**School Improvement
Specialist Training Materials:
Performance Standards,
Improving Schools, and
Literature Review**

**Module 3—
School-Family-Community
Connections**

December 2005

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The School Improvement Specialist Project prepared seven modules. School improvement specialists, as defined by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia, are change agents who work with schools to help them improve in the following areas so as to increase student achievement. These modules are intended to provide training materials for educators seeking professional development to prepare them for a new level of work.

Module 1—Shared Leadership
Module 2—Learning Culture
Module 3—School-Family-Community Connections
Module 4—Effective Teaching
Module 5—Shared Goals for Learning
Module 6—Aligned and Balanced Curriculum
Module 7—Purposeful Student Assessment

Each module has three sections:

1. Standards: Each set of content standards and performance indicators helps school improvement specialists assess their skills and knowledge related to each topic. The rubric format provides both a measurement for self-assessment and goals for self-improvement.
2. Improving Schools: These briefs provide research- and practice-based information to help school improvement specialists consider how they might address strengths and weaknesses in the schools where they work. The information contained in the briefs is often appropriate for sharing with teachers and principals; each includes information about strategies and practices that can be implemented in schools, resources to be consulted for more information, tools for facilitating thinking about and working on school issues, and real-life stories from school improvement specialists who offer their advice and experiences.
3. Literature Review: The reviews of research literature summarize the best available information about the topic of each module. They can be used by school improvement specialists to expand their knowledge base and shared with school staffs as part of professional development activities.

School-Family-Community Connections
Content Standards and Performance Indicators for School Improvement Specialists
Self-Assessment Tool

School-Family-Community Connections: This matrix measures the extent to which a school improvement specialist has the knowledge and skills to assist a school in developing its capacity for effective school-family-community connections, as reflected by the following characteristics: (1) developing policies, organizational structures, and programs that connect the school with families and the community; (2) using the knowledge base on family involvement to enhance school programs and practices; (3) assessing the relative success of a school's efforts to connect with its families and communities; (4) developing the cultural proficiency of faculty and staff to connect with all families and communities represented in the student body; and (5) assessing community resources to support the academic, social, and physical development of students.

Knowledge or Skill	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Novice
1. Developing policies, structures, and programs that function to connect school faculty and staff with all families within the school community	The school improvement specialist a. facilitates ongoing reflection among administrators, teachers, and staff about the extent to which existing policies, structures, and programs are working to enhance school-family connections (e.g., via asking of questions related to this area) b. coaches school leaders in the integration of effective programs and practices related to school-family-community connections into their overall school improvement planning c. coaches school leaders and faculty/staff in the ongoing collection and analysis of data for continuous assessment of their programs and practices in this area	The school improvement specialist a. integrates conversations about proactive use of structures and programs designed to engage families with their students into ongoing consulting with administrators, faculty, and staff b. engages faculty and staff in interactive professional learning focused on research-based structures and programs associated with effective school-family-community connections c. facilitates school leaders, faculty, and staff in data collection about current functioning of policies, structures, and programs designed to enhance school-family connections	The school improvement specialist a. communicates research and theory related to programs and practices that promote effective school-family-community connections to the school's leadership team b. works with school leadership and selected school staff to gather information about the current status and relative effectiveness of their school's programs and practices in this area c. encourages school leaders to include a family-community component in their school's ongoing school improvement planning process	The school improvement specialist a. knows the kinds of policies, structures, and programs that support effective school-family-community connections b. stays abreast of the research and knowledge base related to policies, structures, and programs in this area c. gathers information from a wide range of sources regarding the current status of a school's efforts to connect with families and communities

Knowledge or Skill	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Novice
2. Using the knowledge base on family involvement to enhance programs and practices in their school	The school improvement specialist a. supports school leaders in their efforts to communicate to all stakeholder groups programs and practices that enhance family and community engagement with their children's learning in school b. coaches school leaders in using research-based principles and practices to make decisions about school-family-community issues in their school	The school improvement specialist a. integrates information about effective engagement of families and communities in students' learning into a range of professional learning topics (e.g., classroom management, authentic assessment, etc.) b. facilitates faculty and staff in an examination of the exemplary programs and practices appropriate for the various populations served by the school	The school improvement specialist a. shares the research, theory, and effective practice in this field with school leaders, faculty, and staff b. encourages school leaders, faculty, and staff to adopt practices and programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in engaging families and communities of traditionally underinvolved populations (e.g., English language learners, low-SES groups)	The school improvement specialist a. knows the research and related literature that examines the relationship between different types of school-family-community connections and student academic progress b. knows the range and scope of the school's existing programs, as well as the extent to which families of different populations of students are participating in these programs and services
3. Assessing the relative success of a school's efforts to connect with its families and communities	The school improvement specialist a. coaches school leaders, faculty, and staff in the use of appropriate data collection tools and strategies to assess their current practice b. coaches school leaders, faculty, and staff in data analysis, including disaggregation of data c. mentors school leaders as they facilitate reflection on the part of individuals and groups, based on assessment data	The school improvement specialist a. facilitates school leaders, faculty, and staff in the use of appropriate data-collection tools and strategies to assess their current practice b. assists school leaders, faculty, and staff in data analysis, including disaggregation of data c. guides school leaders, faculty, and staff in drawing conclusions and developing of implications based on data	The school improvement specialist a. uses appropriate data collection tools and strategies to assess a school's current practices related to family and community involvement with the school b. disaggregates data to identify the impact of a school's current programs and practices on families of different SES, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds c. provides feedback to school leaders, faculty, and staff related to their current practice in a nonjudgmental manner	The school improvement specialist a. knows how to access data collection tools and strategies that can be used to assess a school's current practices in the areas of school-family-community connections b. knows how to ensure that all segments of a school's population (i.e., families and communities of students from all SES levels, cultures, ethnicities) are considered in data collection efforts

Knowledge or Skill	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Novice
4. Developing the cultural proficiency among school staff that will enable successful engagement with families from all SES, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds	The school improvement specialist a. coaches leaders in the development of a vision of cultural proficiency for school-family-community relations b. coaches leaders, faculty, and staff in ongoing assessments of their individual and collective cultural proficiency c. mentors leaders in their facilitation of respectful dialogue between and among different stakeholders in the school community	The school improvement specialist a. facilitates reflection of school leaders, faculty, and staff about their own cultural proficiency through the posing of appropriate questions b. engages faculty and staff in an audit of the school's programs and practices using principles of cultural proficiency c. facilitates respectful dialogue between members of a school faculty/staff and families and community members	The school improvement specialist a. communicates the concept of cultural proficiency to school leaders, faculty, and staff—both formally (through presentations, provision of appropriate resources) and informally (in conversation) b. knows about programs and processes that have been successful in reaching families and groups from diverse cultures c. models respectful dialogue with families and community members from all segments of the school community	The school improvement specialist a. understands the concept of cultural proficiency as it applies to school-family-community connections b. uses principles of cultural proficiency in interactions with school faculty and staff and the broader school community c. is aware of the extent to which membership in White, middle class groups conveys privileges not routinely available to other groups
5. Accessing community resources to support the academic, social, and emotional development of all students within the school	The school improvement specialist a. coaches school leaders and staff in their efforts to expand and deepen their relationships with community and business leaders b. promotes reflection among members of the school staff regarding the extent to which they are proactive in interfacing with community agencies and resources that support students' academic, physical, emotional, and social development c. coaches faculty and staff in their communications with families about available community resources and programs that may support their children's academic, physical, emotional, and social development	The school improvement specialist a. facilitates the formation or extension of relationships between school staff and community and business leaders b. assists school staff in the development of strategic plans to increase community and business support for the school and its students c. helps school staff develop programs and strategies to connect students and their families with appropriate community resources	The school improvement specialist a. helps school staff make contact with appropriate community-based programs, businesses, and other agencies that may support instructional programs or individual student's academic or social development b. identifies cultural and economic resources in all communities represented in the student body of the school and discusses these resources with school leaders c. identifies formal and informal community leaders among the various communities represented in the student body and talks with school leaders about the potential benefits of developing relationships with these leaders	The school improvement specialist a. knows how to access both public and private community programs (e.g., community-based youth programs) as well as businesses and other agencies concerned with youth development b. knows how to identify community resources—both cultural and economic—in all communities represented in the student body c. knows the importance of identifying and working with formal and informal community leaders in the various communities represented in the student body

Engaging Families and Community

It would be hard to find any educator who would claim that parent and community involvement in education is unimportant or irrelevant to the task of educating children. According to a synthesis of research conducted in 2002 by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp, families who are involved with their children's education have a major impact on academic performance, attendance, and behavior. The authors conclude that "when families of all backgrounds are engaged in their children's learning, their children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and pursue higher education" (p. 73).

A recent examination of experimental and quasi-experimental research conducted by Kavita Mittapalli for Edvantia (2005) affirms the positive relationship between family involvement and student achievement. This relationship holds true across families of all socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds, and for students at all ages and levels. The main student benefits include

- higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests
- higher scores in mathematics, reading, and writing
- more positive attitudes towards school and better attendance
- more classes passed and credits earned
- lower percentages of students receiving special education services
- better behavior
- more participation in enrichment activities

Although family involvement typically diminishes as students get older, students benefit from family engagement through all grade levels. In addition, the community provides a framework and reinforcement for family efforts on behalf of children. When the community is involved, the "adults in a child's life—parents, school personnel, community members—interact positively and create a caring and predictable environment conducive to child development and learning" (James Comer as cited in Weiss et al., 2005, p. xx.)

While the value of family and community involvement with and support of children's learning is widely recognized, it can be difficult for schools to envision what such engagement could look like beyond head counts of volunteers, people attending school events, or parents appearing for teacher conferences. Educators may also find it hard to believe that the benefit of strong collaborative relationships with families and communities is worth the time and effort required to develop and implement an outreach effort. In most, if not all, public school systems, the chain of accountability is hierarchical. Teachers report to principals, who report to district administrators, who report to state departments of education, who must operate in accordance with state legislation and federal mandates. Although, ultimately, schools belong to taxpayers, people for whom this hierarchical structure is a daily, demanding reality can find it hard to imagine that the views of families and community members will not simply add another, and possibly conflicting, layer of accountability. It is more common to see family involvement programs that inform families about school practices and enlist their support than to see programs that engage families in dialogue and collaborative activities. Yet schools exist whose personnel have achieved and value collaborative relationships with families and

communities. Some are described in the stories on these pages and on Web sites and books listed in the resources.

The Changing Face of Our Schools

This issue of *Improving Schools* pays attention to building relationships with culturally diverse and/or low-income communities in recognition that minority populations in the United States have dramatically increased and are growing at much faster rates than the general U.S. population. According to projections by the U.S. Census Bureau, one in four Americans is now a person of color. The National Center for Education Statistics projects that in 2008, 41% of all students will be minorities; however, only 5% of their teachers will be minorities. In that very near future, 42% of all public schools will have no minority teachers (Ritter et al., 2000).

Forming relationships between schools and families of one's own culture takes time and energy. Forming relationships with families whose values, beliefs, and assumptions are unfamiliar requires, in addition to time and energy, sensitivity, commitment, and persistence. Such relationships must begin with the child. If families believe school personnel genuinely care about the well being of their children, and if school personnel communicate the belief that families want to help their children succeed in school, a basis for a positive relationship can be formed. If either believes otherwise, a productive relationship is unlikely. Therefore, school people must consider how to communicate that they care for children and have respect for families to begin the work of establishing collaborative alliances.

The Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School in Boston, an urban public school serving a racially and socioeconomically diverse population, offers an example of caring alliances built in simple ways. Approximately 90% of O'Hearn parents are involved in one or more of the school's family activities. According to Mapp (1997),

> Members of the O'Hearn community—parent volunteers, the principal, teachers, the secretary, even the custodian—connect with parents through activities and programs specifically designed to welcome families into the school. Staff members also work hard to "honor" families, a process of validating any type of contribution parents can make, whether it be reading to a child at home, donating a book to the school library, or being active in school governance. According to the school's principal, Bill Henderson, "There are three principles that we follow here at the school that I think are key in planning family activities. You want to have some food, have some fun, and always have a focus on the children. We do these things to build good will and trust, to make families feel welcome here. The activities should be interactive or entertaining for parents, and the focus should always be on the children." (pp. 1-4)

Whys and Ways to Connect

Before educators begin to plan for improving the quality of relationships with families and communities, they should first consider their purposes for such relationships.

Four Approaches

Heather Weiss and colleagues (2005) describe four frameworks that guide school and community relationships: family-school partnership, comprehensive school improvement, funds of knowledge and empowerment approaches. Some descriptions and examples of these frameworks are provided in the following paragraphs.

In a *family-school partnership* the purpose is to create family-like schools where families and educators together form a network of support and encouragement for the children they share. Family members are active in the school, and the school both validates their contributions and adapts to their cultures. Equally, families know and support school routines and practices and encourage academic pursuits in the home. The Patrick O'Hearn School, mentioned in the previous story, is an example of a family-school partnership.

The *comprehensive school improvement* model as described by James Comer, restructures schools by forming the following teams:

- the school planning and management team includes teachers and parents and is responsible for developing and monitoring plans for the academic, school climate, and staff development goals
- the parent team operates at three levels: (1) the majority of families attends events and conferences and supports learning at home, (2) parents volunteer in the school and function as paid aides, and (3) members serve on the planning and management team
- the student and staff support team includes the school counselor, nurse, psychologist, and others who consult with teachers and the school planning team on child development and behavior management issues

In these schools family and community are integral to school functioning.

The *funds of knowledge* framework is based on the understanding that families have knowledge and skills that teachers can use in their instruction. School staff view family and community members as experts who can share what they know about budget and finance, nutrition and health, art, music, and so on. At the same time, the community itself might offer topics for study. The funds of knowledge approach "rejects one-way attempts to replicate and transmit school values and activities to the home, regardless of the culture or relevance these values have for the families and communities they try to influence" (Weiss et al., 2005, p. xxii). The Foxfire program, which originated in Georgia in the 1970s, is an example of this type of collaboration. Students define their topics of interest and design their investigations, identifying and connecting with community members who can inform and assist them. Their results are then shared with community members (Keyes & Gregg, 2003, p. xx).

Empowerment approaches instill families with the skills and knowledge they need to advocate for better schools and better outcomes for children. The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Kentucky (www.cipl.org) is one example of an organization whose aim is to empower families. The Institute offers parents a broad base of knowledge and skills for working within the education system. It then requires parents to complete a project that will do three things: improve student achievement, engage more parents in children's learning, and have a lasting impact. This approach is more commonly used by community-based organizations than by schools. However, schools that are open and forthcoming with information about school policies, practices, and outcomes and that include family and community members in decision-making structures are also empowering.

Forming productive relationships with families and communities is a process more than a program. As schools, families, and communities grow more comfortable with one another, mutual trust strengthens and relationships that began simply can evolve to include more complex and collaborative activities.

Six Ways to Cooperate

While Weiss describes four frameworks or philosophical approaches to school-family connections, Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, identifies six types of cooperation between families, schools, and other community organizations that have value whatever approach is used (Epstein et al., 1997). Epstein's types of cooperation are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Some descriptions and examples of these are provided in the following paragraphs.

- Parenting: Schools provide information and training to parents about the stages of child development and how to support their children's healthy maturation. Those who offer such information should be knowledgeable about the cultures of their audiences, so the information offered is culturally appropriate. Behaviors that might be rewarded in some cultures are discouraged in others.
- Communicating: Schools give parents information about school programs and student progress. Important information should be disseminated early, more than once, through more than one channel, and in ways families can understand. For example, if the home language is other than English, information should be provided in that language. For some schools, improving communication involves technology such as e-mail messages and interactive phone systems. When a high school in Virginia established an interactive voice mail system, parent attendance at freshmen orientation jumped from 50 to 1,000 (Viadero, 2005).
- Volunteering: The presence of family and community volunteers in the school makes visible to students that many people in their world consider education to be important and are working to support their learning. However, programs must be planned so volunteers are not limited to clerical duties, they receive adequate training for tutoring or other assistance to students, and they are recruited from all the school's cultures.

- Learning at home: Educators at the school help parents understand the most effective methods for supervising their children's academic progress. Such guidance should take into account the home circumstances of all families. It would be unrealistic, for example, to advise families who live in two rooms to arrange a quiet place at home for children to study, or to suggest to families struggling to pay the rent that they should provide Internet access for research projects. In addition to offering guidance, school personnel should also solicit from families information about their children's learning during home or community activities. Some children may help their parents in small businesses, cook meals, supervise younger children, or participate in community arts programs.
- Decision making: Schools give parents roles in school decision-making processes, as well as the training and information they need to contribute. Give attention to including parents from all segments of the school's communities. Also, meetings should be designed and facilitated so parents feel encouraged to contribute and know their contributions are respected.
- Collaborating with the community: Schools help families gain access to support services offered by other agencies and work with students to contribute to the community. Service learning is one example of contributing to the community. Another is the use of the community as curriculum. Community schools often house a variety of service agencies under the same roof as the school.

Developing strong relationships with families and communities requires skill and thought that few teachers or administrators are likely to have learned in their preservice education or the time to develop since. School improvement specialists may be called on to help schools set goals, plan actions, and assess outcomes. They should also be prepared to help teachers and administrators learn how to relate to families from different cultures, plan productive parent conferences, identify community resources, or improve home-school communication.

Sample Instrument for Assessing Your School's Potential for Building Effective Family and Community Partnerships

Consider the following characteristics at your school, and circle the appropriate numerical value (1 = *high* and 5 = *low*) to rate your school's potential for building partnerships:

	High				**Low**
1. The school's location in the community	1	2	3	4	5
2. The overall appearance of the facility	1	2	3	4	5
3. The school's announcement board and signage	1	2	3	4	5
4. The appearance and organization of the front office	1	2	3	4	5
5. The front office's information and bulletin boards	1	2	3	4	5

6. The front office display of key community visitors   1   2   3   4   5

7. The front office monthly display of a featured teacher and volunteer   1   2   3   4   5

8. The school's mission displayed in the front office   1   2   3   4   5

9. Orderly classrooms that reflect the teacher's curriculum and style   1   2   3   4   5

10. Students' work displayed in classrooms and throughout the school   1   2   3   4   5

11. The overall classroom layout   1   2   3   4   5

12. How parents and visitors are greeted at the front office   1   2   3   4   5

13. The availability of translation services for limited English speakers   1   2   3   4   5

14. A clear understanding of who should support various visitor needs   1   2   3   4   5

15. A list of translators available to support various translation needs   1   2   3   4   5

16. A parent and community handbook outlining the school's polices   1   2   3   4   5

17. A weekly bulletin highlighting upcoming meetings and activities   1   2   3   4   5

18. Monthly or bimonthly school newspapers   1   2   3   4   5

19. A listing of each program's contact name and phone number   1   2   3   4   5

20. Clear communication materials for parents and the community   1   2   3   4   5

21. Adequate academic support services for students and families   1   2   3   4   5

22. Adequate health and human care referral services for families   1   2   3   4   5

23. Adequate health and human care services at the school site   1   2   3   4   5

24. Sufficient community-based partnerships for services   1   2   3   4   5

25. Sufficient community partnerships with all stakeholders   1   2   3   4   5

26. Sufficient child care programs at the school site   1   2   3   4   5

27. A clear process for volunteer development and donations   1   2   3   4   5

28. School policies and procedures that ensure student safety   1   2   3   4   5

29. School policies for volunteers to support students' achievement   1   2   3   4   5

30. Sufficient volunteer use of staff development training   1   2   3   4   5

31. Sufficient parent and community volunteer training   1   2   3   4   5

32. Effective partnerships with parents, families, and the community   1   2   3   4   5

List your school's three strongest characteristics that support partnership development:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

List three strategies that would strengthen your school's ability to build effective partnerships with various stakeholder groups:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Source: M. Burke & L. Picus. (2001). *Developing Community-Empowered Schools,* pp. 12-13, Corwin Press, Inc. Permission to reprint has been requested.

Getting to Know the Communities

Many of the traditional vehicles for parent and community involvement in schools—attending PTO meetings, volunteering, raising funds, helping to develop school improvement plans—help family and community members become familiar with schools. These traditional activities are less likely to help educators get to know the communities of their students, especially when those communities are culturally diverse.

One way of getting to know different cultures is to spend time in the school's communities visiting churches, shopping in local stores, attending events, and making friends. However, principals and teachers who don't live in these communities may find it difficult to spend sufficient time in them to come to know and be known, particularly when a school serves students from several culturally distinct communities.

Another way to approach a community is to develop relationships with community leaders that allow them to become informants about their cultures and advisors about how best to serve their children. Educators might start with people who run community-based after-school programs. Retired teachers, directors of community-based programs, and leaders of neighborhood religious organizations can also be good sources. They generally live in and belong to the neighborhoods where students live. They are likely to be trusted leaders themselves and will know of others who are highly regarded in the community. Relationships with one or two community leaders can be the jumping-off points, for each person can direct the sincere seeker to another.

When seeking advisors to help school people learn about a community, the goal should be to form relationships rather than to gather information. In the process of establishing relationships, educators will naturally come to learn about community norms, traditions, and values. Once trust is established, community leaders will likely extend themselves to be helpful. Approach contacts with community leaders as informal meetings with others who share your concern for the well-being of the communities' children and have expertise to offer. Getting together over lunch or coffee is likely to be more productive than holding formal meetings. It is also better to meet first in the community rather than the school.

While seeking expertise and support from community members for the school, educators may at the same time offer assistance and support to community efforts on behalf of children, such as improving communication between school and after-school program staffs, disseminating information about community-run summer programs, or announcing youth-related community events in the school newsletter.

Vignette for Discussion

An elementary school served an upper middle class neighborhood until boundaries were redrawn to also include lower income neighborhoods. The families in the new neighborhoods were predominantly African American. Over the years, the school developed a reputation for being unfriendly to those not from the "houses on the hill." It is now early in the school year for the school's new principal. She is not aware of the school's past history, but the perception of unfriendliness has already influenced some family interactions with school personnel.

An African American mother has been asked to come to school to meet with the principal. Her son is in the third grade. He has been sent to the office several times because he talks out of turn and won't stay in his seat. He is not aggressive or defiant, but has a voice that carries and talks to adults as if they are equals. The mother enters the new principal's office eating popcorn. School rules do not allow people to eat food while in school halls or offices.

- What issues does this vignette raise?
- What can the principal do to develop an alliance with this parent?

Resources

These resources include descriptions and, in some cases, examples of schools that have achieved productive relationships with families and communities, plus tools that schools can use to develop and assess their own efforts.

Developing Community-Empowered Schools by M. Burke and L. Picus. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2001.

This book offers information and workshop plans on topics such as policies and procedures that support school and community partnerships and how to empower and train staff for effective partnerships.

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins
www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm
The Center conducts and disseminates research, development, and policy analyses that produce new and useful knowledge and practices that help families, educators, and members of communities work together to improve schools, strengthen families, and enhance student learning and development.

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership
www.cipl.org
The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Kentucky is an award-winning program of the Prichard Committee. It has trained more than 1,200 parents from all income levels and ethnic backgrounds who now understand the need for change in their local schools and have the leadership skills necessary to help educators make and sustain improvements.

Engaging Families and Communities: Pathways to Educational Success by L. Decker and V. Decker. Fairfax, VA: National Community Education Association, 2000.
This book is intended to help educators weave some of the best ideas for creating and maintaining family and community engagement into a comprehensive, family-school-community involvement program tailored to their own communities.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action by J. Epstein, L. Coates, K. Salinas, M. Sanders, and B. Simon. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1997.
This handbook includes materials state, district, and school leaders can use to help schools develop and maintain partnerships with families and communities.

National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools
www.sedl.org/connections
This site provides research-based and practical information people need to take action and make connections between schools, families, and communities.

National Parent Teachers Association
www.pta.org/parent_resources.html
The PTA offers national standards for parent/family involvement programs as well as tools and other resources.

Communication Is the Key

The school improvement specialist stories that appear in Improving Schools *come from real life. The names have been changed or removed to preserve confidentiality.*

While having supportive parents is a very important factor contributing to a positive school environment, this does not mean having parents always visible in the school. Many parents work and cannot be present during the school day; still, they can make their support strongly felt.

In my work as a school improvement specialist over the years, I have seen examples of strong parent support in schools where few parents were actually present during the day. I have also seen limited parent support in schools where parents could have been available as volunteers during the day.

The underlying reason for both situations is generally related to communication. Some schools do an excellent job of sending a message that lets parents know they are appreciated and their opinions and concerns are important. Other schools, through a lack of communication, send parents the message that they are not welcome in the school.

When I think about positive messages to parents, one particular school comes to mind. Much of the parent support at this school was based on a solid trust of the staff—trust that was built over two years by hard work on the part of teachers and the principal. The efforts included a commitment to two-way communication between school and home, which used newsletters, notes, phone calls, e-mails, and home visits to keep parents informed about their children. The teachers held evening conferences to accommodate working parents. Parents were encouraged to call or send notes if they had concerns, and teachers responded with phone calls or written replies.

How was this happy situation achieved? In just two years, the school's new principal led this change with some help from me. He had a vision for parent support but was not exactly sure how to go about realizing his vision. Together, we did some problem solving and looked at some research-based strategies. We mapped out a plan to improve communication, both within the school and between the home and school. By experiencing open communication with me, the principal learned to create open communication with the staff.

When the staff began to discuss issues and recognized that their concerns were being heard, they were receptive to discussing ideas for improving home-school communication. As everyone worked to improve communication, the level of trust within the staff and between parents and staff began to grow and, by the end of the second year, the improvement had become very evident across all school operations.

Research Review

Ji Mei Chang, *Family Literacy Nights: Building the Circle of Supporters Within and Beyond School for Middle School English Language Learners,* Educational Practice Report 11, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. It can be ordered online at http://calstore.cal.org/store/detail.aspx?ID=301 or by contacting CALstore, Center for Applied Linguistics, 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016-1859; e-mail store@cal.org, $8.00.

This report from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) discusses Family Literacy Nights designed to teach children's supporters what and how the children were learning in school. The events were aimed at strengthening the school-family relationship and transferring classroom knowledge to the home environment. The outcome: teachers and parents worked collaboratively to support student learning and to serve as student advocates.

The three-year study looked at two groups of students: (1) low-performing Asian American English language learners (ELLs) placed in a sixth-grade sheltered instruction class, and (2) ELLs from diverse backgrounds with mild disabilities placed in sixth- through eighth-grade special education programs. The research concluded that the program's principles and strategies can be transferred to ELLs from other cultural backgrounds and used to form school-family partnerships at other grade levels and in other contexts.

Forming School-Family Partnerships

The number of students from low-income families and diverse language backgrounds is expected to increase. This demographic factor, coupled with the scarcity of true school-family partnerships, places some schools, teachers, and students at risk of failure.

Credentialing programs seldom teach educators how to work with students' families. The problem worsens when school staff are unfamiliar with the students' cultural backgrounds and when parents are unfamiliar with American school culture. This culture gap leaves many schools needing a systematic approach for establishing meaningful teacher-parent partnerships.

Findings and Implications for Practitioners

In the California middle school that was the site for this study, researchers and educators worked together to discover some strategies that made a difference for families and students.

- In districts that have high numbers of ELLs, schools may have frequent administration changes. In fact, during this study, the middle school leadership changed three times, causing the teacher-initiated sheltered program to be abandoned.
- When using multiple intelligences strategies with culturally and linguistically diverse groups, it is important to field-test metaphors and analogies to avoid misunderstandings.
- Teachers worked together to construct a set of integrated units across all content areas. By building the circle of supporters for teachers as well as for the students, most of the big ideas covered in the curriculum were represented in multiple ways.
- In a survey, many Family Literacy Night participants said they found the hands-on modeling and interactions they witnessed in the classrooms to be invaluable experiences.

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**Linking Student Achievement to School, Family, and
Community Involvement—A Review of the Literature**

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Introduction

For its own research purposes and to help schools identify areas in need of improvement, Edvantia (formerly AEL) has developed the Continuous School Improvement Questionnaire (CSIQ) (Meehan, Cowley, Craig, Balow, & Childers, 2002). One subscale collects teachers' perceptions of school, family, and community connections in their school. This CSIQ subscale assesses the degree to which parents and community members are involved and feel a part of the school. It reflects the degrees to which they are kept informed, meaningful partnerships exist, communication is open, and diverse points of view are honored and respected.

This paper summarizes two extensive reviews of the research literature to describe what has been learned to this point. The first review is *Parent Involvement in Children's Education: A Critical Assessment of the Knowledge Base* (Baker & Soden, 1997). The second is *A New Wave of Evidence* (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Baker and Soden (1997) write that considerable confusion exists about activities, goals, and desired outcomes of parent involvement programs and policies. The reason for this confusion, they suggest, is the limited amount of rigorous scientific research that can support claims of cause and effect. Although less is known about the effects of parent and community involvement than advocates would have us believe, more research has been conducted on the topic. In their 2002 review of the most current research literature, Henderson and Mapp report that many studies conducted over more than 25 years suggest that there is an important association between parent and community involvement in schools and the academic performance of students.

The widespread belief in the importance of school-family-community involvement is evidenced by national policies (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) that require parent involvement in programs funded through the U.S. Department of Education. Non-regulatory guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2004) to assist state-, district-, and school-level educators with the implementation of recent law

> is based on four principles that provide a framework through which families, educators, and communities can work together to improve teaching and learning. These principles are accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded parental choice, and effective and successful programs that reflect scientifically based research. The parent involvement provisions in Title I, Part A of the ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act] reflect these principles. Specifically, these provisions stress shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement, including expanded public school choice and supplemental educational services for eligible children in low-performing schools, local development of parent involvement plans with sufficient flexibility to address local needs, and building parents' capacity for using effective practices to improve their own children's academic achievement. (p. 1)

Additionally, guidance by the U.S. Department of Education *defines* parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring

- parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decisionmaking and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parental Involvement). *(Section 9101(32), ESEA, 2004, p. 3)*

Thus, to fully comply with federal guidelines, many schools today must develop or adopt school-, family-, and community-involvement programs and implement them. Now these schools are asking, "What kind of program is most likely to ensure success?"

Background

Since Coleman and colleagues (1966) first reported the important link between student learning and the economic condition of parents and communities, researchers have been trying to develop a clearer understanding of that link. Also during this time, practitioners have tried to develop programs to overcome the negative relationship between poverty and learning. To help researchers and practitioners make sense of the complexity of parent involvement, Gordon (1978) examined the Parent Education Model of Project Follow Through and observed that school-home interactions could be categorized as fitting one of three models:

1. Parent-impact model—schools enhance the family's capability to improve the family's home learning involvement
2. School-impact model—parents take responsibility to change schools to be more responsive to families so children's achievement can improve
3. Community-impact model—indicates the bidirectional nature of the influences among children, families, and schools

Nearly three decades later, Epstein (1994) contributed to the understanding of school, family, and community connections when she developed a classification system to describe six different types of parent involvement activities:

1. parenting
2. communicating
3. volunteering (supporting school)
4. learning at home
5. decision making
6. collaborating with the community

Limitations of the Research

When Baker and Soden (1997) reviewed 211 papers that included 145 empirical studies, they concluded that the studies suffered from four methodological limitations:

1. employment of nonexperimental designs
2. not isolating the effects of parent involvement from a package of treatment services
3. using nonobjective measures of parent involvement
4. assessing a variety of nontheoretically determined aspects of parent involvement (p. 15)

Jordon, Orozco, and Averett (2001) pointed to similar limitations. They found that definitions of parent involvement and community involvement are inconsistent; activities that take place at school or at home may have very different impacts, but are all called parent involvement. Measurements of parent and community connections and their outcomes were also inconsistent across studies. The researchers concluded that more precise information is needed in order to draw conclusions that do not conflict with those of other studies. Also helpful would be a theoretical framework to structure research and development of a knowledge base to guide practitioners. Finally, gaps in the research need to be filled.

Most recently, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found nearly 80 studies that were conducted between 1995 and 2002. They closely examined 51 of those studies that met the following standards:

- Sound methodology: experimental, quasi-experimental, or correlational design with statistical controls, and qualitative studies, such as case studies, that were based on sound theory, objective observation, and thorough design.
- Study findings that matched the data collected and conclusions that were consistent with the findings. (p. 13)

Henderson and Mapp also noted the paucity of experimental or quasi-experimental studies as well as a deficit in long-term research. Many studies have small samples, and others depend on self-reports rather than objective and independent observation. Very little can be said about cause and effect, and some studies have mixed, ambiguous, or incomplete findings.

Nonetheless, based on the findings from this collection of studies, Henderson and Mapp conclude, "Taken together, we feel that these studies make a solid case that programs to engage families can have positive effects on student academic achievement and other outcomes" (p. 30).

What We Know From the Research

The most rigorous empirical research is experimental in format. It enables researchers to draw conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships. Baker and Soden (1997) developed a typology of empirical studies, and that typology was summarized by Henderson and Mapp (2002) as follows:

- Pre-experimental studies: no comparison group, or the comparison group not randomly assigned and assessed at pretest

- Quasi-experimental studies: no pretest comparability between treatment and comparison families (for example, comparing treatment students with students from the year before or in a different class)
- Ex post facto and correlational studies: level of involvement is naturally occurring, not randomly assigned. Parent involvement is a continuous variable that is related to a continuous dependent variable, without an intervention
- Experimental studies: families are assigned to a treatment and control group at random, compared at pretest, received an intervention or not, then tested after the intervention (p. 14)

Baker and Soden (1997) found only three experimental studies among the 211 reports they examined. In these experimental studies, families were randomly assigned to two or more groups and compared at pretest. Each family either received a parent involvement intervention or was in the control group. Children of families in both the treatment group and in the control group were tested after the intervention. Baker and Soden concluded that "changes in children's achievement from pretest to posttest in the treatment group can be attributed to parent involvement with considerable confidence" (p. 10).

One of those experimental studies reported by Baker and Soden (1997) was conducted by Tizard, Schofield, and Hewison (1982). They investigated the effects of parents listening to their children read at home. Children were randomly assigned to three groups: a control group, a group that received extra coaching in reading at school, and a group of children whose parents were trained to listen to them read at home. Because random assignment to groups distributed pre-existing differences such as student ability and classroom practices equally across groups, the findings that the home reading group attained the highest reading scores at posttest could be attributed, with confidence, to the parent involvement intervention. An additional strength of this particular study was the inclusion of the group receiving extra coaching at school, because it ruled out the possibility that the intervention could be implemented by adults other than parents.

In their 2002 review of the literature, Henderson and Mapp examined 31 studies that specifically addressed the connection between student achievement and various parent and community involvement programs and activities. Of the 31 studies, 28 fit the empirical research typology. Six were experimental—double the number that Baker and Soden found. In addition, 3 were quasi-experimental, 17 were correlational, and 2 were pre-experimental. Three non-empirical studies—one case study, one report of interviews and site visits, and one literature review—were also examined. The researchers reported that, overall, school, family, and community connections research had overcome some of the earlier problems. These studies applied fairly uniform definitions and measurements of student academic achievement. The following measures of student achievement and other outcomes were commonly used:

- for young children: teacher ratings (using instruments like the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales) of school adjustment; vocabulary, reading, and language skills; social and motor skills
- for school-age children: report card grades, grade point averages, enrollment in advanced classes, and standardized test scores
- attendance, staying in school, and being promoted to the next grade

- improved behavior and healthy development (for example, less substance abuse and disruptive behavior)

While effect sizes in these studies were small to moderate, a number of studies found that some forms of parent involvement (communications with school, volunteering, attending school events, parent-to-parent connections) appeared to have little effect on student achievement, especially in high school. A few found that parent involvement with homework and parent-initiated contacts with school were negatively related to grades and test scores (e.g., Catsambis, 1998; Fan & Chen, 1999; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Shumow & Miller, 2001).

The findings of the studies in the Henderson and Mapp analysis (2002) offer schools valuable information about the kinds and levels of school-family-community connections most likely to produce higher levels of student achievement. The authors report four key findings, which are described below.

Key finding #1: Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement (p. 25).

A total of 11 studies examined family support of children's learning at home; 4 were experimental, 3 were quasi-experimental, 3 were correlational, and 1 was pre-experimental (see Table 1).

Table 1. 1997-2001 Studies that Examine the Link Between Student Achievement and Families Who Support Learning at Home

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn	1998	The Effects of the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) on Children's School Performance at the End of the Program and One Year Later	experimental
Balli, Demo, & Wedman	1998	Family Involvement with Children's Homework: An Intervention in the Middle Grades	experimental
Epstein, Clark, Salinas, & Sanders	1997	Scaling up School-Family-Community Connections in Baltimore: Effects on Student Achievement and Attendance	correlational
Epstein, Simon, & Salinas	1997	Involving Parents in Homework in the Middle Grades	pre-experimental
Jordan, Snow, & Porche	2000	Project EASE: The Effect of a Family Literacy Project on Kindergarten Students' Early Literacy Skills	quasi-experimental
Kagitcibasi, Sunar, & Bekman	2001	Long-Term Effects of Early Intervention: Turkish Low-Income Mothers and Children	experimental
Love et al.	2001	Building Their Futures: How Early Head Start Programs Are Enhancing the Lives of Infants and Toddlers in Low-Income Families. Volume I: Technical Report	experimental
Shaver & Walls	1998	Effect of Title I Parent Involvement on Student Reading and Mathematics Achievement	quasi-experimental
Starkey & Klein	2000	Fostering Parental Support for Children's Mathematical Development: An Intervention with [African-American and Latino] Head Start Families	Experimental

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
U.S. Department of Education	2001	The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools, Volume I: Executive Summary	Correlational
Van Voorhis	2001	Interactive Science Homework: An Experiment in Home and School Connections	quasi-experimental

Source: Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual synthesis.* Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

According to Henderson and Mapp (2002),

- Researchers (Love et al., 2001) at Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and the Center for Children and Families at Columbia University conducted an experimental study at 17 sites, randomly assigning children to the Early Head Start program or a control group. At age two, Early Head Start children scored higher on cognitive development scales, used more words, and spoke in more complex sentences than children in the control group.
- Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) studied Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education), a literacy program in Minnesota that offers home and school activities for kindergartners and their families, including coaching mothers in developing literacy skills. Over one year, students in the program showed significantly more improvement on language scores than children in a control group.
- Two separate experimental studies of the effects of the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) found that although the HIPPY program showed mixed results in the short term, HIPPY graduates fared better over time than the control groups (Baker et al., 1998; Kagitcibasi et al., 2001).
- Starkey and Klein (2000) conducted two experimental studies of a four-month intervention in two sites—one serving African American families and the other Latino. The program loaned math kits to the families in the treatment groups and taught mothers how to use them with their children. Researchers found that children in both experimental groups developed greater math knowledge and skills than the control-group children.
- A 2001 report prepared by Westat and Policy Studies Associates for the U.S. Department of Education studied the relationship between standards-based reform practices and student achievement and found that teacher outreach to parents of low-performing students was related to improved student achievement in both reading and math.
- Epstein, Clark, Salinas, and Sanders (1997) compared annual data on attendance and achievement with evaluations of schools' partnership programs. They found a relationship between schools with stronger partnership programs and small, but significant, gains in third-grade writing and math scores, as well as improved attendance.
- In a pre-experimental study, Epstein, Simon, and Salinas (1997) found that improved test scores and grades in writing and language arts of 683 Baltimore middle-grade students were related to families' increased participation in Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) learning activities at home.

- A quasi-experimental study of TIPS for Science found that students whose families participated in TIPS earned higher grades than did a control group (Van Voorhis, 2001).
- Balli, Demo, and Wedman (1998) conducted an experimental study but found no significant difference between the group that participated in interactive math homework and the control group; however, they noted the small sample size may have affected the results.

Key finding #2: The continuity of family involvement at home appears to be associated with positive school experiences as they [children in families in the studies] progress through the complex education system. Increases in measures of families' support for their children's learning and educational progress are related to increases in their children's success in school and continuation of their education (p. 30).

A total of 10 studies examined the relationship between the continuity of family involvement and children's positive school experiences. All 10 studies were correlational studies. Thus, no cause-and-effect statements can be made.

Table 2. 1998-2001 Studies that Examine the Relationship Between the Continuity of Family Involvement and Extent to Which Children Have Positive School Experiences as They Progress Through School

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
Catsambis	1998	Expanding Knowledge of Parental Involvement in Secondary Education—Effects on High School Academic Success	correlational
Fan & Chen	1999	Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis	correlational
Gutman & Midgley	2000	The Role of Protective Factors in Supporting the Academic Achievement of Poor African American Students During the Middle School Transition	correlational
Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich	1999	A Longitudinal Assessment of Teacher Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Children's Education and School Performance	correlational
Marcon	1999	Positive Relationships Between Parent School Involvement and Public School Inner-City Preschoolers' Development and Academic Performance	correlational
Miedel & Reynolds	1999	Parent Involvement in Early Intervention for Disadvantaged Children: Does It Matter?	correlational
Sanders & Herting	2000	Gender and the Effects of School, Family, and Church Support on the Academic Achievement of African-American Urban Adolescents	correlational
Shumow & Lomax	2001	Parental Efficacy: Predictor of Parenting Behavior and Adolescent Outcomes	correlational
Shumow & Miller	2001	Parents' At-Home and At-School Academic Involvement With Young Adolescents	correlational
Trusty	1999	Effects of Eighth-Grade Parental Involvement on Late Adolescents' Educational Experiences	correlational

Source: Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual synthesis.* Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude that

- In a 1999 three-year study of 1,200 urban students, Izzo and colleagues found that parent involvement at home and at school was related positively to student achievement.
- Marcon (1999) compared the grades and skill ratings of 700 African American preschoolers to teachers' reports of parent involvement. She found that parents with high involvement tended to have children with higher grades and scores.
- Meidel and Reynolds (1999) compared data from interviews with 700 parents of eighth-grade students to student performance. They found that students whose parents had been involved in a greater number of activities, both at home and at school, did consistently better in school.
- Four studies showed that the combined support of families and school are generally associated with better student performance (Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Sanders & Herting, 2000; Shumow & Lomax, 2001; Trusty, 1999).
- Studies that found negative relationships (Catsambis, 1998; Fan & Chen, 1999; Izzo et al., 1999; Shumow & Miller, 2001) revealed that increased parent involvement was related to the amount of difficulty the children were having in school.
- Shumow and Lomax (2001) found an association between the level of parents' feelings of efficacy and their children reporting doing better in school and feeling happy, safe, and stable. Higher levels of parent involvement were more strongly related to positive student outcomes and perceptions of well-being than were low levels.
- Trusty (1999) found a strong association between high levels of parent involvement and positive school experiences of late adolescent children. Likewise, as reported by Sanders and Herting in 2000, active involvement such as volunteering and visiting the classroom was related to higher levels of positive student outcomes and perceptions of school.

Key finding #3. Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, all types of families can engage in actions that are associated with their children's learning (p. 34).

A total of 11 studies reviewed the relationship between family background, types of involvement, and student achievement. Of the studies, 10 were correlational and 1 was a case study.

Table 3. 1993-2001 Studies that Examine the Relationship Between Family Background, Types of Involvement, and Student Achievement

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
Catsambis	1998	Expanding Knowledge of Parental Involvement in Secondary Education: Effects on High School Academic Success	correlational
Clark	1993	Homework-Focused Parenting Practices That Positively Affect Student Achievement	correlational
Fan & Chen	1999	Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis	correlational

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
Gutman & Midgley	2000	The Role of Protective Factors in Supporting the Academic Achievement of Poor African American Students During the Middle School Transition	correlational
Ho Sui-Chu & Willms	1996	Effects of Parental Involvement on Eighth-Grade Achievement	correlational
Keith & Keith	1993	Does Parental Involvement Affect Eighth-Grade Student Achievement?	correlational
Lareau & Horvat	1999	Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships	case study
Miedel & Reynolds	1999	Parent Involvement in Early Intervention for Disadvantaged Children: Does It Matter?	correlational
Sanders & Herting	2000	Gender and the Effects of School, Family, and Church Support on the Academic Achievement of African-American Urban Adolescents	correlational
Shumow & Miller	2001	Parents' At-Home and At-School Academic Involvement with Young Adolescents	correlational
Williams	1998	Parent Involvement Gender Effects on Preadolescent Student Performance	correlational

Source: Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. Annual synthesis.* Austin, TX: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

According to Henderson and Mapp (2002),

- Clark (1993) correlated the ways children spend their out-of-school time with grades, family background, and other factors. He found that the way children spent their time at home was a better predictor of school success than the family's income or education level.
- Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) found that involvement at home—parents talking with their children about school and planning their education programs—had the greatest effect on student achievement when compared to merely volunteering and attending school activities.
- Catsambis (1998) found that enhancing learning at home had the strongest relationship to staying in school through the 12th grade.
- Fan and Chen (1999) analyzed 25 studies and found that above-median parent involvement was related to student success rates that were 30% higher than those of students from families with below-median parent involvement.
- Shumow and Miller (2001) found that parent involvement at home led to positive attitudes toward school; further, they concluded that parent involvement at school contributed to higher grades. Further, student gender was not related to level or type of parent involvement.
- Williams (1998) found that parents' expectations for their children's education, as well as their out-of-school activities, are positively linked to all aspects of their children's achievement.
- Researchers using the NELS:88 database found that Asian, Hispanic, and African American parents were as active in their middle and high school children's education as White parents. However, the minority groups reported higher levels of home involvement and supervision than did Whites (Catsambis, 1998; Ho Sui-Chu &

Willms, 1996; Keith & Keith, 1993; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Sanders & Herting, 2000).

- Parent involvement is strongly related to the learning of eighth-grade youth, and parents with higher incomes appear to be more involved than those with lower incomes. Among African American, Hispanic, and Native American populations, "at-risk" parents reported more involvement than advantaged parents in the same population (Keith & Keith, 1993).
- In their study of 60 families, Shumow and Miller (2001) concluded that parent involvement in education at home and at school was positively related to young adolescents' academic outcomes. The researchers report: "The relation found between the young adolescents' past school adjustment (success in school) and school orientation (attitudes toward school) indicates that successful children might have been socialized to the importance of education by families that have made a consistent long-term commitment to education" (p. 86). Given that at-home and at-school involvement may have different effects on students, the researchers underscore the importance of specifying the form of parent involvement being studied or targeted in program development.
- In a case study, Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that families with more education and income are more comfortable with school staff because they can relate to each other better.

Key finding #4: Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a stronger association with achievement than more general forms of involvement. This suggests that parent involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills (p. 38).

A total of 13 studies looked at parent and community involvement designed to affect student achievement. Of the 13 studies, 3 were experimental, 3 were quasi-experimental, 3 were correlational, 1 was a report of interviews and site visits, and 1 was a case study.

Table 4. 1995-2002 Studies that Looked at Parent and Community Involvement Designed to Affect Student Achievement

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn	1998	The Effects of the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) on Children's School Performance at the End of the Program and One Year Later	experimental
Clark	2002	Ten Hypotheses About What Predicts Student Achievement for African-American Students and All Other Students: What the Research Shows	correlational
Dryfoos	2000	Evaluations of Community Schools: Findings to Date	literature review
Epstein, Simon, & Salinas	1997	Involving Parents in Homework in the Middle Grades	pre-experimental
Invernizzi, Rosemary, Richards, & Richards	1997	At-Risk Readers and Community Volunteers: A Three-Year Perspective	pre-experimental
Jordan, Snow, & Porche	2000	Project EASE: The Effect of a Family Literacy Project on Kindergarten Students' Early Literacy	quasi-experimental

Researcher(s)	Date	Name of Study	Research Design
		Skills	
Kagitcibasi, Sunar, & Bekman	2001	Long-Term Effects of Early Intervention: Turkish Low-Income Mothers and Children	experimental
Love et al.	2001	Building Their Futures: How Early Head Start Programs Are Enhancing the Lives of Infants and Toddlers in Low-Income Families	experimental
Moore	1998	What Makes These Schools Stand Out: Chicago Elementary Schools with a Seven-Year Trend of Improved Reading Achievement	correlational
Newman	1995	School-Agency-Community Partnerships: What Is the Early Impact on Student Performance?	report of interviews and site visits
Shaver & Walls	1998	Effect of Title I Parent Involvement on Student Reading and Mathematics Achievement	quasi-experimental
Starkey & Klein	2000	Fostering Parental Support for Children's Mathematical Development: An Intervention with [African-American and Latino] Head Start Families	experimental
U.S. Department of Education	2001	The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools, Volume I: Executive Summary	correlational
Van Voorhis	2001	Interactive Science Homework: An Experiment in Home and School Connections	quasi-experimental

According to Henderson and Mapp (2002),

- Several studies (Baker et al., 1998; Kagitcibasi et al., 2001; Jordan et al., 2000; Love et al., 2001; Starkey & Klein, 2000) found that increases in specific areas of student learning were related to programs that were designed to address those areas. Programs targeted at improving writing skills are related to higher grades in language arts and higher test scores in writing, and programs targeted at increasing science knowledge are associated with higher grades in science (Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; VanVoorhis, 2001).
- Workshops that inform parents about what their children are learning and how to help their children at home are connected to gains in achievement (Shaver & Walls, 1998).
- In an effort to isolate the effects of parent involvement from other program elements, Westat/Policy Studies Associates (for the U.S. Department of Education, 2001) used advanced statistical methods and found that students made greater and more consistent gains when teachers were "especially active" in outreach to parents.
- Cooperative adult effort on the part of Local School Councils in Chicago (parents, teachers, community members, and administrators involved in the school) is strongly related to improved student achievement (Moore, 1998).
- A pre-experimental study conducted by Invernizzi and colleagues (1997) found that students who received tutoring from community volunteers made substantial gains in reading, and students who attended more than 40 sessions made greater gains than those who attended fewer.
- Dryfoos (2000) reviewed evaluations of community schools (e.g., before- and after-school learning programs) and found that, although the evaluations were not

rigorous, students in programs that focused on learning made gains of 2-3 years in reading and math test scores.

- Newman (1995) studied a core group of 270 students served by the California Healthy Start program and found that students in programs with a stated goal of improving student learning were more likely to show gains than students in programs without such a goal.
- Clark (2002) studied how high- and low-achieving students of all ages and backgrounds used their out-of-school time and found that students scoring at the 50th percentile or above spent at least 9 hours a week in reading, writing, and studying. Students scoring below the 25th percentile spent much more time on unstructured leisure activities.

Summary

Collectively, recent studies and earlier research indicate a strong relationship between family involvement and improved academic performance. Family involvement is also associated with other key outcomes such as attendance and behavior, which are also related to achievement. The relationship between family involvement and performance holds for families of all backgrounds. The ways parents are involved matters, too. Improved performance is most strongly connected to involvement that is focused on learning, developing students' skills in specific subjects, and steering students toward more challenging classes. Close working relationships between teachers and families are also related to improved performance. Finally, the studies identified several ways that schools can assist families in developing their capacity to support their children's education:

- Adopt a family-school partnership policy. The philosophy behind it should see the total school community as committed to making sure that every single student succeeds at a high level and to working together to make that happen.
- Identify target areas of low achievement. Work with families to design workshops and other activities to give them information about how to help their children. Lend families learning materials to use at home. Get their ideas for how to help their children learn.
- Offer professional development for school staff on working productively with families. Invite families to attend.
- Look at your current parent involvement program. How is it linked to learning? Work with families and teachers to add a learning component to every activity and communication for families. Think about new and different activities that will create a learning community. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 74)

As Henderson and Mapp (2002) conclude, although engaging families can help improve student achievement, it is not enough to overcome the deficits of low-quality schools. Parent involvement programs need to be paired with high-quality initiatives to improve teaching and learning. Such initiatives will be more effective if they engage families.

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