompanying a class on an outing, or assisting teachers in a variety of other ways, either as volunteers or for wages. It can also conjure up images of teachers sending home notes to parents, or of parents working on bake sales and other projects that bring schools much needed support. Increasingly, parent involvement means parents initiating learning activities at home to improve their children's performance in school: reading to them, helping them with homework, playing educational games, discussing current events, and so on.

Sometimes, too, parent involvement is used most broadly to include all the ways in which home life socializes children for school. Here, it means the assumed effect, good or bad, of family background on children's achievement. Related to this definition is the finding that, because books, magazines, a corner for study, good nutrition, and other factors conducive to learning are often absent in low-income homes, disadvantaged children generally have more difficulty in school than do those of more advantaged families; and the controversial belief that having a single parent negatively affects achievement.

Contained in all these meanings of parent involvement is a need that both concerned parents and educators have always sensed: for continuity between the home and the school. Traditionally, both American public schools and middle-class parents have taken this continuity for granted. Just as middle-class parents have trusted that the public schools would educate their children for successful roles in mainstream society, educators have relied on middle-class parents to take an active role in socializing their children for school: to convey to their children the importance of education, to back up teachers by making school attendance, homework, and good grades a priority; and generally to be willing to participate in a wide variety of school activities from signing report cards, observing classes, and chaperoning trips and dances to attending PTA meetings and sitting on school boards. To put it another way, while public schools have assumed the support of these middle-class parents,

the parents have taken for granted that the schools will act as extensions of their desires and values in educating their children. Although this mutuality has begun to break down in some urban areas, where middle-class families have run from the declining test scores, increased violence, and the growing preponderance of poor and minority children in the schools, it is likely that most middle-class parents still feel that their values and goals, and those of public school staff, are congruent, and that there is a continuity between school and home.

In contrast, the fragile links that have long existed between the schools and poor and minority parents have also been made more tenuous by periodic suspicion and misunderstanding on both sides--with school staff often overwhelmed by bouts of futility, and parents equally often filled with resentment. While school administrators and teachers have often seen these parents as failing to provide their children with the intellectual and motivational prerequisites for successful learning, the parents (themselves often undereducated by prevailing standards) have viewed teachers and schools with a mix of awe and anger: for teaching subjects whose importance they do not understand; or, more commonly, for cheating their children of the same quality of education that they believe middle-class children receive. At the same time as poor and minority parents have complained that the schools are not run to benefit their children, and that teachers do not welcome them, educators have lamented that exactly those parents, whose children tend to be lower achievers and who most need extra help to achieve, have tended to be so burdened by their own lives that they are the hardest to reach.

The Recent History of Parent Involvement

It is important when speaking of parent involvement to recall some of its history over the past 25 years. Within this relatively short period there have been a number of dramatic experiments in parent involvement, and the meaning of parent involvement has changed over the period along with prevailing social philosophies. Twenty-five years ago, a social movement was emerging whose goal was to empower all segments of society, even at the expense of existing social hierarchies. The 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, or the Federal War on Poverty as it came to be called, arose out of the two-fold notion that the poor and disenfranchised should be given the power to help themselves, and that publicly funded education should provide one opportunity for this self-help. Thus the Economic Opportunity Act provided for a variety of Community Action programs in the nation's poor neighborhoods--Head Start, Follow Through, Job Corps--involving "maximum feasible participation" by local individuals. Head Start, for example, was to break the cycle of poverty by

educating preschool children before they began to fail at the tasks of schooling. At the same time, it would be a community action program, staffed in part by newly trained paraprofessionals drawn from each community, and planned and run in coordination with wider community self-help programs covering issues such as nutrition, jobs, health services, and family life training.

Parent participation, in the sense of advocacy and accountability or oversight, reached its height in the early 1970s. Not only were Parent Advisory Councils written into all Federal Title I programs of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), but major urban school districts across the country were racked by struggles to place educational decision-making in the hands of the families served by the schools. Most of these changes were prompted by the widespread belief that large bureaucratic structures could no longer adequately deliver services, particularly to poor and minority communities, and that, especially in these communities, local participation by parents and other community members was a crucial requisite to providing people with appropriate and quality services.

The complicated and controversial history of this era of hope for parent decision-making and school accountability to parents merits far more attention than it can be given here. However, a number of forces combined to cause the hope, and the strategies that had inspired it, to wane during the late 1970s and early '80s. As many have noted, neither parent participation nor community control was ever fully realized. On one side was the often staunch resistance by professionals to fully allow it; on the other was the frequent politicization of the vision by small groups of parents, other community members, and even professionals for their own interests. Moynihan's comment that the War on Poverty "was carried out in such a way to produce a minimum of the social change its sponsors desired, and bring about a maximum increase in the opposition to such change, of the kind they feared" (Moynihan, 1969, p.xiii) might be said of most programs directed at the poor during this era. In the educational realm, both the law and local level planning were always ambiguous in intent--thus allowing for the acting out of maximum ambivalence by all concerned. Some believe that parent participation also lost its ascendancy because, even in the face of enlarged opportunities, many low-income parents themselves remained passive. Finally, many educators who were working hardest to improve schools began to believe that the battles over parent participation were deflecting attention from the serious troubles endemic to schools. What schools needed was not more energy directed at ensuring parent participation (and blaming the lack of parent involvement when schools failed), but serious and dedicated attention to improving the schools.

In fact, despite the promise that participation had held for poor

families to take new control over their lives, participation had also contained within it a hidden reproof, which grew more threatening as parent involvement failed to come into its own: since middle-class families, whose children did well, were involved in their children's schools, poor families (who already failed in so many ways when compared to middle-class parents) might by their aloofness from, and even neglect of, school-related activities be responsible for their children's poor achievement. Despite the continued requirements of parental participation in a number of both federal and local school programs, one goal of the effective schooling movement of the late 1970s was to convince educators that the success of public education could no longer be tied to whether or not parents were induced to become involved. Instead, a school should stand or fail on the basis of what went on inside its doors. If a school was to be judged successful, it had to be successful with all children--even those whose homelife was divergent or chaotic, and whose parents did not participate in their education either at home or at school. "While recognizing the importance of family background in developing a child's character, personality, and intelligence," insisted Ronald Edmonds, the effective schooling movement's founder, "I cannot overemphasize my rejection of the notion that a school is relieved of its instructional obligations when teaching the children of the poor" (Edmonds, 1979). Seeking to lift blame for school failure from poor and minority families, Edmonds insisted that some schools do succeed with these children, "partly because these schools are determined to serve all of their pupils without regard to family background" (Edmonds, 1979). Although, after Edmond's untimely death, the effective schooling movement eventually added parent participation to its list of requirements for a successful school, it is important to recall that Edmond's six characteristics of effective schools conspicuously leave out any mention of parent-school ties.

Despite the increasingly slim prospect of achieving massive parent involvement, as defined at its broadest, a number of social and educational factors have recently brought a focus on the connection between parents and good schooling once more to the fore. First has been the national concern with the family and the importance of family life. Although this concern has arisen in part because two-parent families with one working parent are disappearing in all social classes, the nostalgia for the traditional nuclear family has carried in its wake the hope that parent involvement might actually bolster the family as we have known it. Second, serious criticism of current teachers and teaching has made observers wonder whether the schools can successfully handle even those tasks they have accomplished in the past; and the fact that many children arrive at school apparently more difficult to teach has made it natural for educators to want to improve the preparation of students for school.

Third, research continues to show that the home environment is one of the most powerful predictors of school achievement. For some, the continuing low scores of many urban school children in both reading and mathematics, despite some shifts upwards in the last years as a result of compensatory education programs, has suggested the need for richer home experiences. If children aren't given these experiences in the "natural" course of events, might not programs be set up to help enrich what they receive at home? Fourth, although research on the effects of parent involvement in the public school years is, at best, open to wide interpretation, studies of preschools that included extensive parent involvement in their educational programs show notable and apparently long-term changes in their students. Finally, the prospect of educational vouchers has given new seriousness to questions of the role of parents in education. It is likely that even those educators and social leaders who suspect that introducing parent involvement in the current context of urban family life may not heighten achievement are still staunch supporters of parent involvement because, if only as an image, it symbolizes a way out of the blame and isolation the schools feel and a route to much needed support.

Two quite specific kinds of parent involvement characterize the recently renewed interest in the issue. Greatly minimized are advocacy and decision-making, and even attendance at school functions. Instead, parent involvement means (1) what parents do "naturally" in the home to socialize their children, and (2) what schools can do to help parents be more effective in the home. Policy statements, program descriptions, and even the growing bulk of research now focus on both parental socialization for schooling and home learning more than any other type of activities. The U.S. Department of Education's What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning uses research showing the effect on achievement of subtle background factors--such as whether or not there are books in the home--to argue that, no matter what the economic circumstances, parents can play an important role in helping their children with school. "Parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. What parents do to help their children learn is more important to academic success than how well off the family is" (U.S. Department of Education, 1986, p. 7). And, in line with the recent tendency to apply economic models to all areas of social science, Walberg, one of the proponents of the new parent involvement, argues that schools can vastly improve their "productivity" by "enlisting families as partners and engaging them directly and indirectly in their efforts" (Walberg, 1984, May, p.26). According to Walberg,

> the 12 years of 180 six-hour days in elementary and secondary school add up to only about 13 percent of the waking, potentially-educative time during the first 18 years

of life. If a large fraction of the student's waking time nominally under the control of parents that is spent outside school were to be spent in academically-stimulating conditions in the home and peer group, then the total amount of the student's total learning time would be dramatically raised beyond the 13 percent of the time in conventional American schools (Walberg, 1984, May, p. 22).

Today's Inner-City Family

Before discussing what the existing body of research suggests on the effectiveness of various types of parent involvement, it is important to describe the urban families at whom these programs are, or could be, aimed. In the past, when researchers focused on family background, they usually did so in order to point out the relationship between social class and achievement. However, knowledge of the changing urban family can also explain the difficulty of generating active parent involvement, and may enable educators to plan more effectively for increasing this involvement. Although no characterization can include fully the wide range of family types, there are general trends in the urban minority family that will likely make parent involvement increasingly difficult.

Of all areas of society, our cities are now the poorest. As the black middle-class has moved out of the central city ghettoes, these areas have become increasingly populated by what is now called the "underclass"--people who are under- or unemployed, and who, given current conditions, have little prospect of improving their lot. Crime, drug addiction, welfare dependency, poor housing and homelessness, and, understandably, bitterness and resentment toward the rest of society are all too common. In these inner-city areas, the daily struggle to survive may at times make it impossible to reach out to an educational institution that cannot provide relief for immediate needs. A welfare client may have the time to come to school, but may not have the emotional or spiritual resources to do so.

As prospects for industrial employment, jobs once held by black men, have declined, the rate of marriage among black men has dropped sharply (Edelman, 1987). Among poor blacks and Hispanics living in poor urban neighborhoods, the proportion of female-headed families is higher than among whites in comparable areas--74 percent among blacks and 55 percent among Hispanics, compared with 49 percent among whites (Nathan, 1986). Of the nation's 4.6 million black families with children, 2.6 million, or over half, are now headed by a single woman--and in some ghetto areas it may be close to 90 percent (Today's Native Sons, 198[illegible] The great majority of poor children in these urban neigh[illegible]s live in single-parent, female-headed households--hous[illegible]at, because of low wages and unemployment, have typi[illegible]ome poorer since 1980. (In 1985, the after-tax

income of the typical female-headed household with children was 39.9 percent of the income of the typical U.S. household with children (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1987).

Even among those urban families for whom poverty is not a problem, time is nevertheless a luxury, and the opportunity to reach out for school contacts is increasingly limited. The "traditional family," comprised of a stable couple who are biological parents to the children, and where the father has a job and the mother is available in the home for the care of her children, exists in a very small minority of households--one estimate is as low as 7 percent (Brice Heath & McLaughlin, 1987). Increasingly, families are also comprised of children of more than one relationship. With sixty-four percent of all American mothers of school-age children in the work force (Swap, 1987), "latchkey" children are becoming increasingly common, and mothers' and father's time increasingly constrained (Bastian, Fruchter, Gittell, Greer & Haskins, 1987). Moreover, it is becoming more and more difficult for schools to remain in touch with those most concerned for any child's care. Now grandparents, stepmothers, custodial mothers, and a variety of paid helpers are all part of the complicated and imperfect patchwork of childcare that, to some observers, may at times verge on neglect.

Demographic studies suggest that these trends will accelerate over the next years. More families will be urban and more of these urban families will be minority, poor, and headed by women. This means that there will be more poor and minority children for urban schools to teach and care for, and more overburdened grandparents, stepparents, custodial parents, and single-parents to involve in schools and schooling.

The Effect of Parent Involvement on Low-Income Urban Children

Several serious obstacles stand in the way of saying anything with clarity about the effect of parent involvement, no matter what the economic circumstances of the students. First, as has already been implied by the preceding discussion, researchers are seldom evaluating the same thing in the same way. Studies of parent involvement may be based on questionnaires posed to school principals about whether or not the school involves parents in decision-making, offers community-oriented events, holds meetings and workshops for parents to work with teachers, etc. Or parents may be asked about a different set of activities. Still other analyses are based on teachers' reports of parent involvement, and yet another set of possible activities (or some of the same possibilities, but with different meanings) comprises the list. Given these variables, the findings reported here repeat the specific terms used in the research.

A second limitation in discussing the effects of parent involvement stems from the fact that studies of parent involvement have almost uniformly linked the success of various strategies and programs with the achievement of the children as measured by grades and, even more commonly, standardized test scores. This should not be surprising, given the hegemony of achievement tests in evaluating schooling. However, it is likely that most teachers and administrators seek parent involvement as much for the changes in children's citizenship, social values, attitudes, and behaviors, as for their increased achievement. In fact, a few studies have measured far more wide-ranging effects of parent involvement, including effects on children's sense of well-being, and even on the empowerment of parents themselves (Cochran, 1987). A famous exception to the narrow focus on achievement is the complex analysis of the Perry Preschool, a program that included parent involvement among a number of enrichments. The Preschools' graduates, who were studied longitudinally, have shown better school attendance, decreased delinquency, and lower pregnancy rates, among other positive qualities (Berreuta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984). However, the effectiveness of parent involvement can obviously not be separated out from the other enrichments the program offered. Nevertheless, while, at best, the meaning of parent involvement shifts from study to study, and at worst is left open to a wide latitude of interpretation, it is generally studied in its narrowest effects: on the academic achievement of those children involved. Thus, while recommending a wider vision of how to evaluate schooling, this review necessarily follows the confines of the research.

A third problem in discussing the involvement of low-income parents is isolating the effect of social class on both this involvement and the achievement of their children. That is, schools serving high socioeconomic families tend to have both high parent participation and high student achievement, while the reverse is true for schools serving low socioeconomic families. Thus findings that do not control for class may well confuse the effects of parental background on achievement with those of parent participation. In fact, research evidence suggests that, somewhat linked to social class, family size and parent education are also related to parent involvement (Revicki, 1981; Dornbusch, 1986).

Fourth, the total body of research on parent participation is relatively small, and the populations studied are demarcated in very different ways (some by grade level or grade bands, others by whole schools, or even by district policies). There are extremely few studies of the involvement of parents of middle and secondary school students. Thus it is nearly impossible to say anything about the possibly different effects of various kinds of parent involvement as children age and move through school.

Finally, it is not clear how strong a value various kinds of parent involvement have in comparison with other types of intervention--compensatory education programs, tutorials, or even school lunch programs, for instance. Parent participation in school meetings or even in learning projects at home may have relatively weak value in comparison with other interventions and family background and socialization.

Fortunately, some studies--using preschool and elementary school populations--either compare a variety of in-school parent participation activities in low- and high-achieving, low-income schools, or isolate the effects of ethnicity and/or socioeconomic status in other ways. These generally find that the more parents participate in a sustained way, at every level--in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fundraisers and boosters, as volunteers and paraprofessionals, and as home tutors--the better for student achievement. That parent involvement is reasonably well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting is apparently more important than the form it takes (Gordon, 1978). On the other hand, public relations campaigns, one-way communications devices, and "dog and pony shows" are not effective (Henderson, 1987).

Two syntheses of the research attempt to make some analytical statements about findings for different types of parent involvement. One, by Gordon (1978), finds that most of the research on the influence of programs focused on parents and the home to improve the child's learning has been done on programs at the preschool level, where the evidence for the positive effects is consistent. Although such parent impact programs for school-aged children have not been as thoroughly researched, home visits by teachers appear to be an important aspect of these programs. Gordon finds little research on the effect of direct parent involvement in the school, from volunteering to serving on governance councils. As for a more active parent involvement both in the home and in a range of community affairs, Gordon finds its effect on achievement to be strong and positive: children whose parents are directly involved over a period of years, beginning in preschool, score higher on achievement tests than other children, and the effect seems to be greater on second children than on first children (Gordon, 1978).

Taking a somewhat different approach, Leler (1983) categorizes approximately 65 studies (often of low-income and minority communities) according to whether the parent involvement was largely one-directional from the school to the home, or whether the line of influence was to and from the home and school and included the larger community. Seventy percent of the research on programs in which school-to-home influence predominated showed positive effects on student achievement.

Best among these were somewhat structured programs that trained parents to tutor their own children. On the other hand, all of the programs stressing mutual influence had positive results. In fact, "the fuller the participation of parents, the more effective were the results obtained" (Leler, 1983, p. 173). Unlike Gordon, who found little research on direct parent involvement in school decision-making, Leler finds sufficient research to argue with confidence that the most powerful approaches are those in which parents have a definite role in decision-making.

In fact, not all researchers focusing on parents' role in decision-making arrive at Leler's enthusiastic conclusion. Rather, there are significant disagreements on the effectiveness of this politically volatile type of involvement for enhancing student achievement. For example, in a study of low-income minority sixth graders, efforts to involve parents and the community played an important role in increasing achievement in the black community, but not in the Mexican-American neighborhoods studied. (Armor, Conny-Osegura, King, McDonnell, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976). The researchers speculate that this may be partly because of differences in the content of the schools' outreach, and partly because of language barriers in the Hispanic communities. Another study, this time of second and third graders, indicates the importance of parents' perceptions of being involved in decision-making, though the authors claim only its indirect effects on student achievement. Participation (it is not clear in what) made parents feel more positive both about their influence on school decision-making and about the quality of their relations with teachers; it also made teachers feel more positively about their relationships with parents--and this general satisfaction directly influenced students' achievement (Herman & Yeh, 1983). Finally, a survey of 135 Midwestern elementary principals showed that schools with higher achievement were more open to parent and community involvement, while more "closed" schools had lower achievement levels and community support. However, not all types of involvement made a difference: while community support, fundraising, and attendance at school meetings were all highly correlated with achievement, citizen participation in policy decision-making was not related to achievement (Wagenaar, 1977).

Less controversial than parent involvement in decision-making, both politically and in terms of its effects on achievement, is the effect of parent participation through meeting formally with teachers and attending open school nights. In fact, the few studies of high school students and their parents focus on this type of activity; they show that such middle-range participation in school-based activities is, indeed, effective in raising student achievement (Dornbusch, 1986; McDill, Rigsby & Meyers, 1969).

Making the Involvement of Low-Income Parents Easier

Given the many problems urban parents face daily, as well as the increasing pressure on teachers' and administrators' time, several questions concerning the school's expectations for parent involvement must be considered. In what ways can single or working parents be expected to participate? What responsibility do schools have to engage parents who may be particularly busy, whose households may be chaotic, or who, for other reasons, are more difficult to reach? What should be done for the increasing number of parents whose native language is not English, and whose cultural background may remove them from the goals and workings of the school?

Whatever their potential for becoming involved, research indicates that single and working parents may be discriminated against by school personnel, who tend to decide in advance that these parents cannot be approached or relied on (Epstein, 1984, March). While concern does not necessarily lead to action, a recent survey showed that single working parents as well as dual working parent families are especially likely to want more contact and consultation with teachers. Although, teachers see these parents as hard to reach, the parents themselves are often equally dissatisfied about any loss of contact (The Metropolitan Life Survey, 1987).

In both dual working parent and single working parent families, parents' involvement in school activities is usually related to the flexibility of leave policies on the job. Unfortunately, most employers are still rigid about the time and hours they demand of their workers. However, one research project found that employers can be encouraged to allow flextime for working parents, as well as to extend short leaves beyond emergencies, so that parents can observe their children in the classroom or attend meetings (Espinosa, et al., 1985). Where a corporation employs a large number of parents, times can actually be arranged with the employer for parent-teacher conferences and school meetings. It is important to point out to companies that increased employer-school collaboration humanizes the work place and increases productivity along with employee morale, at the same time as the organization is making clear its commitment to the next generation of workers.

The increasing number of parents whose native language is not English raises additional problems for schools trying to generate parent involvement.

Recently, several studies have been conducted on involving Asian/Pacific American parents, including new refugees from Southeast Asia. Not only is language a barrier, making communication between parents and school personnel difficult, but few Asians parents initially want to participate in the American

educational system. For Asians, the concept of citizen participation is alien; instead, Asians tend to believe that schools have the expertise and right to make all decisions. Because these parents come from poorer countries where shortages in educational resources far exceeded those in American schools, "few parents can see that the American schools are not equally equipped and staffed, and that children are not treated equally according to their cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds" (Tran, 1982, p. 18).

Obviously, some families are too burdened by personal troubles or the struggle for survival to be easily reachable, and schools may be justified in considering the time and resources necessary too great. However, these few families should not be used as an excuse to give up on all outreach efforts. There is a substantial urban working-class whose connection with the schools can be strengthened with a little extra effort. Although schools can become overwhelmed by the tasks that are clearly inside their own doors, they should not give up trying to coordinate parent involvement efforts. A variety of methods have been tried around the country to generate better communication between schools and single and working parents. These offer a number of directions in which schools can choose to move (Rich, 1985):

- increasing the awareness and sensitivity of the school staff to parents' real time constraints, and announcing meetings and other events long enough in advance for parents to arrange for time off from work if necessary;
- creating a more accepting environment for working and single parents, as well as those undergoing separation, divorce, or remarriage, or acting as a custodial parent;
- creating evening meetings, with childcare, so that parents can talk to teachers and counselors;
- allowing open-enrollment so that children can attend school near their parents' places of work;
- providing before-school and after-school care, as well as some supervision for older children;
- being more careful about cancelling school at the last minute due to weather conditions, thus leaving single and working parents with no resources for the care of their children;

- acting as a facilitator for teen-, single-, working-, and custodial-parent peer support groups;

- providing both legal and custodial parents with regular information on what is going on in the child's classroom, as well as the help they may need to help.

Parent Involvement in Home Learning and the Achievement of Low-Income Students

According to the current wisdom, when parents' time is limited, becoming involved in home-learning is one of the most efficient uses of their time (Walberg, 1984, February). "What parents do to help their children learn is more important to academic success than how well-off the family is" (U. S. Department of Education, 1986, p. 7) epitomizes this point of view. And Walberg (1984, May) argues that homework, when it is graded or commented upon by the teacher, has three times the effect of socioeconomic status (SES). Although a number of studies support the effectiveness of home learning, for some, the effects of social class may be so great that not even parent involvement in various educational experiences at home can substantially change their children's school achievement. These are the findings of a study of the effects of parents' use of time in different SES groups (Benson, 1979; Benson, Buckley & Medrick, 1980). In the high SES group, the children did well in school regardless of their parents' attention, although cultural and family group activities helped them to do better. In the middle SES group, family activities, parent control, and parent involvement made a substantial difference in student achievement. In the low SES group, however, parent time and activities were not related to achievement, although family activities, parent control, and helping with homework counted a little. The authors speculate that class, neighborhood and social environments are strong counterweights to individual family influence: low SES children, even those with strong, positive families, must surmount many negative influences around the home and the school.

Only one study has tried to compare directly school-based parent involvement with home-based parent involvement among low-income families. In this study, programs offering home visits were more successful in involving disadvantaged parents than were programs requiring parents to visit the school, although programs requiring visits produced greater reading gains. The author speculates that this discrepancy is caused by bias: teachers favor parents who are willing to come to school, and those who do come are more self-confident and committed to the program. A cycle of positive reinforcement thus leads to gains for those children whose parents come to school and shuts out parents who

are afraid or unable to do so. Thus, according to the author, the normal operation of home-school relations, which asks that parents come to school, may actually increase the tendency of teachers to favor parents who are already involved (Toomey, 1986).

According to another study, single and working parents often can and do spend as much time helping their children as do parents with more leisure (Epstein, 1984, March). At times, it is the teachers who hesitate to give these children work to take home, wrongly fearing that the parents will not be available to help. However, Epstein found that when teachers reached out to parents, these parents were generally more than willing to help. More impressive is Epstein's finding that, when teachers help parents to help their children, these parents can be as effective with their children as those parents with more education and leisure whom teachers expect to help their children (Epstein, 1984, April).

Recent research on methods to increase parent involvement in home learning can be viewed as divided according to the amount of mutuality worked for between the home and school. For instance, some researchers, while paying lip-service to mutuality, would work to reform what goes on in the low-income or minority home in order to create learning situations that are more consistent with school learning (Walberg, 1984, February; Grau, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1983). Walberg speaks of "the alterable curriculum of the home" and argues for cooperative efforts by parents and educators to "modify these alterable academic conditions" (1984, May, p.25). The Committee for Economic Development notes that good programs "should teach parents how to provide a home environment that encourages learning" (1987, p. 42).

Others focus more on what can be done to increase teachers' understanding of the "natural" learning that goes on in any low-income home, or even to help these families help each other (Brice Heath, 1983; Cochran, 1987). As Brice Heath's work makes clear, all families participate in extensive literacy practices at home. She argues that, just as parents can be helped in their parenting functions, teachers' effectiveness can be enhanced by learning from parents how they teach. This can help make teachers' instructional styles more harmonious with those the children have grown up with (Brice Heath, 1983; Lareau & Benson, 1984). Cochran, for example, suggests that home visits allow teachers to see what activities are already being carried out and enable them to write up summaries of useful parent activities so that parents can learn from other parents (1987). Summarizing the evidence from a number of studies, Cole and Griffin note that the "school-to-home pathway . . .is more likely to be effective if the two-way nature of the path is explicitly recognized by educators" (1987, p. 78).

Convincing Parents to Become Involved

Virtually all parents want to help their children, but, for a variety of reasons, many who are not already involved feel helpless to do so. A number of schools have found ways of letting parents know that there are simple, time-efficient ways to help their children (Rich, 1985). These include:

- bilingual media campaigns on the important role of the home in educating children;
- stress by ministers and other respected leaders of the importance of this route;
- family learning centers in schools, store fronts and churches that offer help (that is bilingual, when necessary) to parents wanting to help their children learn;
- bilingual hot-lines for parents who need help in helping their children with their homework;
- learning activities created by the schools that parents can use at home with their children.

Although schools may choose different ways to help parents enhance their children's learning, it is important to keep in mind that the greater the continuity and contact between the school and the home, the better it is for the child's learning. Moreover, the mutuality of that contact appears to be an important key to its success.

Creating Other School Partnerships

Despite a nearly universal current acceptance of the importance of involving parents in some aspects of schooling, urban educators often point out that many parents can no longer perform the traditional home-care functions the schools once expected of them. Thus a question as important as what kinds of parent involvement schools should ask for has become: should schools compensate for and assume the socialization and caretaking roles of the absent family and torn community? As Coleman (1987) notes, the historic division of labor between the family and the school no longer pertains, largely because even the middle-class family has given up many of its traditional roles. But, as urban educators are only too aware, their agendas are already overburdened. Should schools, then, be the institution to provide what many families cannot offer, or should

other urban institutions join in helping families assume their traditional responsibilities?

To provide a framework for viewing the current discussion about the changing responsibilities of home and schools, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) note that American schools have always fluctuated between acting as extensions of the family and emancipators of the family. "Schools complement the family and the immediate community as agents of socialization, which means as the role and functioning of the family changes in modern society, different problems are posed for the school. It means also that the role and functioning of the school must change if it is to constitute an effective complement to the changing institutions of the family and the community" (1987, p. 27). However, because schools have traditionally provided the kind of learning that Coleman loosely characterizes as "opportunities and demands," while relegating what he calls "attitudes and effort" to the family, he argues that schools, no matter what their quality, are more effective for children from strong family backgrounds than for children from weak ones." According to Coleman, when families are weak (and the human capital from the family is scarce), schools are more effective if they can draw on the social capital of the surrounding community--that is, on a network of people and a community of shared values that most often goes along with religiously homogeneous schools (but not necessarily independent private schools) (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, 1987).

Although Coleman and Hoffer suggest policy changes that might make it easier for public schools to draw on the resources of churches and religious institutions, their framework is based largely on the traditional notion of "complementarity" between the home and the school. This model of complementarity has recently been rejected by many educational thinkers, who argue that both the school and the family have become too frail for the enormous tasks at hand. Instead, they suggest an expanded vision of those who should be called on to participate in the task of educating our nation's students. The Committee for Economic Development, for example, urges the combined efforts of many institutions: public schools, businesses, foundations, community agencies, and every level of government. The CED advocates a particularly strong role for business, both as a pacesetter in educational change and an advocate in support of educational programming and funding (1987). This view of the school working in tandem, or "as partners," with other urban institutions is increasingly expressed by urban superintendents. The Urban Superintendents' Network has recently argued that, "To intervene in the vicious cycle of failure for many urban and minority youth, schools need to join with community institutions and agencies," and the group suggests joint school and business connections as a major strategy (Ascher & Flaxman, 1987, pp. 11).

Pointing out that "only 7 percent of families could be described as the 'typical family'...of the mid 1960s," Brice Heath and McLaughlin argue that the old role of the school as the "deliverer" of educational services no longer can pertain. They speak of "moving beyond the dependence on school and family" and call for a new view of the school as a "'broker' of the multiple services that can be used to achieve the functions previously filled by families or by families and schools acting together" (Brice Heath & McLaughlin, 1987, p. 579).

Conclusion

The resurgence of interest in parent involvement in education has numerous social and educational sources. Most obviously, this new interest has come at a time when the schools are under serious criticism, particularly for failing to educate low-income and minority school children; and the traditional two-parent family, where one parent works and the other cares for the children, has all but disappeared among the urban and minority poor. Thus the resources of both schools and families are stretched, and each is overwhelmed by its traditional tasks.

While parent involvement once conjured images of parents sitting on advisory councils and participating in a range of school activities, for most educators and researchers, the meaning of parent involvement in this new era has shifted from the affairs of the school to the home site. The term parent involvement now is largely used to suggest parents' efforts to socialize their children at home both in informal and in school-directed learning tasks. One might say that the aim of educators is now to increase school effectiveness by improving the assistance they receive from parents at home. As with research on parent participation in school-based activities, the research on parent involvement in home-based learning shows generally positive effects on students' achievement--though nothing so dramatic as to suggest a revolution in the educational process. It should be said, however, that measuring the effectiveness of parent involvement either at home or in the school by student achievement outcomes is extremely narrow: parent involvement may have much wider effects, such as on student citizenship and social values.

The issue of the fragile connection between low-income minority parents and the schools is a serious one. Efforts are needed to make it more smooth and secure, and to decrease parents' alienation. For however parent involvement is found to directly and indirectly effect student achievement, it is also clear that, for the schools' sake, schools cannot proceed in a vacuum, without parental support. However, although the problem

for schools in the next period will be to give some priority to parent involvement efforts, educators should not demand more from this strategy than it can deliver. Nothing would be gained in subjecting parents to another round of blame when home-learning does not yield hoped for improvements.

As some analysts suggest, the home and the school may no longer be a sufficient unit: wider collaborative arrangements may be necessary. What these will be is not yet clear. When problems are serious and change is rapid, as is the case in the education of low-income and minority students, there can be ultimately no simple analysis or strategy for change. Yet one thing is clear: whichever institutions join in the schooling endeavor, parents must be retained as an active participant in the partnership.

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