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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement with children relative to education can take many forms and depends on a wide variety of factors. This paper reports on perspectives of Latino parents about how they connect to their children's schools and their interactions with children at home. Specifically, the study explored whether parents had the kinds of relationships that facilitate academic performance. Data were gathered through interviews with 20 sets of Latino parents in a midwestern high school and a survey of 10th-grade students. The interviewers asked parents about what they do at home with their children that might promote academic achievement and about how they perceived their relationships with schools. Findings suggest that Latino families epitomize the family values and parent involvement that usually contribute to very high academic achievement. However, only two students had received "premios" (rewards) for their school work and most were described as "doing well." This suggests that schools are failing to take advantage of the sociocultural capital inherent in the close relationships between Latino children and parents. Parents perceived that their children were not challenged by American high schools. (Contains 18 references.) (LMI)

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Effects of Latino Parent Involvement on Academic Achievement

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Effects of Latino Parents' Involvement on Academic Achievement

This paper grew out of our interest in the relationship between educational attainment and Latino parents' involvement with their children's schooling. It is widely accepted in the literature on parental involvement as well as in the public perception that "parental involvement" supports achievement in schooling. Just how the involvement of parents contributes to academic achievement, however, is not so easily agreed upon. Parental involvement with children relative to education can take many forms and depends on a wide variety of factors. Even the term, parental involvement, has various meanings and is seen differently by constituencies who are concerned with parents' roles in education. In the United States, the study of relationships between parents and schooling has been dominated by educators and sociologists, both groups bringing their own perspectives to bear on how to frame the concept of parental involvement with children relative to education (Schneider & Coleman, 1993, p.4). Studies by anthropologists have also begun to contribute significantly to a better understanding of family and parent influences on children's learning and socialization for schooling. Educational anthropologists like Trueba (1986, 1987, 1988) in particular have enlightened the study of factors affecting academic achievement of minorities within institutions like schools.

Much of the literature on parent involvement from the educators' perspective focuses on programs and projects designed to include parents in the formal process of schooling itself. That is, parental involvement from most educators' points of view is about how to get parents into schools, or how parents can support the school's efforts at home by doing things like reading to their children. Many efforts are directed toward "training" parents about the American system of schooling and how parents can help their children succeed in that system (Bermudez, 1996;

Epstein, 1992; Rioux & Berla, 1993). The goal of most educational research on parental involvement efforts is to find out how to make children more “ready” for school and how to improve academic achievement by supporting school initiatives at home. The focus from the educational perspective is the school’s needs and agendas.

On the other hand, sociologists who are interested in how parents relate to their children’s education tend to view parental involvement more in terms of what happens away from school. As opposed to educators who want to teach parents what to do to promote academics, sociologists view parents’ contributions to academic performance through the broader lens of socio-demographic factors such as family income, occupational status, educational level of parents, and family relationships (Coleman, 1988). They study about what resources or “social capital” are available to parents to support involvement in educational activities either at home or at school, resources like money and social networks. The term “cultural capital” has also been used by some sociologists (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 1989) to describe social and cultural resources available to families as a result of their social class, particularly resources possessed by the upper classes. Cultural anthropologists interested in explaining student achievement and family influences on achievement also use the idea of cultural capital but they expand the concept to mean all the values, assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge that any group has to guide their interactions with institutions (Trueba, 1988). They acknowledge that all socio-economic classes and racial/ethnic groups have socio-cultural capital that families can access to educate their children.

Because an overriding concern for promoting academic achievement is behind much of the parental involvement research and literature in education, sociology, and anthropology, it is no

surprise that most of the literature focuses on parents whose children are at greatest risk of not achieving academically - children from economically or educationally “disadvantaged” families who tend to be from racial and ethnic minority groups (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993). Indeed, many of the recent programs and policy initiatives in parent involvement are designed to increase minority parent participation in the education of their children, or at least, to promote educators’ versions of what parents should be doing to help educate their children. An underlying assumption of these initiatives is, of course, that the level or type of involvement from minority parents is inadequate and is somehow contributing to their children’s lack of success in school. Further, because so many minority children are not achieving academically by school standards, there is a widespread belief among school personnel that minority parents do not care to involve themselves in their children’s education.

Researchers from all fields agree that parental involvement depends on the complex interaction of many factors such as financial and human resources available to parents, motivation, time constraints, basic relationships between children and parents, and the willingness of schools to engage parents in the process of schooling. There is also a growing awareness that cultural values and behaviors are factors that affect just how parents involve themselves in the education of their children. Research is finding that different racial and ethnic groups vary in the types of involvement they have with their children. For example, some studies indicate that Asian Americans tend not to be involved in school activities such as parent-teacher organizations, but spend considerably more resources on education related activities outside of school such as music and computer lessons (Schneider & Coleman, 1993, p. 11). These differences inherent among racial/ethnic groups then are other factors complicating the study of parent involvement and how

it affects academic achievement.

To summarize, the contexts for parental involvement can be the home, the school, and/or families within their cultural groups and the broader society. This paper focuses primarily on the context of home in that we report on perspectives of Latino parents about how they connect to their children's schools and their interactions with children at home. We asked parents about what they do at home with their children that might promote academic achievement and we asked about how they perceived their relationships with schools.

Background of the study. Rejecting the notion that minority parents are passive actors in their children's educational careers, we set out to confirm that parents, specifically Latino parents, have an effect on academic achievement. The focus on parents' relations with the school as well as on their relationships with their own children relative to school may be termed "social" or "cultural" capital, in that the focus is on how parents' relationships contribute to the academic achievement of students. We set out to determine whether parents had the kinds of relationships facilitate academic performance. Our expectations were that successful parents "sponsor" their child's academic achievement(1) by establishing and enforcing particular rules for appropriate behavior inside and outside the home, (2) by maintaining regular verbal interaction with the child around school issues, personal behavior, and plans for the future, (3) by engaging the child in recreational activities with parents both inside and outside the home, conveying warmth or emotional nurturing, and (4) by maintaining contacts with the school. These four aspects of parental involvement are among those that experts agree contribute to children's academic success in schooling (Coleman, 1988; Epstein, 1992).

Sample and Methodology

We conducted our study in several phases. During the spring of 1994 we interviewed 20 sets of parents of students in a midwestern high school, Midwest Division High, to find out about their relationships with their children and with the school. Prior to interviewing parents, we also administered a survey to a sample of tenth grade students at the high school and compared findings from parent interviews with data and perspectives of students. Initially we hoped to interview the parents of students who completed the survey but it was not possible to match parents with the students as the school's policy did not allow them to give us home or personal information. Instead we solicited volunteers for parent interviews from lists provided by teachers and a consortium of Latino families and school personnel who were engaged in efforts to improve schools. This group of parent respondents then, was probably more "active" than a larger, random sample would be.

We interviewed 20 families at their homes during the months of May and June, 1994, collecting over 25 hours of audiotaped interviews. The ethnic composition of the families interviewed is as follows: nine were Mexican-American; nine were Puerto Rican; one family had one parent of Mexican origin and another of Puerto Rican ancestry; and one family was from El Salvador. All of the parents interviewed had been born outside of the United States mainland.

A semi-structured interview protocol for parents was developed in two parts, asking questions about 1) parents' relationships with school and 2) their relationships with their own children. Briefly, the first set of questions sought information about parent contacts with schools, the reasons for contacts, and results of contacts. Parents also gave information about their own expectations of school and school personnel, about their understandings of responsibilities toward

school, and about any influence they felt they had in decisions about their children's education. In the second part of the interviews, parents described activities they engaged in with their children. They talked about language usage in the home, about supervision and discipline, and about how they counsel their children relative to school. They described their expectations for higher education and careers for their children. In fourteen of the twenty interviews, both parents were present; in five only the mother was interviewed and one interview was with the father only. In nine cases, one or more children were present and actively participated, contributing their perspectives and giving examples to illustrate or support parents' statements. All but three interviews were conducted totally in Spanish and Spanish was also used intermittently in those that were done primarily in English. The following summarizes the themes that emerged most consistently throughout that data. Then, student perceptions and how they related to findings from the parent interviews are presented.

Findings & Discussion

Relationships with schools

Contact with schools. Data from part one of the interviews generally parallel what is known about all parents' relationships with schools. That is, for all parents, Latino or any other group, relationships at the high school level are more "distant" than at the elementary level or middle school level (Schneider & Coleman, 1993). As in other studies, parents of high school students in this study reported that they have less personal contact with school staff than they did when their children were in elementary school. They received information about school events and news mostly through mail and they visited the school primarily for parent/teacher conferences

or when they received a summons from a teacher or the principal. Usually these "summoned" visits revolved around a problem, i.e., suspensions, negative behavior, or illness. The rate of parent participation on committees for this group of Latino parents was also the same as for the majority of parents, only two parents were actively involved on school committees (Rioux & Berla, 1993). Still, a surprising number (35%) said they visited their children's school on a regular basis just to see what the teachers were doing or how their children were doing. Parents who reported the most contact said they were at school for one reason or another every week while those who reported the least contact said they had had contact at least two least times during the school year.

Reports of academic achievement. In terms of academic achievement, reports of their children's success were most often expressed in general comments of doing well or not, as opposed to discussion of specific grades. Only five parents used grade point averages and letter grades to describe academic achievement of their children. According to parents in this study, a significant number of their children were doing well or were average in their grades. In all 20 families, only two students with special needs and two students who had been suspended were identified as having problems and not doing well. All the other children from the twenty families were reportedly getting average or good grades. This perception of Latino children doing well was at odds with statistics on academic achievement of Latino students as a whole in this city's public schools, especially at this high school and its feeder schools. The grade point average for Latino students in this school system was 1.5 in the 1994-95 school year and the drop-out rate for Latino students starting 9th grade was 42%. These achievement measures reflect national statistics as Latino students consistently have lower graduation rates than non-Hispanic whites

and African American students (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

In describing children's **ability** to succeed in school (as opposed to actual achievement), parents were even more uniform in their perceptions. Except for the two special needs students, the children's abilities were described by parents as average or above average. They perceived their children as capable of learning whatever was required by the school and parents' descriptions of their children demonstrated a thoughtful understanding of just how their children learned. The researchers were struck by the parents' analysis of their children as learners, by how parents elaborated on their children's styles of learning, telling about their strengths and weaknesses as learners. Further, parents recognized and accepted a child's personality as part of his/her way of learning and communicating with adults. There was a great sensitivity in their perceptive descriptions of children's personalities, demonstrating an understanding of the emotional as well as intellectual capacities and needs of their children. Parents saw children as individuals and didn't expect the same behavior or achievement from all their children, but they did believe that all had the ability to succeed in school and in anything they would like to do with their lives if they would work hard and apply themselves.

Interestingly, there was also a perception among a number of Mexican American parents that their children were underachieving, even though they might be "doing well". These parents thought schools in the United States were not as demanding as in their home country. To illustrate, we offer these words from one of the Mexican parents:

Schools in Mexico are superior to schools here...studying in Mexico is hard. My daughter used to cry when she had a test in Mexico. She would spend all night studying. Here it is easy, tests are easy to pass.

Other Mexican parents complained that their children were not learning world history and geography, subjects they claimed are covered in Mexico beginning in elementary school. Still others thought the school day is too short and that there are far more vacation days in the United States than in Mexico. One parent explained that although he thought schooling was generally better in Mexico, he thought it was more accessible in the United States and he brought his children to the U.S. because he knew they would be able to attend and complete a secondary education here.

By contrast, Puerto Rican parents, when comparing school systems either saw no differences or perceived Midwest public schools to be more demanding than Puerto Rican schools. However, some Puerto Rican parents perceived Puerto Rican teachers as more "warm" and caring than Midwest Division High School teachers. For example, in referring to teachers in Puerto Rico, one mother said "there is this attitude, let us say, maternal, more emotional." Also referring to Puerto Rican teachers, a father commented that a "teacher's attitude over there is more positive... they are more concerned about their students..." However, parents did not directly criticize Midwest city teachers. Instead, they tended to attribute the "colder" demeanor of Midwest Division teachers to cultural differences between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland.

Satisfaction with schools. Parents generally expressed satisfaction with teachers more than administrators, although they admitted not really knowing much of what happens in school or what their children really did in classrooms. Half of the respondents said they were not satisfied with the way schools had treated one child, but were happy with the treatment of another. Three families specifically mentioned discrimination against Latinos as something that was a concern in the treatment of their children.

When asked about their satisfaction with specific areas of schooling such as communications with parents, curriculum, and instructional strategies, the parents in our sample did not criticize any of these aspects of schooling in a direct manner except in two areas - the lack of communication with parents and the assignment of homework. When asked about their expectations of schools, all parents mentioned they expected schools to communicate with them, specifically about their own children's progress, but also about the "goings on" at school. Parents were dissatisfied when these expectations were not met by school personnel. The lack of effective communication with parents was an especially sore point those parents who gave this as a concern. Examples of ineffective communication were that administrators did not return calls, that teachers and administrators in the high school did not facilitate communication with parents, and some felt intimidated because they did not speak English well. They did acknowledge that written communications received from schools were often in Spanish, but these tended to be form letters and notices, not communications specifically about their children.

Parent dissatisfaction related to homework resulted from the expectation that children should not only have a lot of work in school, but should be assigned homework. The second most frequently mentioned expectation (by half of the respondents) was the expectation that the schools would provide students with a "good education" that would "teach them something" and prepare them for the future. They did not just want the minimum for their children however, they used words like "challenging" and said they wanted their children to be "pushed" to the maximum. And, for them, a rigorous curriculum included homework assignments. That was why they complained when children didn't seem to have much homework. That was a sign to parents that the schools were not expecting much of the students. A quarter of the parents also said they

expected teachers and administrators to treat children fairly, to know the individual needs of students and to take a personal interest in them.

A few parents worried about or misunderstood pedagogical methods used to teach math or English. For example, one parent commented that the bilingual program "does not help the student strive to learn English." In this high school, however, the bilingual teachers were charged with teaching content areas such as math or science in the native language or bilingually. It was the English as a Second Language program that was responsible for teaching English. All the children of the families interviewed had been in bilingual programs at some time, in elementary or middle schools, and half of the families had children in bilingual programs at the time of the interviews.

Responsibilities to school. In terms of their responsibilities to the school, all parents felt their job was to prepare children for school by teaching them the value of an education and to respect the teacher. Other responsibilities mentioned were: to be aware of school rules and regulations, respond to teachers and support them, and to be an example to their children. Several parents also mentioned that they had the responsibility to advocate for their children when necessary and, in fact, there were a number of stories about how parents had intervened when they thought students had been given unfair grades, had been suspended without just cause, or had not received insurance compensation for an accident.

The interview questions about parents' influence on decision making about schooling were met with confusion and surprise. Parents seemed confused about the idea of having influence on decisions made regarding any aspect of schooling and generally answered that they didn't know or hadn't ever thought about that. One even said that it was "silly to think" that parents

influenced decisions about schools. Only one parent who was an officer of the Parent - Teacher Organization (PTO) responded that the organization itself was an avenue for “giving input”. The majority of parents were not involved in the PTO or any other organized group although five parents reported attending PTO meetings and two were elected officers of the organizations.

Information from this study about parents’ relationships with schools and school personnel generally parallels what is already known about parents and their connections with schools. The more important findings from this sample of parents were the perceptions that the average and above average children of these families were underachieving, even though they were “doing well”. In the case of the Mexican American parents in particular, the concern that the schools were not as challenging as those in Mexico is another finding that was unusual. The statements about students not being pushed as much as they should be, and certainly not as much as parents wanted them to be, are other insights that are not the norm when reading about Latino parents.

Relationships with children

Data from the second set of questions about Latino parents’ interactions with their children produced more unique information as there are relatively few data sources that describe Latino parents' interactions with their children relative to education. Some of these sources (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valdez, 1996) provide detailed descriptions of how Latino parents interact with children in a variety of areas, including education. However, much of the education and sociology literature assumes that minority parents do not engage in meaningful activities with their adolescent children. Interviews in this study produced data that contradict that majority opinion. Results indicated that the 20 sets of Latino parents have a high level of interaction and engagement with their children relative to schooling. Every family reported a

range of activities that they did together, from going to church, to playing soccer, to going out for dinner. In addition, parents talked with their children about events and issues in their lives, discussed education and its importance to getting good jobs, and their expectations for graduation and going on to college for a particular job. In some cases, parents and children discussed specific classes and teachers, although most of the time they talked more generally about the children's history of schooling and over all experiences .

Supervision & monitoring. All parents reported some type of supervision and monitoring of homework. A typical statement was, "I have to see that they do their homework, I have to see to it that they are disciplined and behave themselves". When asked if they had rules for their children regarding homework, friends, or free time, their responses indicated that these Latino parents did monitor activities of their children closely. Their descriptions, however, seemed more like expectations rather than a set of formalized rules and consequences. They most frequently mentioned expectations for getting homework done, including where students worked, the time allocated, and the fact that they were to do homework before other activities, but parents did not seem to think of this monitoring as making rules for their children, rules that would result in punishments if they were broken.

Although very few parents directly helped their children with schoolwork, we found many instances where an older sibling would provide assistance. Parents encouraged students, but most said they couldn't directly help because of their lack of English proficiency. The parents' role regarding homework was primarily one of making sure that students spent time on homework. Parental sanctioning of the importance of education was most clearly visible in their close oversight of their children's schoolwork through constant monitoring of children's diligence in

doing homework and exhortations to do their best in school. Beyond that, parents put their trust in the schools to actually give their children a good education. Perhaps they felt they couldn't directly help because most parents interviewed only had minimal formal education themselves, and thus felt they could give little or no direct assistance with homework.

Parents in our study who reported the most academically successful students also showed the most intrusive parenting style, that is, they not only monitored homework, they monitored the rest of their children's lives very closely. This monitoring behavior included knowing what children did during their leisure time and who their friends were, as well as establishing strong expectations for curfew times. Communication between parents and children was frequent, with parents reporting a high degree of trust and camaraderie between themselves and their children. In the interviews where children were present, the children volunteered information about family outings or discussions that confirmed the active participation of both adolescents and parents in a wide variety of activities. Family outings were frequent and included leisure activities such as soccer, fishing, dances, attending movies, and shopping.

Parental advocacy. Every parent expressed interest and caring about their children's schooling and wanted to support their children. For example, we found instances of parents advocating at school when they thought their children were not being treated fairly. In one case, a mother contacted the principal and teachers about her child's grade when she thought the criteria for grading had been changed after a paper had been turned in. Another parent insisted on the school's providing disability support for her daughter who had been injured in school, and she fought to have the school's insurance policy cover medical costs associated with the accident. A number of parents asked for information in Spanish so they could understand school

communications and make sure they were attending to what the school asked for. Only a few parents engaged in traditional activism advocating for a "cause" such as school reform, but all parents indicated a willingness to advocate, or gave examples of, personally advocating for the needs of their own children when necessary.

Educational expectations. All the parents in our sample expressed high aspirations related to their children's education and these aspirations were made known to the children. They expected that their children would graduate from high school and most expressed a strong desire for higher education. Specifically, they shared that they wanted schools to teach their children English and job related skills well enough so they could find meaningful employment in this country. When parents identified specific jobs they and/or their children hoped for, they said things like doctor, architect, and teacher, careers that require a university education. Parents made these expectations known to their children directly by telling them how important they thought high school graduation was, and indirectly by their questioning about school and homework, exhorting them to attend school faithfully. In terms of understanding how to help students get to college, only two families spoke of financial aid and knowing what papers to sign for financial aid. None had comments on academic requirements for admission to college or about the process of applying. There was only one instance where an educator (a counselor) was mentioned as a resource for helping students who wanted to go to college. As parents discussed their aspirations for their children, the tone was one of vague hopefulness for their children through education. There was very little specificity or demonstrated knowledge about the requirements for entering college or about the process of getting there. Even so, parent statements consistently indicated a high degree of hope for their children's education and all our

respondents exhibited a strong faith in the value of schooling, regardless of how well they rated individual teachers or schools or what they knew about getting through high school and into college.

Maintenance of language & culture. Another important aspect of interaction between parents and children was the importance placed on cultural bonds within the family. All the parents interviewed displayed an intense desire to transmit the home culture to their children. For example, they invariably supported the maintenance of Spanish and consistently spoke Spanish at home. This did not, however, negate their desire that their children learn English. Most parents taught their children songs and dances from their respective countries. During family gatherings and at church events Latino music was played. A number of parents made the connection between language and identity as the following excerpt illustrates:

I think they need to have chances to have identity as to who they are and a history of themselves. I think that language is important to me and to my husband. . . to be able to be bilingual is also introducing them to the possibility of other languages, other cultures, other worlds.

The parents with children in bilingual programs expected native language and cultural maintenance to be emphasized in its curriculum even though they expected the program to result in learning English as well. In fact, many respondents told us that cultural maintenance was one of the main motivations behind their efforts to enroll their children in the bilingual program. Mexican American parents also suggested that residence in the barrio surrounding Midwest Division was in itself conducive to preserving traditions and values. Parents saw cultural maintenance primarily as their responsibility, but appreciated the school (bilingual programs)

reinforcing the value they placed on learning their native culture and language.

The dominant home language for all the families in the study was Spanish. Spanish was used for communication between parents and children; only two families reported using English regularly between parents and children. Both languages however, were used among children, either among siblings or with other children outside of the home.

Survey of Students Perspectives

In order to see how parents' perspectives compared to students' academic achievement, we now turn to a discussion of findings from the survey administered to tenth grade students at Midwest Division High School where the children of parent interviewees attended. Our target for the student survey were 10 tenth grade homerooms with significant numbers of Latino students. A total of 110 students completed the survey, out of which 79 respondents were identified as Latinos. Of these, only 76 surveys were complete and they form the basis for the results presented below. We were hoping for a larger sample, but we only had access to first period homerooms which traditionally have a high absentee rate. The ethnic composition of respondents is broken down as follows: 56% Puerto Rican and 44% Mexican American. The survey instrument was in Spanish or English, and two out of every five respondents (40%) chose to answer the survey in Spanish. Given the small number of respondents, most of the survey-related findings are illustrated by pearson correlation coefficients, and only when they achieve a significance level of at least .05 or less.

In order to explore factors affecting academic achievement, we first had to determine how our sample of students was doing academically. Since we did not have access to grades, we used several other ways of ascertaining academic achievement. Students gave self-reports of grades

and how well they were doing in several core subjects - English, Mathematics, and Science.

Language and immigrant status. To better understand academic achievement for Latino students in an American high school, we felt we had to look at how long the students had been studying in this country, their relative proficiency in English and Spanish, and their language preference. Therefore we compared two variables, 1) recency of arrival (the most recent completed 7th grade outside of U.S.) and 2) home language use with students' self-reported grades. Recency of arrival was not found to be related to English grades; neither was it related to Math grades. In Science, however, recent arrivals reported better grades than students who have been in U.S. schools longer ($r=.27$). For example, 23% of recent arrivals reported getting As and Bs in Science, compared to only 6% of children who had been in American schools prior to 7th grade.

To compare how proficiency in English related to grades, an index for English proficiency was created out of the variables indicating students' perceptions of their ability to read, write, speak, and understand English. Their assessments of their English proficiency were not related to their reports of English grades, neither were they related to Math grades. Surprisingly, English proficiency was negatively associated with performance in Science ($r=-.23$). That is, students who spoke only Spanish at home reported receiving higher grades in Science than those residing in bilingual or English only homes. Students who spoke only Spanish at home reported similar grades in English and Math to those who came from homes where both English and Spanish were used.

To further explore the impact of immigrant status and language proficiency we created an index out of the variables for English Proficiency, recency of arrival, and survey language

(whether the student chose to answer the survey using an English version of the instrument). We constructed the index so that ascending scores reflected increasing assimilation, with the highest possible score attained by students who completed the 7th grade on the mainland, and answered the survey in English and described themselves as highly proficient in English,

Assimilation & achievement. The findings from student surveys suggest assimilation was associated with lower school performance. More assimilated students reported lower grades in Science ($r=-.30$), and Math ($r=-.26$) than their less assimilated counterparts. Interestingly, our parental interviews suggested to us that migration might be experienced differently by Mexican and Puerto Rican parents, so we conducted further analyses on the effects of assimilation by looking at these two groups separately. The results show the negative impact of assimilation on grades occurred only within the Mexican-origin sub-sample. For example, 56% of Mexican recent arrivals reported getting very good grades (mostly As or As and Bs) in Science compared to 25 percent of their native-born counterparts ($r=.45$). The corresponding numbers in the Puerto Rican sample are 0 and 6 percent ($r=-.04$).

We offer several possible explanations for these findings related to lower academic achievement for students who are more assimilated. Perhaps students who are recent arrivals may be in different academic programs, possibly bilingual or English as a Second Language programs, from those who are more assimilated. The native language instruction they receive in the bilingual program might have a positive effect on their academic performance. By contrast, more assimilated students are more likely to experience "second generation discrimination" to the extent that their presence in regular or "mainstream" programs may deny them access to full understanding of the curriculum. These students also come from Spanish speaking homes and

may still need native language support. One can also argue that recently arrived students are more motivated to do well in their studies than those who have been here longer. This last explanation fits the "socialization for failure" hypotheses espoused by other researchers (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995) where native-born Latinos have been so alienated by schools they have acquired habits and attitudes antagonistic to school goals. More recently, Portes (1995) developed the concept of "segmented assimilation" to describe some of the adaptation strategies pursued by second generation children. One of the assimilation strategies involves taking on values and norms of the inner city "underclass" leading to academic failure.

Comparison of Parents' & Students' Perspectives

Still another explanation for the negative effect of assimilation may lie in findings from the parent interviews. Parents from Mexico felt that schools there were more demanding and rigorous than schools in the United States. If this is so, the more rigorous schooling and solid academic background acquired in Mexico may help account for the results presented above related to negative effects of assimilation on the academic performance of Mexican-origin children. It is possible that the most recent arrivals have a better academic background than those who have attended American elementary schools and that the longer they stay in the United States, the more that background is eroded as they are not building upon it in American schools. Another explanation for more recent arrivals having higher achievement may be found in the self report aspect of this study. Recent arrivals - and parents - may have an unrealistic notion of what "doing well" means in American high schools and of how they compare to mainstream students, and so they may overrate their achievement.

Time on task. Another variable related to school achievement studied in the survey and in

parent interviews was time spent on homework. In general, students who spent more time doing homework reported getting better grades. Students who spent one or more hours per week on English homework reported getting better grades in Math ($r=.23$) and Science ($r=.21$) than those who spent less than an hour on English homework. Respondents who spent one or more hours on Math homework earned better grades in English ($r=.28$) and Math ($r=.44$) than those who spent less than an hour on Math homework. For example, of those doing at least one hour of Math homework, slightly more than a third (35%) reported getting As and Bs in Math, compared to only one of every ten students who spent less than an hour on math homework (10%).

Students who spent one or more hours doing Science homework reported better grades in English ($r=.25$) and Math ($r=.46$) than those who spent less than an hour on Science homework. Finally, an index for time on homework was created out of variables measuring student reports of time spent on English, Math, and Science homework per week. The time on homework index shows a positive and significant relationship to grades in English ($r=.28$); Math ($r=.48$); and Science ($r=.24$). These results show that completing homework did correlate with higher academic achievement for these students. This definitely supports the parents in their concern that children weren't given more homework. Those parents who were dismayed at the low amount of schoolwork that was brought home apparently have good reason to be concerned when students who are more successful are those who spend more time on homework.

Another important time variable related to academic achievement was time spent on task in school. This was analyzed in several different ways, looking at time out of the classroom resulting from disciplinary actions and looking at truancy. An index for time away from class was created out of the variables measuring school suspensions, times sent to the office for disciplinary

problems, and the number of times parents were asked to come to the school. The results suggest oppositional behaviors are related to lowered school performance. The disciplinary problems index was negatively related to math ($r=-.26$) and science ($-.33$) grades. To illustrate these findings, consider that while one third of the students who had never been suspended reported earning mostly As or Bs in mathematics, only 15% of students suspended reported similar grades in math.

Although only two families interviewed reported suspensions in their children's history of schooling, the parents of those children were very concerned about the time lost from school. They did not believe that keeping a child at home, away from instruction, was helpful to the child. Parents viewed suspension as a way of putting students further behind in schoolwork. Again, when comparing parents' concern with findings from student surveys, parents may have reason to be concerned about the time taken from children during suspensions. To parents, it was common sense that taking students out of class would cut back on student learning, but, according to parents the school did not view suspensions in this way. From parents' perspective, school personnel viewed suspensions as a punishment for a crime, not time lost from learning. In both cases reported in the interviews, the "crimes" had been viewed by parents as misdemeanors - throwing food in the cafeteria and not turning papers in.

Truancy was also highly related to academic performance in findings from student surveys. We had three measures for truancy: days of school missed in the previous month without a valid excuse; times late for school in the previous month; and whether students skipped classes. Missing School was negatively related to performance in English ($r=-.23$), Math ($r=-.26$), and Science ($r=-.22$), which means the more days of school a student missed, the worse her/his grades

were. Tardiness was negatively related to performance in Science ($r=-.23$) and Math ($r=-.23$). Finally, students who skipped classes earned lower grades in English ($r=-.28$) and Math ($r=-.31$) than those who never cut classes. For example, of those students who reported never skipping a class, three out of every ten (29.5%) got mostly As or As and Bs, while none of the students who skipped classes reported such high performance. Combined with the results on disciplinary problems discussed above, our findings suggest that the way these students behaved in school, including compliance with attendance rules, was significantly connected to their academic performance. Although it might seem obvious, the parents were on the right track by exhorting their children to be on their best behavior, to mind the teachers, and do their best. It is important to state this because educators all too frequently forget that parents too, are trying to get students to behave in ways that the school wants and that will benefit the children.

Repeating a year in school was another variable that was related to academic performance in the student survey. Students who had been held back reported lower school performance than students who had never repeated a grade. Repeating a grade was negatively correlated with grades in Science ($r=-.30$) and English ($r=-.25$). If we look at performance in Science, for example, we find that amongst those who had never repeated a grade, 16% reported getting mostly As, while none of the students who repeated a grade earned such high grades.

Educational expectations. Educational expectations reported in the student survey were also related to school performance. Students whose plans for the future included attendance at postsecondary institutions reported higher grades than those who had less ambitious plans. Educational expectations are positively and significantly related to grades in English ($r=.38$), Math ($r=.44$), and Science ($r=.32$).

All parents too had high expectations for their children as defined by graduation from high school and preparation for jobs. Parents hoped for college although they qualified their statements by saying “if their children wanted to go”. The very positive relationship between high expectations of students and academic achievement in the student survey supports parents’ efforts at encouraging and talking to their children about reaching for graduation and careers.

Student perceptions of parent involvement. Because we were interested in the connection between parent involvement with schools and students’ academic achievement, we asked students questions about how they thought their parents were involved in schools. Student reports suggested a very low level of parental participation in school activities and committees. For example, only 11% of students reported that their parents belonged to any school committee. Participation on committees, however, is a limited way to view parent participation and we did not ask students to elaborate on any other kinds of parent contact with schools or personnel.

When asked about how parents were involved with students at home relative to academics, students’ responses supported parents’ perceptions of the importance of monitoring homework and other aspects of their lives. According to information from student surveys, direct involvement of parents by supervising the child at home, appeared to be related to academic performance. After asking students if there were rules at home for a number of behaviors, things like TV viewing, bedtime, school grades, homework, and so forth, we asked about any punishments associated with breaking parental rules. The findings suggest students whose parents enforced rules at home obtained better grades in Science ($r=.31$) and Math ($r=.31$) than respondents whose parents did not enforce rules at home. Again, this correlation between supervision and higher achievement supports parents’ views that monitoring and supervision are

important. Parents who reported a more intrusive, supervisory parenting style also reported higher achievement in their children.

There was definite correspondence between data from parent interviews and student surveys. Factors identified in the student surveys as correlating with higher academic achievement for Midwest Division Latino 10th graders were factors that surfaced as important to parents in their involvement with schools and their own children. Specifically, there was correspondence in the following areas: 1) time devoted to academic work at home and at school, 2) educational expectations, and 3) parent engagement in supervising and monitoring. Student responses showed that the things that parents believed were important did correlate with higher academic achievement. In fact, findings from both sets of data corresponded to what parent involvement literature says facilitates academic achievement. There was one other area in which there might have been correspondence, that of the importance of maintaining students' native language and culture. The better academic achievement of recent arrivals and those who mostly spoke Spanish at home may give support to parents' beliefs that maintaining the native cultural heritage and language is important. Parents believed that knowing their identity helped students but there were no questions on the student survey that asked students how they felt about maintaining their native languages and cultures.

Overall, the Latino parents we interviewed did everything that research in parent involvement in the fields of education, sociology, and anthropology says is conducive to academic success. Specifically, parents first, established, encouraged, and made known particular expectations/rules for their children's behavior relative to schooling. Second, they maintained regular verbal interaction with their children around school issues, personal behavior, and plans

for the future. Third, parents in this study engaged their children in a variety of activities that would convey emotional nurturing and fourth, they did maintain regular contacts with the high school.

Conclusions

Findings from this study are important because research indicates that the type of parent/child interaction identified in these families **should** provide a firm foundation for academic achievement - the stronger the relationships, especially as they relate to educational issues, the higher the academic achievement. It is clear that Latino parents and children interviewed for this study had strong, supporting relationships that should translate into academic success for their children, assuming adequate instruction on the part of the school. Even so, only two students had received “premios” for their school work and most were described as “doing well”. Because the parents interviewed were not the parents of the students who completed the survey, direct comparisons between the academic achievement of the student sample and parents’ descriptions of interactions with the school and their children cannot be made. However, if each group is typical or even has characteristics of Latino parents and students as a whole, findings suggest that Latino families in fact epitomize the family values and parental involvement that normally contribute to very high academic achievement. Why then, are so many Latino students failing or dropping out of that high school? Like a number of other studies (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Moll, 1992; Snow, 1991; Valdez, 1996), this one suggests that schools in general are failing to take advantage of the socio-cultural capital inherent in the close relationships between Latino children and parents to promote academic achievement. Further, findings suggest more research should be done to explore the parents’ perceptions that even though students are “doing well”,

they are underachieving and need to be challenged more. This perception that Latino students are not challenged by American high schools has been voiced by some educators and policy makers, but rarely have Mexican American parents so pointedly voiced that perception. If children are as capable as the parents in this study seem to believe they are, and if children receive the nurturing typically conducive to academic success, they should not only be “doing well”, they should be academic leaders in the school. Totally contrary to the opinion that Latino parents don’t care or support education, results from these parent interviews suggest that Latino families not only care about education, they also provide children with the socio-cultural capital that should be resulting in high academic success.

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