

Mexican Parents' and Teachers' Views of Effective Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT: We surveyed 374 parents and 82 teachers in the Juarez, Mexico schools regarding their views of what makes an effective elementary school. The survey was a Spanish translation of an instrument used by Johnson (1998). Although both parents and teachers supported most of the factors associated with effective schools, they emphasized different aspects of a quality education. Parents stressed involvement in the schools and students engagement in learning basic skills. Parents also rejected socioeconomic status as a causal factor in school success. Teachers stressed the personal development of students as well as involvement in learning basic skills, and placed much greater emphasis on teacher salaries.

Designing an effective school is the vision and driving force behind much of the research in the field of education. Public concern over the effectiveness of schooling is illustrated by an issue of Time magazine in which 26 pages were devoted to "What Makes a Good School?: Special Report" (Wulf, Lacayo, Collins, Fedarko, Hornblower, Harrison, Larson, & Lemann, 1997). Lemann (1997) concluded this special section by appealing to readers to guarantee to every American child the key ingredients of a good education. Because only a system level change in the schools can bring about high quality instruction (Power, 2006), significant public involvement of the kind called for by Lemann will be needed to bring about necessary reform. Public involvement per se will not necessarily lead to better schools. Unless members of the public understand and support changes supported by educational research, public involvement could actually be harmful. Thus, public beliefs regarding what constitutes effective educational practice are as critical to school reform as are the efforts of educational researchers to identify these practices.

Unfortunately, public opinion polls have consistently shown that, although the public is concerned about the quality of schools in general, most parents believe their children attend good schools (e.g., Elam, 1990; Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1993; Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996). In addition, public perceptions of schools are often based on comparisons of local, regional, and state averages on standardized tests reported in local newspapers (e.g., McElvy, 1997; Quinn, 1997), and these scores are subject to manipulation by educational officials. More important, however, is that reports of standardized test scores provide no information regarding either the characteristics of an effective school or what characteristics are present or absent in a particular school. When parents are queried about the characteristics they want in a school they report either very general characteristics (e.g., educational quality, learning climate, principal's leadership) or factors that have little or nothing to do with the actual quality of instruction such as zoning laws, convenience, or day-care options (Elam, 1990).

Teachers' beliefs regarding educational practices are also vitally important. Not only do teachers implement instruction, but they also provide a link that can be used to inform parents of the characteristics of effective schools. Unfortunately, although many of the characteristics of effective schools have been identified (Johnson, Livingston, Slate, & Schwartz, 2000; Ornstein, 1993), actual educational practice is more often based upon tradition or ideology than sound scientific research (Carnine, 1992). In addition, Carnine has demonstrated that teachers seeking scientifically validated practices are typically unable to locate appropriate articles in the professional literature. Glickman (1993) argued that teachers are not prepared to help the public understand what is needed for schools to be effective. More important, however, is that educational practices lacking strong social validity with teachers are unlikely to be implemented with high treatment integrity.

Thus, simply identifying the characteristics of effective schools will not be sufficient to bring about needed school reforms. Understanding the beliefs about educational practices held by important constituent groups such as parents and teachers will also be necessary. As a result, Tacheny (1997) encouraged the use of survey research to understand perceptions of the problems confronting schools. Prudent use of survey results will help educational officials determine which changes will be supported and identify areas where public education will be necessary before change can be implemented successfully.

In a recent study Johnson (1998) surveyed 127 teachers and 1,034 parents from three National Schools of Excellence at the elementary level in South Georgia. She found that parents' and teachers' views of effective elementary schools were similar. For example, both parents and teachers rated "Students think teachers believe in

them" among the five most important characteristics of effective schools. Similarly, both parents and teachers rated "Parents' formal education is high," "There is high district spending per pupil," and "The economic status of the community in which the school is located is high" among the five least important characteristics of effective schools.

The present study was conducted to replicate Johnson's (1998) study with parents and teachers in Juarez, Mexico. Although additional research on the beliefs of parents and teachers in the United States is clearly needed, views regarding the characteristics of effective schools are likely to vary depending on the cultural values and beliefs of respondents. We were unable to identify any previous studies describing perceived characteristics of effective elementary schools conducted in Mexico. Thus, the present study provides important cross-cultural information on beliefs about educational practice. In addition, the number of Hispanic students in schools in the United States is expected to increase sharply in the coming decades (Roach, 2001). Understanding the beliefs of Mexican parents can help educators in the United States prepare for changes that will occur as the demographics of our schools change. Data collection addressed the following three research questions. (a) What are the beliefs of the parents of students in Mexican schools regarding the characteristics of an effective elementary school? (b) What are the beliefs of teachers in Mexican schools regarding the characteristics of an effective elementary school? (c) What are the similarities and dissimilarities in beliefs of these parents and teachers regarding the characteristics of an effective elementary school?

Method

Respondents

Parents.

Respondents included 374 parents whose children attended public and private elementary schools in Juarez, Mexico. Nearly three-quarters of the parent respondents were women (73.3%). Parents were almost exclusively Mexican (98.7%) with only 1.1% White non-Hispanic and 0.2% other. The age distribution was 2.4% 20 years or younger, 3.3% between 21-25 years, 14.9% between 26-30 years, 27.1% between 31-35 years, and 52.3% older than 35 years of age. The educational level of parents included 41.6% who had not completed high school, 15.3% who had a high school diploma, 17.4% who had some college courses, 25.1% who had a university degree; and 0.6% who did not respond to this item. Almost all parents indicated the primary language spoken at home was Spanish (95.7%) with only 1.6% reporting the primary language at home was English and 2.7% not responding to this item.

Teachers.

Respondents also included 82 teachers from the same public and private elementary schools. Slightly over three-quarters of the teachers were women (76.8%). Ethnic backgrounds of teachers included 95.1% Mexican, 3.7% White non-Hispanic, and 1.2% Asian. The age distribution was 3.7% between 21-25 years, 11.0% between 26-30 years, 35.4% between 31-35 years, and 50.0% older than 35 years of age. The educational level of teachers included 2.7% who had not completed high school, 37.8% who had earned a high school diploma, 3.7% who had some college courses, and 54.9% who had a university degree. Similar to parents, almost all teachers (98.8%) reported the primary language spoken at home was Spanish.

Instrumentation

In addition to demographic questions, all respondents completed the Effective School Characteristics Survey which Johnson (1996) adapted from Van Der Burg (1987). This instrument is comprised of 100 questions. There are 98 rating scale items on which respondents rate specific characteristics of effective schools on a 5-point scale ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly with regard to perceived importance for effective schools. The questions cover 14 domains including socio-economic variables, adequate physical facility, parent involvement, orderly and safe environment, leadership, school climate, frequent monitoring of student progress, emphasis on basic skills, philosophy and mission statement, support services, time on task, high expectations, and recognition of individuality. The remaining two items are open-ended items. Johnson found the Coefficient α for her adaptation of this instrument was .98 indicating a very high level of internal consistency.

For the present study the Effective School Characteristics Survey was translated into Spanish. Instructions were phrased so that parents and teachers were asked to respond to survey items in terms of what they deemed most important for influencing instructional practices in elementary schools in Mexico. Prior to use, this translated version was pilot tested on a sample of 10 parents and 10 teachers who were all fluent in Spanish. Slight modifications were made in the wording of several items that pilot respondents found confusing or inaccurate. For the actual respondents in this study, the Coefficient α was .96 for both parents and teachers indicating that the high internal consistency found by Johnson (1996) was retained by the translation into Spanish. This level of internal consistency is more than

sufficient for survey research (Nunnally, 1978). All 98 rating scale items are presented in Table 1 and again in Table 2. The time required to complete the survey was approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the Secretaria de Educación Pública to hand out surveys at elementary schools in Juarez, Mexico. Next, directors of the elementary schools, public and private, were asked to allow the survey to be administered to the teachers and parents. Plans for distribution of the parents' surveys were arranged according to the preferences of directors of the individual schools. Parents received their surveys via their children and were asked to return the survey to their individual teacher who, in turn, handed in their students' surveys to the school director.

Results

59. The principal's decisions promote an environment conducive to teaching and learning	73.4	10.4	15.2
60. There is an annual review of school-wide objectives.	72.7	16.8	10.2
61. The instructional supervisor often follows up formal observations with suggestions for improving teaching strategies	72.6	18.5	8.6
62. The principal provides guidelines for instructional emphasis	72.5	15.8	11.5
63. Testing is used to prescribe appropriate instruction	72.5	15.0	12.5
64. Regularly assigned homework reinforces basic skills instruction	72.1	17.5	10.2
65. Pull-out programs (i.e., field trips) do not disrupt basic skills instruction	72.1	10.5	17.2
66. A written curriculum is well coordinated between grades.	71.9	16.3	11.7
67. The principal aligns instructional goals with the school philosophy	71.9	16.0	12.0
68. School supplies (e.g., volumes in library, # of computers, and lab equipment) are plentiful	71.6	15.3	12.8
69. Ideas of parents are used in making school decisions.	71.6	13.4	14.8
70. The principal brings instructional issues to the staff for discussion	71.4	19.8	8.3
71. The school has a low rate of vandalism	71.4	14.4	14.2
72. The school has support programs for students with special needs	71.3	13.7	14.8
73. Students are comfortable in approaching the teachers	70.4	21.1	8.2
74. A school improvement plan is developed annually	70.4	17.5	11.6
75. Students think teachers believe in them	70.4	16.6	12.9
76. Test results are used to identify learning needs.	69.2	18.5	12.3
77. The instructional supervisor regularly reviews teaching plans	69.2	16.0	13.7
78. All materials necessary for instruction are available.	67.7	12.0	20.1
79. The staff actively participates in curriculum planning	67.3	24.4	8.3
80. Frequent staff development activities are required.	65.4	19.6	15.0
81. The professional growth of each staff member is annually reviewed	65.2	21.1	13.7
82. Staff enforces a policy that no one disturbs a teacher during instruction	64.9	16.4	18.8
83. There is an annual standardized testing at designated grade levels	63.9	22.7	13.1
84. The school has a strong music and art program	61.7	18.2	20.0
85. A strong teacher educational preparation is demanded	60.5	21.9	17.6
86. The school campus is physically safe	59.3	20.4	19.9
87. School-wide goals are the focal point for instruction	59.0	17.4	23.4
88. Staff demonstrates concern for the personal welfare of students	58.7	28.2	13.1
89. There is a high district spending per pupil.	58.0	24.7	17.4
90. Students are not excused from meeting achievement levels in basic skills	57.3	21.2	21.5
91. The district supports a low student-teacher ratio	57.2	20.3	22.0
92. Racial/ethnic tension is not an issue at the school	51.0	3.4	0.3
22. An active parent group collaborates with school staff	81.5	12.6	5.6
23. The teacher's primary task is to teach.	81.3	11.5	7.2
24. Strong human values are taught.	81.3	8.3	9.6
25. Textbooks are current.	81.2	8.6	7.2
26. Students must attain identified mastery before going on to the next level.	81.0	11.5	7.4

Parents

The percentage of parents agreeing or disagreeing with each of the 98 rating scale items is presented in Table 1. Strongly Agree and Agree responses have been combined as have the Strongly Disagree and Disagree responses. Questions are listed in descending order by percent agreement. Some rows do not total to 100% due to missing data.

92. Economic status of community in which the school is located is high.	52.7	16.3	31.0
93. Building repairs are made swiftly.	52.5	19.5	28.1
94. Instructional supervision/evaluation is regular and meaningful	48.0	33.0	19.0
95. Parents' formal education is high.	44.0	29.5	26.5
96. Administrators are easily approachable by students and teachers	43.0	24.2	32.8
97. School supplies (e.g., volumes in library, number of computers, lab equipment) are plentiful.	52.1	17.2	30.5
98. District schools boast high standardized test scores	50.1	25.5	15.5

In general, parents support the identified characteristics of effective elementary schools with only three items falling below 50% agreement and none rising above 32.8% disagreement. There are 12 items endorsed by more than 85% of parents. Content analyses of these items reveal six basic themes. The first theme is parental involvement in the school reflected by shared responsibility for discipline (92.8%), parental involvement supporting homework (89.2%), and frequent staff communication with parents (87.7%). The second theme is academic engaged time reflected by wanting the staff to protect the instructional schedule (89.6%) and starting and stopping activities at the appropriate times (85.5%). The third is positive identification with the school by staff and students (88.2%). Fourth, an emphasis on basic skills reflected by seeing this as the goal of school programs (87.9%) and wanting textbooks to reflect these skills (87.4%). The fifth is effective teaching reflected by wanting the supervisor to emphasize this (85.9%) and principals to reinforce it (85.6%). And, finally, clarity in instructional goals (85.8%) and school rules (85.3%).

Five items were present that were either not endorsed by 50% of parents or which more than 25% of parents explicitly disagreed. The most important theme is that parents rejected the ideas that schools cannot be successful when the socioeconomic status of the community is low (only 52.7% agreed; 31.0% disagreed) or parents lack formal education (only 44.0% agreed; 26.5% disagreed). Parents were also not especially concerned if building repairs were made swiftly (52.5% agreed; 28.1% disagreed) or if administrators were seen as approachable by students and teachers (43% agreed; 32.8% disagreed). An interesting contradiction is that, although parents put a strong emphasis on reinforcing effective instruction, fewer than half (48.0%) saw regular, meaningful supervision and evaluation of instruction as necessary for an effective school.

Teachers

The percentage of teachers agreeing or disagreeing with each of the 98 rating scale items is presented in Table 2. More than 50% of teachers agreed with every item and there were only three items with which more than 25% of teachers disagreed.

Table 2

Teachers' Responses to Characteristics of Effective Elementary Schools

Survey Items	Strongly Agree to Agree	No Opinion	Strongly Disagree to Disagree
1. The principal reinforces teachers for quality instruction	90.2	1.2	8.5
2. Staff protects the instructional schedule	87.8	6.1	6.1
3. Teachers' materials reflect the focus on basic skills	87.8	4.9	7.4
4. Personal development is an important goal	86.5	6.1	7.3
5. The district offers competitive staff salaries	86.4	3.7	9.9
6. In the evaluation of teachers, the instructional supervisor In evaluation of teachers, the instructional supervisor places emphasis on effective teaching	85.3	6.1	8.5
7. The principal actively promotes effective teaching	84.1	13.4	2.4
8. The principal frequently communicates with teachers regarding their responsibility to students	81.7	9.8	8.5
9. Teachers start class on time and continue with planned activity until the end of the allocated time	81.7	9.8	8.6
10. Immediate feedback is given to students on performance	81.4	4.9	13.6
11. Reading and math instruction is emphasized	80.5	13.4	6.1
12. Students feel welcome in the school	80.5	12.2	7.3
13. Social skills are an important school focus	80.5	7.3	12.2
14. The instructional supervisor regularly reviews teaching plans	80.5	6.1	13.4
15. Staff and students identify positively with the school	79.3	12.2	8.5
16. A school improvement plan is developed annually	79.3	11.0	9.8
17. Quality of instructional time is emphasized	79.3	9.8	11.0
18. Instructional supervision/evaluation is regular and meaningful	79.3	4.9	15.9
19. Teachers believe that all students can master the basic skills as a direct result of the instructional program	79.2	7.3	13.4
20. Teachers hold consistently high expectations for all students	79.2	7.3	13.4
21. Many parents are involved in a home-school support network	79.0	8.6	12.3
22. There is an annual review of school-wide objectives	78.1	11.0	11.0
23. Frequent staff development activities are required	78.0	12.2	9.7
24. The school building has adequate space	78.0	11.0	10.9
25. A strong teacher educational preparation is demanded	78.0	11.0	11.0

26. Staff enforces a policy that no one disturbs a teacher during instruction	78.0	11.0	11.0
27. The principal provides guidelines for instructional emphasis	77.8	11.1	9.9
28. Staff believes the instructional effectiveness of the school determines student achievement more than family background or ethnicity	77.8	8.6	11.6
29. The physical condition of the school is pleasant	77.8	9.9	12.3
30. The district has strong support services (e.g., alcohol and other drug programs, drop-out prevention)	77.7	9.9	12.3
31. Each grade level is guided by written instructional goals	76.9	8.5	14.7
32. Textbooks are current	76.8	12.2	9.7
33. The goal of school programs is to enhance basic skills instruction	76.8	9.8	13.4
34. The staff and parents share responsibility for school discipline	76.8	8.5	14.7
35. Students have many opportunities to receive recognition	76.5	12.3	11.1
36. Testing is used to prescribe appropriate instruction	75.6	14.6	9.7
37. Administrators are easily approachable by students and teachers	75.6	12.2	11.0
38. Parents support the school's instructional program	75.6	13.4	11.0
39. Parents are supportive of the school's homework policy	75.6	8.5	15.9
40. Instructional time is rarely interrupted	75.6	6.1	18.3
41. Test results are used to diagnose weaknesses in the curriculum	75.6	4.9	19.5
42. Rules are clear and consistent	74.4	13.4	12.2
43. The school atmosphere is orderly and conducive to learning	74.4	11.0	14.6
44. The school has a low rate of vandalism	74.4	11.0	14.6
45. Ideas of parents are used in making school decisions	74.4	9.8	15.8
46. Student absenteeism is minimal	74.4	8.5	17.0
47. Pull-out programs (i.e., field trips) do not disrupt basic skills instruction	74.4	7.3	18.3
48. The facility is well-maintained	74.3	9.8	11.0
49. The principal brings instructional issues to the staff for discussion	74.3	12.2	13.5
50. Teachers and support staff are nurturing and caring	74.3	7.3	17.1
51. Teacher morale is high	74.1	16.0	8.7
52. School-wide goals are the focal point for instruction	74.1	11.1	14.8
53. Test results are used to identify learning needs	74.0	16.0	9.9
54. Students must attain identified mastery before going on to the next level.	73.8	12.5	13.8
55. Teachers believe they are accountable for student progress	73.2	17.1	8.5
56. Staff frequently communicates with parents by phone calls, newsletters, notes and/or progress reports	73.2	12.2	14.6
57. The principal's decisions promote an environment conducive to teaching and learning	73.2	9.8	15.8
58. There is a high district spending per pupil	73.1	19.5	7.3
59. The district supports a low student-teacher ratio	71.9	19.5	8.5

60. Many opportunities exist for students to participate in school-wide activities	71.9	18.3	9.7
61. Staff demonstrates concern for the personal welfare of students	71.9	14.6	13.4
62. Strong human values are taught	71.9	12.2	14.6
63. Students feel that their parents are welcome in the schools	71.9	13.4	14.6
64. Teachers accept responsibility for student learning	71.9	13.4	14.7
65. Students are consistently encouraged to achieve	71.9	11.0	17.1
66. Regularly assigned homework reinforces basic skills instruction	71.9	9.8	18.3
67. All materials necessary for instruction are available	71.1	11.0	15.8
68. The principal aligns instructional goals with the school philosophy	70.8	18.5	11.0
69. Achievement in basic skills is a primary school goal	70.7	15.9	13.4
70. Interruptions (i.e., announcements, calling students to the office) during instruction are actively discouraged	70.7	15.9	13.5
71. The school has a strong music and art program	70.7	13.4	15.9
72. Building repairs are made swiftly	70.7	8.5	20.7
73. The instructional supervisor often follows up formal observations with suggestions for improving teaching strategies	70.6	16.0	12.3
74. Students are comfortable in approaching the teachers	70.3	17.3	12.3
75. The school objectives are the driving force behind school decisions	70.3	14.8	14.8
76. The staff actively participates in curriculum planning	69.5	14.6	15.9
77. Parent conferences are encouraged	69.5	13.4	17.1
78. Students abide by the school rules	69.5	13.4	17.1
79. The teacher's primary task is to teach	69.5	13.4	17.1
80. There is an annual standardized testing at designated grade levels	69.5	13.4	17.1
81. Teachers recognize unique talents of each individual	69.5	8.5	20.7
82. School staff works well together	68.3	18.3	13.5
83. There is systematic, regular assessment of student achievement	68.3	15.9	14.6
84. Students are not excused from meeting achievement levels in basic skills	68.3	15.9	15.9
85. Students think teachers believe in them	68.3	14.6	15.9
86. A written curriculum is well coordinated between grades	67.0	7.3	25.6
87. A high percentage of district high school students go to college	66.7	14.8	18.5
88. Economic status of community in which the school is located is high.	64.2	17.3	18.5
89. The school has a strong counseling program	61.7	22.2	16.0
90. The school has support programs for students with special needs (i.e. gifted and talented, special education)	61.0	17.1	21.9
91. The school campus is physically safe	61.0	17.1	21.9
92. Racial/ethnic tension is not an issue at the school	60.5	18.5	20.0
93. Parents' formal education is high	59.8	23.2	17.1
94. An active parent group collaborates with school staff	59.3	23.5	17.3
95. District schools boast high standardized test scores	58.6	22.0	19.5
96. The professional growth of each staff member is annually reviewed	58.0	11.1	29.6
97. School supplies (e.g., volumes in library, number of computers, lab equipment) are plentiful	53.6	14.6	31.7
98. Teachers' formal education is high.	74.0	19.5	6.5

Fourteen items were present with which more than 80% of teachers agreed. These items emphasize seven basic themes. The strongest theme focuses on administrative support for teaching. Teachers strongly agreed that principals should reinforce quality instruction (90.2%), actively promote effective teaching (84.1%), and regularly communicate teachers' responsibilities to students (81.7%). They also wanted instructional supervisors to place emphasis on effective teaching (85.3%) and review teaching plans regularly (80.5%). The second theme was academic engaged time reflected by wanting the staff to protect the instructional schedule (87.8%) and starting and stopping activities at the appropriate times (81.7%). Third was an emphasis on basic skills, wanting teaching materials to focus on these skills (87.8%) and an emphasis on reading and math instruction (80.5%). The fourth theme, however, is a more holistic view of education in which personal development (86.5%) including social skills (80.5%) is an important goal. The fifth theme is a need for competitive staff salaries (86.4%), the sixth is the need for immediate feedback to students (81.4%), and the seventh is a school climate that makes students feel welcome (80.5%).

Three items were present with which more than one quarter of the teachers disagreed. Strongest disagreement was with the need for successful elementary schools to have such supplies as library books, computers, and lab

equipment (31.7%). Next was a need for the professional growth of staff to be reviewed annually (29.6%) and, finally, the need for a written curriculum that is well coordinated between grades.

Discussion

Parents' Beliefs

The first research question addressed the beliefs of Mexican parents regarding the characteristics of an effective elementary school. The findings revealed that parents strongly support most of the factors that characterize effective elementary schools. These parents believed that their involvement contributes to school success and expect frequent communication from school staff. They also wanted their children to identify strongly with the school. In short, they believed that for elementary schools to be effective, parents and students must have deep connections to the school. This finding runs counter to research on Mexican-American parents of students in schools in the United States. These parents tend to see schools as Anglo run bureaucracies with which parents should not interfere (Chavkin & Gonzales, 1995), and assign total responsibility for their children's education to school personnel (Carrasquillo & London, 1993).

The parents also stressed academics. They wanted quality teaching that maintained academic engagement and clear instructional goals that focused on basic skills. The parents also wanted clear school rules. They saw administrators as somewhat distant individuals responsible for schools running properly.

Perhaps the most important finding regarding parental beliefs is that the majority rejected the idea that the educational backgrounds and socioeconomic status of parents is a causal factor in school success. These parents are committed to the idea that all children can learn, regardless of their family background, if given proper instruction. This view has long been supported by educational research (Becker, 1988; Becker & Carnine, 1981; Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989). Thus, these parents placed a much higher emphasis on instructional materials than on building repairs.

Johnson et al. (2000) reviewed research in the United States on parental beliefs concerning effective education. Parents in these studies tended to place the greatest emphasis on strong administrative leadership. The parents in the present study had a similar emphasis especially with regard to administrative leadership to promote effective teaching. Parents in the United States also place a strong emphasis on school climate, high expectations for student performance, assessment of student progress, and school safety. These issues did not have an equally high priority among the Mexican parents in the present study.

Teachers' Beliefs

The second research question addressed the beliefs of the teachers in Mexican schools, and the third research question addressed the similarities and dissimilarities in beliefs of parents and teachers. The teachers shared with parents the widespread support for the characteristics of effective elementary schools. Teachers also shared the strong emphasis on quality instruction, maintaining academic engaged time, and basic skills. These three themes, therefore, constitute a common core regarding the most important factors that are required for an effective elementary school. The fact that both parents and teachers placed a high concern on maintaining the integrity of instructional time is interesting given recent research showing that instructional time is frequently interrupted by externally imposed activities (Leonard, 2001).

In contrast to parents, teachers did not place as much emphasis on parental involvement in the schools. This finding is consistent with research in the United States showing that parents rated parental involvement as more important to effective schools than do parents (Scieszka, 1996). This difference is also interesting given that teachers often complain about a lack of parental involvement and that many teachers are not especially interested in working with parents (Johnson et al., 2000). Parents and teachers also showed concern for students' relationship to the school but expressed this concern differently. That is, rather than emphasizing students' identification with the school as parents did, teachers emphasized students feeling welcome in the school. These differences could reflect subtle differences in point-of-view regarding to whom schools really belong. To some degree teachers seem to be expressing the view that the school belongs to them and that students and parents should feel like welcome guests. This may be the reason teacher contact with parents is an important factor in increasing parental involvement (Feuerstein, 2000). Teachers may convey the attitude that parents should be invited before they become involved.

A very important difference is that teachers did not show the strong rejection of the role of parental background factors in school success that parents showed. Indeed, only 18.5% of teachers rejected the economic status of the community as an important factor in school success, and only 17.1% rejected the formal education of parents as an important factor. Thus, teachers seem less committed as a group to the idea that all students can learn than parents

are. Scieszka (1996) found that many teachers in the United States reject the idea that all students can learn, frequently citing low ability and low motivation as obstacles. This contrasts with Johnson's findings that both parents and teachers rejected socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of parents as an important factor in school success.

Also in contrast to parents, teachers emphasized a more holistic view of educational goals. Teachers saw students' personal development, not just basic skill development, as an essential characteristic of effective schools. Given that both groups place a heavy emphasis on how school time is used; this difference in goals could lead to conflict over the content of the curriculum. Curricular conflict could also occur because parents placed a high priority on coordination across grades whereas more than a quarter of teachers explicitly rejected this as a characteristic of effective elementary schools. On the positive side, this difference may reflect teachers' understanding that students' individual skill levels will vary within any grade level and a lock step curriculum cannot meet all students' needs.

The remaining difference is that competitive staff salaries are ranked fifth by teachers and thirty-first by parents. Given teachers' stronger self-interest in salaries, this difference should not be unexpected. However, parents do recognize a need for competitive salaries in order to obtain quality instruction for their children. Indeed, 79.7% of parents agreed that such salaries are needed and only 12.0% disagreed. Thus, the difference is more relative than absolute but could become a source of conflict when budgets are very tight.

Limitations

Readers are cautioned that these findings are based upon parents and teachers beliefs in a single Mexican city located on the border with the United States. As such, these findings must be considered preliminary in nature and dependent upon the specific geographic location. In addition, due to the lack of research on Mexican parents' and teachers' beliefs, some interpretations of the findings are based upon extrapolations from research in the United States and Canada that may not actually generalize to our respondents. Until further studies are conducted and these findings replicated, all conclusions must be tentative.

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