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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the two issues in volume 5 of "Parent News Offline," a publication of the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) designed to introduced those without Internet Access to the activities and information available through NPIN. The Spring 2003 issue contains the following articles: (1) "Summer Academic Programs" (Anne S. Robertson); (2) "Summertime: Safety First" (Peggy Patten); (3) "Student Mobility and Academic Achievement" (Russell W. Rumberger); and (4) "School Placement Decisions" (Saran Donahoo). The Fall 2003 issue contains the following articles: (1) "Parent-School Partnerships and NCLB" (Anne S. Robertson); (2) "Children and Grief" (Nancy McEntire); (3) "Volunteer School-Parent Groups Find Renewed Relevance" (Anne S. Robertson); and (4) "Making Homework Work" (Peggy Patten). (HTH)

Parent News Offline, 2003.

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Anne S. Robertson, Editor

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

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Parent News Offline

Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2003

In This Issue

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Summer Academic Programs: Get the Facts!

Anne S. Robertson

Teachers often spend 6 to 8 weeks at the start of the new school year re-teaching forgotten information to their students. To help prevent this "summer learning loss," parents may want to ask their child's teacher about different types of summer school programs. *Summer enrichment programs* are normally for students who are at or above grade level, helping them experiment, explore a particular interest, or learn a new skill. *Summer remedial programs* help students review academic skills and may require students to pass an exam at the end of the summer. Some schools require that students performing below grade level pass a remedial summer program for promotion to the next grade level. Parents whose children are going to participate in summer enrichment or remedial programs will want to ask their children's teachers these questions:

- *What do the tests say?* It is important to meet with the teacher and principal to discuss your child's test scores. You can also request additional diagnostic testing to help answer questions about your child's abilities or to see if your child might have a learning problem.
- *What does the child's school work show?* Test scores are only one type of information. The child's daily performance throughout the school year is also important. Reviewing your child's daily school work may help clarify where she or he needs extra help.
- *What is the summer program's structure?* Understanding the details of the program will help you prepare your family's summer schedule. Will the program be for the morning hours only, or will it run for a normal school day? Will there be busing to and from the program? How many weeks does the program last? How will it differ from the regular year? Will there be more "hands-on" activities or field trips? What specialists will be working with your child?
- *What are the expected outcomes of participation?* Students may have to pass another test at the end of the summer class to be promoted. If your child does not pass the test and you believe he or she should be promoted, you may be able to request a waiver from the principal or school district office.
- *How will my child get extra help throughout the school year?* Children performing below grade level may not maintain the gains of a summer class without long-term help, so it is important that your child has extra support during the school year. Meet with your child's teacher early in the fall and request extra help from tutors or support services.
- *How can I help my child at home?* Ask the teacher how you can help at home. Activities such as reading together, taking trips to museums, discussing important events related to the child's school work, or working with the teacher to ensure that all homework is completed can help enrich the child's educational experience.

Adapted from a June/July/August 2002 online *Parent News* article (http://npin.org/pnews/2002/pnew602/feat602.html).

Summertime: Safety First!

Peggy Patten

For many families, summertime means a break from school and work routines, some unstructured time to relax and be outdoors. Because children have more free time and spend much of it outdoors, unintentional injuries peak during the summer months (May through August). According to the National SAFE KIDS Campaign (NSKC), children 14 and under will be rushed to hospital emergency rooms nearly 3 million times for serious injuries this summer. An estimated 2500 children will die from such injuries. Two-thirds of these deaths result from bike, pedestrian, or motor vehicle occupant injury; falls; or drowning [2]. The following summer safety tips and resources from the NSKC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) can help families have fun and be safe this summer [1].

Children 14 and under will be rushed to hospital emergency rooms nearly 3 million times for serious injuries this summer.

Ride Safe!

- When traveling in a car, children should ride in their own child safety seats or safety belts that are suitable for their size and age.
- Children should ride in the back seat, the safest place in the car.
- Children in rear-facing car seats should never be in a front seat of a car that is equipped with an air bag.

Swim Safe!

- Stay close to young children at all times around swimming pools, lakes, ponds, and streams.
- Personal flotation devices should be worn when out on boats, near open bodies of water, or when taking part in water sports.
- Inflatable swimming aids such as "floaties" are not substitutes for approved life vests.

Wheel Safe!

- Children should never ride their bikes, scooters, or skates at dusk or after dark.
- Children should know and practice the rules of the road.
- Children should wear a properly fitting helmet and other protective equipment every time they ride bicycles, scooters, in-line skates, or skateboards.

Walk Safe!

- Young children should stop at curbs and never cross the street without an adult.
- Older children should always look both ways before crossing a street.
- When walking at dusk or in the dark, children should wear retroreflective materials and carry a flashlight.

Play Safe!

- Young children should be supervised when playing on playgrounds.
- Metal slides should be cool to prevent children's legs from getting burned.
- Playground landing surfaces should be made of mulch, gravel, rubber, or fine sand to help cushion children's falls.

For More Information

Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families 2002
http://www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.htm

The Injury Prevention Program (TIPP)
Age-Related Safety Sheets
http://www.aap.org/family/tippmain.htm

National Safe Kids Campaign Summer Safety Tips (in English and Spanish)
http://www.safekids.org/
tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=2110&folder_id=660

Preparing for the Summer: From Activity Suggestions to Safety Guidelines
http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnew597/pnew597j.html

Playgrounds: Keeping Outdoor Learning Safe
http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00181/n00181.html

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission: Kidd Safety
http://www.cpsc.gov/kids/kidsafety/index.html

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Adapted from a June/July/August 2002 online *Parent News* article (http://npin.org/pnews/2002/pnew602/int602b.html).

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ERIC DIGEST
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Student Mobility and Academic Achievement

Russell W. Rumberger

Student mobility—students moving from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next school level—is widespread in the United States. Over their entire elementary and secondary careers, most students make at least one non-promotional school change (Rumberger et al., 1999). Many educators believe that student mobility is an inevitable result of students changing residences. Indeed, 2000 U.S. census data show that 15% to 18% of school-age children moved in the previous year (see http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-538.pdf). There have also been indications that welfare reform may affect moving, with parents moving to accept jobs.

However, research has also found that between 30% and 40% of school changes are not associated with residential changes (Kerbow, 1996; Rumberger et al., 1999). School factors such as overcrowding, class size reduction, suspension and expulsion policies, and the general academic and social climate also contribute to student mobility. The increase of parental options included in the No Child Left Behind legislation may also contribute over time to increased mobility. This Digest examines the research on the academic consequences of mobility for elementary school students and discusses what schools and parents can do to mitigate the possible negative effects of changing schools.

Research on Academic Achievement

Numerous studies have examined the impact of mobility on several aspects of academic achievement: test scores, grades, retention, and high school completion. As with all research studies, there are limitations to what these studies tell us. Most important, because mobile students may have personal and family problems that contribute to their mobility, studies should take into account those prior characteristics in order to determine whether mobility itself is the cause of subsequent achievement and other problems in schools.

Studies that do not control for the background characteristics of students consistently find that mobile students have lower achievement on average than non-mobile or stable students. For example, one national study of third-grade students found that frequent school changes were associated with a host of problems, including nutrition and health problems, below-grade-level reading scores, and retention in grade (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994).

Yet studies that do account for background differences find that mobility may be more of a symptom than a cause of poor school performance. One study of mobile students in Chicago found that half of the achievement differences between mobile and stable students could be attributed to differences between the students that pre-dated their school changes (Temple & Reynolds, 1997). One well-designed study of elementary students in Baltimore found that although mobility during elementary school had a negative association with test scores, grades, retention, and referral to special education in fifth grade, the association was largely insignificant once controls were introduced for the family and academic performance in first grade (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996). In other words, mobile students came from poorer families and had lower academic performance before they were mobile, a finding supported by other studies (Nelson et al., 1996).

Several national studies have also examined the impact of student mobility on the academic performance of students across grade levels. These studies were based on a national health survey that provided controls for the demographic characteristics of students but not prior educational performance. These studies found that only frequent—three or more—family moves predicted grade retention (Simpson & Fowler, 1994; Wood et al., 1993). However, another study based on the same data found that even one residential move had a negative impact on a combined measure of both academic and behavioral aspects of school performance, although the negative association was found only among children who did not live with both biological parents (Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998). The authors suggest that two-parent families may have more so-called "social capital" that can help mitigate the effects of residential mobility (Coleman, 1987).

Finally, there is strong evidence that mobility during elementary school as well as during high school diminishes the prospects for graduation. One study that tracked children from early childhood to young adulthood found that residential mobility reduced the odds of high school graduation even after controlling for a variety of family background variables (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994). Several studies based on the same national database of over 10,000 high school students found that school mobility between the first and eighth grades increased the odds of dropping out of school during high school even after controlling for eighth-grade achievement and other factors (Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996).

What Can Be Done?

The answer to this question depends on how one views this phenomenon. Some mobility is viewed largely as a *strategic* activity initiated by students and their families to serve their own interests and educational preferences. And there may be little that can be done to prevent mobility when mobility is a result of families' decisions to change jobs or residences. In this case, the only response is perhaps to better inform students and parents about the possible problems that can result from changing schools and how to mitigate them.

However, at least some mobility is neither strategic nor related to moving. Rather, both students and schools initiate student transfers in response to social as well as academic concerns. Consequently, much can and should be done both to prevent some types of mobility, especially those caused by school factors, and to mitigate some of the harmful effects from mobility.

Although not supported by formal research, experience suggests that schools and parents can help reduce unnecessary mobility and mitigate its harmful effects. Schools and districts can limit policies such as redistricting that contribute to unnecessary mobility. The most general yet potentially the most effective strategy to reduce mobility is to improve the overall quality of the school. Case studies have suggested that substantial and meaningful school reforms can dramatically reduce a school's student mobility rate. For example, in a three-year period, Hollibrook Accelerated School in Houston, Texas, reduced its student mobility rate from 104% to 47% (McCarthy & Still, 1993). School districts can also be flexible with school boundaries and provide transportation and other supports to help students in low-income families remain in their schools. Districts can also cooperate with each other to support transferring students.

In addition to these large-scale efforts, counselors, administrators, and other school staff can:

- Counsel students to remain in the school if at all possible. Staff can "problem solve" with a withdrawing student about how he or she could remain at least until the year end—for example, how the student could use public transportation or be transported by a family member if he or she moved out of the neighborhood.
- Prepare *in advance* for incoming transfer students and facilitate the transition of incoming transfer students *as soon as they arrive.*
- Establish *ongoing* activities and procedures to address the needs of new students.
- Assess the past enrollment history of incoming students, including the number of previous school changes, and closely monitor the educational progress of students with three or more previous school changes.

Parents and students may also be able to prevent unnecessary mobility as well as help mitigate the potentially harmful effects of mobility that may be necessary or desirable:

- Students and parents can attempt to resolve problems at school before initiating a school transfer.
- If possible, students can make school changes between semesters or at the end of the school year.
- When a transfer is made, parents should personally sign students into their new school and meet with a school counselor. They should also make sure that their child's school records are forwarded in a timely manner from their previous school.
- Parents should make a follow-up appointment with a school counselor and teachers two or three weeks after a transfer is made to see how their child is adjusting to the new school.

Conclusion

Although a substantial body of research suggests that students may be affected psychologically, socially, and academically from changing schools, the impact of mobility depends on such factors as the number of school changes, when they occur, the reason for the changes, and the student's personal and family situation.

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Family Literacy Improves Access to Education

Anne S. Robertson

Family literacy programs support a "strengths-based" approach to learning that respects how parents, grandparents, and other relatives help each other and help their children to do well in school. The number of family literacy programs is increasing around the country. Some programs are offered in schools, others are offered in community buildings, and still others use home visitors who come to the family's home to help with lessons. Most family literacy programs have three different ways parents and their children can be involved:

1. *Adult education*: You decide on your own educational goals—working toward a GED, receiving additional job training, or getting a college education.
2. *Parent education*: Join a group with other parents—or start one—to learn more about helping your child's growth and development. Together, you can learn new ways to handle your children's behavior and ways you can work with your children's teachers. Most programs have a regular activity called PACT time—*Parents And Children Together*—when parents and children play together in organized learning activities.
3. *Early childhood education*: One requirement to participate in most family literacy programs is that you must be the parent or guardian of at least one child under 8 years old. The younger child attends a preschool program while you are working on your GED or other goals. If there are older children in the family, you can learn ways to encourage the older child's learning.

Many communities like family literacy programs because they are flexible enough to adjust to different types of community and family needs. Most family literacy programs are offered through the local school district or community college. They may also be connected to local hospitals and other family support agencies. For more information, contact your school district or the following group:

National Center for Family Literacy
Waterfront Plaza, Suite 200
325 W. Main St.
Louisville, KY 40202
Telephone: 502-584-1133
Internet: http://www.famlit.org

Adapted from a March/April/May 2002 online *Parent News* article (http://npin.org/pnews/2002/pnew302/spot302.html).

School Placement Decisions: What Can Parents Do?

Saran Donahoo

Students in any given class have a wide range of academic skills and abilities, and schools employ a variety of different placement methods to help make sure that students are assigned to appropriate classrooms—e.g., remedial, college preparatory, etc.—and grade levels. Although there is currently no law that gives parents the right to determine where their children are placed in schools [1], parents can influence their children's teacher and classroom assignments. Here are some suggestions parents can use to help facilitate appropriate placement for their children:

- Find out how placement and gifted education decisions are made at the child's school.
- If more than one teacher is available for the child's next grade level, talk with the child's current teacher and school principal to help identify which teacher may have the best teaching approach for your child.
- Encourage the school to offer opportunities for parents to meet and talk with teachers for the child's next grade level, perhaps through the local parent-teacher organization.
- Learn more about what students are expected to know to be successful at each grade level.
- Monitor academic performance throughout the school year by checking progress on homework assignments, class projects, etc.
- Use time outside of school to help students work on academic skills.
- Find out what programs for skill improvement are available at the school and in the community (e.g., tutoring, homework clubs).

In most cases, schools do not have the personnel or resources to fully meet the needs of every child. Although parent involvement will not resolve placement issues, it can help to ensure that the child makes the most of the resources available at school and in the community.

Source

[1] Belter, Catherine A. (1997). Parental rights legislation: A bad idea. *Educational Leadership, 55*(3), 84-86.

Adapted from a June/July/August 2002 online *Parent News* article (http://npin.org/pnews/2002/pnew602/int602a.html).

About NPIN and *Parent News Offline*

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to collect and disseminate high-quality resources for parents, supported through the ERIC system, and maintained by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. NPIN has one of the largest noncommercial collections of parenting information on the Internet (http://npin.org) and offers question-answering services via a toll-free telephone number (800-583-4135) and by email through the AskERIC service (askeric@askeric.org).

Parent News is NPIN's Internet magazine that focuses on topics of interest to parents and professionals who work with parents. *Parent News Offline* presents selected *Parent News* articles for those without Internet access. We encourage you to share both our online and offline resources with parenting groups, schools, and community initiatives.

In each article, references identified with an ED (ERIC document) or EJ (ERIC journal) number are cited in the ERIC database. Most documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 1,000 locations worldwide (see http://www.ed.gov/Programs/EROD). They can also be ordered through EDRS: 800-443-ERIC or online at http://www.edrs.com/Webstore/Express.cfm. Journal articles are available from the original journal, interlibrary loan services, or article reproduction clearinghouses such as Ingenta (800-296-2221).

ED Celebrates NCLB Anniversary

The January 21, 2003, broadcast of *Education News Parents Can Use* celebrated the anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act. The topic was "Empowering Parents, Creating Change." Some of the discussion questions included the following:

- How does the No Child Left Behind Act impact my home and community?
- What options are available to parents whose children are attending underperforming and unsafe schools?
- What can parents do to promote reading excellence in schools?
- How are parents using the choice options in the law to strengthen their children's school and learning community?
- How can parents best support their children's educational growth during the after-school hours and in the home?
- How can I help develop my child's study skills and the quality of her homework assignments?

Find the archived Webcast at http://www.connectlive.com/events/ednews/.

Related NPIN resources of interest to parents are available on the Web at http://npin.org.

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Parent News

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In This Issue

Parent-School Partnerships and NCLB

Anne S. Robertson

Every year, parents struggle with determining how to make connections with teachers, principals, or other school personnel to help resolve a problem related to their child's education. Susan Benjamin and Susan Sanchez (1996), authors of *Should I Go to the Teacher? Developing a Cooperative Relationship with Your Child's School Community*, stress the value of maintaining communication between parents and their child's school community throughout the year, even if there are no specific problems. Unfortunately, developing open communication and effective partnerships for many parents and teachers may not come naturally ([2], p. 17).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has increased expectations for parent-school partnership in several important ways. For example, NCLB gives parents access to information about their child's teacher and her or his credentials, and also requires that schools make "adequate yearly progress" as reflected by an annual rise in standardized assessment scores (http://nclb.gov/start/facts/yearly.html).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has increased expectations for parent-school partnerships in several important ways.

As might be expected during the early stages of a new initiative, there is confusion and anxiety on the part of parents and teachers about how students, families, and school staff will be affected by NCLB. Here are some ways parents can help resolve some of the communication problems resulting from the NCLB standards:

Talk with your child's teacher first. When a parent has a concern that his or her child cannot resolve and the issue requires parental intervention, the first step is to speak directly with the child's teacher. Rather than trying to discuss the problem casually when the child is being picked up at the end of the school day, it is usually helpful to make an appointment with the teacher. Setting a time and location in advance allows both the parent and the teacher to discuss the problem without distraction. Parents should leave the parent-teacher meeting with a plan that will address the concern and that will be implemented within 2 or 3 weeks.

Talk with the principal. The parent may wish to meet with the principal if the parent or teacher feels that the principal's involvement would be helpful, if the parent and teacher are unable to agree on an appropriate resolution to the concern, or if the plan did not improve the situation within an agreed-upon length of time. The role of the principal in parent-school partnerships is important because the principal typically sets the tone for the school atmosphere and motivates staff ([2],

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p. 36). The principal also has a broad knowledge of curriculum, discipline, and special needs alternatives that are helpful for children. The principal can act as a natural advocate for children while balancing the needs of the school staff. Once again, parents should expect to leave the meeting with an identified plan that will address the problem within 2 or 3 weeks.

It is not unusual for the teacher, principal, or parent to request a "team meeting" to discuss an educational plan for a specific child.

Take time to view the bigger picture. It is easy for concerned parents to get caught up in their child's emotional recounting of a distressing school incident or poor performance on a standardized test. However, taking the time to listen to the child while encouraging him or her to examine the problem or think of other points of view and possible remedies can help build the child's competence to resolve future incidents. This strategy also gives parents time to reflect rather than pass judgment too quickly and make a hasty phone call to the school. The parents may still need to call the teacher or school to get all the facts, but the emphasis is on listening and problem solving rather than placing blame ([2], pp. 87-101).

Work within the system. Almost all organizations have procedures or policies for resolving conflicts. Schools are certainly no exception, although their procedures may vary. Smaller schools may be casual with their conflict resolution policies, while other schools—particularly larger ones—may have a set of complex procedures. Asking the principal for a copy of the student's or parent's guide to the school's policies will give the parent more information about the school's rules and unique culture.

Request a team meeting. It is not unusual for the teacher, principal, or parent to request a "team meeting" to discuss an educational plan for a specific child. The team typically includes the child's teachers, the principal, the parents, and any school personnel who might provide support for the child's successful development. Depending on the nature of the problem, parents may request the participation of other school personnel, such as the special education teacher, the school counselor, the district's occupational therapist, or the school psychologist. Parents who are unfamiliar with the team approach may feel uncomfortable in or intimidated by a meeting where there are several professionals discussing their child. Parents should keep in mind that they are equal partners on their child's educational team and should feel free to ask questions, make contributions when appropriate, and ask for clarification about the role of each school professional present at the meeting. Parents may also wish to bring another family member, friend, or counselor who can assist with advocating for the child by providing more information about their child's strengths and educational needs ([1], pp. 4-5). The goal of the team should be to work together to develop a plan that will support the child's healthy development. Once again, the parents should expect to see the plan implemented within 2 to 3 weeks.

Take time to understand standardized test results and your child's options. If test scores identify your child or your child's school as being in need of support, talk with your child's teacher and principal about the specifics of the test results. Find out what the results mean in the larger context of your child's work and the school environment. School principals and districts are required to develop a plan to improve the school's weak areas of performance, and it is possible that with a new plan in place, or with special tutoring for your child, you will feel comfortable that the school staff is addressing your concerns.

Understand the pros and cons of moving to a new school. If your child's school has been identified as "needing support" and the best option appears to be a move to a neighboring school, it is important to be aware that it will take time for your child to adjust. While a move may provide an enhanced academic environment, your child may be more concerned about adjusting to a new school culture and making new friends. A recent summary of research suggests that moving from one school to another, particularly if the child moves three or more times during his or her school experience, can increase the child's likelihood of performing poorly in school and dropping out [3]. If the parent feels that a move is the best option, then preparing the child in advance, visiting the school, and working closely with the school staff during the first few months of the transition will be helpful for the child's adjustment.

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Children and Grief

Nancy McEntire

The death of a loved one is a part of the life cycle that brings grief to children as well as to adults. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 4% of single parents had been widowed; 13.9% of these households included children under the age of 12 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). In addition to the death of a parent, many children may also experience the death of a grandparent, sibling, or friend. Parents and teachers can play an important role in helping children deal with loss. This Digest discusses psychological tasks that appear to be essential to children's adjustment, how children understand death and react to the death of a loved one, and how parents and teachers can help children cope with loss.

Children's "Tasks" during Mourning

The Harvard Child Bereavement Study (HCBS), co-directed by J. W. Worden, interviewed and tested 125 children between the ages of 6 and 17 and their families. Standardized instruments, such as the Smilansky Death Questionnaire and the Child Behavior Checklist, as well as interviews, were used in this study. Of these children, 74% had lost a father, and 26% had lost a mother. A similar group of 70 children who had not suffered such bereavement were similarly studied. Worden distinguished among four tasks of mourning for these children: (1) accepting the reality of loss, (2) experiencing the pain or emotional aspects of loss, (3) adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing, and (4) relocating the person within one's life and finding ways to memorialize the person (Worden, 1996, pp. 13-15).

Christian (1997), a professor of early childhood education who worked with families with AIDS, observes that, unlike adults, some children may not realize that they can survive without the deceased parent. Baker and Sedney (1996), based on clinical experience and interviews, list early tasks of bereavement for children including self-protection or the need for assurance that they will be safe and cared for. Understanding the death, another task, requires the provision of information to these children on how or why the death occurred. Some experts believe that vague abstractions may leave a child believing that deceased parents could return if they wanted to do so (Corr & Corr, 1996, pp. 120-121). As they mature, experts agree, children need to be able to ask questions about the death repeatedly and to work through their developing understanding of such a major event (Christian, 1997).

How Do Children Understand Death?

Experts suggest that understanding death involves comprehending the concepts of irreversibility, finality, inevitability, and causality (Corr & Corr, 1996). A study of 50 children between the ages of 7 and 12 years explored the understanding of these concepts as affected by variables such as age, experience, and cognitive development (Cuddy-Casey et al., 1997). Based on experience gained from being counselors at the New England Center for Loss and Transition, Emswiler and Emswiler (2000) concluded that prior to age 3, babies may sense an absence among those in their immediate world and miss a familiar person who is gone, but they are unlikely to understand the difference between a temporary absence and death. A preschool child may talk about death but may still expect the person to come back. The National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) has pulled together the work of several professionals who work with grief in children. This group theorizes that before age 5, most children do not realize that all people, including themselves, will die. By ages 9 or 10, however, most children have developed an understanding of death as final, irreversible, and inescapable (Worden, 1996, pp. 10-11; NCVC, 2003).

How Do Children React to the Death of a Loved One?

In the HCBS study of children ages 6 to 17 who had lost a parent, children reacted with sadness and tears to the news. In most cases, the crying subsided or lessened over time, although 13% of children still cried daily or weekly even after a year had passed (Worden, 1996). Tears often were triggered by the sight of others crying. Bereaved children also became anxious over the safety of other loved ones or themselves. Many children in this study expressed guilt about remembered misbehavior or missed opportunities to express affection (Worden, 1996).

Parents and teachers may observe outbursts of anger and acting-out behavior among children who have lost a loved one. Somaticization (physical complaints without a disease or physical basis to account for them) increased during the first year after the death of a loved one in 13% of the children studied (Worden, 1996). The number of children experiencing serious illness during the first year increased but fell to match the percentage of nonbereaved children during the second year. A similar pattern was observed in the number of accidents experienced by bereaved children (Worden, 1996).

How Can Parents Help?

Shaw, a specialist in bereavement, trauma, and loss, suggests that parents explain death to children in simple, age-appropriate terms. Shaw (1999) points out that vague euphemisms may be confusing and frightening. She suggests that parents avoid trying to suppress the child's tears or expressions of grief, help the child put feelings into words, and provide honest answers to questions. Children can be given the choice to attend the funeral or other memorial services. If children choose to attend, parents can prepare them beforehand for what they may see and hear, including the grief others may

show. Parents can also help children find ways to honor and remember the deceased. Parents may need to reassure children that it is all right for them to resume normal daily activities as well as to play and laugh again (Shaw, 1999).

How Can Teachers Help?

Hogan (2002) suggests that teachers can ease a bereaved child's return to school by offering immediate sympathy to the child, attending the funeral, and talking to the class about the death before the child's return. The teacher can be sensitive to the possibility that activities related to family may make the child uncomfortable. Holidays often bring renewed sadness, and teachers can help children cope with these times of renewed sorrow. The teacher may also mention that others have lost a loved one, so that the child feels less alone and different. Children who have lost a family member can be reassured that in time they will be happy again and that it is appropriate for them to play and have fun.

What Are Signs That a Grieving Child Needs Extra Help?

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1998) cautions parents and teachers that, although most children grieve less over time, counseling might be considered if children exhibit several of these behaviors over an extended period:

- Depression so severe that a child shows little interest in daily activities
- Inability to sleep, eat normally, or be alone
- Regression in behavior to that of a less-mature child
- Imitation of the deceased person
- Repeatedly wishing to join the deceased
- Loss of interest in friends or play
- Refusal to attend school or a persistent and marked drop in school achievement

Conclusion

The death of a parent or loved one during childhood can have profound and lasting effects (Harris, 1995). Further research on the long-term effects of various interventions is needed. The literature suggests that although adults cannot shield children from the sorrow caused by the death of a loved one, they can guide and comfort them through the process of mourning.

Children's Books on Death and Grief

Those who work with grieving children often use literature such as that recommended by Corr (2000) and others (*Children's Books on Death and Dying,* 1997). These recommended titles include the following books:

Adler, C. S. (1993). *Daddy's Climbing Tree.* New York: Clarion Books. A father is killed in a hit-and-run accident.

Anderson, Leone. (1979). *It's O.K. to Cry.* Illus. by Richard Wahl. Elgin, IL: Child's World. Two brothers grieve the death of an uncle.

Bartoli, Jennifer. (1975). *Nonna.* Illus. by Joan Drescher. New York: Harvey House. A family deals with a grandmother's death.

Jones, Penelope. (1981). *Holding Together.* New York: Bradbury Press. Sisters help each other through the illness and death of their mother.

Stiles, Norman. (1984). *I'll Miss You, Mr. Hooper.* Illus. by Joe Mathieu. New York: Random House. Big Bird mourns the death of Mr. Hooper. Contains notes for parents.

Viorst, Judith. (1971). *The Tenth Good Thing about Barney.* Illus. by Erik Blegvad. New York: Antheneum. A child learns about death through the loss of a pet.

Wolfelt, Alan. (2000). *Healing Your Grieving Heart: 100 Practical Ideas for Kids.* Ft. Collins, CO: Companion Press. Children 6-12 who have had a loved one die find ideas to help with the grief.

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Volunteer School-Parent Groups Find Renewed Relevance

Anne S. Robertson

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of parental involvement in education. The new No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation promotes parent participation in a variety of ways, including increasing school choice for some parents and requiring schools to provide information to parents about the educational backgrounds of each of their children's teachers. Booned by this heightened imperative on parent participation, parents and teachers are searching for ways to increase parent involvement in the educational process. One result is the expansion of existing school-parent organizations and the creation of new parent groups with an educational focus.

Organizations such as the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) have a long history of supporting parent-teacher partnerships at the local and national level. In 1997, the PTA released *Standards for Parental Involvement* (http://npin.org/pnews/1997/pnew797/pnew797e.html), which has been adopted by many schools and organizations across the country. Increased efforts from traditional parent-school organizations and emerging new parent or citizen groups are developing parent involvement strategies to address a host of concerns about educational quality.

This article provides more information about both the traditional and new parent organizations that focus on educational growth and development.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) started in 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers (NCM). It brought together educational and philanthropic leaders to advocate improvements in education and public health and the formation of a juvenile court system that would not prosecute and incarcerate children as adults. By the early 1900s, NCM had expanded to include fathers and teachers. In 1924, NCM also started its own child welfare publication and adopted a new name, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. The organization later became known as the National PTA. Currently the PTA may be the most widely recognized organization, at the local, state, and national levels, engaged in activities to encourage parents and teachers to collaborate to improve public education and child welfare.

In some communities, the PTA (or PTSA for Parent Teacher Student Association) supports the local school district and its teachers and advocates for educational change within the community. In other communities, the PTA may be identified with a monthly "mothers' meeting" and school fundraisers. The nature of the local PTA group varies depending on the goals of the local leadership and the national organization.

In recent years, some parents have become frustrated with their local PTA when the group has focused primarily on tasks such as fundraising for school projects or for activities that the parents believed had little relevance to improving educational outcomes in the community. It is important for concerned parents to remember that the local PTAs are part of a national organization. National PTA is available to provide technical assistance to local organizations to get the organization "back on track" with the goals of improving education and child welfare.

Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is a generic term that encompasses many other parent-teacher groups that choose to remain independent of the PTA. Often they are single-school groups that are concerned primarily with issues relevant to their own schools and communities. They are often not interested in the national lobbying efforts of the National PTA. The PTO provides a variety of supports and services at an expense that may be additional to the group membership rate. PTO, Inc., has a Web site with resources and information, including tips for starting your own "family night." The National PTO Network is a new initiative sponsored by PTO, Inc., and outlines how groups can purchase a number of additional benefits, including in-depth guidebooks, trade show/sharing opportunities, and group insurance packages. Groups that have opted to affiliate with the national PTO often do so because of disagreements they have with the National PTA's lobbying agenda and to keep all of their membership dues in the local community.

An example of a volunteer parent group that is not affiliated with the PTA or PTO is the Asian American Parent Association (AAPA), which was formed in 1991 by a group of concerned parents to work primarily with California's Cupertino and Fremont school districts to increase opportunities for children of Asian descent.

Volunteer school-parent groups serve not only as helpful resources for information related to NCLB but also as ongoing support systems for local schools, children, and families. Many groups expand their services to provide school supplies, clothing, or food for needy children and their families.

Find the full article, with description of other groups, at http://npin.org/pnews/2003/pnew103/spot103.html.

About NPIN and *Parent News Offline*

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) was funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1992 to collect and disseminate high-quality resources for parents. NPIN is supported through the ERIC system and maintained by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. NPIN's Web site is one of the largest noncommercial collections of parenting information on the Internet (http://npin.org). In addition to its Web site, NPIN offers question-answering services via a toll-free telephone number (800-583-4135) and by email through the AskERIC service (askeric@askeric.org).

Another service provided by NPIN is *Parent News*, an Internet magazine that focuses on topics of interest to parents and professionals who work with parents. Many of the articles featured in *Parent News* have been developed in direct response to frequently asked questions. *Parent News Offline* has been created in response to requests for a newsletter that would introduce those without Internet access to the activities and information available through NPIN. We encourage you to share both our online and offline resources, including ERIC/EECE Digests, with parenting groups, schools, and community initiatives.

Making Homework Work

Peggy Patten

Harris M. Cooper, a researcher on homework policies and practices and author of *The Battle over Homework*, described the cycle of support and opposition to homework over the past 70 years in the United States. In his synthesis of the research on homework, Harris found both positive and negative effects. The goal for schools and parents, Cooper said, should be to emphasize the positive effects of homework and reduce its negative effects.

The online version of this article identifies some of the potential positive and negative effects of homework, offers tips parents can use to help children get the most out of homework, and suggests ways that parents can tell if their child is getting too much homework and raise the topic of excessive homework with teachers. The article also lists additional resources about homework.

Find the full article at http://npin.org/pnews/2003/pnew103/int103a.html.

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