Migrant students have a host of factors working against their chances of success in school. In the search for ways to counter these risk factors, educators have recognized the value of parent involvement. In addition to its effects on student learning and achievement, parent involvement also strengthens school accountability and gives historically marginalized communities a voice in school decision making. Little systematic research has focused specifically on best practices for involving migrant parents, and educators have had to rely on anecdotal evidence about creative approaches to involve this population. An ongoing research project focusing on successful Texas schools has found that effective initiatives in migrant parent involvement are not defined as a set of practices or activities for parents to do, but rather as a form of outreach. The schools in this study perceived themselves as active and proactive agents in reaching out to migrant parents and meeting their needs. Home visits and personal interactions between parents and school personnel made school personnel aware of the very basic survival needs of migrant families, which must be addressed as a first step in helping migrant students succeed. The schools also offered parent education that was an end in itself and improved migrant families' lives. In addition to removing logistical barriers to parents' attendance at school functions, the schools addressed social barriers by creating a more democratic and collaborative environment. (SV)
Prior to 1966, state and local governments, including local school boards, were reluctant to assist migrant workers and their families, who were seen as temporary farmhands, in the area for only a short time. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—the cornerstone of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty—finally made migrant students an identifiable subject in the educational discourse. The thousands of children who traversed the continent with their caretakers in search of agricultural work prior to 1965 were, for all intents and purposes, invisible and considered unworthy of local, state, and federal assistance. Although the amount and types of services offered to migrant students have improved substantially since 1965, most migrant-impacted schools and districts still do not address adequately the multiple needs of migrant students and their families. In other words, schools have yet to solve the

complex educational problems associated with mobility.  

As in the past, migrant students still face economic, cultural, and social discrimination, both within and outside the school environment. High poverty rates, numerous health- and work-related factors, increased rates of social and physical isolation, and a host of other factors (e.g., limited English proficiency, high turnover rates) place enhanced demands on schools to address the needs of this population.  

Migrants have one of the highest drop-out rates of any student group in the country. Research suggests the vast majority of migrant children are at risk of dropping out due to poverty; the primacy of family survival, which often forces migrant children to work at an early age; and perpetual relocation from one school district to another.  

All in all, migrant children are at greater risk than other youth in the United States. Many migrant families today still do not have taken-for-granted "necessities" such as running water, refrigerators, appli-
 BRING THE MOUNTAIN TO MOHAMMED: PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MIGRANT-IMPACTED SCHOOLS

ances, and basic sanitation facilities. They do not willingly choose to live without such necessities; rather, the substandard living conditions are an all-too-common outgrowth of the piece-rate pay system that dominates migratory work. In addition, these conditions often expose migrant children and their families to toxic pesticides, resulting in higher rates of tuberculosis, pneumonia, asthma, emphysema, and bronchitis. In fact, one study shows the average life expectancy of a migrant worker is 49 years.

Common sense suggests these hardships would have a negative impact on the educational progress of migrant children. To be certain, research demonstrates overwhelmingly that migrant students consistently must adjust to harsh living and working conditions while simultaneously learning, with each move, to navigate new curricula, teachers, friendships, testing practices, credit accrual systems, and state regulations. Given the nature of social and cultural reproduction, the educational prospects for migratory

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Huang, Health Problems.


children do not look very promising. In fact, data demonstrate migrants are less educated than the general workforce, having an average education of less than eight years.

The most reliable and recent national studies of migrant school completion rates (more than a decade old) report that only about half received a high school diploma. In light of this sobering statistic, it would be easy to conclude that the destiny of many migrant youth is to become permanent members of the migrant stream. However, there are success stories in the literature that show the strong mediating role educational institutions can play in the lives of migrant children.

Rather than accepting (and perhaps expecting) low academic performance from Latino students and other students of color, educational institutions need to foster, promote, and demand accountable systems that ensure a proper education for all children. This requires adopting policies and practices that call for educational excellence, particularly for the most marginalized and disadvantaged youth.


The Promise of Parent Involvement in Improving Minority Student Achievement

In recent years, parent involvement increasingly has been recognized by educators as a positive force in addressing minority student underachievement. Research consistently shows a high correlation between parent involvement and the academic performance of children. Parent involvement is so popular among educators and policymakers that one researcher has referred to it as the "vanguard of educational reform." 

Because of its participatory nature, parent involvement is seen not...
only as an effective vehicle for school accountability but also as a powerful tool to promote the academic success of students. For example, research consistently finds that parental participation enhances student self-esteem, improves parent-child relationships, and helps parents develop positive attitudes toward schools. Research also suggests that educators benefit as a result of increased parent involvement: teachers gain confidence in their efficacy to teach children, administrators strengthen community relations as they interact with parents on a more frequent basis, and schools become more collaborative and less hierarchical in nature.

Most importantly, parent involvement has a positive effect on student learning. Children whose parents are involved in their education have better grades, improved test scores, long-term academic success, more positive academic attitudes, higher reading achievement, improved grades through homework assignments, and other indicators of a sound educational foundation. In short, there is general consensus concerning the efficacy of parent involvement as a

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22 Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, Beyond the Bake Sale.
transformational tool of school reform and school accountability.\textsuperscript{28} Parent involvement gives historically marginalized communities a voice in school decision-making efforts and a role as collaborators in their children's education.\textsuperscript{29} It also is a vehicle for turning schools into true learning organizations that focus on student success for all children, irrespective of cultural backgrounds or migratory status.\textsuperscript{30}

However, despite improved efforts to include minority parents in school matters, studies have shown that marginalized parents still are not involved at the same rate as their White nonmigrating counterparts. This problem troubles scholars in the field, who recognize the connection between parent involvement and student achievement.\textsuperscript{31}

**Moving Beyond Good Intentions: The Need to Identify Best Practices**

How can schools involve marginalized parents on a daily basis? Both researchers and practitioners have provided recommendations and guidance to answer that question. Mary Henry, for example, suggests schools look to feminist theory, which moves away from bureaucratic and disconnected understandings of organizational leadership toward a more egalitarian, collaborative, and caring ethos. Henry criticizes the traditional male domination of organizational and leadership roles and contends schools should develop a partnership approach, where respect, shared decision making, and a celebration of diversity are daily parts of school. Henry believes schools must move toward a more democratic vision, with the values and teachings of feminism serving as a vehicle for school reform. Other scholars have provided compelling arguments for egalitarian and caring practices.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28}Becher, *Parents and Schools*; Eccles and Harold, "Family Involvement"; and Henderson, *Evidence Continues to Grow.

\textsuperscript{29}Henry, *Parent-School Collaboration.

\textsuperscript{30}Moles, "Collaboration between Schools."

\textsuperscript{31}Chavkin, *Families and Schools*; and Moles, "Collaboration between Schools."

However, much of the advice educators have had to rely on in working with migrant parents is based primarily on anecdotal evidence and accounts of schools that have developed creative approaches. Little systematic research has been done to specifically address best practices for involving this particular population of parents. In part because of this lack of research-based knowledge, many parent involvement efforts have limited success. Schools often fail to acknowledge the multiple factors that migrant families face on a daily basis. In short, there is a great need for research that identifies and documents successful approaches to increasing migrant parent involvement in their children’s educations. Researchers could begin to develop this knowledge by studying schools that have a proven track record of success.

One such effort was initiated more than three years ago by a cadre of researchers from The University of Texas at Austin with the assistance of the Migrant Office at the Texas Education Agency. This group has launched one of the first comprehensive research projects to focus specifically on best practices for migrants. Early findings of this research indicate that effective migrant parent involvement initiatives are not defined as a set of practices or activities for parents to do (e.g., PTA/PTO, bake sales, parent-teacher conferences). Instead the focus is on ways schools can help migrant parents cope with the problems they face on a daily basis.


35Although this research project was not the first to identify best parent involvement practices for migrant populations, it was one of the first to research and document such practices in a systematic and comprehensive manner. To be certain, a wealth of important practitioner-based research has been conducted in the migrant parent involvement arena for more than 35 years. Such work should not be minimized or presumed to be less significant than this research project.

These findings reconceptualize how we have traditionally viewed parent involvement. Instead of requiring parents to come to schools to get involved, the schools in this study perceived themselves as active and proactive agents in reaching out to migrant parents. In other words, the effective schools and districts in this study showed a high degree of “home involvement” and worked very hard to reach out to migrant parents on a daily basis.

The high degree of outreach employed by these schools and districts was a necessary response to the situations faced by the migrant families they served. Many families had little or no food to eat; some lived in their cars or tiny travel trailers; others had no electricity, natural gas, heat, running water, or sewage/septic systems. Their primary concern was basic survival from one day to the next. When parents are living under such harsh conditions, it becomes very difficult for them to think about school involvement in traditional ways. The parent involvement coordinators, migrant personnel, teachers, school staff, and other administrators in these schools and districts fully recognized the necessity of meeting the needs of migrant families as a first step. The researchers found that home visits played a major role in making school personnel aware of the various needs of migrant families. In fact, many schools and districts in the study had an official policy that a teacher or school administrator would visit the home of every student at least once a year.

Migrant families highly valued this type of personal, one-on-one interaction. In the study, school personnel felt they had to get to know families on a more personal, rather than professional, level in order to understand the lived reality of the families with whom they worked. They dedicated a tremendous amount of time to meeting personally with every migrant family, time that was never counted or recognized in any official document.

2001): 253-88. We identified "exceptional" as school districts with at least an 80 percent migrant graduation rate, an 80 percent migrant promotion rate, a 94 percent migrant student attendance rate, and a 70 percent passing rate on all areas (e.g., math, reading, and writing) of the state standardized test during the 1995-1996 academic year. The study of four school districts included a total of 17 interviews (12 group interviews, 5 individual interviews) with district-level administrators, school-level administrators, parent involvement coordinators, migrant personnel, school paraprofessionals, and parents themselves. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed according to traditional qualitative guidelines.
The researchers concluded that this level of personal commitment was what made the difference in the studied schools and districts. The schools placed a high priority on helping families and serving parents, as opposed to having the parents serve the schools. Accommodating the needs of migrant families, first and foremost in a respectful and nonjudgmental way, made the families more likely to view schools as true partners in the education process.

Another finding of this research related to the types of parent education programs the schools offered. Traditionally, parent education is viewed as a means to train parents to better intervene in the schooling process. In these schools, however, parent education was seen as a vehicle to broaden parents' cultural capital, enhancing their ability to improve their lives and to gain access to employment options other than migratory work. In essence, parent education was seen as an end in itself and not necessarily as a means toward some other end. This commitment to meet the needs of migrant parents—above any other factor—is what made these schools and districts unique.

In short, the researchers found in these effective schools that the concept of parent involvement was entirely different from traditional approaches. The schools in this study viewed parent involvement as a proactive endeavor. School personnel made an extra effort to visit homes and take the school to the migrant families. The schools also redefined parent education as an end in itself rather than as a system to teach parents about appropriate parenting styles or suitable involvement forms. Underlying this approach was a genuine interest in the well-being of migrant families.

Conclusion

This research points to the fact that migrant parents cannot be involved in traditional ways until their basic needs have been met. As long as parents are worried about their day-to-day survival there is little hope of getting them involved in typical school-based parent activities. The schools in this study were effective because they fully understood that meeting the basic needs of migrant families was first and foremost.

This research also suggests that schools move away from the assumption that involvement consists only of specific activities such as
PTA, school-governance councils, or parent-teacher conferences. This study and others show that minority populations tend not to be involved in these traditional ways. However, if we begin with the premise that involvement results from actions taken by the school, then the question becomes not “How can parents be involved?” but rather “What can we, as educators, do to get parents involved?”

The schools in this research project were successful because they asked an entirely different set of questions regarding parent involvement. School personnel took affirmative, proactive steps to address the basic fundamental needs of migrant parents. As a parent involvement coordinator in La Joya, Texas, suggested:

You have to understand where migrants are coming from: the poverty, not having electricity, no running water, always moving around from place to place—all that stuff. It really makes life difficult for them, you know? . . . So most of the time, migrant parents have to prioritize. . . . [They have] to figure out how they’re gonna live, or even where they’re gonna live, or how they’re gonna put food on the table. You know, basic stuff like that. So if they can’t come to the school, then we have to take it upon ourselves to go to them. It’s like that saying goes: “If Mohammed doesn’t come to the mountain, then the mountain has to go to Mohammed.” I really think that’s what we’re about in this district. Everyday we try to live by that [philosophy]. And I think that’s what makes us different than the other school districts out there. Because we really do believe that, and we really do care about these families 110 percent. We really care about these families and we’ll go the extra mile, if we have to, in order to do our job. Because our main concern is those parents and those families. We need to make sure they don’t fall through the cracks.

Effective parent involvement programs can take root in a school environment that is receptive, welcoming, and nonjudgmental of marginalized parents. Schools can foster such an environment by

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engaging in home involvement and by removing logistical barriers that often inhibit many disadvantaged parents from attending school functions. For example, barriers can be overcome by providing parents with transportation, child-care services, bilingual interpreters, and campus security. However, not all barriers are logistical—some barriers are social. School professionals must develop a vision for change, including an organizational approach that is less hierarchical and more collaborative, with active encouragement for minority parents’ participation. In other words, a successful recipe for involvement engenders two-way communication and a democratic partnership approach, including ongoing cooperation, collaboration, trust, learning, and professional development for everyone.

This expanded definition of involvement has obvious implications for both policy and practice—especially for schools impacted by migrant students. It is time for us to “bring the mountain to Mohammed” and begin the process of making a real difference in the educational lives of migrant families.

38Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, Beyond the Bake Sale.
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