

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION –  
IMPROVING FAMILIES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

By

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### Abstract

The rapid changing educational environment with high stakes testing, vigorous accountability, and high standards is causing schools to reach outside the walls of their buildings and actively partner with their communities. Community refers to students, parents, schools, and community members. Research has made a significant link between parent/family involvement and academic success. Currently, most higher education institutions do not prepare teachers to communicate and partner with parents and communities effectively. The purpose of the following review is to (a) examine parent education, (b) consider parent efficacy, (c) explore teacher education, and (d) evaluate implementation of a collaborative school/community training program. This paper highlights the benefits of school-community involvement and the need for parent and teacher training in the area of school partnership to help our students achieve academic success.

## Chapter I: Introduction

*When schools and families work together, a partnership of support for children develops. Education becomes a shared venture, characterized by mutual respect and trust in which the importance and influence of each partner is recognized. Although children, families, teachers, and schools benefit individually, their partnership enhances the entire process of education.”—Rebecca Crawford Burns  
“Parent Involvement: Promises, Problems, and Solutions”  
in Parents and Schools: From Visitors to Partners*

*Statement of Problem*

The face of parent/family involvement has changed over the last 25-30 years. Originally, parent/family involvement involved packing lunch for one’s child, and ensuring basic food and clothing needs were met, leaving schooling to the teachers. The definition of parent/family involvement has evolved over time and is much more comprehensive in its meaning. Some of the reasons for the evolution can be directly linked to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB Act 2001 defines parent/family involvement as:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting children’s learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in children’s education at school; that parents are full partners in children’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and an advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parental Involvement )  
[Section 9101(32), ESEA].

Student achievement is raised when the family makes positive, consistent support from preschool through secondary school. Researchers consistently show parent/family support is important to students’ success (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Hara & Burke,

1998). "Family practices of involvement are as or more important than family background variables in determining whether and how students progress and succeed in school" (Epstein, 1995, p.217).

Henderson and Berla (1994) asserted the level of involvement by the parent/family is the "single best predictor" of positive student outcomes. Positive outcomes achieved by parent/family involvement are improved test scores, attendance, student behavior, an increased commitment to completing homework, and an overall improved positive view of school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Family involvement, a major factor in improving students' achievement, has reached a higher level of importance in today's society however, many schools are not sure how to design, evaluate or implement effective, sustainable programs.

In today's rapid changing educational environment with high stakes testing, vigorous accountability, and high standards, schools are forced to reach outside the walls of their buildings and actively partner with their communities. Teachers are constantly being overloaded with tremendous responsibilities and curriculum requirements. For these reasons, now is an appropriate time to reevaluate parental involvement and delve into the design, evaluation and implementation of effective parent/school/family partnerships.

### *Definition of Terms*

A universal definition of parent/family involvement does not exist. However, a definition given by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) describes parent involvement in two ways: home-based involvement and school-based involvement. Home-based involvement extends school learning at home, for example: helping complete schoolwork, practicing letter-naming fluency, engaging in meaningful conversations about school, and establishing and sustaining an open and positive relationship with the teacher. Also included in these activities are school-based activities

where the parent may chaperone a trip, work a concession stand at a school function, meet the teacher for parent conferences, or volunteer at the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Epstein and Sheldon (2006) have suggested the use of the term “school, family and community partnership” rather than parental involvement, to ensure that all stakeholders are included in the process (Epstein & Sheldon).

### *Research Questions*

This literature review focuses on the following question: To what extent does a collaborative approach to education result in better outcomes for families, schools, and communities? This paper will also include effective, sustainable programming ideas. This review contains research articles and studies with evidence that family/school/community partnerships and influences are very important to students’ academic success. The effects of parent/family involvement include parent education, parent efficacy, teacher education, parent/family involvement in and out of school and ways to implement parent and teacher- training programs within a school district.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Dr. Joyce Epstein, an expert in the field of school/family/community partnerships, developed a framework of six types of involvement by conducting mixed studies using both qualitative measures such as observations and interviews and, and quantitative research methods such as comparison and analysis of student achievement data over a period of more than 25 years. The six types of involvement are:

- Parenting (skills)
- Communicating (communication between school and home)
- Volunteering (recruit parent support)
- Learning at home (provide information and ideas to parents)
- Decision making (include parents as partners)
- Collaborating with community (incorporate beneficial community partners)

Epstein (1995) found overwhelming evidence, through her three decades of synthesizing research based parental involvement studies indicating high family/school/community involvement directly correlated with increased student achievement, and increased self- esteem. Epstein and others recognize that further research must be done to exact testing methods to ensure reliability and validity.

Several research studies, summaries, literature reviews, and meta-analyses have associated positive parent/family involvement and support to increased positive results for students with or without learning deficits (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999). Some reported causal outcomes from parental involvement include improved attendance, student behavior, an increased commitment to completing homework, and an overall improved positive view of school are some of the positive outcomes. Other

researchers have found correlations with SES (socio-economic status), ethnicity, and material possessions (Harry, 2002). A greater number of studies have been done at the elementary level, than either the middle, or high school levels. Many researchers have a difficult time proving definite causal links between parental involvement and student outcomes because of the lack of definitive variables. However, researchers have established a correlative or associative link about parent, school, and community partnerships and their benefits (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1997). Some of the benefits include improved academic performance and a lower drop out rate (Henderson & Berla 1997).

Altering family parenting practices with appropriate interventions may help students perform better in school. Furthermore, unifying efforts between schools, parents and students may increase the outcomes for all major stockholders. Not trying these various efforts may cost students greatly. The purpose of this literature review is to determine characteristics of effective collaborative school-parent-community partnerships to increase students' academic achievements.

Thirty years of research clearly show a link between parent/family involvement and academic success. However, several inconsistencies in the research exist, accounting for possible discrepancies. When trying to measure parent/family involvement, differences in testing instruments, excluding factors such as differences in social economic status and parent's age and educational background, can cause inconsistencies (Mattingly et. al, 2002). In addition, the broad definition of parent/family involvement makes accurate measurement difficult.

#### *Parents Getting Educated*

One of the leading barriers in productive parent/family involvement in the schools is parents' uncertainty of the responsibilities required within the context of the school. Other

contributing factors that may contribute to parents' lack of involvement in student's education include parents' prior educational experiences. Some parents do not have the skills, or training to help their child with schoolwork (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burrow, 1995; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

Chavkin and Williams (1993) conducted a study in which they sought to find out how and to what extent minority parents were involved with their children's education. The researchers from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) conducted an exploratory study of 1,188 African-Americans and Hispanic parents. This sampling was taken from a larger study of 3,103 parents that was conducted from (1980-1986). Parents from six states including Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas were included in the study. A Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) with seven parts was used in the study to survey parents on various, general topics about: parent involvement in schools, parent decision making involvement, interest in parent involvement roles in school, participation in parent involvement activities within the school, parents suggestion for further involvement opportunities within the school, reasons parents become less involved with their child's education as they enter high school, and questions about demographical information . A 1-4 Likert-type scale was used on the first 6 portions of the questionnaire. One was "strongly disagree" and 4 was "strongly agree". However, various parts of the questionnaire have different Likert-type scales. For example, on the second, third, and fourth parts of the survey a five-point scale was used. The scale indicated that 1 meant, "definitely not interested" and 5 meant, "definitely interested". Part four, which asked about parent involvement activities and how often they participated in them, had a 1-4 scale with 1 being "never" and 4 being "often". The fifth part of the questionnaire with parents' suggestions on parental involvement used a five-point scale.

One indicated, “definitely would not work” and a 5 indicated, “definitely would work”. Parent Teacher Associations for the 6 state areas distributed the PIQ’s at school’s open-house meetings. Non-English speaking parents had translators available to them during these meetings. 3,015 of the parents surveyed indicated their ethnic background. The number of Anglo parents identified in the survey was 1,779 (59%), African-American parents totaled 682 (22.6%), and Hispanic parents totaled 506 (16.8%). Two smaller subgroups being Asian parents and American-Indian parents were also identified, but were too small to include in the study. The Statistical Package from the Social Sciences (SPSS) helped to interpret the variables between the groups. The SPSS found the means and the standard deviations for the study. The p level of  $p < .001$  was used to interpret the comparisons in ethnicity. In regards to the section in which parents believed that they needed more information and help to better understand the subjects that were being taught in their child’s school the survey found that 92% of African-American parents and 89% of Hispanic parents needed and wanted further help in understanding their child’s homework. Anglo parents wanted more information as well, but at a much smaller percentage of 76%. Using the p value the statistic was found to be .078 or 7.8% of the difference is caused from ethnic differences. All the parents, regardless of background, felt if they had the tools necessary to complete the homework, they could help their child succeed (Chavkin & Williams, 1993).

Further barriers to parent/family involvement exist, such as time constraints, money constraints, daycare issues, poor attitudes, and perceived lack of communication. In addition, parents are more likely to be involved when children are in the lower elementary (K-3). The homework at this particular age is usually easy enough for parents to help children complete. However, as students progress into the upper elementary, homework progressively gets harder, and parents find that completing homework tasks get more difficult (Epstein, 1983; Fuller &

Olsen, 1998). Educating parents in the fundamentals of helping children complete homework, and remain successful in school is paramount to children's academic success throughout grade school, high school, and beyond (Benson & Harkavy, 2001).

Parental involvement takes place in and out of the school setting. Researchers have found evidence that parents who directly instruct reading at home help to increase reading achievement in students (Shuttleworth, 1986). Shuttleworth conducted a study that found a significant rise in student's reading progress when they were instructed at home. Students who participated in the study were pre and post tested using the Slosson Oral Reading Test. The same, knowledgeable person administered this test each time to keep testing conditions consistent. Shuttleworth monitored the progress of eighteen students who were being tutored at home by their parents. The parents agreed to listen to their child read for 20 minutes each night. The teacher gave explicit instructions accompanied by written instructions on how to complete the reading homework to each parent. After the twelve-week period ended, researchers found that the average reading gain for class number one was 9.5 months, and 7.7 months for class number two (Shuttleworth, 1986). The teacher of class number two attributed the discrepancies in the averages to having a challenging class. Some of the challenges stated were that a number of students repeated the grade, some did not speak English as their primary language, and others were behavior problems. Even with the discrepancies between the two classes it is quite a startling gain since it required very minimal time and effort on the part of the parent.

Hourcade and Richardson found similar findings when they studied thirty children and their families for eight weeks. Parental surveys were collected at the start of the school year, and from the pool of survey's 30 were randomly selected. Hourcade and Richardson administered the Woodcock Reading Test to each child, thereafter, every two weeks each child was given a

random list of new words to learn. The students studied these words at home with their parents and Hourcade and Richardson found that the students' average of learning 9.5 words per two weeks rose to 12.7 words in the same two-week period with parental help (Hourcade & Richardson, 1987). Cotton and Wikelund (1989) reviewed 41 studies about parental involvement. The researchers utilized this information to create a framework for parental involvement and to make assumptions about the types of parental involvement that would help students achieve academically. They included: research studies with supporting documents, reviews, program descriptions and guidelines for setting up a research-based program. In a 1989 study, Cotton and Wikelund found this correlation to hold true:

There are strong indications that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities in the home. Programs that involve parents in reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers, show particularly impressive results (p. 3).

Other positive parenting practices that take place within the home may include regulating television viewing, setting a specific homework time, reading to children, or simply asking about children's school days (Henderson & Mapp, 1994). Parenting practices outside of the home involve attending PTO meetings, parent/ teacher conferences, concerts, help with bake sales, help with fund-raisers, or volunteering at school during day (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

#### *Parents Efficacy and Student's Achievement*

When parents have attained the proper tools and skills to contribute positively to their child's education, encouraging success and acting in a complimentary manner comes easily (Bandura, 1997). For the purposes of this review, parent efficacy will be defined as, "the parent's

beliefs in his or her ability to influence the child and his or her environment to foster the child's development and success" (Bandura, 1997, p.3). In addition, according to Bandura (1997), "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Researchers such as, Bandura, Epstein, and Zimmerman hypothesized students would have greater success if parents felt greater efficacy about the abilities possessed to aid in the academic achievement of children. This particular study focused on the differences between white and black families. In this study of 376 black and white inner-city mothers in Philadelphia, researchers attempted to find whether adverse environments affected parental efficacy and their ability to successfully support their children's academic success. Other racially diverse minorities were not included in this study. The selection criteria came from census information, from which researchers then randomly selected families within a four-block radius. Families were called on the telephone and asked if they had children in the 11-14 year old age range. Households without phones were randomly screened and interviewed in person. This was 10% of the total. 80% of families interviewed returned their questionnaires. In this study caregivers, usually single mothers, and their children were interviewed apart from each other. While one was being interviewed the other subject was completing a questionnaire. When attempting to determine the mother's self-efficacy beliefs two sets of questions were used. Mothers were to rate themselves on their ability to help their child achieve using a scale of 1-4 with 1 being none and 4 being a great deal. Some questions that were asked were: Could they help their child stay out of trouble, get a job, complete homework, and graduate from school? The second set of research questions asked of the mothers involved how well mothers thought they could control things that affected their child. Some questions

included were: Could they provide a safe home, monitor after-school activities, keep children safe in the neighborhood? The same 1-4 scale was used.

After synthesizing the data researchers found that black families tended to have homes headed by single mothers, and live in more economically depressed areas. Black mothers felt less control over their circumstances. In contrast, white mothers tended to believe that their neighborhoods offered more opportunities for their child's success, and that they were able to guide their child using their positive, parenting strategies (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). A note of interest came from this study: it was found that the affects of having positive parental self-efficacy was more positively associated with less educated, black mothers. This was attributed to the fact that these mothers have more adverse environments to overcome. The more self-efficacy these mothers have, the more positive parenting strategies are used within the home, thusly positively influencing the children. (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001) In addition, researchers found that parents who were given an opportunity to educate themselves, to better help children succeed, were more adept at encouraging successful completion of children's educational journey. In comparison, Eccles and Furstenberg 1993, both believed that parents who lacked perceived efficacy, failed to encourage successful school completion (Eccles et al., 1993; Furstenberg, 1993).

Parents often cited poor child attitude or extenuating, environmental problems for child's low academic achievement (Goodnow & Collins, 1993; Miller, 1988, 1995). Known as the "attribution theory", this essentially implies parents blame children's failures on extenuating circumstances and reward themselves for any successes the children experience (Bradley, 1978; Green & Gross, 1979). In contrast to this theory, Bandura's efficacy theory (1997), suggests a parent who has confidence in their parenting strategies can convey a positive attitude to their

children by being positive role models. This positive parental self- efficacy helps children to believe that they can succeed even when presented with adverse environments (Bandura, 1997).

Clearly, unanswered questions exist about parents' efficacy and the positive benefits for children; however, researchers have found a link between parent's confidence levels and children's success.

#### *Preparing Teachers To Involve Parents Actively*

Parents and teachers need to establish a positive working relationship for the good of the student. However, many secondary institutions offer no formal strategies to help pre-service teachers to include parents and families as partners in teaching. Chavkin and Williams (1988) conducted a six-state, five-year study of 575 teachers. The states included Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Mississippi. The method used in collecting the data was a questionnaire. Once the questionnaires were returned the researchers found that teachers, principals, and support staff confirm the importance of parental involvement. In fact, 86.6% of 575 educators surveyed reported needing additional training in the area of parental involvement. (Chavkin & Williams, 1988).

Epstein (1983) conducted a landmark study of 1,269 parents of Maryland elementary students in first, third, and fifth grades. Epstein gathered data about the parent's perception of teacher's practices for using parental involvement in their child's school. Data was gathered using a questionnaire that was mailed to each parent. Fifty-nine percent of surveyed parents responded. Parents were surveyed about their attitudes toward their child's teacher concerning communication, types of parent involvement activities that were offered, and thoughts on the educators teaching practices, and programming. Thirty-six case study teachers were identified in an earlier study as strong supporters of parental involvement and were then used in this study.

Forty-six control teachers who reported in their earlier survey that they were not strong on parental involvement were compared to case study teachers by experience, grade level, years of experience, equivalent parent education, and who were in the same school district.

Epstein found that the parents who had the most education returned their surveys promptly. Most of these participants were female. A wide range of educational backgrounds was represented in this study. A number of parents had some high school background but did not graduate (one-fourth), some with a high school diploma, (one-third), a few who attended some college (one-fifth), and others who graduated from college and beyond (one-fourth). In addition, parents were comprised of stay at home parents who did not work outside the home, single parents, part-time, and full-time workers. Also, about one-third of the parents were black. Response rates were this, teachers who used positive parental involvement strategies, had parents who felt more positive about the school. However, if a parent's child was high academically, the parent was more critical of the teacher and the school. A statistical model was used to account for the many characteristics in the participants, including the students, parents, and teachers in order to gather data about the parent's perception of teacher's practices for using parental involvement in their child's school. When analyzing the data researchers used an  $\chi^2$  test to show if parents more frequently reported parent involvement activities within their child's classroom if they had teacher-leaders as compared to other teachers. Frequency was categorized as: several times or often as opposed to never, once, or twice. The value of p for each test was either  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ , or  $p < .001$ . A regression method was used to analyze the data, the findings were:

- Teachers formed negative opinions of parents less often when they involved them this was a significant finding at or beyond the .01 level.
- Teachers who involve parents more often develop positive attitudes about interacting,

understanding, and listening to them this was a significant finding at or beyond the .01 level.

- Teachers who had positive experiences with parental involvement came to value the benefits this was a significant finding at or beyond the .01 level.

Since Chavkin and Williams did their study in 1988 many higher educational institutions have introduced some form of parental involvement programming. However, researchers believe further progress is needed in this area of parental involvement.

Although the research base is thin in the area of parent/school/ family involvement some promising programs for effectively bridging the gap between home and school have surfaced. One such program is the Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) program. Researchers show the importance of educating teachers to involve family members. Some researchers suggest that in addition to coursework in college, future educators should gain field experience by working with families in a collaborative effort (Weiss, 1996). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), founded in 1969 to promote the academic success of students through offering educators professional development. NSDC has developed a framework in which professional development programs and practices are guided. NSDC has implied that providing teachers and staff with appropriate, effective strategies to involve all stakeholders may improve all students learning (as cited in Murphy, 2001). The Harvard Family Research Project (1995), recognized several areas of focus for pre-service teachers including:

- Forging a bridge between home and school
- Helping low socioeconomic families to meet basic needs
- Construct positive beliefs about parents
- Include parents in decision making, through respect and encouragement

- Allow parents opportunity to trust school system and help their child succeed

Clearly, extended professional development can teach educators effective techniques to connect with students and parents to further students' success (HFRP, 1995).

*Implementation of a Collaborative Parent/ Teacher Training Program*

Researchers have acknowledged the great importance for a collaborative plan between teachers, families, and communities. Sanders (2006) after five years of research and teaching with the National Network of Partnership Schools has synthesized numerous research studies, case studies, best practices and development plans that can help show schools how to create collaborative educational communities. Researchers have found the studies in this area of involvement to be sparse, and often lacking in concrete theoretical framework. Baker and Soden (1997) did an extensive, critical review of the literature on parent involvement and student academic success. This review included several studies which included evaluations of: programs, early childhood and preschool, home-school interactions, family processes, community effects, culture and class, case studies, pre-experimental studies, quasi-experimental, studies, and experimental studies. The researchers found that the experimental design of many of the studies was flawed by inconsistencies in parental involvement definitions, and the use of subjective measurements. These researchers admit that the field of parental involvement is ever evolving and needs continued, refined study, but they also made assertive, claims about the benefits of school, family, and community partnerships, and gave recommendations based on their findings. (Baker & Soden, 1997). Examples of benefits for students include, increased student performance, decreased drop out rates (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Benefits for parents include acquiring new parenting skills, and increased confidence in their ability to help their child (Bandura, 1997; Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

Researchers have found that parents can influence not only their children but also members of the educational community. These people may include other parents, teachers, and para-professionals (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, & Marcias, 2001). Before and after- school program providers such as para-professionals often can bridge the communication gap between schools and home (Cosden et. al.). VanVoorhis (2007) conducted a two-year longitudinal study of the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) in four elementary schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Research took place in the areas of Math, Language Arts, and Science. Researchers considered the cognitive and emotional benefits on students who utilized the TIPS program over the two-year period. Teachers were randomly assigned either the TIPS Math program or the control groups. Four subgroups of students were identified during this study: Control groups with no TIPS, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> graders who received TIPS for one year, or students who received TIPS for two years. The TIPS program requires students to talk with their parents and other family members about their homework. VanVoorhis 2007 synthesized the data from the two- year period and found the following results: over the two-year period, parents who participated in the TIPS program were reported to have signed 70% or more of the TIPS assignments, students completed 78% of TIPS assignments with 75% accuracy. Standardized test scores and report cards were used as cognitive indicators in this study. In addition, families were reported to have an improved view of math. Researchers collected surveys from families that indicated a significant rise in positive attitude about working on math with their children. Control families whose child were in grade 4 who did not receive the TIPS program were reported to have 40% improvement on attitude about math, whereas, the TIPS families reported a 57% increase of positive improvement. Additional findings included control group families needed significantly more information to complete the homework assignments, family involvement was

higher in TIPS families than in the control families, and TIPS students achieved higher test scores. Researchers took the following variables into account: race, prior test scores and student ability levels. Once these variables were accounted for, researchers used regression analysis to analyze students test scores. Significantly higher test scores were found for TIPS students who received intervention for a period of two years (VanVoorhis, 2007). Similar TIPS studies were conducted in the areas of Language Arts and Science with similar results.

Teacher-Parent Partnership for the Enhancement of School Success is another successfully implemented program that substantiates the theory of parent/school/community partnerships. A cooperative project created by the University of South Carolina and the Salkehatchie Consortium targeting rural, young at-risk kids in three rural schools. The goal of the program was to incorporate early childhood skills including math, language, and social and expressive skills, parental involvement activities in the home, training for teachers, parents and children, a computer literacy component, in-class assistance targeting at-risk students, and a summer program. The framework for achieving this goal was developed using a collaborative approach plan utilizing university staff, school staff, families, and members from the community. The second part of the project was to utilize and implement a school to home curriculum that would improve parental/family involvement and raise student achievement. Ninety-two rural families took part in the project. The University of South Carolina's Education Department, the Salkehatchie Consortium, and the three Superintendents of the participating schools ran the entire project collaboratively. A criterion-referenced evaluation was utilized when processing the program data. Various assessments were used: attendance reports, report cards, questionnaires, and anecdotal notes gathered from an objective, external observer. The project indicators assessed were: a curriculum for early childhood, suitable instruction without computers, proper

instruction with computers, appropriate instruction of key concepts of the program by teachers and other educators, involvement of parents, evaluation of the parent involvement process, rise in positive parent confidence in relation to helping their child, and academic success for ninety of the participating students. The findings at the end of the one-year program were that the collaborative design process was highly successful (Swick, 1991).

The common theme in developing, and implementing an effective, collaborative plan included some key concepts such as: providing for the involvement of families and communities with the school, offering opportunities for continued parent and teacher educational opportunities, incorporating Epstein's six models of involvement including; communicating, parenting, student learning, volunteering, school decision-making and advocacy, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995). All stakeholders involved within a system including, but not limited to, teachers, families, students, and members of the community, must "buy in" to the importance of a collaborative partnership between stakeholders and its added benefits.

### Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem

Schools across America have been mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act to offer parents the tools they need to help children succeed, communicate effectively and regularly with parents about students progress, and to provide families opportunities to be actively engaged in their children's learning processes. Researchers have found a strong correlation between students' academic success and direct parental/family involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Hara & Burke, 1998).

Research on educating parents in the fundamentals of helping children complete homework assignments, and be successful in schools has proven to be vital in children's academic success. Research suggests that parents often want specific suggestions from teachers about how to provide meaningful support for their children at home (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). Educators, who value family involvement, may unintentionally exclude parents due to insecurities about teaching practices or communication skills. In addition, a teacher may lack the administrative support to implement positive collaboration programs (Hoover- Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992). This is why further education for teachers is necessary.

Positive parental self-efficacy has been shown to have a positive affect on children. When studying groups of people including minorities, researchers found that parents who believed in their ability to control their environments were better able to influence their child's success (Bandura, 1997). Black women who were head of households living in economically depressed neighborhoods, and who were less educated were found to be more positively associated with their ability to successfully support their children's academic success (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). Researchers show a strong correlation between SES and children's academic success; however, studies such as the one conducted by Ardelt and Eccles, 2001 show parents' abilities to help their

children succeed through several types of involvement. Henderson and Berla 1997 found that programs that bridge the gaps between low income families and schools help to deter the traditional relationships between low academic achievement and SES (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

The research on preparing teachers to effectively engage parents is sparse. A barrier to an effective parental/ family involvement program continues to be a lack of providing pre- or in-service teachers with training in this area (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). While it is clear that educators value parental/family partnership opportunities, it is unclear when national mandates will provide funding and or training. Current programs tend to be under-funded and lack the ability to provide quality services as they do not provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to interact with parents of different, races, cultures or backgrounds in the field (Office of Post Secondary Education, 1999).

The common theme in the area of parent/school/community partnerships is that schools are seeking to educate families on their students' curricula, ways to assist with homework completion, and to instill a feeling of empowerment in parents (Epstein et. al., 1997). Researchers did caution that parent/school/community involvement alone does not improve students' academic achievement. Integral variables such as curriculum, effective instruction, and well-trained teachers must also be included (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Parent/school/community partnerships have not found a prominent place in many school districts in the United States. However, with the state and federal mandates that govern our school systems today it is important for schools and communities to find a common ground and build a framework of support for our children. It is clear that the research on this subject has not been fully exhausted and continues to expand. Priorities need to be set starting at the national

level, including full financial support of such collaborations. We need to find a balance between homes, schools, and communities that best support students and their academic achievement.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

*Recommendations*

Despite the ever-changing educational mandates, many parents, schools and communities have not yet found a common ground on which they can meet to develop and implement successful programs that will benefit students. Establishing a partnership among all interested parties that encourages productive, collaborative, sustained involvement should be the first step. Promising implemented programs that school districts can duplicate are Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), Teacher-Parent Partnership for the Enhancement of School Success. Early child hood programs such as Even Start and the Total Village Project are other effective programs. Even Start is a program developed by the University of Montana, which encourages parents to be major players in their child's education (Center for Community Education, 1989). The Total Village Project in rural West Virginia advocates a community effort to educate children (Swick, 1991).

In this era of national mandates educators are required to help students reach new levels of achievement; conversely, we should consider the level of high achievement parents should be attaining. Parents should learn new skills that will aid in assisting children with homework completion. Added attention given to learning by the parent/family member may directly affect children in a positive manner. The positive attitude about learning and achieving may carry over into daily home life. Parents who find a place within the school community may have a stronger grasp on the inner workings of the public school system, gaining confidence to stay involved in children's education through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Many schools have not yet achieved strong, positive parent/teacher collaborations.

Despite the heavy research in the area of parental involvement and its importance effective, statewide and/or nationwide programs have not been put into effect. Parents are children's first teachers and their efforts to help them succeed have far-reaching, long lasting effects. Increasing families' confidence in their ability to positively affect their children's academic success may benefit not only students, but schools, communities and the parents themselves.

A concerted effort to promote parental education, and confidence should be a priority when school districts are charting out a comprehensive parent collaboration plan. School districts will benefit from the education of parents. The decision to allocate funds may be difficult due to limited research and resources. However, the potential positive impact on staff, students, and families is worth further study. As schools statewide and nationwide begin to develop and implement effective programs it is critical that adequate financial support, evaluative support, and corrective measure support are available

An additional recommendation is that schools revisit their current parental involvement policies. As a staff or district, decide on an effective, research-based approach that will be used throughout the district, a long-term plan that aims to include on-going professional development for new and seasoned educators. This plan should include, but is not limited to, the following items: a written parental involvement policy in plain terms parents can understand, a schedule of monthly PTO meetings, a parent needs/evaluation survey to be sent out at the start of the year, and a schedule of planned meetings to discuss students' progress throughout the school year. This plan should be carried throughout all grade levels until graduation. In addition, a survey can be devised to evaluate how teachers are currently, effectively involving parents in their

classroom. Once these methods are identified a comprehensive list of best practices can be made available to educators within the district.

### *Areas for Further Research*

More research is needed to further develop effective, successful, and sustainable parent/school/community partnership plans. Continuing studies are needed to examine best practices for outreach to parents and the specific processes that contribute to students' success. Extending these studies to the middle school and high school levels is also recommended. Extensive research is needed in the area of teacher preparation courses at the college level to determine if courses in methods to encourage family involvement should be mandated to all pre-service teachers to maximize parent/school/community partnerships. A study in the form of a questionnaire can be sent to the education departments of all institutions that are accredited for teacher certification. The results will show if the school offers any courses in methods to involve parents and will identify best practices used in training teachers to involve parents. In addition, research on the beneficial effects of parental involvement and other related resources on effective collaboration methods could be made available to teachers at professional development training courses.

Principals who can clearly and concisely provide their staff with ways to effectively involve parents will benefit not only their staff by giving them the tools to succeed, but they will benefit the students and families as well, by making them active participants in creating success.

### *Conclusion*

Researchers over the past 30 to 40 years have shown parental/family involvement in a child's life extends past the home environment and into the school. Parents are their child's very first and most important teacher. As a child's first teacher and role model, parents must be a

driving, positive force throughout the child's entire education, in spite of time or financial pressure (Desimone, 1999). Researchers continue to support, the positive correlation between high levels of school/family/community collaboration and increased student outcomes. The amount of meaningful participation a parent has in their child's education may improve student achievement. The potential benefit for all stakeholders involved is worth more detailed investigating. School-community collaborative partnerships will take a concerted effort by all stakeholders involved. Parents should actively seek educational opportunities to provide themselves with skills to further the success of their children. Teachers must also use professional development opportunities to gain insight into positively interacting and involving parents in meaningful activities. The school district must allocate time and resources to promote an effective program that can be sustained throughout a student's education. Lastly, school-community partnerships can only be forged if all stakeholders believe in the possibilities and success of our children.

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