An Urban School District's Parent Involvement: A Study of Teachers' and Administrators' Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

This quantitative study examines the practices and beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding parent involvement in an urban school district following the first year of the implementation of an action plan based on six national standards for parent involvement (National PTA, 1997). The theoretical framework is based upon Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. Administrators and teachers from an urban school district were surveyed. The instrument used for this study was adapted from "The Parent Involvement Inventory" published by the Illinois State Board of Education (1994). A two-tailed t-test was conducted and findings indicate some statistically significant differences between many beliefs and practices. The results of this study show a mismatch between teachers' and administrators' beliefs and practices about parent involvement. Although teachers and administrators have strong beliefs about parent involvement and its importance in strengthening student achievement, what they practice in their schools and classrooms is not congruent with these beliefs.

Key Words: parental involvement, self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, urban education, teachers, administrators, beliefs, practices, urban school districts, family engagement, families, parents

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The recent legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has put parent involvement at the forefront of national policy. The law requires school districts who receive federal funds to inform parents how they can be involved in their children's schools and requires school districts to disseminate an annual district report card to parents. This has prompted many school districts across the country to re-examine current parent involvement policies and programs to ensure they are in compliance in order to continue to obtain federal education funding through programs such as Title I. Parent involvement policies and programs are not new to most school districts. What has changed is the educational environment, which is asking public school districts to be more accountable for student achievement. This change brings challenges for many school districts who struggle to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) because of low achievement scores or low attendance rates. "Just as no child should be left behind, so, too no parent should be left behind in the American educational enterprise" (Lapp & Flood, 2004, p. 70); therefore, school districts must realize the importance that families play in children's school success and take responsibility for bridging the home and school environments.

Families have a profound impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Benson & Martin, 2003; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). Students' development and academic progress are affected by the beliefs and practices of the teachers and administrators within the school district. School leaders have a strong impact on the priority placed on parent involvement within their schools and in the overall community (Protheroe, Shellard, & Turner, 2003). In addition, teachers must realize that they are not only working with children, but also with their students' families (Kirschenbaum, 2001). Although family involvement at the elementary level is more prevalent, recent research has focused on the lack of family involvement at the middle and high school levels (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Schools must consistently encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning at all grade levels. Respectful relationships and supportive links between schools, families, and communities are imperative to successful partnerships (Christenson, Godber, & Anderson, 2005).

This study examines the practices and beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding family involvement in an urban school district following the first year of the implementation of an action plan to improve parent involvement based on six national standards for parent involvement (National PTA, 1997). The district was 1 of 13 districts in Pennsylvania selected to send a team to the

first Governor's Institute for Parental Involvement. The team of two educators and four parents attended the institute for two weekends in the fall of 2004.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are urban teachers' and administrators' practices regarding family involvement?
2. What are urban teachers' and administrators' beliefs about family involvement?
3. Using the literature on family involvement as a set of evaluative criteria, what characteristics of urban teachers' practices and beliefs about family involvement are consistent with the literature on family involvement?
4. What effects do urban teachers' and administrators' beliefs about family involvement have on their practices of family involvement in their schools?

Literature Review

Parent Involvement Practices of Teachers and Administrators

Parent involvement may be viewed as multidimensional due to the fact that researchers have utilized various models and definitions (Pelco, Jacobson, Ries, & Melka, 2000). Parent involvement research can generally be categorized into three areas which include: at-risk studies that involve below average parent involvement, descriptive studies that describe parent involvement within children's schools, and outcome-based studies that link student learning and parent involvement (Griffith, 1998). Several organizational characteristics must be considered in order to build successful family-school partnerships. Parent empowerment, good communication, and school climate are significant factors within positive family-school relationships (Griffith). Cochran and Dean (1991) discuss the "empowerment process" which includes self-perception, an emphasis on relationships, and social action regarding children. Empowerment focuses on all families' strengths and the belief that differences do not constitute deficits (Cochran & Dean). Another factor includes schools sharing information with parents about their children's education (Griffith). Communication is a vital component of parent involvement programs (Bridgemohan, van Wyk, & van Staden, 2005). However, communication is typically from school to home, and barriers such as language differences may exist (Bridgemohan et al.; Peña, 2000). Bridgemohan, van Wyk, and van Staden found that parents often have limited opportunities to initiate communication with their children's schools. Therefore, dedicated parent involvement coordinators and organized programs are beneficial for parent involvement efforts to flourish (Epstein & Becker, 1982). There is a lack of knowledge regarding the sociological teaching and organizational context within urban schools and their influence on

home-school communication which must be addressed when creating and implementing programs (Bauch & Goldring, 2000). In order to foster parent involvement, school districts' practices and policies should build trust between families, teachers, and administrators (Feuerstein, 2000).

Depending upon the types of parent involvement activities that are offered, teachers play either a direct or indirect role (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). For example, teachers play a direct role when parents volunteer in classrooms or are employed as paid paraprofessionals; teachers play an indirect role when they motivate parents to participate in learning activities at home with their children. Regardless of their role, teachers maintain an important influence on parent involvement activities (Greenwood & Hickman). When teachers contact parents, parent participation in organizations (e.g., the PTO) and volunteerism typically increase (Feuerstein, 2000). Some traditional parent involvement activities include: open houses, parents attendance during events/classroom activities, parent-teacher conferences, child-delivered notes for communication, and counseling for parents (Greenwood & Hickman). When parents volunteer, teachers must involve them in meaningful tasks in order to use their talents and time wisely (Bauch & Goldring, 2000; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman; Kyriakides, 2005; O'Connor, 2001). Within many elementary and secondary schools, students are assigned homework, and parental support is often requested by teachers (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). While helping their children with homework, parents model skills and attitudes, provide reinforcement and feedback, and engage their children in instruction. Parents typically help their children with homework due to the following reasons: beliefs that they ought to be involved; beliefs that their involvement is beneficial; and perceptions that their involvement is welcomed and expected (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Although the traditional forms of parent involvement are familiar to most, they should not be considered the only forms (Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman).

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) conducted a study to examine the implementation of community and family involvement activities in an effort to reduce student discipline problems and promote student learning. Two types of involvement, parenting and volunteering, were the most predictive for reducing student discipline problems within schools. "Parenting" is defined as "helping all families establish home environments to support children as students;" "volunteering" relates to "recruiting and organizing families to help the school and support students" (Sheldon & Epstein, p. 5). The teachers described numerous student and/or parent benefits that they perceived resulting from parental involvement which include: improved basic skills, better skill retention throughout the summer, enhanced in-class behavior of students, enrichment, positive

self-images of parents due to successful home-school cooperation, and a wider array of parent-generated materials for classrooms (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Thus, there are many advantages to parent involvement including the reduction of student discipline problems.

Parent Involvement Beliefs of Teachers and Administrators

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about parent involvement are greatly influenced by their views and participation in school life. When teachers perceive their school has a caring atmosphere, parents are more likely to be involved (Bauch & Goldring, 2000). Epstein and Becker (1982) address the findings from comments from over 1,000 teachers on a survey about parent involvement; teachers' time, parents' time, and students' time and feelings were addressed. Teachers mentioned the abundance of time that it takes to implement parent involvement practices (Chavkin & Williams, 2001; Epstein & Becker). Teachers surveyed by Epstein and Becker also acknowledged the various duties that parents have within the home that may contribute to a lack of time for parent involvement in their children's education. In addition, teachers described the importance of students' out-of-school time to relax, play, and pursue their own interests. Teachers did suggest that even brief amounts of time that parents spend on home learning activities with their children can be quite beneficial if the time is used wisely. However, teachers also felt that the children whose parents did not take part in home learning activities with them were at an academic disadvantage. Many teachers described their principal's support and school climate as important aspects for successful parent involvement programs (Epstein & Becker).

Parents' involvement in home learning activities with their children often constitutes both positive and negative responses from educators. Some teachers believe that academic-related interactions between children and parents provide educational support, while others believe that teaching academic skills is the teacher's responsibility (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1986). Becker and Epstein conducted a survey of 3,700 first, third, and fifth grade public school teachers. The teachers described their professional attitudes and teaching practices. Also, over 600 elementary school principals participated in a brief questionnaire about parent involvement programs. Overall, the survey yielded highly positive views of teaching strategies that were parent-oriented. About half of the teachers reported some parent involvement in the classroom. Therefore, parents' observations while volunteering may lead to effective home learning activities related to school. Communications that involve "traditional" parent-teacher interactions (e.g., open house, parent-teacher conferences) were viewed favorably by both teachers and principals. Some teachers described

active use of parent involvement strategies regardless of the various educational levels of the parents. The survey results indicated that teachers who do not use parent involvement techniques and teach children of less educated parents believed the parents would be unlikely to complete homework-related activities with their children.

Although teachers reported using personal contact with parents (e.g., brief conversations, telephone conversations, conferences, and special appointments), home visits were infrequently used. However, teachers who did make home visits were more inclined to have positive views about parent involvement techniques (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Sometimes home visits conducted by teachers or parent involvement coordinators are used to deliver home learning materials (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Some successful parent involvement activities were described by teachers as the following: parents reading with children at home, signing papers and/or folders, conferencing at convenient times for parents, home visits, and summer learning activities to complete at home (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Teachers and Administrators: Self-Efficacy Regarding Parent Involvement

Efficacy "manifested by confidence in one's teaching and instructional program…implies a sense of professionalism and security in the teaching role. Such confidence would logically enhance teachers' efforts to discuss their teaching program and goals with parents" (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987, p. 429). The greatest amount of parent involvement occurs when teachers with positive attitudes regarding parent involvement maintain open communication with parents and collaborate with them; when administrators and teachers initiate and welcome parent involvement, it can be successful (Griffith, 1998). Thus, in order to improve parent-teacher relations, principals should make a conscious effort to promote teacher efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) conducted a study of 66 schools within eight school districts. Questionnaires were distributed to 66 principals and 1,003 teachers. Upon completion of the study, the researchers reported that the strongest predictor for teacher support of parent involvement was teacher efficacy, that is, teachers' beliefs regarding teaching effectiveness. Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues describe teacher efficacy related to four different parent involvement practices which include: (1) conferences, (2) parent volunteers, (3) parents as tutors, and (4) teacher perception regarding support of parents. Teacher concerns focus on the following: undependable volunteers, failure of parents to implement home learning activities, lack of discipline in the home, and teachers' fear of parent contact (Epstein & Becker,

1982). In regard to home tutoring, principals' perceptions of teachers' efficacy were significant contributors. Therefore, principals who believe their teachers are highly efficacious may communicate this belief to both parents and teachers, thus promoting positive expectations for student learning (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

It is also important to remember that parent efficacy is critical for effective parent involvement (O'Connor, 2001; Swick, 1988). As previously stated, parent involvement typically decreases as children's grade level increases (Griffith, 1998). This may be due to parental beliefs that children become more independent as they grow older and parental support is no longer needed. Parents may also feel that they lack the skills to assist their children with more difficult content in various subject areas. Griffith studied the social and physical environments of schools and whether the perceptions of all parents regarding a school's social environment impacted the involvement and perceptions of individual parents. Findings indicated that families with lower socioeconomic status usually had lower parent involvement. The limited involvement may be due to time demands/work schedules and to attitudes and practices within schools that suggest parents lack the abilities to help (Griffith). Barriers to parent involvement may include: parents' fatigue, parents' lack of awareness of their rights as well as school policies and procedures, and limited opportunities for parent involvement (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Logistical limitations, such as lack of transportation or child care and language barriers may also exist (Geenen et al., 2001; Peña, 2000). Thus, school systems must make concerted efforts to eliminate barriers and form true partnerships with families.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Self-Efficacy

The conceptual framework for this study draws on the work of Bandura's (1977a) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. This theory argues that people create self-perceptions of capability that become influential to their pursuits. In other words, people's beliefs about their capabilities are critical in determining their successes in specific tasks. Strong self-efficacy beliefs are usually the result of prior experience with similar tasks (Pajares & Shunk, 2001). When people are highly self-efficacious, they tend to undertake more challenging tasks, set higher goals for themselves, and persist longer to achieve their goals (Bandura, 1997; Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña, & Schwarzer, 2005). This research hypothesizes that the practices of teachers and administrators are influenced by various beliefs. Bandura's (1977a) theory of self-efficacy implies that the

efficacy beliefs of teachers are related to their instructional practices. A strong sense of self-efficacy for specific tasks influences the level of accomplishment.

The research on teacher efficacy and parent involvement provides evidence of a connection between the two (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). Garcia's study of elementary teachers in a large urban school district revealed that teacher efficacy was significantly correlated to the family involvement practices found in Epstein's (1995) typology: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) also found teacher efficacy to be a predictor for parent involvement in school, classroom, and home activities. Given the prior research on the topic, this study hypothesizes that practices of teachers to engage in family involvement are influenced through various beliefs. Teachers with higher efficacy for family involvement create classroom environments that provide substantial opportunities for family involvement activities.

Unlike traditional behaviorists, Bandura (1986) disagreed with the contention that one's environment alone causes behavior. Instead, he felt that a cause/effect relationship exists between environment and behavior—both simultaneously creating and affecting one another. Subsequently, he argued that it is one's beliefs that enable him to control his thoughts and actions, ultimately affecting behavior. His social cognitive theory explains this in terms of triadic reciprocal causation: "In this causal mode, cognitive and other personal factors, behavior, and environmental events all influence one another bidirectionally" (Bandura, 1977b, p. 454). Bandura (1997) believed people to be active participants in the construction of learning. He felt that in "a social cognitive view, people function as active agents in their own motivation rather than being simply reactive to discordant events that produce cognitive perturbations" (p. 133). In other words, constructing meaning is an ongoing process that relies on the mind's ability to choose important stimuli in order to solve problems. When people realize they lack comprehension, they decide whether or not they want to learn something new to gain that comprehension. If they are motivated, they will construct new meaning. To better illustrate this theory, Bandura (1986) posits three constructs: observational learning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. For the purpose of this study, self-efficacy will be the only construct of the three examined.

Bandura (1986) proposes that self-efficacy, defined as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391), plays the most influential role in determining one's choices, effort, perseverance, and degree of anxiety or confidence one brings to the task at hand. There are also different types of

self-efficacy which include: *general* self-efficacy (GSE), believing in one's capabilities to deal with adverse situations and new tasks, and *specific* self-efficacy, limited to an explicit task (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Self-efficacy is different than self-esteem, a term coined by William James in 1890. Self-esteem is used to describe how people feel about themselves in relation to the success with which they accomplish things they want to accomplish. Self-esteem is an evaluative component and involves personal approval or disapproval of self or personal judgment of one's worthiness (Pajares & Shunk, 2001). Self-efficacy is also different from self-concept. Coopersmith and Feldman (1974) describe self-concept as "beliefs, hypotheses, and assumptions that the individual has about himself" (p. 199). Self-concept can be compared to the looking-glass self metaphor whereby an individual's sense of self is formed by his or her perceptions of others' views.

In contrast to self-esteem and self-concept, self-efficacy is task or context specific. Someone may have a high self-efficacy for some tasks and not others and in some contexts and not others (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). What people do and how they behave is predicted more by their beliefs about their competence than by what they actually accomplish. For example, one's self-efficacy for driving a car may change dependent on the conditions of the road; a student's self-efficacy for writing may depend on the assignment. Therefore, people's self-efficacy helps explain why people have differing behaviors even when they have similar knowledge and skills (Pajares, 1992; Pajares & Shunk, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Moreover, unlike self-concept, self-efficacy does not involve cultural or social considerations. Since self-concept involves self-worth, it is dependent partially on how culture or society values the characteristics by which an individual bases his feelings of self-worth. Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is a judgment one has in his or her abilities. It is really a difference in the source of a person's judgment; self-concept judgments rely on social and self-comparisons and performance whereas self-efficacy judgments rely on a person's judgment about his or her ability to accomplish tasks (Pajares & Shunk).

Teachers' instructional beliefs have become an issue for research in educational reform. Some have argued that teacher instructional beliefs have a strong impact on reforming teaching and learning (Handal, Bobis, & Grimison, 2001; Lovat & Smith, 1995; Wenner, 2001). Larry Cuban posits, "The knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that teachers have…shape what they choose to do in their classrooms and explain the core of instructional practices that have endured over time" (1993, p. 256). As a result of the low degree of success in many educational innovations, it is important that teacher beliefs be explored prior to implementation of new educational innovation (Fullan, 1993).

Teacher efficacy, defined as "a teacher's expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning" (Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 2001, p. 141), influences classroom innovation. Gibson and Dembo (1984) suggest that teacher efficacy be subdivided into general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. General teaching efficacy is a teacher's belief that certain teaching practices or behaviors, such as involving parents, can affect student performance; whereas, personal teaching efficacy is a teacher's personal sense of his or her ability to perform the activities necessary to affect student performance. It has been suggested that the first years of teachers' careers may be pivotal to their long-term efficacy development (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Since it appears that teachers' self-efficacy affects both teaching and learning, "the origins, supports, and enemies of efficacy" are of interest to policymakers, administrators, and teacher educators (Hoy & Spero, p. 343).

Many studies have found a relationship between teacher efficacy and educational reform. Teachers with higher self-efficacy are more willing to try new teaching methods, even those thought to be difficult to implement (Allinder, 1994; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1987; Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 1992). Other studies have found a relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement. McLaughlin and Marsh (1978) suggested that levels of efficacy influence teachers' behaviors, which influence student behaviors leading to student achievement. Several researchers support this hypothesis (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992). Teacher efficacy has also been linked to student motivation (Ross, 1994; Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990) and higher expectations for students (Allinder, 1995; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Ross, 1994). Thus, teachers' and principals' self-efficacy may greatly determine if and how schools districts plan, implement, and support successful parent involvement programs.

Method

This quantitative study included 92 practicing male and female teachers (grades K-12) and 7 administrators in an urban school district in Pennsylvania who were part of a statewide parent involvement initiative during the 2004-2005 school year. The study was described by the principal investigator at a district-wide in-service meeting. Each teacher and administrator received a letter describing the study and a script was read to the participants. The instrument used for this study was adapted from "The Parent Involvement Inventory" published by the Illinois State Board of Education (1994). The instrument was intended to provide information regarding district, teacher, and administrator family involvement practices and beliefs. The survey asked teachers and

administrators to provide information about current family involvement practices in their district and school based upon the following categories: teacher/coach, supporter/volunteer, communicator, learner, advocate/decision maker, and home/school/community partners. Using a five-point Likert Scale, teachers and administrators were also asked about practices and beliefs about family involvement. In addition, the survey asked participants to provide demographic variables such as degree attained, age, gender, years of teaching experience, and current position in the district; distribution frequencies were calculated to summarize participants' responses. A paired t-test was used to examine the relationship between teacher and administrator beliefs about parent involvement and their practices of parent involvement in their classrooms and schools.

Summary of Research Findings

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Urban Teachers and Administrators

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent		Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age				Grade Level		
20-29	17	17.3		K-3	23	24.0
30-39	22	22.4		4-6	14	14.6
40-49	24	24.5		7-8	19	19.8
50-59	35	35.7		9-12	33	34.4
60+	0	0		Administrator	7	7.3
Total	99			Total	96	
Missing	1			Missing	3	
				Highest Degree		
Gender				Bachelors	30	31.3
Female	68	70.8		Bachelors +25	18	18.8
Male	28	29.2		Masters	31	32.3
Total	96			Masters +	17	17.7
Missing	3			Total	96	
				Missing	3	
Years Teaching						
0-5	11	11.5				
6-10	31	32.3				
11-15	24	25.0				
16-20	15	15.6				
21-25	15	15.6				
26-30	0	0				
Over 30	0	0				
Total	96					
Missing	3					

Demographics

After considering the various demographic data, the largest representative groups (35.7%) were teachers and administrators ages 50-59. However, the other age groups were represented equally. The sample consisted of mostly females (70.8%) with 6-10 years of teaching experience (32.3%) who teach at the secondary level in grades 9-12 (34.4%). The master's degree (32.3%) was the highest degree level achieved by most of the sample. This demographic data is fairly representative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education Statistics (2007) in all categories. See Table 1 for a detailed description of the demographic data.

Parent Involvement Practices

District/School Level Practices

Participants were asked to answer questions about the occurrence of various school and district level parent involvement practices. The participants gave evidence that the school supported parent involvement in a variety of ways: through the support of student learning, soliciting volunteers to help in school buildings, providing parent communication in a variety of languages, providing parents access to classes, giving parents input in school decisions, providing teachers with resources to improve parent involvement practices, and assessing the relationships between parents and teachers.

A majority of participants were unsure about school and/or district volunteer programs and opportunities the school and/or district provided for parent learning, such as GED classes, parenting classes, computer literacy classes, study skills classes, and so on. A majority of the participants were also unsure if the school and/or district provided parents with opportunities to help with policy and decision making on committees. Frequencies of all district and school level parent involvement practices are available from the authors upon request (contact information is available at the end of this article).

Teacher/Administrator Practices

The parent involvement practices of teachers and administrators were calculated using distribution frequencies. Teachers were asked to respond to the items about parent involvement practices on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = once in a while, 4 = pretty often, and 5 = almost always. When asked about ways to inform parents about a homework policy, the majority of respondents almost always used a school handbook, parent orientation, and an assignment notebook and/or special information sheet. There were several items that were never used by a majority of teachers to keep parents informed, including the following: newsletter, homework calendar, homework hotline,

teacher contract, teacher web page, and e-mail to parent(s). The survey also asked teachers to respond to how they provide parents with specific ways to monitor homework. The majority of participants responded that they never use a newsletter, interactive homework, teacher web page, or e-mail to parent. They responded that they "pretty often" use parent-teacher conferences and special information sheets. When asked if and how they provide information to parents about educational opportunities and if they provide home projects to reinforce classroom work, the majority of participants responded that they never do so. On the other hand, when asked if they are accessible to parents, the participants resoundingly responded that they are almost always available during prep time, after school, before school, by appointment, and via e-mail. The majority also held parent-teacher conferences either once or twice per school year or as needed. Finally, teachers responded that they "almost always" used progress reports and/or telephone conferences to notify parents when a child was having academic difficulty and provided guidance to parents about how to help their child. The majority of teachers responded that they "never" used teacher web pages or e-mail to notify parents of academic difficulty. Table 2 provides a list of the mean and standard deviation for participant practices.

Table 2. Effects of Parent Involvement Beliefs on Parent Involvement Practices

		Teacher Beliefs		Teacher Practices		
Keep Parents Informed of Classroom-Homework Policy	N	M	SD	M	SD	t
Handbook	49	3.95	1.15	3.10	1.65	1.84
Parent Orientation	48	4.10	1.07	3.35	1.53	1.68
Newsletter	49	4.16	1.02	2.32	1.25	4.24***
Homework Calendar	44	3.53	1.22	2.11	1.41	2.86**
Assignment Notebook	44	3.70	1.13	3.10	1.45	1.43
Homework Hotline	47	3.21	1.44	1.26	.733	5.26***
Special Information Sheet	48	3.80	1.32	3.35	1.35	.987
Teacher Contract	47	3.44	1.42	2.78	1.63	1.36
Teacher Web Page	46	3.28	1.45	1.39	1.45	4.35***
E-mail to Parents	46	3.11	1.49	2.06	1.26	2.16*
Specific Ways to Monitor Homework						
Newsletter	42	3.40	1.21	1.81	1.22	7.31***
Parent Teacher Conference	44	4.34	.939	3.66	1.24	3.10**
Interactive Homework	41	3.54	1.21	2.29	1.49	4.50***
Special Information Sheet	44	3.61	1.22	3.07	1.42	2.44*
Teacher Web Page	42	3.21	1.22	1.62	1.31	6.04***
E-mail to Parents	40	3.35	1.39	1.93	1.10	6.15***
Information about Libraries, Book Clubs, Educational Opportunities						
Newsletter	44	4.30	.904	2.27	1.53	7.41***
Parent Resource Room	41	3.51	1.19	1.20	.511	12.03***

		Teacher Beliefs		Teacher Practices		
Parent Tip Sheets	41	3.83	1.02	1.61	1.09	9.03***
Daily Activity Calendar	41	3.68	1.13	2.05	1.47	5.82***
Parent In-Service	40	3.98	.920	1.63	1.08	9.73***
Teacher Contract	42	3.48	1.27	2.45	1.42	3.77**
Informational Brochures	40	4.03	.947	2.30	1.49	5.93***
Teacher Web Page	40	3.50	1.11	1.40	.982	9.42***
E-mail to Parents	40	3.40	1.28	1.58	.984	7.78***
Holding Parent Conferences						
Once Per Year	38	4.13	1.12	3.58	1.77	2.30*
Twice Per Year	41	4.10	.917	3.39	1.63	3.28**
Quarterly	36	3.42	1.03	2.25	1.32	5.58***
As Needed	43	4.70	.513	4.21	.965	3.10**
During School Hours Only	37	3.59	1.24	3.54	1.50	.183
Combination Evening/School Hours	36	3.69	1.33	2.72	1.52	3.88***
Easily Accessible						
Prep Time	44	4.36	.810	4.70	.632	2.81**
After School	45	3.47	1.20	3.53	1.36	.380
Before School	45	3.53	1.20	3.84	1.30	2.01
By Appointment	49	4.65	.481	4.57	.791	.727
By E-mail	42	3.81	1.22	3.88	1.55	.380
Projects to Reinforce Class Work						
Student and Parent Information Sessions	41	3.68	.986	2.20	1.37	7.96***
Science Fairs	39	3.33	1.06	1.51	.997	9.74***
Home Learning Packets	40	3.48	1.01	2.00	1.30	7.93***
Other Academic Fairs	38	3.39	.946	1.42	.793	11.29***
Family Math Night	40	3.43	.958	1.38	.774	11.70***
Family Reading Night	40	3.43	.958	1.60	.982	10.43***
Notify Parents about Academic Difficulty						
Written Progress Reports	45	4.73	.447	4.38	.650	-3.51**
Individual Student Conferences	41	4.46	.809	3.71	1.12	-4.64***
Telephone Conferences	42	4.74	.497	4.43	.668	-2.95**
Student/Parent Contracts	42	4.00	1.10	2.76	1.46	-6.66***
Team Meeting with Parents	42	4.26	.885	3.02	1.37	-7.02***
Teacher Web Page	40	2.90	1.17	1.30	.791	-8.80***
E-mail to Parents	40	3.38	1.23	2.28	1.28	-5.21***
Provide Suggestions to Parents to Prevent Failure						
Written Progress Reports	44	4.45	.548	4.23	.886	-2.03*
Individual Student Conferences	42	4.33	.816	3.79	1.16	-3.77**
Telephone Conferences	43	4.51	.592	4.30	.860	-2.03*
Student/Parent Contracts	42	3.76	1.23	2.74	1.45	-6.07***
Teacher Web Page	40	3.00	1.09	1.35	.802	-9.12***
E-mail to Parents	39	3.44	1.27	2.18	1.23	-5.36***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Parent Involvement Beliefs

The parent involvement beliefs of teachers and administrators were calculated using distribution frequencies. Teachers and administrators were asked to respond to the items about beliefs based on a five-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Teachers and administrators "strongly agreed" and "agreed" that a variety of methods were beneficial to help inform parents about homework policies; these included a handbook, parent orientation, newsletter, homework calendar, assignment notebook, special information sheet, and teacher contract. They also believed that using parent-teacher conferences, special information sheets, and e-mail to parents were good ways to help parents monitor homework. Teachers and administrators also agreed that newsletters, parent resource rooms, parent tip sheets, daily activity calendars, parent in-services, teacher contracts, information brochures, teacher web pages, and e-mail to parents were good ways to inform parents about upcoming educational opportunities for their child. Moreover, they agreed that holding a parent informational session, science fairs and other academic fairs, providing home-learning packets, and hosting math and reading nights were good ways to reinforce classroom work. The majority of teachers and administrators "agree" and/or "strongly agree" that it is important to hold parent-teacher conferences once or twice per year, or as needed, offered both during evening and regular school hours. The majority also "agree" and/or "strongly agree" they should be accessible to parents during prep time, after school, before school, by appointment, and via e-mail. Finally, teachers and administrators "agree" and/or "strongly agree" to notify parents when a child is having academic difficulty and to provide guidance to parents about their child's academic difficulty through progress reports, student and phone conferences, contracts, meetings with parents, and e-mail to parents. Table 2 provides a listing of the mean and standard deviation for participant beliefs.

Effects of Teachers' Parent Involvement Self-Efficacy on Parent Involvement Practices

The research on parent involvement indicates that teachers and administrators have a strong influence on parent involvement. Teachers' practices, attitudes, and beliefs about parent involvement are correlated to more involvement in schools and in at-home educational activities by parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burrow, 1995). There has been a great deal of research and literature on the effects of and linkages between parents' self-efficacy and their involvement with their children's education at

home and at school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Watkins, 1997). The research on teachers' self-efficacy and parent involvement is more limited. Much of the literature that does exist finds that a teacher's self-efficacy is a predictor for parent involvement practices in the classroom (Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, 1992). Teachers' beliefs about the impact they have on parent involvement have been found to be a predictor of teachers' effort to encourage parent involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

This study analyzed teachers' and administrators' self-efficacy beliefs about parent involvement in comparison to their parent involvement practices in terms of the following: how they believe various methods will help them keep parents informed of classroom homework policies; providing parents specific ways to monitor homework; providing parents with information about libraries, book clubs, and other educational opportunities; holding parent conferences; being accessible to parents; providing parents with projects to reinforce class work; and notifying parents about academic difficulty. Teachers and administrators were asked to respond to the items about beliefs based on a five-point Likert scale; similarly, teachers and administrators responded to items about practices on a five-point Likert. The overall findings indicate that there is a mismatch between what a majority of teachers and administrators believe about parent involvement and the parent involvement practices in which they are engaged in their classrooms and schools. This is contrary to much of the literature, which finds teacher efficacy associated with parent involvement practices and outcomes. A summary of all of the data on the effects of teachers' beliefs on parent involvement practices can be found in Table 2.

When asked about their practices and beliefs of keeping parents informed of homework policies, a majority of teachers and administrators both believed in and practiced the use of a handbook, parent orientation, assignment notebook, special information sheets, and teacher contracts as vehicles to keep their parents informed. Although teachers and administrators had strong beliefs about using a newsletter, homework calendar, homework hotline, teacher webpage, and e-mail to parents as ways to inform parents about homework policies, there was a significant difference in what they actually practiced.

When asked about their practices and beliefs of providing parents with specific ways to monitor homework, there was a statistically significant difference in teacher and administrator beliefs and practices. Teachers and administrators had strong beliefs that using a newsletter, holding parent-teacher conferences, using interactive homework, special information sheets, teacher web pages, and e-mailing parents would create greater parent involvement, but they did not necessarily practice these beliefs.

Likewise, when asked about practices and beliefs about providing information about libraries, book clubs, and educational opportunities to parents, specifically in using a newsletter, holding a parent conference, providing interactive homework, providing a special information sheet, using a teacher webpage, and e-mailing parents, there was a statistically significant difference in teachers' and administrators' beliefs about good parent involvement and their practice of those beliefs in the school or classroom. When asked about practices and beliefs about providing parents with projects to help reinforce class work, there was a statistically significant difference between beliefs and practices in the following areas: holding student and parent information sessions, hosting science fairs, providing home learning packets, hosting other academic fairs, and hosting a family math and/or reading night. Although teachers and administrators believed parent involvement would improve by offering a range of parent projects, they did not implement the projects.

When asked about practices and beliefs about notifying parents of academic difficulty, there was once again a statistically significant difference between beliefs and practices. Teachers and administrators have fairly strong beliefs about using written progress reports, holding individual conferences and telephone conferences, using student and parent contracts, and meeting with parents, but their practices do not support these beliefs. Teachers and administrators do not report having strong beliefs or practices in regards to using teacher web pages and/or e-mail to parents regarding academic difficulty. When asked about practices and beliefs in relation to providing suggestions to parents to prevent failure, there was a statistically significant difference between beliefs and practices in all areas.

Discussion

This study is unique from many other studies regarding parent involvement because it involves teachers and administrators within an urban school district in Pennsylvania who took part in a statewide parent involvement initiative during the 2004-2005 school year. Additionally, it addresses the lack of family involvement at the middle and high school levels (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). This study fills a gap in the existing research by focusing on parent involvement within elementary, middle, and high school settings. Research must be conducted to chart the progress of the parental involvement movement (Kirschenbaum, 2001). Educators often view families within inner-city schools in terms of deficiencies; therefore, positive views and attitudes must replace negative beliefs (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Recruiting efforts may be necessary in order to gain parent volunteers, especially fathers and parents of middle and

high school students (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; DiCamillo, 2001; Hiatt-Michael; Schulte, 2002). Family-like schools must be fostered where children are aware of high expectations and common messages from the significant adults who have an impact on their lives (Simon & Epstein, 2001).

Ultimately, educators and administrators must be knowledgeable of parent involvement practices in order to create successful partnerships with families. "Schools are not the only institutions in society in which teaching and learning occur. The family is a critical institution in this regard, and parents are teachers of their children" (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, p. 280). Beliefs and professional experiences shape teaching practices (Graue & Brown, 2003). Teacher preparation programs must reform their courses and integrate field experiences and internships to enhance preservice teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills regarding school-family-community partnerships (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Graue & Brown; Greenwood & Hickman; Kirschenbaum, 2001; Young & Hite, 1994). Parent involvement coursework and professional experiences for educators are scarce (Greenwood & Hickman; Young & Hite). When courses are offered, they typically only emphasize "traditional" forms of parent involvement, such as conferencing. Universities and colleges must consider if parent involvement should be taught in separate courses or be infused directly into coursework. In regard to parent involvement, Greenwood & Hickman give 10 recommendations for teacher education, which include: (1) emphasize a research- and practice-based rationale; (2) teach excellent techniques to involve parents in their children's education; (3) promote teachers' self-efficacy; (4) tailor coursework to meet the needs of teachers, based upon grade level taught and inservice versus preservice training; (5) discuss various types of parent involvement – traditional to non-traditional practices; (6) provide opportunities for preservice teacher field experiences working with parents; (7) provide ongoing inservice training to school districts to foster home-school connections; (8) examine whether state Praxis exams measure preservice teachers' professional knowledge on parent involvement; (9) universities and colleges should network with professional organizations; and (10) parent involvement research should be encouraged. District administrators, unions, and school boards must support partnerships with families through appropriate funding, resources, and on-going professional development (Devlin-Scherer & Devlin-Scherer, 1994; Kirschenbaum). Professionals who are well prepared to work with students and families alike develop greater self-efficacy (Kirschenbaum).

Greenwood and Hickman (1991) recommend school system-level programming to coordinate parent involvement so teachers do not feel overwhelmed. In collaboration with teachers and administrators, school psychologists (Pelco et al., 2000) and/or ombudsmen could foster positive family-school-community

partnerships. Four broad features are suggested for the implementation of effective parent involvement programs (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004). First, establish proactive programs to foster positive interactions with parents at the beginning of the school year. Second, focus on a 180-day plan which entails developing handouts for parents, offering parents a variety of opportunities to become actively involved, and taking families' interests into account while helping them plan for their children's transition into upcoming grade levels. Third, schools should inform parents of classroom management and instructional activities. Fourth, accommodations must be made to meet the needs of families of diverse backgrounds. Practical strategies include: providing parents with information regarding parenting skills and child development; assisting families with increased knowledge of community resources (e.g., Internet access and suggesting significant websites); supporting teachers' efforts to plan optimal parent-teacher conferences (e.g., inclusion of extended family members, caregivers, and the students themselves); and participating in home visits to build partnerships between children's home and school environments (Pelco et al., 2000). Greenwood and Hickman posit that teachers also play a vital role in selecting, planning, and developing materials for home learning. In addition, teachers must work with parents to explain, monitor, and evaluate the activities. Parent programs/workshops should be offered, and teachers may either play a direct role, conducting the workshop, or an indirect role, motivating parents to attend. Parents should be encouraged to partake in school governance activities, such as advisory committees (Greenwood & Hickman). When parents are invited to participate in their children's education, strong bonds can be made between home and school.

Schools must recognize and respect families' cultural and socioeconomic differences (Garcia, 2004; Griffith, 1998). Events and activities sponsored by the school must be structured and scheduled to fit the parents' needs (e.g., provide transportation and child care, incorporate the parents' sociocultural values) in order to welcome and encourage their involvement (Griffith). It must also be considered whether school boards exert a positive influence on administrators to incorporate parent involvement programs (Devlin-Scherer & Devlin-Scherer, 1994). Additionally, the effect of student mobility on parents' relations to the school should be studied (Griffith). In order to help parents of older children assist with learning at home, parent "refresher" courses dealing with various subjects could be offered by schools.

School size generally affects parent involvement, with smaller schools including more involvement (Griffith, 1998). Baron and Byrne (1997) describe "social loafing" or a lack of motivation among staff and parents that often transpires within large rather than small schools (pp. 444-448). In order to alleviate

this problem, restructuring schools to create small schools within larger schools is recommended in order to foster cohesiveness and greater parent involvement (Garcia, 2004).

Various obstacles regarding parent involvement have been identified (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Some of the obstacles include: insufficient teacher education related to parent involvement management, limited time constraints of parents and teachers, parents' and teachers' diverse goals for children, parents' lack of knowledge to serve as a classroom volunteer or advisory committee member, feeling a lack of power to have an influence in a school setting, and a lack of health (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Greenwood & Hickman). Some of these obstacles may be eradicated through school and state leadership, such as providing parent involvement coordinators. In addition, teachers' attitudes, skills, and knowledge may also be considered barriers (Greenwood & Hickman). In order to minimize and alleviate barriers, parent involvement practices, along with teachers' and administrators' self-efficacy, should be carefully examined to support children's education.

Limitations of the Study

Although the findings in this study help broaden the scope of research on parent involvement, several limitations to the research exist. First, this study is limited to examining certain variables of teacher and administrator practices and beliefs about parent involvement. The study does not measure other variables that may also impact teacher beliefs about parent involvement. Secondly, this study does not indicate the district and school factors that may limit teachers' and administrators' abilities to implement into practice certain parent involvement strategies. For example, as stated in the review of research section of this study, there was a mismatch between many beliefs and practices of parent involvement. Certain environmental factors may impede these practices. One such instance was the use of a teacher webpage as a way to be involved with parents; this capacity may be limited depending on the district and school technological capabilities and policies. Third, this study is also limited by its sample, which includes teachers and administrators in one urban school district in southwestern Pennsylvania. The sample is also limited by the number of participants responding to each question. A larger representative population would provide a more accurate account of teacher and administrator beliefs and practices about parent involvement. Fourth, the survey was only offered to teachers and administrators in an electronic version. The potential participants may have felt unwilling to participate if they maintained low self-efficacy regarding technology. Technical difficulties may also have affected participation.

Directions for Future Research

Various recommendations for future research should be considered. Future studies should focus on the early years, which are critical to children's development. More research on parent education programs for infants and toddlers is needed (DiCamillo, 2001). In addition, families, teachers, and administrators who resist parent involvement should be studied to better understand how to overcome barriers to successful partnerships. Future research should include the following: types of useful home learning activities for children at various grade levels; efficient training for parent tutors; attitudes of parents, teachers, and administrators; beneficial roles of parents during home learning activities; helping parents tailor home learning to meet their child's individual needs; the teacher's role regarding various types of parent involvement; and designing carefully constructed assignments to promote positive parent-child interactions and academic support (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Research on school discipline, student behavior, family-school-community activities, and family responses is needed as well (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). It is also recommended that parents' reports and views regarding involvement be studied (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987).

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of various parent involvement programs, future studies must carefully implement rigorous research methods before sound conclusions can be made (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodrieguez, & Kayzar, 2002). Research should focus on the interrelationships among the following variables: parental satisfaction of their children's schools, empowerment of parents, school climate, and the extent to which schools share information with parents. In addition, environmental and contextual features of schools have not been adequately studied (Griffith, 1998). Cochran and Dean (1991) describe the imperative to include teachers and parents in research, as their voices are necessary to forge true partnerships. Despite the many positive aspects of parent involvement, there have been inconsistencies in the findings that link parent involvement with student achievement (Kyriakides, 2005). Therefore, future studies should also continue to measure teachers' perceptions rather than merely student or parent direct reports. Finally, research in urban areas at the elementary, middle, and high school levels is recommended.

Conclusion

Institutional changes and allocated resources through the schools must be considered for long-term parent involvement goals (Cochran & Dean, 1991). As evidenced by this study, it is clear that institutional support is needed to

support parent involvement initiatives. This study presents evidence that both teachers and administrators have strong beliefs regarding parental involvement in the educational system. However, their practices do not necessarily match their beliefs. For that reason, teachers need clear direction from building level administrators, and those administrators need direction from central office administrators regarding parent involvement best practices. Without clear direction and support, parent involvement programs will not succeed.

However, when parent programs based upon the six national standards for parent/family involvement are combined with high teacher and administrator self-efficacy as well as institutional support, gains can be made in parental involvement efforts. Schools must focus on and utilize families' strengths to support involvement. It is the schools' responsibility to welcome and encourage parental support and involvement in order to create beneficial partnerships.

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