Examining the Underutilization of Parent Involvement in the Schools

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Abstract

This article examines the underutilization of parent involvement practices in the public schools. Parental involvement in public schools has been documented as academically beneficial by educational researchers, supported politically, and valued by many educators and individuals in the general public. Despite such support, involvement practices often reach a narrow audience of parent populations and are generally restricted to a few types of parent participation. More systematic and meaningful parent participation is hindered by many obstacles: parents who lack the desire and confidence to become involved, educators who lack the desire to encourage parent involvement, teachers' preconceptions surrounding parental culpability, home-school scheduling conflicts, conflicting beliefs about the ways parents should be involved, vagueness surrounding the changing role of parent involvement during students' adolescent years, and lack of teacher preparation and administrative support. Discussion is framed within a need to address these obstacles in teacher education.

Keywords: parent involvement, rates, underutilization, obstacles, challenges, teacher education

Introduction

Parental involvement in public schools has been documented as academically beneficial by educational researchers, supported politically, and valued by many educators and individuals in the general public. Despite such overwhelming support for the value of parent involvement, current research consistently documents that parent involvement is underutilized at all levels, while parental participation at high school levels is particularly low. Parent involvement activities often reach a narrow audience of parent populations and are generally restricted to a few types of parent involvement. This article reviews support for parent involvement practices, documents how underutilized parent involvement is in the public school system, and examines some of the barriers accounting for the underutilization of such a beneficial teaching practice. A discussion of these obstacles is particularly important relative to preservice teacher education and in-service staff development. If teachers are engaged in discussions of how these obstacles are hindering parent involvement, more conscious efforts to overcome them can be undertaken.

Support for Parent Involvement

Praise of parent involvement in the schools has been sung far and wide. For instance, Greenwood and Hickman (1991) cite numerous studies, primarily focusing on elementary school years, that found relationships between parent involvement and such student variables as: academic achievement, student sense of well-being, student attendance, student attitude, homework readiness, grades, and educational aspirations. However, the benefits for parent involvement are not exclusive to the elementary school context. Researchers conclude, "across a range of studies, there has emerged a strong conclusion that parental involvement in child and adolescent education generally benefits children's learning and school success" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Studies on programs in early childhood, elementary, middle, and high schools indicate that efforts to improve student outcomes are more effective when the family is actively involved (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Parent involvement is an important factor in a student's educational success all the way to the high school level (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hart, 1988; Henderson, 1987). Parental involvement has been positively related to high school students' academic achievement (Paulson, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Trusty 1996), time spent on homework (Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986; Trusty, 1996), favorable attitudes toward school (Trusty, 1996), less likelihood of high school dropout (Rubmerger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990), and academic motivation (Gonzalez, Doan

Holbein, & Quilter, 2001; Steinberg et al., 1992).

The support for parental involvement is not isolated to the journals of academic educational research. There has been a national movement politically to encourage family involvement. "The stimulus for parental involvement was the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which specified that parents were expected to assume a more direct role in their children's formal education" (Hart, 1988, p. 4). In 1996, former secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Richard Riley, sponsored the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (Shores, 1998), an organization seeking to build local partnerships in order to improve children's learning. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act called for schools to promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation: "Every school will promote parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (Decker, Decker, Boo, Gregg, & Erickson, 2000, p. 31).

When elementary and secondary teachers have been asked what one thing they would change in the hopes of improving the public schools, parent involvement has been listed as a top priority (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). Even public opinion rates lack of parent involvement as a main obstacle to improving public schools (Langdon & Vesper) and a critical factor influencing school success (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997). In summary, then, parental involvement in the public schools has been documented to be academically beneficial by educational researchers, supported politically, and valued by a great many educators as well as individuals in the general public. So, theoretically, home-school collaboration efforts should be flourishing in the public school system. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case.

Parent Involvement Underutilized

Although the importance of family involvement is widely recognized in education, its implementation in actual practice is weaker (Shores, 1998). School efforts to involve parents vary greatly (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Despite federal mandates for an increase in family involvement programs in education, development of such programs has not kept pace with the demand (Shores). Studies suggest that parents are not as involved as they would like (Eccles & Harold, 1993). "Swap (1993) states the paradox: 'Given the widespread recognition that parent involvement in schools is important, that it is unequivocally related to improvements in children's achievement, and that improvement in children's achievement is urgently needed, it is paradoxical that most schools do not have comprehensive parent involvement programs'" (Decker et al., 2000, p. 37).

A survey of 3700 elementary school teacher practices by Epstein and Becker (1982a) across 600 schools in Maryland found that there are teachers who reported little or no parental activity within the school and no use of parents as classroom volunteers. Furthermore, the survey revealed that even when elementary school teachers asked parents to get involved in their child's education it was merely to supplement the teacher's emphasis on basic skills rather than enrich or extend students' experiences. While there were some teachers that have parents actively assisting in school, they were usually selectively recruited. Results of research from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1990) show that among eighth-graders only 50 percent of parents had attended a school meeting since the beginning of the school year, 42 percent had not contacted the school about their child's academic performance, and only 29 percent had visited their children's classes (White-Clark & Decker, 1996).

In a survey of 307 high school teachers in the San Francisco Bay area, more than half of the teachers reported little contact with parents (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). Teachers rarely initiate contact with parents; in fact, Dornbusch and Ritter found that 63% of the teachers in their study reported initiating almost no contact with any of the parents of their students. Teachers in this study reported that their job as high school teachers was complex and did not emphasize interactions with parents. Furthermore, teachers reported that when there was contact with the parents it was either to address discipline problems or to discuss a students' progress with parents that had demonstrated an interest in their child's education. Thus, this report found that parents of students considered to be average with regards to conduct and academics have very little contact with the teacher. In addition, teachers in this study reported that they would not prefer an increase in the contact with such parents. These results are unsettling due to the fact that students of average achievement and conduct comprise a substantial proportion of every high school. Moreover, the author reports that dramatic changes are not expected with regards to parental involvement or parent-teacher contact because the results of the survey suggest that schools are not ready to embark on the road to massive change in family-school relations.

In general, rates of parent involvement in schools follow a trend as children move through the educational system. The relationship between parents and schools seems to weaken as children move from elementary school to secondary school (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Even though parent involvement in elementary school is minimal, it declines even further as children move into secondary school. Adolescents have much to gain from the exposure to many different adult models as they try to form their own identities. Parent involvement at the secondary level is just as important, if not more important, than in the elementary years, especially in inner city areas and high-risk communities.

Finally, research also indicates that there are limited types of parent involvement being pursued. Schools that have parent-involvement strategies or have parents actively involved with the school primarily do so through the use of parent-teacher conferences. "Although all schools routinely invite parents to attend informational meetings and conferences, few invite them to actively participate in extended and engaging activities" (Dodd & Konzal, 2000, p. 11). In fact, the traditional parent-teacher conference has been the focus of most parent involvement efforts (Shores, 1998). The Harvard Family Research Project found that among 58 teacher education programs nationwide, parent-teacher conference was by far the most frequently addressed strategy for family involvement, while encouraging parents to teach children at home ranked second, and recruiting parents as classroom volunteers ranked third. Understanding the parent/families ranked last in the survey (Shartrand, Kreider, & Erickson-Warfield, 1994).

Other research cites traditional parent involvement activities as focusing on parent participation in organized activities at school or giving parents "specific guidelines, materials, and/or training to carry out school-like activities in the home" (Lopez et al., 2001, p. 256). These limited parent involvement activities ignore cultural perspectives of minority populations. In fact, the lowest rates of parent involvement are often among minority homes (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). In particular, Lopez et al. conclude that this is an ineffective avenue for enlisting parent involvement in migrant-impacted schools. Matters are only made worse in that few reform efforts have made serious attempts to include families from low-income backgrounds (Lewis & Henderson, 1997). In totality, parent involvement in practice is weaker than expected. Further, when they are utilized, parent involvement activities often reach a narrow part of parent populations and represent only select types of parental participation. What might account for such a limited practice of parent involvement?

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Some Parents lack the Desire or Confidence to Become Involved

While some research indicates parents do want to be more involved in the education of their children and want the aid of their schools in order to accomplish this goal (Comer, 1988; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988), other research reminds us there is also the possibility that some parents do not value the importance of parent involvement in the schools. There are parents who do not want to become involved in the schools because they do not value education for their children or believe that running schools should be left up to educational professionals (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Some parents may feel their participation is not necessary given

their child is doing well in school, and others may have no history of being involved and see no reason to begin doing so (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001).

An alternative reason parents may not hasten to be involved is that many parents had poor experiences themselves going through school (Decker et al., 2000; Dwyer & Hecht, 2001; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). These parents might have encountered academic difficulties or other painful experiences during their time in school. Additionally, many parents don't want to become involved because they question their ability to make a difference (Decker et al.). There are many parents who want to become involved but do not know how to translate that desire into effective involvement (Baker, 2000b; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein & Connors, 1992). They may feel they lack the skills to participate in such activities as school advisory councils or classroom volunteering (Greenwood & Hickman). This is an unfortunate state of affairs given that it has been suggested that parent involvement programs will meet with limited success unless they address parental efficacy for helping their children succeed in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Teachers need to be informed of the importance of parental efficacy for involvement, and they need to have some understanding of communication and parent involvement strategies that will increase such efficacy.

Some Teachers Do Not Value Parent Involvement

Unfortunately, there is an attitude within some schools that reflects a lack of valuing of parental participation or of parental opinions in the schools (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997; Ramirez, 1999). This attitude ranges from disinterest in encouraging parental involvement to outright hostility towards parents. Frequently, educators view parents as problems that are best kept at a safe distance from the genuine work of the schools and who often have to be appeased when angry (Dodd & Konzal, 2000). Even if teachers thought that it made practical sense to invite parent input, they fear that doing so will take away from their authority as a teacher or will bring parental criticism of their instructional methods, curriculum decisions, and classroom management techniques (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). According to Baker (2000a) many teachers felt that parents did not respect them and unnecessarily questioned their authority. Consequently, this study reported that some parents often feel unwelcome on school premises, feel like intruders rather than partners, and receive the impression they are interfering when they do contact teachers with questions. There has to be a discussion among parents and teachers as to the importance of each party's role; instead of viewing parents in an adversarial light, schools should nurture the role of parents as partners in the education of their child (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001).

Lazar & Slostad (1999) argue that teachers fear that they may not be able to handle conflicts with parents. Thus, these authors conclude some teachers may prefer to avoid contact with parents because it reduces the chances of having a confrontation. However, keeping parents out of the school to create the false impression that the school runs smoothly can have costly effects, such as making parents more hostile and denying teachers the chance to acquire knowledge and to gain the parental support that makes schools work better for their students (Dodd & Konzal, 2000). Teachers should be called on to examine and reflect on their own beliefs, especially any preconceived notions that may be detrimental to encouraging parent involvement. Generally, an understanding of the benefits derived from parent involvement in the schools and discussions with educators successfully implementing parent involvement may help preservice teachers to reflect on the benefit of increasing parent involvement. Preparation in problem-solving and communication skills will also help to build teachers' own confidence in successfully interacting with parents.

Teachers' Preconceptions about Parental Culpability

In addition to the lack of consensus among educators on the value of parent involvement more generally, teachers' preconceived notions about some parents' competencies and skills in respect to child-rearing practices further hinders efforts to build parent involvement. Since America's colonial period, educators have blamed many parents for their incapability to support their children's intellectual, social, and moral development. More than a century later, we find that educators are still placing the blame on the parents for their children's academic failures, especially parents from low-income and minority backgrounds (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Teachers' perceptions of parents and parent involvement are influenced by culture, history, and schooling practices (Lazar & Slostad). It is such predetermined perceptions of parent involvement which can inhibit home-school linkages. Lazar & Slostad argue that teachers often complain that kids are failing in school because parents do not read to them; this suggests that teachers have an underlying assumption that such parents do not care about supporting their children's education. As a result, parents feel as though teachers automatically blame them when a child encounters difficulty at school, rather than examining the possibility that there was something about the classroom environment that was a contributing factor in their child's school problems (Baker, 2000a).

Studies have found that many teachers possess doubt regarding parents' competencies or skills to help with their child's learning. A study conducted by Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) found that 39% of high-school teachers surveyed reported believing that parents lack training to help at home, while 62% of teach-

ers surveyed agreed that they cannot affect the way parents assist in schoolwork. Epstein and Becker (1982b) found similar results with regards to teachers believing that parents had a lack of training when they surveyed elementary school teachers. In their study, teachers reported being concerned that involving parents in the classroom or too deeply in homework assignments would not be beneficial since most parents lack the necessary training. Dornbush and Ritter's study also found that teachers reported that either they believed parents cared but they could not do much to help their child in actual learning or that parents cared but should not help with school learning. It has even been reported that teachers express a belief that parents encourage students to disrespect them by insisting that they do not listen to the teacher and by not following through with disciplinary suggestions made by the teacher (Baker, 2000a).

Due to the predetermined attitudes that some teachers hold, parents may perceive that they are being judged before even coming in contact with the teacher. Once again, future teachers should be called on to examine and reflect on their own beliefs. They need to become cognizant of their preconceived notions that may be detrimental to both parent involvement and teacher-family interactions in general. It is true that some parenting practices leave much to be desired, but teachers need to put aside the inclination to blame in order to best meet the needs of their students.

Home-School Scheduling Conflicts

Even when both parents and educators agree as to the importance of parental involvement, scheduling conflicts often arise when planning participation. Conflicting work schedules and competing demands on parents' time have been cited as a barrier to parent involvement in the schools (Baker, 2000b; Eccles & Harold, 1993). While often this refers to parents with odd work schedules or those who must work more than one job, it is also possible to find parents who feel they don't have the time given their busy leisure interests and activities (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001). Some principals have had enough discouraging experiences with parent involvement that they feel weary of trying to include or involve parents as partners. The most universal problem is poor attendance at school events that deal with educational topics, convey important information, or require work to be done (Kirschenbaum, 2000). Moreover, it has been reported that asking busy parents to increase their participation in the school rarely produces significant results (Greenleaf, 2000).

Due to the inconsistency of participation across all parents, teachers feel concerned that creating and incorporating too many parent involvement activities may pose problems in that not all children are receiving such parental assistance

(Epstein & Becker, 1982b). Teachers often agree that it is unrealistic to expect busy parents to contribute considerable amounts of time to working with their children on school tasks (Dornbush & Ritter, 1988; Greenleaf, 2000). However, when teachers grasp the range of types of parent involvement available, they may be able to find various types that are convenient for different parents. Not all parents may be able to get involved in all school or learning activities, but perhaps they can be involved in the sense of staying informed as to their child's progress in school and by providing encouragement and support.

Conflicting Beliefs About the Ways Parents Should Be Involved

The lack of parental attendance at various involvement activities is not only a scheduling issue. Parents and teachers often disagree as to the role parents should play in their child's education (Shartrand et al., 1997), particularly among families of immigrant status (Decker et al., 2000) or migrant status (Lopez et al., 2001). Lopez et al. conclude that while schools tend to see parent involvement defined in terms of parental participation in organized activities at the school, parents see their involvement in more informal activities that can take place outside the school such as providing nurturance, talking with their children, instilling cultural values, and checking homework.

Parents of low-income or minority children face many barriers when attempting to becoming involved in the schools their children attend. According to a study by Baker et al. (1999), these parents have fewer opportunities to meet and share information with the teachers, to attend events at school due to lack of transportation, money, or child care, or to make their presence known to the school staff. Cultural discrepancies that exist between the home life of minority and less-educated parents and their children's school life may create tensions and intimidation between the parents and the teacher, discouraging such parents from taking part in their children's school environment (Baker et al., 1999; Eccles & Harold, 1993).

The problem with making these parent involvement changes lies in the fact that schools are primarily in charge of arranging and holding parent involvement activities. For example, the parent-teacher conference, which is very intimidating for parents of low-income or minority children, is dictated by the school and held on school turf (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Dornbusch and Ritter (1988) found 80 percent of high school teachers in their study agree that many parents are uncomfortable or feel out of place at school, and this is especially true of minority parents. Alternative ways of communication between parents and teachers are not offered, and parents have little say (Lazar & Slostad). Teachers need to be apprised of the cultural disparities in parent involvement that do exist, so that they are prepared to interact with and involve parents in culturally sensitive ways.

Vagueness as to the Role of Parent Involvement During Adolescent Years

Unlike teachers in elementary schools, teachers in secondary schools do not view parental involvement as having a critical impact on students' academic progress (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). These teachers are faced with educational challenges and changes in students' social and emotional development that are unique to the adolescent environment. Eccles and Harold (1993) argue teachers often interpret students' increasing need for autonomy as a sign students do not require or wish their parents to be involved in their educational experiences. However, adolescents' need for independence should not be interpreted as a call to end parental involvement. Adolescents can be better assisted when both parents and teachers work to support them (Lazar & Slostad).

Additional factors that could be responsible for the decline of parent involvement in secondary schools are the nature of the schooling and the complexity of the curriculum. According to Dwyer and Hecht (2001), because some parents feel that they have not mastered the academic concepts their children are studying, they lose confidence in their ability to help. However, these authors conclude it is parents' willingness to help that may be the more important factor. Because of the class size and the number of classes a teacher is responsible for at the secondary level, teachers have limited access to students and, consequently, their parents. Meanwhile, because students have a different teacher for each class, parents are unsure as to whom to contact when they have questions (Dwyer & Hecht). The intricacy of the secondary-level curriculum, the high level of academics required, and the added extracurricular choices also make it difficult for parents to get involved as well as for the teachers to connect with students and their families (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

Another possible explanation for the decrease in parent involvement in secondary school may be linked to the type of parent involvement that is characteristic at the elementary level. Parents and other family members often assist teachers in the classroom by performing such tasks as supervising, teaching special skills, or providing clerical help (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Furthermore, parents of elementary school children also have opportunities to be involved in homeroom parties, PTA meetings, and co-curricular events. However, once a child reaches the secondary level such parent involvement opportunities may not be present or may no longer be appropriate with secondary curricula. Consequently, it would not be surprising if parent involvement in such capacities would decrease at the secondary level. In fact, "a spiraling decline of parental support is evident in most high schools around the nation," with more than 70 percent of urban school leaders recently citing the scarceness of active parental involvement as a major dilemma in their schools (Ziegler, 2000, p. 22).

However, the problem is that parent involvement activities used at the elemen-

tary level are not replaced with other forms of parent involvement at the secondary level. For instance, Eccles and Harold (1993) argue that there is a pressing need at the secondary level for tutorial programs, in particular tutors and places to house such programs. Parent involvement in the secondary level may require parents to take on different roles, and teachers may not be sure what these new roles should be. Once students leave elementary school and enter adolescence, parents begin to assume the role of advisor and confidant (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001). New strategies to involve parents of adolescents need to be disseminated to teachers, including new types of involvement that are beneficial to students' learning, yet comfortable for both adolescents and their parents.

Lack of Teacher Preparation and Administrative Support

One of the most frequently voiced barriers to more parental involvement in the schools is the lack of teacher training in promoting home-school involvement (Baker, 2000b; Decker et al., 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Shartrand et al., 1997; Shores, 1998). Subsequently, it is no wonder that schools and teachers often lack the knowledge of how to effectively involve parents in the schools and rely on very limited, traditional types of parent involvement. In spite of the desire by many teachers and administrators to promote parent involvement in their schools, this desire goes unrealized due to a lack of know-how. Further, despite federal policy on family involvement, there has been a "limited effect on state certification requirements" (Shores, p. 9). A review of studies conducted by Katz & Bauch (1999) examined state mandates for parent involvement in teacher education programs dating over the previous decade. The studies they reviewed reported minimal if any inclusion of parent involvement in the standards, and those states that did have some parental involvement training listed were almost all focused at the elementary level. Thus deficit is born from a lack of preparation of pre-service teachers and is perpetuated with lack of professional development through in-service training. In fact, the question has been raised as to whether such training should be addressed at the preservice level, in-service level or both. "Unfortunately, the number of courses and professional experiences in parent involvement included in the preservice and in-service preparation of teachers is insufficient" (Greenwood & Hickman, p. 279).

Chavkin (2000) poignantly states that if we are devout in our beliefs that family involvement is related to student success, we must stop giving it "lip service" and allocate at least modest financial resources for staff training in involving parents. The organizational nature of schools and the levels of support from school districts to reward teachers' efforts in home-school networking are often restrictive (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Lack of incentives or support from administrative and district offi-

cials and large class sizes that place heavy demands on teachers' time further impede attempts by teachers to spend significant time geared towards parents (Shartrand et al., 1997). There are teachers that believe they do not have the authority to work with parents collaboratively unless they have been given permission to do so by the school office or the school board (Lazar & Slostad). Even if they wanted to interact with the parents, in general, there may not be much time left in a teacher's busy schedule for parent involvement activities (Baker, 2000b). If teachers go naively into the classrooms expecting such support to be given, they may be more likely to give up when confronted with the harsh reality that some schools do not appear to value parent involvement on more than a surface level. Overall, then, the lack of preparation, administrative support, and resources offered teachers presents a rather bleak picture in terms of the support teachers have in facilitating parental involvement. This is particularly unfortunate in light of research indicating some of the most essential elements for promising family involvement programs are teacher training in and administrative support of parental involvement (Chavkin, 2000).

Conclusions

Parent involvement in the schools will continue to be of interest to academics, educators, politicians, and parents. It is a worthy endeavor and has a sound research base as evidence of the many potential benefits it can offer in education. Unfortunately, it is also largely unrealized in many schools, and rates of parent involvement in the secondary years are of particular concern. More systematic and meaningful parent involvement is hindered by many obstacles which include: parents who lack the desire and confidence to become involved, educators who lack the desire to encourage parent involvement, teachers' preconceptions surrounding parental capabilities, home-school scheduling conflicts, conflicting beliefs about the ways parents should be involved, vagueness surrounding the changing role of parent involvement during students' adolescent years, and lack of teacher preparation and administrative support. Until we address these concerns, we will not reap the rewards widespread parent involvement can offer.

A discussion of these obstacles is particularly important to pre-service teacher education, although it continues to be debated as to whether this dialogue should be a separate course or infused throughout other teacher education courses (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Either way, discussions with educators successfully implementing parent involvement in their schools and opportunities for field experience in working with families should be a critical element in every teacher education program. Teacher preparation programs do provide a systematic foundation of diverse pedagogical tools; however, this is only the first step. In-service

staff development is a necessity for ongoing professional development, and should also include training for involving families. Both avenues for teacher development are essential and will naturally play a part to some degree. More discussion among academics and practitioners is necessary to determine the most feasible and effective ways to approach this education.

There are certain content areas that would be of benefit to both pre-service and in-service educators. Critical content areas might include the following: presentations of techniques for involving parents; discussions on different types of parent involvement appropriate for elementary, junior, and senior high levels; opportunities for field experiences that involve working with parents; and coverage of the basic legal rights of both teachers and students. In addition, the development of teachers' communication skills will help to build teachers' confidence in successfully interacting with parents outside of the conference situation. Teacher knowledge of family support services in the community will help to strengthen the link between home and school. A discussion on the types of parent involvement strategies that work best with families of varying socioeconomic status and ethnicity is particularly needed. Teachers need to be apprised of the cultural disparities in parent involvement that do exist in order to be better prepared to interact with and involve parents in culturally sensitive ways. Most importantly, teacher education in parent involvement must capture teachers' attention and instill in them an appreciation for the benefits of parent involvement for multiple stakeholders. Once educators see the value and are sincerely receptive to parent involvement, instruction can be geared toward a range of parent involvement types and strategies.

The value of parent involvement should be communicated to teachers getting ready to enter the field, along with potential difficulties that may be encountered. Such a presentation will help ground these teachers' expectations in reality. In addition, helping teachers currently in the field to see the value of and barriers to parental involvement may lead to a greater interest in learning techniques to surmount these challenges. Helping teachers to examine and reflect on their own beliefs about parents' involvement may serve to challenge any preconceived notions they may have that are detrimental to encouraging parent involvement. If teachers engage in discussions of these obstacles and how they are minimizing parent involvement, more conscious efforts to overcome them can be undertaken.

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