

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS: A PRINCIPAL'S GUIDE*

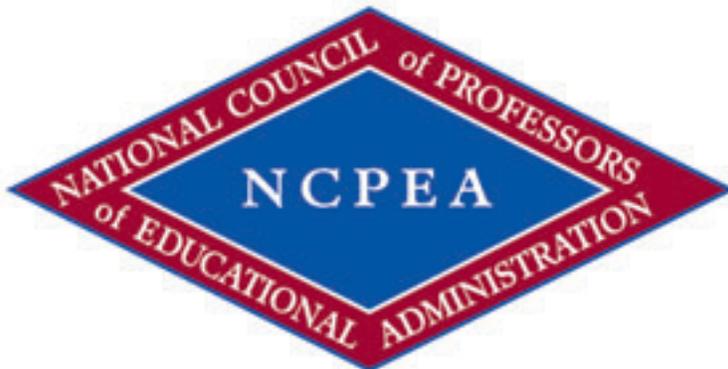
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Abstract

Parental involvement is an important indicator of students' success in school. When schools engage families in a manner connected to improving learning, students do make greater gains. Creating and implementing an effective parental involvement model is an essential component in increasing student achievement in school. This article addresses the role of the principal in developing a multi-dimensional parental involvement model. To clarify this role, first parental involvement is defined and discussed. Effects of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender on parental involvement are investigated and effective strategies for involving parental subgroups are explored. Following the literature review, recommendations for multi-dimensional parental involvement are suggested.

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2 Sumario en español

La participación paternal es un indicador importante del éxito de estudiantes en la escuela. Cuando las escuelas comprometen las familias en una manera conectada a mejorar aprender, los estudiantes hacen ganancias más grande. Para crear y aplicar un modelo paternal efectivo de participación es un componente esencial en el logro creciente de estudiante en la escuela. Este artículo dirige el papel del director a desarrollar un modelo paternal multidimensional de participación. Para clarificar este papel, participación primero paternal es definida y es discutida. Los efectos de etnia, de estatus socioeconómica, y del género en la participación paternal son investigados y estrategias efectivas para implicar subgrupos paternas son explorados. Siguiendo la revisión de la literatura, las recomendaciones para la participación paternal multidimensional son sugeridas.

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

3 Introduction

Parental involvement is an important indicator of students' success in school (Pattnaik & Sriram, 2010). As the relationship between parents and school becomes more connected, student achievement increases. When the school engages families in their children's education, students make greater gains (Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Ingram, Wolfe, & Leiberman, 2007; Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007; Reeves, 2005; Sirvani, 2007).

Parents are not disinterested bystanders. They want to know that schools are preparing their children with a high-quality education. They also want to know how to connect to teachers and administrators (Epstein et al., 2009). Parents are their children's first educators, and they remain their life-long teachers. The question is not *if* parental involvement is an essential aspect of education; rather, it is *how* do educational establishments create a system that fosters and encourages strong partnerships that include all parents. It is the responsibility of the school leader to implement a cohesive parental involvement model (Reeves, 2005).

Currently parental involvement seems to be somewhat one-dimensional. The vast majority of involved parents appears to be middle-class, Caucasian mothers (McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999). While this subgroup is of consequence, not all parents respond in the same way that middle-class mothers do. Differences must be acknowledged and addressed (Henderson et al., 2007). Many other equally important subgroups should be represented in a parental partnership model. Racial diversity in most US communities is apparent. Asians, Latinos, Hispanics, Native Americans, and African Americans may have different cultural views of parental involvement. School leaders must make every effort to understand these differences, yet make parents feel they are valued and belong. They must also be aware of the impact socioeconomic status has on the way parents connect to school (Payne, 2006). Moreover, in elementary schools, parental involvement is usually synonymous with "mother" involvement (Shedlin, 2004). Fathers should no longer be viewed solely as breadwinners or disciplinarians. School leaders must create more father-friendly schools and develop a framework that includes maternal and paternal involvement (Shedlin, 2004).

For school leaders, the ability to create and implement an effective parental involvement model is an essential component of increasing student achievement in school. If parents, principals, and teachers work

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together for the success of each child, then every child wins (Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson et al., 2007). This article addresses the role of the principal related to the development of a multi-dimensional parental involvement model. To clarify this role, a literature review of essential elements follows. Parental involvement is defined, and elements of are discussed. Effects of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender are explored. Following the literature review, a model for multi-dimensional parental involvement is suggested. Applications of the model are addressed and discussed. Finally, a brief conclusion reiterates the importance of the principal as a knowledgeable promoter of parental involvement.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Defining Parental Involvement

To create a parental involvement model to include a diversity of parents, the school leader must first understand how parental involvement is defined. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 2004) define parental involvement as:

4.1.1

[T]he participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: Assisting their child’s learning; Being actively involved in their child’s education at school; Serving as full partners in their child’s education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and, Carrying out of other activities such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA Section 9101(32). (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004, para. 5)

Jeynes (2005) created an operational definition of parental involvement to support his meta-analysis of forty-one studies on that topic. He defined parental involvement as “parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children” (p.245). This definition includes parental involvement related to education within the school and also in the home of each child. Parental involvement cannot be defined in one conclusive statement. In fact, parents and school personnel may view parental involvement differently. For example, some parents may view parental involvement as keeping their children safe and transporting them to school, whereas teachers and other school staff members more see it as parents’ actual presence at school (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) differentiated between school-based and home-based involvement: School-based involvement requires parents to make actual contact with school personnel (for example, attending school meetings, talking to teachers, supporting school events, and volunteering time at the school). On the other hand, home-based involvement encompasses assisting with homework, responding to children’s academic performance, and talking with children about happenings at school (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Although it is difficult to articulate a specific definition of parental involvement, many researchers agree that it is comprised of separate dimensions (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007).

Dimensions of parental involvement. According to Georgiou and Tourva (2007), parental involvement includes five dimensions that were originally coined by Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon (1997). These five dimensions include: Parenting, assisting with homework, communicating with the school, volunteering time at the school, and participating in school decision-making. Epstein et al. (2009) added a sixth dimension, namely collaborating with the community. Epstein et al. (2009) created definitions for each of the six categories.

Parenting. Parenting refers to the support for education children receive in their own homes. To assist parents, schools can provide families with a greater understanding of child development.

Communicating. Communicating includes written and oral converse between school and home. Effective communication should have a focus on student progress and be a two-way process initiated by parents as well as members of the school community.

Volunteering. Volunteering is when parents actually donate their time for the betterment of the educational establishment. Volunteering benefits many students at once.

Learning at home. Learning at home is related to homework and other curriculum activities including reading to children in the home.

Decision-making. Decision-making refers to parent leaders and representatives making up councils and committees for the school. These councils and committees should have a positive impact on the culture of the school. Parents should have the opportunity to serve on various management and fiscal plans of action.

Collaborating. Finally, collaborating with the community, includes seeking resources and services from the larger community for the benefit of the students (Epstein, 2009).

4.2 Role of Parents in Enhancing Student Achievement

In a recent study conducted by Korkmaz (2007), teachers were asked what they believe the role of parents should be to enhance student achievement. First and foremost teachers felt parents should love and respect their children. Next, parents should take responsibility for their children's education. Finally, parents should engage in relevant conversation with teachers at school (Korkmaz, 2007). Parents should be provided professional knowledge in best practices and effective programs that are used at the school.

In recent years, many parental organizations have come into existence to assist parents and schools to understand and utilize the various elements of parental involvement. Project Appleseed (1992) is an independent foundation established to help guide parents through practical tips on how to get involved with their children's schools. The project started in 1992 with a goal of helping parents to understand laws and mandates in education. Currently, Project Appleseed (2008) is grounded in Epstein et al.'s (1997) six dimensions of parental involvement. Within these six areas, Project Appleseed provides schools and parents with specific best practices to address each dimension. There are numerous other sites and programs available to assist parents. Sorting through all the literature and information available to parents may be overwhelming for some families. Therefore, it is important for schools to understand the elements of parental involvement required to create an effective partnership. Who is ultimately responsible for creating a multi-dimensional system of parental involvement with an emphasis on best practices? Such a system must begin with a visionary principal acting in collaboration with each stakeholder group.

4.3 Principal-Parent Partnerships

The principal is the key individual in creating successful parent-school partnerships. School leaders must convince teachers, students, parents, and community members of the value of working together for the benefit of the school and the students it serves (Epstein & Rodriguez-Jansorn, 2004). Moreover, it takes a certain kind of leader to create a successful, welcoming partnership with parents. Effective principals must also be willing and able to delegate power to stakeholder groups while simultaneously guiding the process (Gordon & Seashore-Louis, 2009). Such a process of shared decision-making among teachers and parents may produce better decisions and create a sense of ownership and responsibility for the outcomes of those shared decisions (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). According to Stelmach and Preston (2007), parents are now being asked to contribute to educational decisions that were once left only to the professionals. Encouraging this democratic point of view has led to the voices of parents and non-professionals being heard in making decisions on school reform, and gives parents a more powerful place in the educational establishment (Stelmach & Preston, 2007).

To create parental partnerships that are grounded in democratic practice, the principal must implement three processes (Henderson et al., 2007); (a) allow parents to take part in decision-making by implementing workable mechanisms for all stakeholders to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns. Topics such as budgeting, student safety, curriculum, and policy lend themselves well to parental input; (b) increase awareness of community norms and expectations; and (c) create strong links between families and community organizations and resources. To organize such a system requires a multi-dimensional approach, multi-level leadership, a focus on student learning, partnerships at the school and classroom levels, and equity (Epstein & Rodriguez-Jansorn, 2004).

Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Green, and Walker (2007) also suggested a model of parental involvement in which the school leader is the key partner with parents. This model consists of three constructs. The

first concerns parents' motivational beliefs, that is, how and what they perceive as their responsibilities in relation to education. Parents make decisions based on how likely they think their involvement will be linked to positive outcomes. The principal should create parental roles that focus on active participation in school. It is not enough for principals to simply listen to parents' input; rather, they must actively follow up on parents' input. The next construct is general school invitations. The principal should require teachers to deliver specific invitations to parents. Teachers should be encouraged to communicate with parents about interventions, achievement, and home-based activities to enhance school learning. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2007) also implied that child invitations are powerful. Receiving an invitation from their child to engage in an educational conversation can be a great way to increase parental involvement. The final construct is life context variables, that is, knowledge of parents' strengths so that they may be provided with opportunities to participate where they feel most comfortable, in the places where they feel they can benefit the school in the most effective way (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2007).

4.4 Legal Aspects of Parental Involvement

When developing and implementing a parental involvement model, the school leader must be knowledgeable about the laws surrounding parental involvement. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) applies to all public schools. The US Department of Education gives additional funding to schools that serve large populations of low income and at risk students; these schools are referred to as Title 1 schools. Title I schools are required to create a parental involvement policy. Title I schools must report on how parents and teachers work together, how many parents are attending professional development opportunities, how parents observe in the classroom, and how often parents meet with the principal. Every school gets a report card. This report card explains to stakeholders how schools are performing. Parents may request to transfer their children to another school if the school where their children attend is not satisfactory. This legislation can greatly help schools and leaders to articulate the importance of parental involvement (Henderson et al., 2007).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 1997) is a law that also supports a parent-professional collaboration in the decision-making process for the education of students with disabilities (Matuszny, Banda, & Coleman, 2007). Parents are guaranteed rights in the individual education plan (IEP) process. Acting ethically and within the constraints of the law is of the utmost importance for a school principal. Beyond knowing the laws surrounding parental involvement, the principal must have background knowledge in other areas of parental involvement.

4.5 Cultural Differences in Parental Involvement

Research shows that while parents of different ethnicities do support their children academically (Chang, Park, Singh, & Sung, 2009), their support often takes on different appearances and cultural patterns. Often white parents tend to be seen in the school volunteering, and while parents of ethnicity are also involved with the school, their participation tends to be more at home in working with homework and encouraging children to do their best in order to have a more promising future (Patel & Stevens, 2010).

Minority families still experience power differences and conflicts in their relationships with school personnel (Reynolds, 2010). An assumption commonly shared by educators is that ethnic cultural values and norms, in particular those of the Black culture, are not supportive of education (Noguera, 2001). Indeed, according to Reynolds, "many educators, along with policy-makers, have come to accept the idea that Black parents are more of a deficit to their children's educational development than an asset" (p. 148). In a study that explored family involvement in urban schools, McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) observed teachers' frustration with a lack of African American and Latino parental involvement in activities at home and at school. On the other hand, parents indicated they purposefully did not involve themselves in school because they felt a lack of trust and perceived that the educators were biased against their children and families. Indeed, in some cases educator bias is evident. Previous research has indicated that teachers may assign lower grades to children of ethnicity (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Msengi, 2007; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009).

What is often misunderstood is that racial and ethnic subgroups historically have differing views of parental involvement, which leads to a need for greater understanding of differences (Chang et al., 2009;

Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Hyslop, 2000; Spera et al., 2009; Wong & Hughes, 2006). Wong & Hughes (2006) studied Hispanic parental involvement and found lower levels of parental involvement in the actual school than for Caucasian parents. They concluded that Hispanic parents tend to be more trusting of teacher practices and less comfortable conversing with teachers and principals (Wong & Hughes, 2006). They often display more passive attitudes towards the education of their children (Chang et al., 2009); they view teachers as experts, and so do not feel it is their place to question them (Hyslop, 2000). Diamond and Gomez (2004), in a study of working-class African American parents, had similar findings, where parents did not consider it was their place to intervene in schools or to engage in home-based educational activities. Passive attitudes may arise from language barriers and a lack of understanding of the American educational system. Support for their children's education in the form of informal activities at home tends to be more important to Hispanic parents than meetings, committees, and other formal gatherings at school (Henderson et al., 2007). Parents of Hispanic students may also feel more comfortable with the educational establishment when they are treated like family (Henderson et al., 2007). Diamond, Wang and Gomez (2004), in a study of African American and Chinese American middle-class parents, found that although the two groups had similar academic objectives for their children, their educational involvement differed: African American parents intervened more frequently and actively in their children's school, whereas Chinese American parents took a more 'backstage' home-based role.

Msengi (2007) recommended encouraging communication between teachers and African American parents. Msengi's findings indicated that many of the African American parents surveyed believed that as their children were doing well in school, they did not need extra support at home. However, once parents were given specific information on how to support their children at home, they implemented the suggestions. Communication is the key to increased learning (Msengi, 2007), a finding that was reiterated by Howard and Reynolds (2008) in a study of middle-class African American parents. Parents emphasized the importance of keeping informed about what is happening in school, and claimed that the greater the amount of school information they accessed, the better they were equipped to advocate for their children (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

According to Lee and Bowen (2006), many parents of ethnicity feel more comfortable helping their children with educational goals at home. While this is still considered parental involvement, many teachers and other school personnel may still perceive a lack of interest towards the school. Such negative attitudes must be addressed. Lack of parental trust is cemented by initial school/parent interaction that is frequently focused on negative communication about student behavior or lack of progress (Reynolds, 2010). Reynolds suggests early positive contact is key to establishing collaborative trusting relationships. Creative strategies must be implemented to overcome discomfort for students of ethnicity and their parents in the school setting (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

4.6 Addressing Ethnicity in Parental Involvement

Jeynes (2005), in a meta-analysis of forty-one studies, identified an association (effect size of .84) between increased parental involvement and higher achievement for students from diverse backgrounds. Chang et al. (2009) agreed that positive parental involvement is especially important for children of ethnic-minorities. An effective principal must take into account diversity (Dessoff, 2009; Epstein, 2009; Henderson et al., 2007). Administrators must be responsible for bridging cultural differences. Addressing the needs of all subgroups takes strong support from the leadership (Dessoff, 2009). To create a culture that embraces diversity, principals must first have strong understanding of the research surrounding the ethnicity. Matusny, Banda, and Coleman (2007) report that as of 2007, students of color made up nearly 40% of the total United States student population. It is predicted by the year 2020, that number will grow to 50%. Therefore, it is highly probable teachers and administrators will need guidance and support to meet the needs of this diverse population (Matuszny, et al., 2007).

A mere 14% or less of all professionals involved in public education are from culturally diverse backgrounds (Msengi, 2007). Msengi (2007) reports that when families and teachers are from different ethnicities, they are likely to have differing expectations of school. This may lead to a home and school disconnect. Therefore,

educators could greatly benefit from the parental input from diverse families (Matuszny, et al., 2007). One may conclude that to support all parents, a multidimensional parental involvement system is necessary (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

How does a principal create a school where ethnicity is respected and appreciated? Howard (2007) encouraged schools to work through a five phase system to build an environment which is welcoming to diversity. First, the school should build trust by engaging in inclusive and non-judgmental conversations with parents and staff. Second, educators' cultural competence, a term defined by Howard (2007) as educators' knowledge of cultural differences, should be developed. Cultural competency is evidenced by teachers' and parents' ability to form authentic relationships in the face of diversity. Third, social dominance must be confronted. Social dominance refers to the privilege and power sometimes associated with being white in America (Howard, 2007). To diminish social dominance, the school must adopt a practice of social justice where all ethnicities are treated equitably. Again purposeful, open communication is a key component. Conversations should be facilitated towards creating an inclusive and equitable environment. Fourth, instructional practices need to be transformed. In this phase, teams collaborate to make decisions on how to become more responsive to diversity within the curriculum. School leaders should take advantage of gathering input from parents of ethnicity to help enrich the curriculum. This phase also includes *stopping the blame*. Teachers and school staff should no longer blame students and their families for educational gaps, but rather should welcome these as educational opportunities. Finally, the last phase is school community engagement, which is involving all stakeholders in conversations about student achievement across diverse cultures (Howard, 2007). Once the school has embraced cultural diversity, the next step is to engage parents of ethnicity.

Matuszny et al. (2007) suggest a progressive four-stage plan to engage parents of diversity. In the first phase, the parent-teacher relationships are established before the school year starts. A comfortable, informal gathering may be the best way to initiate engagement. If parents and teachers are comfortable and friendly with each other prior to the beginning of the school year, they are more apt to be open to communication as the year progresses. Building a solid foundation is the emphasis of the second phase. This phase should begin during the first few weeks of school. Teachers should begin a system of two-way communication. Sharing information with parents, providing some choices to parents, and welcoming input from diverse parents in decision-making about their children's education are examples of two-way communication. Also, schools should gather input from diverse parents on family religious practices and celebrations that should be respected in the classroom. The next phase is maintenance and support in which the school communicates early and often with parents with a focus on positive discourse. Too often, parent communication from teachers and administrators centers on negative aspects, such as discipline and failing grades. Finally, in the last phase, teachers should engage parents in reflection (Matuszny et al., 2007). This plan should recycle year after year to involve parents of diverse backgrounds. Beyond implementing a plan to include diversity, the school leader must also have an understanding of cultural differences. When schools understand, acknowledge, and reward all involvement efforts, their partnerships with parents are likely to become more productive. In the case of parents who are unable to visit the school, innovative methods of sharing information about how to help at home and showing appreciation for existing efforts may need to be developed (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 215).

Communication is the single most important component of a multi-dimensional model. To increase participation at the school level, principals must create a welcoming, respectful environment for all parents. Parents of low socioeconomic status must also be included.

4.7 Addressing Poverty

Children of multi-generational poverty come to school from a unique subculture. Educators' understanding of the effects and barriers of low socioeconomic status is a vital component in improving school-parent partnerships for low-income families. Despite the positive benefits to their children, low socioeconomic status (SES) parents participate less in the schools than their higher SES counterparts. This may be due to a number of barriers that low-income parents face in attempts at school involvement; such barriers include

not only demographic and psychological obstacles, but also barriers generated by the school itself (VanVelsor & Orozco, 2007). Demographic reasons that may prevent participation in school centric parental involvement activities include inflexible work schedules, lack of transportation, and a responsibility for more than one job. *School centric* is a term that refers to activities that take place only at the school and are centered on academics (VanVelsor & Orozco, 2007). Low SES parents may also experience psychological barriers, such as a lack of confidence in their own intellect and/or negative connotations about their own schooling. To overcome some of these psychological barriers, Payne (2006) advocates that showing respect is very important. The school leader should come across as personally strong and positive. A confident approach helps parents of poverty to respect the school leader. Calling parents by their title, for example, Mr. or Mrs., is also a positive way to build a respectful relationship (Payne, 2006). Lloyd-Nesling (2006) adds that parents must be engaged in positive conversations. Coming to school for conversations about punitive mishaps should not be parents' only involvement at school.

Beyond the demographic and psychological components, there are also barriers to parental presence that originate within the school itself. Many teachers make sweeping negative generalizations about parents of low SES. Teachers tend to communicate less frequently with this subgroup of parents (VanVelsor & Orozco, 2007). Creating a welcoming, respectful environment is necessary to diminish some of these negative generalizations (Lloyd-Nesling, 2006).

Davis-Kean and Sexton (2009) suggested the influence of SES on parenting is significant. Parents of low SES may not have the access to the resources that provide an optimal home environment in which intellectual stimulation is the norm and education is of high priority. This may lead to a higher risk for lower achievement of students. Guo and Harris (2000) found income influences intellectual development as low income parents may not have the financial capability to purchase elements of cognitive stimulation such as books, newspapers, games, and magazines.

Payne (2006) explained five key issues that come into play when dealing with parents of poverty. The first issue is mutual respect. It is important to respect parents' values and opinions. It is equally important that parents believe the principal and staff are worthy of respect. Second is the use of casual register. Telling parents a story instead of confronting them with an issue is an example of how to accomplish casual register. Keeping discussions casual instead of formal is an excellent way to make parents less defensive. Third is the way discipline is viewed. In homes of poverty, discipline vacillates from being very passive to strict and punitive. Parents of poverty tend to believe the discipline of their child is solely their right. When a school official punishes their child, conflict may occur. Parents may become defensive of their children. To help lessen the defensiveness, the principal may use the *What, Why, How Approach* (Payne, 2006). What did the child do that was wrong? Why is the incident considered worthy of punishment? How should the child have acted?

Time constraints are the fourth common issue for parents of poverty. Parents are not always available for conversations, involvement, and/or activities at school. Creative scheduling is necessary in order to reach all parents.

Last is the role of the school and education in life. It is important for the school personnel to relay the importance of education. Parents need to hear that continuing education will bring more opportunities for their child. When a principal is aware of these issues, he/she can work towards breaking down barriers instead of creating them (Payne, 2006).

Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2007) conducted research on parental involvement of low SES parents. They used Epstein et al.'s (1997) six dimensions of parental involvement for the basis of their study, and found that low SES parents respond very positively to two of the six dimensions (learning at home and parenting). Low SES parents perceived these two areas to be the most important for their personal involvement, and that the other four areas (communicating, volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community) are better left to the professionals at the school. Low SES parents involved in the study offered suggestions on how to increase their participation in schools. They recommended that teachers provide families with more information on homework policies and tips on how to help their children with homework. They also suggested that teachers should encourage parents to take advantage of community resources such as libraries, zoos, and museums. Lastly, the parents stated that the school should help them find the resources necessary

to assist them with parenting, employment, educational opportunities, and personal goals (Ingram et al., 2007).

VanVelsor and Orozco (2007) relayed the importance of the principal giving part of the responsibility of welcoming this parental subgroup to the school counselors. It is then partially the responsibility of the school counselors to create a community-centric model. The term, community-centric, refers to the idea of the community being at the center of education. All stakeholders come together. This type of model does not only focus on academics. The whole child and family are taken into consideration. In the community-centric model, schools must first learn about the families of the children of the school. Proactive communication can help teachers, counselors, and other school personnel create a solid foundation with parents. Personal invitations, positive notes or feedback, and surveys of parents may be a good way to get parents of poverty more involved in their children's education. Lloyd-Nesling (2006) stated principals should be responsible for making sure personal invitations are going to parents of low SES. Home visits are also suggested as a way to meet with low SES parents in a relaxed, comfortable environment. The next step of the community-centric model is to learn about the communities in which students live. Principals who work successfully with the community are very familiar with community leaders. They have insights about help organizations and other agencies that may provide the appropriate assistance to families of need. VanVelsor and Orozco (2007) also recommend having on-site services available to parents. Family math nights, discipline topics, and even topics such as prenatal care would be beneficial.

Low SES parents should be invited to school in a positive, flexible way (Payne, 2006). Rather than using a formal meeting format, schools may use the "museum" format. In this format, parents can come and go as they please. Activities may be arranged to rotate in twenty to thirty minute cycles. Thus, parents' work schedules do not interfere with the opportunity to attend school meetings. Having food available and allowing children to come to the school with their parents facilitates attendance at school events, as babysitting is often not an option for parents of poverty. Finally, setting up classes for parents geared toward areas that are important to parents such as, how to speak English, how to write a résumé, or how to care for young children, can be beneficial (Payne, 2006).

Communication and understanding are key components of a diverse multi-dimensional model for involving parents in their children's education. Acknowledgement of differences is of the utmost importance when creating this partnership system.

4.8 Addressing Paternal Involvement

Until recently, the words, parental involvement, have become almost synonymous with "mother involvement". Research suggests fathers are less involved with their children's schools than other caregivers (Martin, Marsh, Cheng, & Ginns, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). "Children do better in school when their fathers are involved there" (Shedlin, 2004, p. 29). Children of all ages can benefit positively both cognitively and academically from father involvement (Gorvine, 2010; Pattnaik & Siriam, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005; Roopnarine, 2004). Roopnarine (2004) concluded that when fathers strongly encourage educational achievement, set clear expectations and goals for grades, act in a supportive yet demanding role, communicate with their children clearly and consistently about education, and draw on resources offered by the community, their children have higher levels of achievement.

Fathers tend to feel somewhat uncomfortable in the physical environment of schools. Shedlin (2004) suggested one reason for this discomfort may be that for the last two hundred years elementary schools have been considered primarily as places for women. Research on gender bias shows elementary curriculum and behavioral expectations are more geared toward girls (Shedlin, 2004). This may be one reason why fathers feel less at ease when coming into schools. Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda (2004) assert that the number one barrier for a lack of paternal involvement is the father's workplace. Many fathers believe it is their duty to earn a living for their family. They have to put their workplace ahead of involvement at school as a priority. In the workplace, men typically face a different set of standards than women making it more difficult to leave work during scheduled hours. Many modern educational establishments may actually act in ways to exclude father involvement by scheduling most involvement activities during the working day. Many schools that try

to include fathers often only do so in a gender-typed capacity such as expecting fathers to only coach sports or assist with building activities (Lamb, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004). How does a principal develop a system which welcomes both female and male parents equally?

Rimm-Kaufman and Zhang (2005) offer advice on how to tap the underutilized resources of fathers. First, schools should time events to better accommodate fathers' work schedules, for example arrange evening and weekend meetings. Another idea is that schools should develop activities that are more appealing to fathers. To establish these activities, the school leader must actively ask for fathers' opinions on what they would like to do at school. In what ways would they feel most effective? Principals may also seek innovative ways to include mothers and fathers in mutual decision-making, such as explicitly asking both parents to attend an individual education plan meeting. Mothers and fathers could also be joint members on school related committees or organizations. Lastly, it is important for the school to develop relationships that fathers perceive as non-evaluative.

Shedlin (2004) recommends creating parent-teacher conferences with an expectation that both parents attend the conference. Asking each parent to contribute for a specified amount of time during the conference can also be beneficial. Communicating with fathers during the early years of schooling may help create a more welcoming and comfortable feeling for fathers in the long run. Principals must encourage school personnel to create father-friendly schools (Shedlin, 2004).

School leaders must have an understanding of the benefits and barriers to including all parents in a multi-dimensional model of parental involvement. In a diverse country, it is necessary to explore the differences represented within the school population. To effectively create a model reflective of diversity, research-based elements must be included.

As a new principal, implementing a model of parental involvement may seem overwhelming. Having a well-planned approach may make all the difference. When parents, teachers, and principals present a united front in promoting high quality learning, the students will win. After synthesizing the research in the area of parental involvement models, several themes emerge: The role of the principal in parental involvement; the role of school staff, and the role of parents.

5 Parental Involvement: Practical Applications

A diverse group of parents send their children through the doors of American schools. These parents come from different cultures, belief systems, and experiences. The vast majority want what is best for their child. It is important for the principal to set research-based parent involvement expectations for staff members, and to facilitate parental involvement in their children's education. The climate of the school is apparent from the first step inside its doors. The message should be clear that the well-being of every child is important at this school. Parents should feel they are welcome every day in every way. This does not happen through colorful art and clean windows. Rather, the feeling of welcome comes from the voices and attitudes of the educators. The leader sets the tone. Parents must be invited to be heard. Parents must be appreciated and respected for their time and input. Parents must truly feel their opinions, ideas, and questions make a difference. All parents should feel they are being treated ethically, equitably, and with confidentiality. The principal must make a significant effort to create an environment in which all school staff work together to engage all parents in their children's educations.

5.1 Creating a Parent-friendly School Environment – Role of the Principal

The principal is the driving force in the creation of a parent-friendly school environment (Epstein & Rodriguez-Jansorn, 2004). The school leader needs to begin with a mindset which focuses on a collaborative, democratic leadership style. To implement this leadership style, the principal should provide opportunities for ideas and opinions to be heard (Stelmach & Preston, 2007). Parents should be included in decisions that impact their child (Gordon & Seashore-Louis, 2009). Once an atmosphere of collaboration has been initiated, parents should see positive results from their involvement.

Principals must also create a system that is sensitive to time and other issues parents face. If schools truly want all parents to have the opportunity to be heard, meaningful scheduling is a must. Parent/teacher conferences should be scheduled creatively and flexibly (Shedlin, 2004). This may mean that there are multiple opportunities for parents to attend school functions with provisions made for transport, child-minding, and food (Payne, 2006). Principals should be aware of the unique needs of their parental groups and seek out school and community opportunities to meet those needs (Henderson, et al., 2007; Ingram et al., 2007; Payne, 2006; VanVelsor & Orozco, 2007).

Finally, principals must first communicate the importance of parental involvement and integrate professional development for school staff that includes working with parents, increasing cultural competencies, and increasing awareness of socio-economic differences (Howard, 2007; Payne, 2006). Teachers must be convinced of the necessity of parental involvement and provided direction and later follow-up concerning the implementation of a parental partnership model. Staff members need to be on board before a model can be implemented successfully.

5.2 Creating a Parent-friendly School Environment – Role of the all School Staff

Once staff understands the importance and benefits of parental involvement, it is time to set some guidelines for working with parents in an effective manner. Teachers should take time to learn about the cultures and traditions of the families represented in their classrooms and be prepared to respect and honor religious and cultural practices (Matuszny et al., 2007). Parents should be engaged in conversations early and often about their child and the school in general. There should be no secrets kept from parents about their own child. To be most effective, communication must be two-way. It should be proactive and positive more often than reactive and negative (Howard, 2007; Matuszny et al., 2007). Once teachers and support staff are ready to foster a welcoming community, then the parents themselves must be the target of communication efforts regarding their roles in their children's education.

Teachers must make time for every parent, even those who historically have had little contact with the school (VanVelsor & Orozco, 2007). Teachers should issue personal invitations to parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2007; Lloyd-Nesling, 2006) through personal notes home, emails, or telephone calls. During parent conferences, teachers and support staff need to create relaxed, comfortable environments and convey their genuine commitment to an equal partnership (Henderson et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2007; Howard, 2007; Matuszny et al., 2007). Staff should be encouraged to create a system by which they may assist parents to help their children with homework (Ingram et al., 2007). Having a teacher-parent homework guide may be a step in the right direction. Once established, communication should be proactive, focus on positives, and occur frequently, openly, purposefully, and respectfully (Howard, 2007; Lloyd-Nesling, 2006; Matuszny et al., 2007; Reynolds, 2010). Parents must feel they are being treated fairly, equitably, and ethically (Payne, 2006).

5.3 Creating a Parent-friendly School Environment – Roles of Parents

What can parents do to be involved with their child's education? There are many ways parents can complete the partnership. These involvement activities range from the home level to the building level (Epstein, 1997). At home, parents can promote high achievement and set educational goals with their child (Lee and Bowen, 2006; Patel & Stevens, 2010; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Roopnarine, 2004). They can stimulate their child's cognition through experience, dialogue, and educational materials (Guo and Harris, 2000). Parents can encourage out-of-school learning (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2007). Taking trips to museums, zoos, or other educational destinations can be fun for the whole family (Ingram, et al., 2007).

It is important for parents to be aware of their child's progress (Lloyd-Nesling, 2006; Korkmaz, 2007; Matuszny et al., 2007) and to communicate with school personnel often (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Msengi, 2007; Reynolds, 2010). In these communication efforts, parents should be supportive, yet not demanding (Payne, 2006). Sharing expertise with their child's teacher is another excellent involvement opportunity for parents (Howard, 2007). Parents should also plan to occasionally visit their child's classroom.

Volunteering at the school level to help with school activities is also a way to be supportive of the school (Epstein, 1997). Being a part of the decision-making at the school about educational topics is an important role of the parent (Leithwood, et al., 1999; Matuszny, et al., 2007). The school leader must create and promote a menu of opportunities that are inclusive, transparent, and welcoming of all parents (Payne, 2006). Opportunities to be involved should be articulated in orientations, newsletters, kindergarten registration packets, school literature, web-sites, and through conversations with all parents. While parents should receive communication from the school, they should be expected to return communication back to the school (Matuszny et al., 2007; Reynolds, 2010). When parents take time to contribute input, they should expect to see action. They should expect to be kept informed about the topic until its conclusion. When serving on committees and other decision-making groups, parents' input should be genuinely acknowledged (Leithwood, et al., 1999). The principal should model effective communication efforts and expect staff members adopt transparent and equitable practices when working with parents.

6 Conclusion

Parental involvement is a crucial element of a successful school. Students of involved parents have been shown to have higher achievement in school. The principal must facilitate a collaborative, democratic environment in which opinions, beliefs, and ideas are listened to and acted upon. The ultimate aim is to form a community of practice in which all members work towards student success.

7 References

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