Parental Involvement and Perceived At-Risk Student Performance: Views from Predominantly Hispanic Parents

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Summary

Introduction

A parent's job is complex, and effective parenting takes time, patience, and love. One responsibility of parents is the role of teaching and guiding their children as they mature toward adulthood. Schools have felt the pressure to court family involvement (National School Public Relations Association, 1991). Reported in studies such as one conducted by the National School Public Relations Association is that relationships exist between parental involvement and such student variables as academic achievement, sense of well being, attendance, attitude, homework readiness, grades, and educational aspirations. These benefits have been documented to be present not only at the elementary school level, but at the other levels of schooling as well. Researchers (e.g., Gonzales, 2002) have provided strong evidence that parental involvement in child and adolescent education generally benefits student learning and school success in all grades. Parental involvement enhances student educational success all the way to the high school level. Gonzales (2002) found that parental involvement was positively related to high school student academic achievement, time spent on homework, favorable attitudes toward school, likelihood of staying in school, and educational aspirations beyond the high school level.

Parental Involvement and Its Relationship with Student Achievement

A child's education begins at home, not in the classroom, and certainly the home's powerful influence does not end when school begins. It is a force to be reckoned with, for good or ill, throughout a youngster's school career (Weaver, 2005). Every parent known by these authors has wanted his or her child to succeed in school and in life. No parent ever said, "I want my kid to fail." Just as no educator ever gets up in the morning and says, "I want my students to fail today." Parents and educators want the same thing, for our children and students to succeed. When they do succeed, both parents and educators alike are filled with pride (Weaver, 2005).

Home-based behaviors such as helping with homework occur quite frequently for most

parents. Similarly, school-based activities such as P.T.A. or parent-teacher communications also occur frequently for many parents. Parental involvement has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades and achievement test scores (Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999). Parent involvement has also been associated with other indicators of school success, including lower rates of retention in grades, lower dropout rates, higher on-time high school graduation rates, and higher rates of participation in advanced courses (Barnard, 2004). In addition to these outcomes, parental involvement has been linked to psychological processes and attributes that support student achievement (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). Those attributes support achievement across groups of students, including students at-risk for poorer educational or developmental outcomes (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000). Those student motivational, cognitive, social, and behavioral attributes are particularly important because they are susceptible to direct parent and teacher influence (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara, & Pastorelli, 1996).

Involving parents in schools is very important and can be a win-win situation. Research conducted by staff of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory stated that some parent involvement programs have produced effects on student achievement 10 times greater than the effect that socioeconomic status has on achievement. Student achievement is based on having involved parents. It is important to be involved as a parent so that children feel a sense of accompaniment and support. Children can succeed when parents show an interest and provide them with enough attention (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Brockern, 1990).

Parental Involvement and Its Relationship with Student Attendance

Beyond the influence of a teenager's prior attendance or background, when parents participate in various school activities with teenagers, teenagers attend school more consistently than those teenagers whose parents do not partake in school activities (Simon, 2001). In general, when parents attend school functions, they have the opportunity to meet other parents and to develop relationships. As in close knit neighborhoods where teenagers are held accountable to the community's adults (not

just their own parents), parents' network may prevent teenagers from skipping school because they know the other parents may be keeping tabs on them. In addition, parents may have the opportunity to chat with teachers or high school administrators who are also attending school events. Those informal conversations reinforce the link between home and school and may remind teenagers that what they do at school may be reported to their parents (Simon, 2001).

Many factors have been found to be associated with poor student attendance, which can eventually lead to a student dropping out of school during the middle school and/or high school years (Ingels, 1994). The factors can be broken down into two main areas: school factors and personal factors. In relation to school factors, the literature noted the following reasons as contributing to poor attendance and high dropout rates among school aged children: did not like school in general or a particular transfer school; was failing, getting poor grades, or could not keep up with the school work; did not get along with teachers and/or other students; or had disciplinary problems, was suspended or expelled (Ingels, 1994). The second factor associated with poor attendance that can eventually lead to a student dropping out of school is personal factors. In relation to personal factors, the following reasons are attributed to poor attendance and high dropout rates among school aged children: got a job, had a family to support, or had trouble managing both school and work; got married, got pregnant, became a parent, wanted to have a family, or had a family to take care of; had friends who dropped out; wanted to travel; or had a drug or alcohol problem (Ingels, 1994).

Parental Involvement and Its Relationship with High School Completion

Researchers have demonstrated that the effects of family practices on student academic success tend to vary by age and are strongest for elementary school children. Some researchers report no effects of parental involvement on student standardized test scores in high school (Lee, 1994). However, other researchers conclude that parental involvement remains important for children's success throughout secondary education (Astone & McLanahan, 1991).

Identifying that a student comes from an at-risk family does not automatically indicate that the student will not be successful in completing high school. Many times it is the determination that the individual student has, no matter what family background or individual circumstance the student comes from, that predicts whether or not the student finishes. There are students who are in at-risk situations who manage to complete high school. They seem to not let obstacles get in their way. They want a better life for themselves, and they have dreams to graduate and do something with

their lives. No matter what their circumstances are, they have goals and want to accomplish them (Jesse, 1998).

The issue of high school dropouts has attracted the attention of policymakers, researchers, and educational practitioners who are trying both to understand the nature of this problem and to do something about it. One reason for such widespread concern is that demographic shifts are increasing the number of disadvantaged minority students who historically have had the highest rates of dropping out (Levin, 1986). Another reason for that widespread concern is that some observers fear that recent reform efforts, such as more stringent requirements for graduation, may make it more difficult for some students to graduate from high school (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1985).

Research on the cause of dropping out has focused on a wide range of related factors. These factors can be grouped into four major categories: demographic, school related, family related, and individual. Within each category previous studies have found a large number of lesser factors that influence the decision to leave school. Among school-related factors, for example, poor attendance, disciplinary problems, and low academic achievement are all associated with higher dropout rates (Rumberger, 1983).

Families influence student academic achievement in many ways. What remains unclear is whether those same factors influence a student's decision to dropout of school. For instance, the presence of study aids and other literary materials in the home decreases the likelihood of a student dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1983). Children from families in which family relations are good and in which parents more closely monitor the activities and whereabouts of their children are less likely to drop out of school than are other children. Also, children from families in which parents are very punitive in nature are more likely to drop out of school than are other children (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the perceptions of parents about their degree of involvement with their child's (labeled as being at-risk) achievement. Examined was how parents perceived that their involvement influenced their child's achievement, attendance, high school completion, and why students from an at-risk family were or were not successful in completing a high school education.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions answered from the parental perspective:

What is the relationship between parental involvement and perceptions of their student's achievement?

What is the relationship between parental involvement and perceptions of their student's attendance?

What is the relationship between parental involvement and perceptions of high school completion?

In what ways do Hispanic parents of children labeled as being at-risk perceive that schools can increase their level of parental involvement?

Method

Participants

The sample for this study, comprised of the parents of 229 public school students who meet the state definition of at-risk as defined by TEA in the PEIMS data standards, was selected from all the schools in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District located in the southernmost tip of Texas, the Rio Grande Valley. South Texas is considered to be a fast growing area in terms of population. The targeted students all attend schools in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District. From the number of at-risk students in the 2006-2007 school year (n = 9,914), 100 students were selected through a stratified random sampling procedure from elementary schools, from middle schools, and from high schools located in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District. From the 100 students who were selected from each grade level, the parents of 93 elementary students returned the survey, 68 parents of middle school students, and 68 parents of high school students returned completed surveys.

Survey instruments were completed by 229 parents: 218 (95.2%) Hispanic participants, 8 (3.4%) White participants, 1 (0.4%) participant of Other ethnicity, and 2 respondents who did not indicate ethnicity. Hispanic participants were the major ethnic group in the study, exceeding over 90% of the survey population. All participants were parents of at-risk students in the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD). Of the parents who participated, 93 (40.6%) had children enrolled at the elementary school level, 68 (29.7%) had children enrolled at the middle school level, and 68 (29.7%) had children enrolled at the high school level. The majority of the parents who completed the survey were from the elementary level. As would be expected, more of the parents who completed the survey were female (n = 174, 76.0%) than male (n = 55, 24.0%). Regarding the gender of the students labeled as being at risk, 54.1% (n = 124) were male and 45.9% (n = 105) were female.

Procedures

To select the sample for this study, the last four numbers of the school identification

number of all students identified as being at-risk were entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences-Version 9.0 database. From the population entry, the data procedure from the menu was selected. In the Select Case category, 100 cases from each of the three levels were selected to complete the needed random sample population that was surveyed for the study (Norusis, 1999). This process ensured that the different grade groups of at-risk students were represented in the sample.

Once the specific students had been randomly selected from the SPSS program, addresses of the 300 students were provided by the Research and Evaluation's Department of the HCISD. After determining from a review of each student's folder of the language spoken by the child's parents, surveys were mailed in Spring 2007. Parents were either mailed a survey in English or one translated into Spanish. Each survey was mailed to parents in the sample along with a cover letter, in English or in Spanish, guaranteeing confidentiality. Parents were provided a two week period in which to respond. No additional mailing was conducted.

Instrumentation

A 26-item instrument, Parental Involvement Survey, was designed based upon an extensive review of the research literature. Measured by the instrument was the level of parental involvement, as reported by parents, and how parents viewed their involvement to impact the success of at-risk students. In addition to these 26 items in which parents responded using a Likert format, one open-ended question was present. To determine the reliability of the 26-item survey instrument, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used for each of the four scales: parental involvement, achievement, attendance, and completion. The first five questions on the survey comprised the Parental Involvement Scale. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this scale was .75, more than sufficient for research purposes. All items were positively intercorrelated. For the second scale, Achievement, items 6 through 10 yielded a coefficient alpha of .85, again more than sufficiently reliable for research purposes. Scale three, Attendance, had a coefficient alpha of .79, and Scale four, Completion, yielded a coefficient alpha of .86. For all four scales combined, the internal consistency was .75. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), these values are more than sufficiently high for research purposes. Thus, these four scales were sufficiently consistent to be used for statistical purposes in this study.

The content validity of the survey was checked by a panel of experts at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, who evaluated the instrument for content, clarity and appropriateness. Suggestions and recommendations from these persons were sought before the survey instrument was mailed. In addition, content validity was examined by a Delphi panel of experts (n = 4) to review content and clarity.

Results

When asked about their involvement at school, 108 (47.2%) of the respondents indicated that they do participate in the school's parental involvement program, whereas 121 (52.8%) of the respondents indicated that they did participate in the parental involvement program. Concerning specific ways in which parents were involved with their children, Table 1 depicts parents' responses to five survey items. As can be seen in Table 1, parents had the highest degree of agreement with the item "I ask my child about his/her grades often." Parents had the lowest amount of agreement for the item, "I participate in parental involvement activities in my child's school."

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Parental Involvement Survey Items

Variable	M	SD
1. I participate in parental involvement activities in my child's school.	3.24	1.40
2. I enjoy getting ideas and tips from my child's school on how to be more encouraging of his/her education.	4.08	1.12
3. I ask my child about his/her grades often.	4.70	0.68
4. I ask my child how his/her day went.	4.64	0.74
5. I check my child's homework regularly.	4.21	1.00

Table 2 depicts parents' responses to items about their child's achievement. With higher means indicating more agreement, Table 2 shows parents reported the most agreement with "My child's academic achievement is very important." Parents indicated the lowest amount of agreement with, "My child is a better and more successful student because of my involvement in his/her education."

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Achievement Survey Items

Variable	M	SD
6. I would agree that improving parental	4.51	0.82

involvement in schools can help students achieve at a higher level.		
7. My child's academic achievement is very important to me.	4.81	0.59
8. My child is a better and more successful student because of my involvement in his/her education.	4.34	0.92
9. I participate in strengthening my child's educational achievement.	4.48	0.74
10. I believe that being involved in my child's school activities has helped him/her to achieve better.	4.37	0.95

Shown in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for parents' responses to items dealing with their child's attendance at school. With higher means indicating more parent agreement, Table 3 depicts the highest amount of parent agreement with two items: "I know that parents can enhance the level of their child's attendance at school no matter what background they come from" and "I encourage my child to take advantage of his/her activities and programs by attending school everyday." The lowest level of parental agreement was to the item "I feel that my involvement as a parent has shown an increase in my child's attendance." As indicated in Table 4, parents reported the most agreement to the item, "Completing high school is very important for my child," whereas the lowest amount of parent agreement was to the item "I believe that there are students who are in at-risk situations and yet manage to complete high school."

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Attendance Survey Items

Variable	M	SD
11. I encourage perfect attendance and make certain that my child attends school on a daily basis.	4.66	0.67
12. I feel that my involvement as a parent has shown an increase in my child's attendance.	4.46	0.85

13. I think that poor student attendance leads to low student achievement.	4.58	0.81
14. I know that parents can enhance the level of their child's attendance at school no matter what background they come from.	4.75	0.56
15. I encourage my child to take advantage of his/her activities and programs by attending school everyday.	4.75	0.67

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Completion Survey Items

Variable	M	SD
16. I believe that there are students who are in at-risk situations and yet manage to complete high school.	4.56	0.70
17. I believe that parental involvement impacts high school completion.	4.63	0.69
18. My child will benefit in life from completing high school.	4.83	0.52
19. Completing high school is very important for my child.	4.86	0.51
20. I know that my child will complete high school.	4.84	0.55

After calculating the descriptive statistics for each individual survey item, the individual survey items that comprised each of the four scales were summed to create a total score for each of the four areas. For Scale 1, Parental Involvement, items 1 through 5 were summed to create a composite Parental Involvement measure. Items 6 through 10 were summed to generate an Achievement measure. The Attendance scale was created by adding items 11 through 15 together. Finally, the fourth scale, Completion, was generated by adding items 16 through 20 together. It should be noted that the higher the score on the Parental Involvement scale, the more often parents reported

that they were involved in that area. For the other three scales, high scores meant that parents reported more agreement with those questions whereas low scores reflected that parents disagreed with those items.

Research Question One

What is the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement?

For this research question, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure was conducted, with parental involvement (i.e., involvement versus no involvement) serving as the independent variable and the Achievement survey scale (i.e., aggregated survey items 6 through 10) serving as the dependent variable. The result was statistically significant, $F(1, 227) = 9.63$, $p < .01$, indicating that the reported agreement with the achievement questions differed as a function of parental involvement. Parents who were involved (M = 23.19, SD = 2.69) reported stronger agreement with the achievement survey questions than did parents who were not involved (M = 21.91, SD = 3.47). The effect size for this statistically significant finding was small, .20 (Cohen, 1988).

Because the ANOVA indicated that parents responded differently to the aggregated Achievement scale, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine which of the five achievement items parents responded differently. Parents did not differ in their responses to survey items 6 and 7 as a function of their reported involvement at school, $ps > .05$. Parents, however, did respond differently on item 8 ($F[1, 227] = 12.19$, $p < .001$), item 9 ($F[1, 227] = 8.57$, $p < .01$), and on item 10 ($F[1, 227] = 13.65$, $p < .01$), as a function of their involvement. As can be seen from the tables in which the descriptive statistics for these items are present, parents who reported more involvement had stronger agreement with item 8, item 9, and item 10 than parents who reported less involvement.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between parental involvement and student attendance?

For this research question, an ANOVA was conducted, with parental involvement (i.e., involvement versus no involvement) serving as the independent variable and the Attendance scale (i.e., aggregated survey items 11 through 15) serving as the dependent variable. The result was not statistically significant, $F(1, 227) = 0.92$, $p = .34$, indicating that the reported agreement with the student attendance questions did not differ as a function of parental involvement. Parents who were involved (M = 23.38, SD = 2.49) and parents who were not involved (M = 23.04, SD = 2.81) reported similar agreement with the attendance survey questions. Because the ANOVA failed to indicate that parents responded differently to the aggregated Attendance scale, a MANOVA was not conducted.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between parental involvement and high school completion?

For this research question, an ANOVA was conducted, with parental involvement (i.e., involvement versus no involvement) serving as the independent variable and the

Completion scale (i.e., aggregated survey items 16 through 20) serving as the dependent variable. The difference was not statistically significant, $F(1, 227) = 0.08$, $p = .78$, indicating that the reported agreement with the high school completion questions did not differ as a function of parental involvement. Parents who were involved (M = 23.77, SD = 2.41) and parents who were not involved (M = 23.68, SD = 2.41) reported similar agreement with the high school completion survey questions. Because the ANOVA failed to indicate that parents responded differently to the aggregated Completion scale, a MANOVA was not conducted.

Research Question Four

In what ways do Hispanic parents of children labeled as being at-risk perceive that schools can increase their level of parental involvement?

To address this research question, parents' responses to an open-ended question (How can schools increase their level of parental involvement?) were analyzed through the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, responses were read for all parents who chose to respond to this question (n = 129). Then consistent words and/or phrases were noted. The following themes were given in responses. They are listed here in order of most responses to least responses. These consistencies in parents' responses were then classified into themes. Themes identified in respondents' answers included:

Increase Parental Involvement Activities on Campus

Twenty four (n = 24) parents stated that increasing parental involvement activities in the campuses would increase parental involvement in their schools. Some of their responses are provided below:

"Having parent involvement activities on campus are always important."

"If the schools offered a variety of parental involvement activities in school would increase the level of parent involvement."

"Parent involvement activities always lead to parent interaction with school."

"The only way that I can see parental involvement increase is having more activities on campus."

"Parent involvement activities on school are ways to increase parents being involved."

Communication

Twenty three respondents (n = 23) felt that better communication would increase the level of parental involvement in their schools. Some of their responses are provided below:

"Schools should communicate on a daily bases with parents."

"There are a variety of ways to communicate with parents, such as telephone calls, home visits, etc."

"Communication can bring in parents that are not involved."

"Communication is a way to bring in parents and increase involvement."

"Constant communication is a must to increase parent involvement."

Scheduling Parental Involvement Opportunities at Different Hours and Days

Eighteen respondents (n = 18) stated that scheduling parental involvement opportunities at different times of the days other than the normal school day hours would be helpful. Some of their responses are provided below:

"After school activities would be helpful for parents that work."

"Weekends would be great to have activities for the parents."

"Working parents need opportunities to become involved after the normal school day hours due to their jobs."

"By having more 6:30 P.M. opportunities for us parents to be involved would be helpful to me."

"Having parents scheduling their volunteerism at schools after school would increase parent involvement."

Teachers and Parents working Together

Sixteen respondents (n =16) stated that teachers and parents should work together to increase the level of parental involvement in schools. Provided below are several of their comments:

"If parents and teachers work together, many problems of students would be solved."

"The unity of teachers and parents is vital for the child."

"Parents and teachers working together are important in order to increase parent involvement."

"Schools can increase the level of parent involvement if the teachers and parents worked together."

"I think parents and teachers must work hand in hand in order to have parental involvement and our schools."

Parents Welcomed at School

Eleven respondents (n = 11) responded that parents must be welcomed in schools in order to increase the level of parental involvement in schools. Provided below are several of their comments:

"Parents must be welcomed at school to increase parent involvement."

"Parents should be welcomed at our schools."

"It is important to feel wanted and welcomed at our children's schools."

"I like to feel welcomed at my child's school, this feeling does increase the level of parent involvement activities at a school."

"Simply being welcomed at a school increases parent involvement at that campus."

Bilingual and Spanish Speaking

Eight respondents (n = 8) felt that if parents were spoken to in Spanish or even bilingual, this would increase the level of parental involvement in their schools. Several of their responses are provided below:

"If the parent meetings were bilingual it would certainly be helpful."

"It is important for the teachers to speak in Spanish to parents that do not speak in English."

"I like it when my son's teacher speaks to me in Spanish this for me make me feel that I am involved."

"Having more Bilingual people on campus would increase the level of parent involvement."

"If campus personal were bilingual and spoke to me in Spanish, I would be more involved, especially in the meetings."

Parental Participation

Eight respondents (n = 8) stated that parents must participate in their children's school

in order to increase the level of parent involvement in their campus. Provided below are several of their responses.

"In order to increase parent involvement, participation of parents is important."

"Parent participation would better serve the child's academic needs."

"The school's parent involvement increase if parents participated."

"If parents participated more at their children's school, this would increase parent involvement."

"Participation is the key to parent involvement."

Parental Involvement Meetings

Seven respondents (n = 7) responded that if the campuses had parental involvement meetings at their campuses, it would increase the level of parent involvement in their campuses. One mentioned, "Parent meetings are always needed for the betterment of the student." Another wrote, "More parent meetings are important." One respondent wrote, "More Meetings!" Another respondent wrote, "Have more parent meetings would increase parent involvement."

Parental Involvement Presentations

Six respondents (n = 6) stated that if the campuses offered parent involvement presentations at their schools, it would increase the level of parent involvement. One respondent wrote, "Parent presentation such as helpful tips for parents would be helpful." Another wrote, "Parent sessions would be beneficial to both the child and parents." "Parenting presentations are always important," wrote a respondent.

Notifications to Parents

Four respondents (n = 4) reported that a way to increase the level of parental involvement in their schools would be better notifications of activities and events. One respondent wrote, "Notifying parents of meetings ahead of time is important as those arrangements can be made." Another wrote, "Notices are always important."

Food

Two respondents (n = 2) mentioned that providing food at the parent meetings, activities, etcetera, are always a way to bring in parents. "Food will always attract people," was written by a respondent.

Teachers Trained in Parental Involvement Issues

One respondent (n = 1) wrote, "If the teachers were trained in the area of parent involvement, this would increase the level of parental involvement in their schools."

Discussion

Reported agreement with achievement questions differed as a function of parental involvement. Parents who were involved reported stronger agreement with the achievement survey questions than did parents who were not involved. Reported

agreement with the student attendance questions did not differ as a function of parental involvement. Parents who were involved and parents who were not reported similar agreement with attendance survey questions. Reported agreement with the high school completion questions did not differ as a function of parental involvement. Parents who were involved and parents who were not involved reported similar agreement with high school completion survey questions.

From the findings, parents believed that it was important for them to ask for their children's grades. To enhance and facilitate that parental role, the schools can begin ensuring that parents know about graded items by instituting a policy that graded items must be taken home, signed by the parent, and then returned to the teacher. From the findings, parents reported that that being involved in the children's academic achievement is important. To enhance and facilitate that parental role, the schools can hold a meeting with parents every grade reporting period to discuss their children's academics.

These predominantly Hispanic parents want to see their children graduate from high school. Schools can stress the benefits and importance of graduating from high school to the students at early stages in their grade levels, and the pride the parents will receive from seeing their children graduate. These parents indicated that they wanted to participate in schools. Schools could send a volunteer form to the parents through the mail inviting them to participate in a series of parent-child activities.

Findings from this study may be useful to school districts who want to increase the parent involvement of their Hispanic students. Given the increase in the Hispanic population, not only in Texas, but in states across the country, hearing directly from Hispanic parents ways in which their involvement could be increased is important. Readers should be cautious in the extent to which they generalize these findings until they can be replicated in other school settings and regions of the country. Until such time, these findings should be viewed as tenuous in nature.

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