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## ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between the attendance of parents of low-achieving students at scheduled school meetings and conferences and student performance in reading and language arts. Data were gathered from 73 Chapter 1 schools in the Dallas Independent School District. Variables used were the performance of Chapter 1 students in reading and language arts as measured by the lowa Tests of Basic Skills, parent attendance rates, school size, percentage of students from low-income families, and the percentage of minority students. A related study used parent attendance rates at the annual Chapter 1 parent meeting to indicate the level of parental involvement. Results of correlational analyses and the related study indicated that even though parental attendance rates are encouraged by local educational agencies and approved by the state education department as an indicator of success, no evidence was found to suggest that high parent attendance rate is directly related to improvement in student reading performance. Findings suggest that: (1) school district administrators and instructional leaders should reexamine the focus of their parent involvement programs; (2) further research is needed for examining the effectiveness of substantial parental involvement approaches to determine what types of activities have a positive impact on student learning; and (3) coordination between Chapter 1 instruction and parental involvement programs is important. (Contains 11 references and 3 tables of data.) (RS)

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**The Impact of Parent Attendance at School Meetings  
on Chapter 1 Student Performance in  
Reading and Language Arts**

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## Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the attendance of parents of low-achieving students at scheduled school meetings and conferences and student performance in reading and language arts. Specifically, this study challenges the current practices applied in implementing and evaluating Chapter 1 parent involvement programs in many school districts across the country that use the parent attendance rates as a key measure in determining the effectiveness of parent involvement activities.

## Context

Researchers, instructional leaders, and policy makers have noted the importance of parental involvement as a component and an indicator of effective schools. As a national policy, parent and family involvement was identified by the former President Bush and his educational advisors as one of four critical organizational variables (teaching, curriculum, physical setting, and parents) for excellence and improved education (Epstein, 1987). In Chapter 1 education, parent involvement has been a part of the program from its inception. In 1988, Hawkins-Stafford Amendments of Chapter 1 education established new requirements for parental involvement activities and mandated local evaluation of parent involvement.

However, as important as it is, parent involvement today still remains a relative vague concept after many years of practice. Most school administrators and instructional leaders embrace the concept of parent involvement, "but few have translated their beliefs into plans or their plans into practice" (Epstein, 1991). There are still vast gaps in our knowledge of what should be the priority in implementing parent involvement activities, how to measure the effectiveness of parent involvement, and what particular types of parent involvement work in support of student learning.

As Chapter 1 evaluators in Dallas Independent School District, we are aware of the difficulties involved in the implementation and assessment of parental involvement activities through our own experiences. In Texas, parental involvement is listed by Texas

Education Agency<sup>1</sup> as one outcome variable that school districts may use to show a "preponderance of evidence of success of Chapter 1 programs" (Hunter, 1992) The Dallas Independent School District required all elementary schools with Chapter 1 programs to show increased parental involvement in their schools Evidence of success of this parental involvement goal was to be shown by increased attendance rate at the school's fall and spring evening parent conferences

The Dallas Independent School District is not alone in practicing such an approach in assessing the effectiveness of Chapter 1 program parent involvement According to the final report of the national assessment of the Chapter 1, 94% of school districts across the country faced with the federal mandate to assess the effectiveness of parental involvement programs reported using attendance rate at Chapter 1 meetings, conferences, and workshops as a measure of effectiveness, and 43% used parent attendance at school events, other than Chapter 1 events, as a measure of effectiveness (U S Department of Education, 1993)

Under such an approach, parent attendance rates at planned school meetings and conferences can be easily measured and, consequently, success can be readily proclaimed. For example, based on individual school's self-reported information, in the 1992-93 school year more than 80% of the 99 Chapter 1 schools in the Dallas Independent School District met the District goal by achieving over 20% parent attendance rates at the fall and spring parent conferences at each school At the District level, the rate of parent participation for all Chapter 1 eligible students in grades (K-3) reached 50% However, is high parent attendance rate at school meetings and conferences related to improved student learning and performance? Is attendance rate an appropriate indicator of parent involvement in the educational process? These are important research and policy issues that must be addressed This study was not designed to offer definitive answers to these questions Rather, it was designed to draw attention to these issues by examining the relationship

<sup>1</sup> Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the formal name for the State Department of Education in Texas

between parent attendance rates at school meetings and the improvement of student learning. The data used in the study were collected in the evaluation of parent involvement in Chapter 1 schools in the Dallas Independent School District during the 1992-93 school year.

### Methodology

**Sample** Seventy-three Chapter 1 schools in the Dallas Independent School District were included in the study. The Dallas Independent School District is one of the largest public school systems in the country. In the 1992-93 school year, the Federally funded Chapter 1 compensatory education program in the Dallas Independent School District served a total number of 17,366 K-3 students in 99 elementary schools. This represented more than 40% of all K-3 students enrolled in the 99 Chapter 1 schools. The Chapter 1 program in Dallas focused on providing supplemental reading and language arts instruction to low achieving students in grades K-3.

Chapter 1 schools in Dallas vary in their sizes -- student enrollment in the schools ranges from 220 to more than 1,300. However, they share two characteristics in common: (a) the high concentration of students from low income families and (b) the high concentration of students from minorities families. In 1992-93, the percentage of students coming from economically disadvantaged families in each of the Chapter 1 school ranged from 65% to 97%. Eighty-six of the 99 Chapter 1 schools (87%) had more than 90% minority students in their enrollment, mostly Blacks and Hispanics and a few Asians and Native Americans. At the District level, Hispanic and Black students made up the two largest ethnic groups of the students enrolled in the Chapter 1 program with 51% and 42%, respectively. White students only accounted for 6% of the total Chapter 1 students.

**Variables** To examine the relationship between parent attendance rates at the scheduled school meetings/conferences and the improvement of student performance, two primary variables were employed.

The outcome variable was the performance of Chapter 1 students in reading and language arts advanced skills (reading comprehension), as measured by the *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)*. The *ITBS* test was administered to students in the spring of 1992 and spring of 1993. The scope of the study was limited to Chapter 1 students in grades 2-3 because only these students took the test examining reading comprehension skills.

Specifically, individual Chapter 1 student's year-to-year gain in normal curve equivalents (NCE) was used as the measuring base. Individual student's NCE gains were then aggregated at the school level to obtain an average NCE gain score for all Chapter 1 students who took the test in the two years. This score was used to show the aggregated performance of Chapter 1 students in the school. In order to make comparable samples, the schools with very small number of students with matched pre- and post-test scores were excluded from the study. Thus, a total of 73 schools were included in the analysis.

NCE gain scores were used as the outcome variable for aggregate student performance in this study since, under the 1988 Hawkins-Stafford Amendments, Chapter 1 schools are now evaluated principally on the basis of NCEs. The U.S. Department of Education's Final Regulation for the Chapter 1 program clarified that "aggregate performance" refers to annual achievement gains, measured in NCE scores, on nationally norm-referenced tests or on tests equated to nationally normed tests (U.S. Department of Education, 1989). In other words, mean NCE gains have been widely used by many states to identify effective and ineffective Chapter 1 programs and are interpreted as evidence of program impact. The assumption is that Chapter 1 students should increase their NCE scores from year to year, i.e., they should improve relative to the test's normative population. In the Dallas Independent School District, the criterion for an adequate NCE gain (substantial student progress) had been determined by the Texas Education Agency for all districts in the state as any gain greater than zero for the 1992-93 school year.

The second variable used in this study was parent attendance rate at school spring and fall parent conferences. This variable was chosen by the District at the beginning of the 1992-93 school year as one of the outcome indicators to show "preponderance of evidence of success of the Chapter 1 program." To show evidence of achieving this outcome measure, each Dallas Chapter 1 school was required to maintain Chapter 1 parent sign-in rosters for the fall and spring parent conferences which included parent name, Chapter 1 student name, grade level, home address, and telephone number. A data collection form was sent by the Chapter 1 evaluators to each Chapter 1 school to obtain the number of parents who attended the fall and spring conferences. The two numbers reported by each school were averaged to represent the number of parents attending the parent conference during the year. In this study, because *ITBS* reading comprehension scores were only available for students in grades 2 and 3, the measure of parental involvement was also obtained only from parents of children in grades 2 and 3. Calculations were then made to obtain an attendance rate of Chapter 1 parents at the conference for individual school.

In addition to the two primary variables, three other context variables that might have strong influences on student performance were also considered in the study. These variables were school size (number of students enrolled), percentage of students from low income families, and the percentage of minority students.

#### Analyses

Correlation analysis was first employed to examine the interrelationship of the five variables in the study. Then a partial correlation analysis was applied to estimate the linear association between Chapter 1 students' NCE gain scores and parent attendance rates after the effects of school size, percentage of minority students, and percentage of students from low income families were removed. The partial correlation analysis was done to discover any hidden relationships between the two primary variables after other influences were controlled.

## Results

The means and standard deviations of the five variables in the analysis are presented in Table 1. Data show that, in general, Chapter 1 schools in the Dallas Independent School District are characterized by high percentage of minority students (94%) and high percentage of students from low income families (83.5%). School size was the only variable that had great variability among all the variables examined.

Table 1  
Means and Standard Deviations of the  
Variables in the Analysis

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Aggregated Annual NCE Gains	73	3.3	5.5
Parent Attendance Rate	73	47.8	21.2
School Size	73	703.6	229.7
Percentage of Minority Students	73	94.0	9.3
Percentage of Students from Low Income Families	73	83.5	13.1

The intercorrelations of the five variables in the analysis are presented in Table 2. Data indicate that the only significant correlation found among the five variables was between the percentage of students from low income families and the percentage of minority students, as was expected. No significant correlational relationship was found between NCE gains and any context factors. The relationship between NCE gains and parent attendance rate was the weakest (-.016) compared to the relationships between aggregated NCE gains and other context variables.



Table 2

## Intercorrelations of the Variables in the Analysis

Variable	NCE Gains	Parent Attendance	School Size	Minority	Low Income
Aggregated NCE Gains	1.000	-.016	-.175	.149	.155
Parent Attendance Rates		1.000	-.253	-.043	.056
School Size			1.000	-.005	-.075
Percentage of Minority Students				1.000	.391*
Percentage of Low Income Family Students					1.000

\*  $p < 0.01$ 

Table 3 presents data from the partial correlation analysis examining linear association between NCE gain scores and parent attendance rates while other context variables (school size, percentage of minority students, and percentage of low income family students) were controlled. The data show that when controlling other contextual factors, the correlation coefficient between NCE gains and parent attendance rates increased slightly (from -.016 to -.063). But still no significant relationship was found between the two variables.

Table 3

Correlation between NCE Gains and  
Parent Attendance Rates

Variable	NCE Gains	Parent Attendance
Aggregated NCE Gains	1.000	- .063
Parent Attendance Rates		1.000

Note: The statistical design controlled for school size, percentage of minority students, and percentage of students from low income families.

Another study (Boykin, Yang, & Benoit, 1993) was conducted in the Dallas Independent School District to examine the relationship between parent involvement and student performances. Instead of using parent attendance rates at the fall and spring parent conferences as the independent variable, the second study used the parent attendance rates at the annual Chapter 1 parent meeting to indicate the level of parental involvement at each school. Two groups of schools were identified as high parental involvement schools (with attendance rates of 40% or above) and low parental involvement schools (with attendance rates of 1-2%). An analysis of covariance was conducted to determine if the differences in academic performance between the high and low parental involvement schools could be contributed to the effective parental involvement. The study also found no relationship between the two variables.

### Conclusions

The results of this study and the related study suggest that even though the parental attendance rates at various scheduled school meetings are encouraged by the local educational agencies and approved by the state education department as an indicator of success in parental involvement, no evidence was found to suggest that high parent

attendance rate is directly related to improvement in student reading performance

### Implications

Despite its narrow focus and limited data resources, the results of this study suggest that the current policies regarding the selection, implementation, and evaluation of Chapter 1 parental involvement activities should be reconsidered. There are some research and policy related issues associated with this study which require further discussion.

1 The 1988 Chapter 1 legislation places major emphasis on the role of parental involvement in student achievement (Letendre, 1991, Weckstein, 1986). In many school districts across the country, the implementation and evaluation of parental involvement programs focuses on a limited number of involvement strategies such as attendance at meetings and non-academic school events. However, no clear evidences have been found from this study and from other studies (e.g., Epstein, 1987, 1991) that indicate current approaches have a strong positive impact on student achievement. Thus it is important for school district administrators and instructional leaders to reexamine the focus of their current parental involvement programs. This is especially true if the success of the program is evaluated and determined largely by maintaining high attendance rates of parents at planned meetings and conferences.

2 There are vast gaps in our knowledge on what particular types of parent involvement work in support of student learning and what should be the priority in implementing parent involvement activities. Even though there is no one best approach to having an effective parental involvement program, it is clear that parental involvement procedures and practices must be comprehensive and flexible. In practice, many effective parental involvement programs are implemented that include parent involvement at school as well as learning activities at home that are coordinated with students' class work. Other effective approaches focus on increasing the number and proportion of teachers' home visits or parent education on how parents can directly assist their children to achieve

in school (Boykin, Turner, and Diogu, 1991; Chrispeels, Fernandez, and Preston, 1990). Further study is needed examining the effectiveness of various substantial parental involvement approaches to determine what types of activities have a positive impact upon student learning.

3. The results of the study also imply the importance of program coordination between Chapter 1 instruction program and parental involvement programs in the program management. To ensure that the focus of parent involvement services is congruent with the instructional program goals, it is important that school principals have authority over and responsibility for all Chapter 1 parental involvement activities in a school. It is also important to consult with the entire school staff to determine strategies and practices that might be effective in associating parental involvement with student achievement. School administrators and teachers will then be better equipped to develop a coordinated, systematic educational plan that maximizes the use of Chapter 1 personnel and resources in order to meet the intended purposes of the federal legislation.

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