Survey on Teachers' Attitudes Regarding Parents and Parental Involvement

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Abstract

Seventy teachers from two high schools participated in a survey that studied their attitudes toward parents and parental involvement. The teachers that were surveyed work at two high schools within 10 miles of one another, and are located near a major university.

This study suggests that although the teachers desire parents to be involved in their children's education, they feel it is not as important to respond or communicate with the parents of their students. This finding, along with disparity over whether or not it is the responsibility of teachers to involve parents in the educational process of their children, suggests that teachers may not be aware of the educational benefits parental involvement brings to schools.

Introduction

Educational researchers (Ballen, & Moles, 1994; Benjet, 1995; Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, 1995a; Epstein; 1991) generally agree that school-home partnerships increase student success. The findings of this study, however, suggest that teachers are reluctant to have parents become involved in the classroom. The power and importance of this contradiction cannot be overemphasized. If found to be signifi-

cant in future studies, this major contradiction may become a primary educational focus in improving student learning, based on many researchers' suggestion that parental involvement is important in the educational development of children.

A potential challenge in investigating parental involvement in education is the fact that many obstacles may hinder parental participation. These obstacles include narrow conceptualizations of parental involvement by schools, negative attitudes of school personnel toward parents, a lack of teacher preparation, occupational demands that impose constraints on parents' participation, cultural characteristics that affect parent involvement (Yap & Enoki, 1995), and parental insecurities concerning schools. Many of these conclusions were supported in this investigation.

The purpose of using a survey was to discover the attitudes of teachers towards parents. The survey also assisted in the development of interview questions to be used to better understand teachers' attitudes toward parents.

Summary of Survey Data

Of the 203 teachers that are employed within the two schools, 70 (35%) completed their questionnaire and returned it to the appropriate location. All 70 respondents to this survey are teachers in grades 9-12 at one of the two schools in the survey. They formed a homogeneous group (100% Euro-American), of whom 49 (70%) of the respondents had more than five years of teaching at the secondary level, with 53 (76%) having earned a master's degree or more. Thirty-nine females (56%) and 26 males (37%) participated in the survey; 5 (7%) chose not to reveal their gender.

Setting

The two schools in the study are situated in a small, Midwestern university town. The population of each school is approximately 2000 students. In terms of ethnic diversity, the schools resemble the town, with a majority (95%) of the school population being Euro-American. A male principal heads one school; a female principal heads the other.

Before handing the surveys out to the teachers, this researcher spoke to each faculty group to explain the intentions of the study and to assure them that the study would provide valuable information for the school and the community to discuss regarding the issue of parental involvement within their school. The surveys were then copied and distributed to the faculty mailboxes by the on-site assistants in the study, with instructions to complete the survey and return it within one month. At one school, a teacher served as the assistant, while at the other school, the principal assisted in gathering the surveys.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study is entitled: *High school and family partnership surveys of teachers, parents and students.* The survey is disseminated from the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at The John's Hopkins University. This instrument was used because it deals directly with teachers' attitudes toward parents and parental involvement.

Data Analysis

Completed surveys were calculated by response category frequencies (percentage responding to each of the four categories on the Likert scale) for each question on the seven-page questionnaire. To concentrate on a more focused agenda about parental participation, specific questions were chosen that were relevant to key topics. The questions were chosen to give an indication of what practices responding teachers are currently using, as well as what the teachers would like to see implemented regarding parent partnerships. The creator of the instrument, Joyce Epstein, recommended the specific questions.

Section I: Professional Judgment on Parental Involvement

In this first section, teachers were asked about the importance of parents and parental involvement in education.

Question 1: Parental involvement is important for a good high school.

Table 1. Importance of Parent Involvement

Value label	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
Disagree	0	0
Agree	21	30.0
Strongly agree	48	68.6
Total	70	100.0

Teachers indicated (99%) that parental involvement is important for a good high school.

Question 2: This high school is known for trying new things to improve the school.

Table 2. New Ideas to Improve Schools

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	2.9
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
Disagree	6	8.6
Agree	39	55.7
Strongly agree	22	31.4
Total	70	100.0

The results from this question indicate that 87% of the teachers responding believe that their school does try innovations to improve the school.

Question 3: High schools should have an active parent organization (e.g., PTA or PTO).

Table 3. Active PTA/PTO

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	1	1.4
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
Disagree	2	2.9
Agree	33	47.1
Strongly agree	33	47.1
Total	70	100.0

94.2% of the teachers are in favor of having active parents organizations, with only 4.3% of the teachers disagreeing that high schools should have active parent organizations. However, only one of the schools has a parent organization that is active in school events. The other school is in the process of forming an organization for parents.

Question 4: Parent involvement can increase teacher effectiveness.

Table 4. Parent Involvement and Teacher Effectiveness

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	1	1.4
Agree	29	41.4
Strongly Agree	40	57.1
Total	70	100.0

In this question, 98.5% of the teachers responded that parent involvement can increase student effectiveness.

Question 5: It is not necessary for parents of high school students to be involved in their teen's education.

Table 5. Parents Involvement Unnecessary

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	2.9
Strongly disagree	27	38.6
Disagree	35	50.0
Agree	6	8.6
Total	70	100.0

In Table 5, 88.6% of the teachers disagree it is not necessary for parents to be involved in their teen's education, whereas 8.6% of the teachers agree that it is not necessary for the parents to be involved in their teen's education.

Question 6: Involving families is a responsibility of teachers.

Table 6. Teachers Responsibility for Involving Families

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	2.9
Strongly Disagree	2	2.9
Disagree	36	51.4
Agree	30	42.9
Total	70	100.0

Although approximately 43% of the teachers agree that it is their responsibility to involve families, 54.3% of the teachers surveyed believed that it is

not the responsibility of the teachers to involve parents.

Question 7: Most parents of high school students do not know how to talk with their teens about schoolwork.

Table 7. Parents Communicating with Teens about School

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	2.9
Strongly Disagree	1	1.4
Disagree	10	14.3
Agree	38	54.3
Strongly agree	19	27.1
Total	70	100.0

As shown in Table 7, 81.4% of the teachers responded that parents do not know how to speak to their children regarding schoolwork. This will be discussed further in section six.

Question 8: All parents could learn ways to assist their teens on schoolwork at home, if shown how.

Table 8. Parents Learning to Assist with Teen's Schoolwork

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	1	1.4
Strongly disagree	2	2.9
Disagree	2	2.9
Agree	45	64.3
Strongly agree	20	28.6
Total	70	100.0

Although most teachers (Table 7) responded that parents are not involved in discussing their children's education, 92.9% felt parents could learn how to assist their children with schoolwork. The issue of educating parents will be discussed further in section five.

Question 9: Parent involvement can increase student achievement

Table 9. Involvement of Parents and Student Achievement

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
Disagree	3	4.3
Agree	34	48.6
Strongly agree	32	45.7
Total	70	100.0

A majority of the teachers (94.3%) were in agreement that parental involvement increases student achievement.

Question 10: High school teachers need in-service education to implement effective parental involvement practices.

Table 10. Teacher In-service Training

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.4
Disagree	20	28.6
Agree	44	62.9
Strongly agree	5	7.1
Total	70	100.0

Most teachers (70%) felt that in-service strategies could assist teachers in implementing effective parental involvement practices. However, a large portion (30%) of teachers felt that they are not in need of in-service training on parental involvement.

Question 11: High school teachers do not have the time to involve parents in useful ways.

Table 11. Teacher Time and Parent Involvement

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	2	2.9
Strongly disagree	2	2.9
Disagree	29	41.4
Agree	34	48.6
Strongly agree	3	4.3
Total	70	100.0

There was not a clear consensus regarding high school teachers having time to involve parents in useful ways. Half (52.9%) of the teachers felt that they did not have time to involve parents, while nearly half (44.3%) did have the time. "Time" as an issue for teachers and parents will be discussed in section six.

Question 12: This school views parents as important partners.

Table 12. Views on Parents as Partners

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	1	1.4
Disagree	15	21.4
Agree	45	64.3
Strongly agree	9	12.9
Total	70	100.0

This table reflects a majority of the teachers (77.2%) viewing the parents as partners. However, 21.4% of the teachers feel the school does not view the parents as important partners. This finding will be discussed further in section five, recording the results of the teachers' opportunity to discuss their beliefs of parent involvement using an interview format.

In reviewing section one, teachers are in favor of parents being involved in their teen's education. The teachers also feel parents are important in the education of their teen, however, the parents are regarded as not knowing how to speak to their teen concerning educational issues. Teachers in turn feel that parents need education to become better partners in their teen's education. However, half (Table 6) of the teachers believed it is not their responsibility to assist in the involvement of families, and 30% (Table 10) felt that it is not necessary for teachers to learn more about effective parent involvement strategies.

Section II: Specific Ways of Involving Families

For this section, teachers were asked about the high school's challenge to serve the diverse populations of families that are part of the school. The teachers were to record specific ways of involving the families of their students.

When asked, 63% of the teachers agreed that information regarding "parenting skills" needs to be developed to assist parents with their teens. Also, the teachers stated there is a great need to assess and improve communication between the school and home.

Statement 13: Communication from the school to the home can be understood and used by all families.

Table 13. School-home Communication

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	9	12.9
Needs to be developed	9	12.9
Needs to be improved	44	62.9
A strong program now	8	11.4
Total	70	100.0

A majority of teachers (75.8%) felt that communication between the school and home needs to be developed or improved.

Statement 14: Surveying parents each year on their ideas about the school . . .

Table 14. Surveying of Parents

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	11	15.7
Is Not important	3	4.3
Needs to be developed	32	45.7
Needs to be improved	24	34.3
Total	70	100.0

Response to this statement suggests that 80% of the teachers believe surveying parents on their ideas and beliefs about school is important.

Statement 15: Parent-teacher conferences with all families . . .

Table 15. Parent-teacher Conferences

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No Response	10	14.3
Is Not important	20	28.6
Needs to be developed	27	38.6
Needs to be improved	11	15.7
A strong program now	2	2.9
Total	70	100.0

In discussing parent-teacher conferences with all families, 54.3% of the teachers in the study indicated that a program needs to be developed or improved. However, 28.6% of the teachers stated that a parent-teacher conference with all families is not important.

Section III: Teacher Activities to Assist Students

In section III, teachers were asked to rate how important they believe certain activities are in assisting students.

Question 16: How important is it for you to have at least one conference with a parent of each of your students?

Table 16. Teacher Conference with Each Student's Parent

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	10	14.3
Not important	7	10.0
Slightly important	18	25.7
Somewhat important	20	28.6
Very important	15	21.4
Total	70	100.0

Teachers (75.7%) are to some degree in favor of having at least one conference with a parent, with only 10% stating that such contact is not important.

Section IV: Teacher Contacts with Families

Teachers contact families in many different ways. The teachers in this study estimated the percentage of students' families that they contacted or met during the school year.

Statement 17: Estimate the percent of your students' families you contacted or met via letter or memo this year:

Table 17. Communication through Letter or Memo

Percentage of families contacted	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
Number of teachers contacting parents (N= 57)	6 (9%)	16 (30%)	13 (19%)	3 (4%)	6 (9%)	2 (3%)	(0%)	1 (1%)	10 (14%)

22.8% of the teachers sent a letter or memo home to more than 50% of their students, with 28.1% of the teachers not writing their students' families. Most teachers (56%) responded that they contacted 10% or less of families by letter or memo.

Statement 18: Estimate the percent of your students' families you contacted or met via telephone this year.

Table 18. Communication by Phone

Percentage of families contacted	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
Number of teachers contacting parents (N= 57)	5 (7%)	2 (3%)	10 (14%)	11 (26%)	17 (24%)	6 (9%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	3 (4%)

In Table 18, we see that 19% teachers contact 50% of their students' families by phone. Similar to the lack of written communication in Table 17, many families are not being contacted by phone. Communication by phone will be discussed further in section five.

Question 19: Estimate the percentage of your students' families you contacted or met in the last year via scheduled parent-teacher conference.

Table 19. Parent-teacher Conference

Percentage of families contacted	NA	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	All
Number of teachers contacting parents (N= 57)	7 (12%)	3 (5%)	27 (47%)	4 (7%)	8 (14%)	2 (4%)	3 (5%)	(0%)	3 (5%)

In Table 19, we see that only 14% of surveyed teachers have conferences with 50% or more of parents. Although the teachers have responded that communication between the school and the home is important, the teachers here indicate that they have limited communication with their students' homes vis-à-vis parent-teacher conferences.

Section V: Parental Responsibilities

In this section, teachers were asked to comment on their perceptions of parental responsibilities that relate to schooling.

Question 20: How important is it for parents to volunteer to help the school?

Table 20. Parents as Volunteers

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	9	12.9
Not important	2	2.9
Slightly important	19	27.1
Somewhat important	26	37.1
Very important	14	20.0
Total	70	100.0

Teachers felt that parents' volunteering at school was important (84.2%). Note again that at the time of this survey, only one of the two schools involved had an active PTA.

Question 21: How important is it for parents to talk to teachers about problems their teen is facing at home?

Table 21. Parents Speaking to Teachers about the Home

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	10	14.3
Slightly important	8	11.4
Somewhat important	32	45.7
Very important	20	28.6
Total	70	100.0

The teachers generally (85.7%) felt that it is important for parents to talk to the teachers about problems that their teen is facing at home.

Question 22: How important is it for parents to join a parent organization or school committee?

Table 22. Parents Joining School Organizations

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	9	12.9
Not important	2	2.9
Slightly important	19	27.1
Somewhat important	25	35.7
Very important	15	21.4
Total	70	100.0

Of the teachers that responded, 96.7% stated that it is at least slightly important for parents to join a parent organization or school committee.

Section VI: Estimation of Parent Participation

The next section of the questionnaire examined teachers' estimation of parental participation in their teen's affairs.

Statement 23: Estimate the percent of your families who supervised their teen's behavior this year.

Table 23. Parent Supervision of Teen

Percentage of parents that supervised their teen's behavior.	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
Teacher response of actual # of parents that supervised teen's behavior (N= 54).	3 (5%)	3 (5%)	2 (4%)	11 (20%)	17 (32%)	14 (26%)	4 (7%)	(0%)

68.4% of the teachers reported that at least 50% of parents supervise teen's behavior. What is also indicated in this table is that almost 15% of the teachers believe that only 10% of parents supervise their teen's behavior.

Question 24: Estimate the percent of your families who attended parent-teacher conferences with you this year.

Table 24. Parents Attending Teacher Conferences

Percentage of parents that attend P-T conferences with teacher.	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
Teacher response of actual # of parents that attended conferences (N=53).	5 (9%)	17 (24%)	10 (19%)	11 (16%)	6 (11%)	(0%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)

Only 19% of teachers indicated that 50% or more of the parents attended parent-teacher conferences held at the school. This could be due to the lack of parent-teacher conferences that are held by the teachers (see Table 19). In

contrast, 52% of teachers indicated that 10% or less of the parents attended parent-teacher conferences.

Question 25: Estimate the percent of your families who talked to their teen regularly about classwork in your subject this year.

Table 25. Parents Speaking to Teen about Teacher's Subject

Percentage of parents that talk regularly to teen about teachers subject.	0%	5%	10%	25%	50%	75%	90%	100%
Teacher response of actual # of parents that speak about subject to teen (N=53).	3 (4%)	8 (15%)	7 (13%)	14 (27%)	16 (31%)	4 (8%)	(0%)	(0%)

In this table, 38.4% of the teachers stated that 50% or more of the parents spoke to their teen regularly about classwork in the respondent's subject area. This would coincide with the teachers' belief that many of the parents do not know how to talk to their teens about school (see Table 7).

Section VII: Teachers' Perception of School-Wide Support for Parental Involvement

The teachers in this section were asked to focus on who "supported parental involvement in the school and how much."

Question 26: How do you perceive your own personal support of parental involvement in your school.

Table 26. Teachers View on their Support of Parents

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	6	8.6
Strong support	4	5.7
Some support	15	21.4
Weak support	28	40.0
No support	17	24.3
Total	70	100.0

Of the teachers that responded, 67.1% support parental involvement.

However, 40% provided only weak support, and 24.3% indicated that they do not support parental involvement.

Question 27: How do you perceive others' support of parental involvement in your school, specifically other teachers in your department?

Table 27. Teachers' View on Department Peers Support of Parents

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	7	10.0
Strong support	2	2.9
Some support	17	24.3
Weak support	32	45.7
No support	12	17.1
Total	70	100.0

In Table 27, the teachers felt that their colleagues support parental involvement with similar intensity to their own level, with most providing weak or no support.

Question 28: How do you perceive others' support of parental involvement in your school, specifically other teachers in the school?

Table 28. Teachers' View on Other Teachers' Support of Parents

Value Label	Frequency	Percent
No response	7	10.0
Strong support	2	2.9
Some support	18	25.7
Weak support	39	55.7
No support	4	5.7
Total	70	100.0

In Table 28, the teachers felt a majority of their colleagues give weak or no support to parental involvement.

Section VIII: Community Issues

The survey also asked teachers to say how they "viewed the community in which they teach," and what social ills may be a part of their school and community. As with many communities throughout the nation, the teachers felt the three major problems that faced their school community are drug use (64% of the respondents), teen parenthood (51% of the respondents), and

gangs (68% of the respondents). Seven of the teachers responded that unemployment as well as homelessness were major problems within the community in which they lived. The top three responses are similar to the top four problems that the public feels are a part of the public schools as evidenced from the recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll (September, 1998). Concern about fighting, gangs, violence (15% of the respondents) and drugs (10%) were some of the top concerns the public had concerning schools.

Summary of Survey Findings

The teachers in this survey showed similarities and differences in their assessment of parents and parental involvement. Although the teachers came from two different high schools, comparing the teachers' findings across schools was not the emphasis of the study.

A majority of the teachers were in agreement regarding Professional Judgement on Parental Involvement (Tables 1-5). These questions dealt with parents being involved in the education of their teen at home and at school, and asked teachers if involving parents was important in the lives of their children. Since these responses may be attributed to a socially approved response, a halo effect may have been established. That is, the professional norm is for the teacher to be in favor of parents being involved in their children's education. However, there is a question as to what teachers feel is the appropriate form and level of parental involvement. Thus, interviewing the teachers after the survey would provide more information regarding the information in Tables 1-5. Another area in which the teachers were in agreement dealt with communicating with parents. The teachers rarely communicated with more than 50% of the families from their school.

Questions on which teachers were undecided concerned what they could do as teachers to stimulate more parent interaction at the school (Tables 6, 10, 11, and 15). In Table 6, 43% of the teachers feel that it is their responsibility to involve families in the school, whereas 54% disagree that it is their responsibility. This disparity could mean that some teachers desire to include more parental involvement in their school, but do not have the resources to do so. However, if parental involvement practices are implemented, and some faculty members still feel it is not their responsibility to comply with the policy, then some parents may be included, and others may not. The teachers also felt they did not need to learn to stimulate parental involvement, or they felt that it was the school's responsibility to implement strategies to include parents as partners.

The teachers believe that parents need to be acting forces in the educational career of their child, and even suggest that parents talk to teachers about problems that their teen is facing at home (Table 21). This indicates

that teachers feel that the parents need to be responsible for telling teachers information that may affect the teens learning. But even discussing issues with teachers would prove difficult when many teachers responded that it is not important to conduct parent-teacher conferences with all families of their students (Table 15), or to contact parents in other ways (Tables 17-19).

An interesting finding of the survey suggests that a large number of the teachers do not have written or verbal contact with many of their student's families throughout the year (Tables 17-19). Even if written materials are being sent home, communication may be absent, because a home volunteer for the county-wide adult literacy program stated that 20% of the adults in the county studied are functionally illiterate (Mary Wilcox, personal communication, 1996). National statistics also indicate that 20% of our nation's adults cannot comprehend prose literature at a minimal level (Organization for economic co-operation and development, 1995). The teachers acknowledge that there is a communication gap between the school and home. They also feel a need to improve communication with the families of their students (Table 13). However, improving communication with families would prove difficult when half of the teachers feel they do not have the time to involve families (Table 11). Also, more than half the teachers feel that it is not their responsibility to involve families.

The teachers also indicated that certain aspects of parental interaction are important (e.g., parent-student-teacher conferences), but believed that parental involvement was less important in areas that involved school-related affairs.

A review of the written portion of the questionnaire, in which teachers were able to give their own comments, reveal that a majority of the teachers (95%) stated that "time and money" are major factors that hinder them from producing active parental involvement within their school. However, it was not clear whether they were referring to lack of time to initiate a school-wide program, or lack of time and money to involve parents within their own classrooms.

This study examined teachers' attitudes toward parents using a survey. The results suggest that although the teachers do wish parents to be involved in the education of their children, there is a limit regarding what that involvement should entail. The teacher's communication with parents was often limited in nature. Many of the parents at both schools rarely received any communication from the teachers regarding their children and their performance. This suggests a lack of communication that may result in negative attitudes between the teachers and the parents. Time is a factor that the teachers stated often limits their involvement with parents. By exploring alternatives implemented by other schools, these and other teachers may find that time does not necessarily become a major factor in establishing positive home-school relationships.

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