



Synthesis of Research Studies

How the Studies Define Family Involvement and Student Achievement

In this review, we look at 51 recent studies, all but two published from 1995 to 2002. Every one sheds some light on the relationship between parent involvement and, in some cases, community involvement and improved student achievement. Together they cover children and youth of all ages, from birth through high school and into the postsecondary years. These studies also cover a wide range of perspectives and approaches.

Some studies evaluate programs that are designed to engage families in improving achievement, while others look at high-performing schools or students to study how parent involvement may have contributed. Several studies analyze long-term databases drawn from large-scale surveys of families, students, and educators, while others focus closely on how families and educators interact in a single setting.

In general, the studies fall into three broad categories:

1. **Studies on the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement.**
2. **Studies on effective strategies to connect schools, families, and community.**
3. **Studies on parent and community organizing efforts to improve schools.** These studies comprise a new, still developing arena of research that forecasts some interesting trends in both research and practice.

The next sections will cover the findings for each category, make some recommendations for putting these findings into action, and draw a brief conclusion. Before we describe this research in more detail, let's look at how the studies define parent involvement and student achievement.

How do the studies define parent involvement? Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at the Center on Family, School, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, have developed a useful framework of six types of parent involvement. Table 4, adapted from the Sophia Catsambis study (1998), is based on this work. It shows how parent involvement is frequently broken down and defined. Many researchers used some variation of this framework.

In this review, we look at 51 recent studies, all but two published from 1995 to 2002. Every one sheds some light on the relationship between parent involvement and, in some cases, community involvement and improved student achievement.

Table 4. Six Types of Parent Involvement for Grades 8 and 12

TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT	IN GRADE 8	IN GRADE 12
Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expressing expectations about student’s education – Limiting television viewing – Supervising time use and behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discussing interests, issues, and studies at school – Doing things together (shopping, vacations, movies, meals) – Supervising behavior – Knowing what courses student is taking – Supervising academic work
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parent-initiated contacts about academic performance – School-initiated contacts about student’s academic program (courses, placement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – School-initiated contacts about academic performance – Parent-initiated contacts on student’s academic program – Parent-school contacts on post-secondary plans
Supporting school	Volunteering at school and fund-raising	Volunteering at school and attending school activities
Learning at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Academic lessons outside school – Music or dance lessons – Discussions about school and plans for future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encouraging college – Encouraging high school graduation – Learning about postsecondary education – Taking on private educational expenses
Decision making	Taking part in parent organization	Taking part in parent organization
Collaborating with community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using community learning resources (like museum visits) – Taking part in community groups (scouts, sports) 	Communicating parent-to-parent

Definitions of parent involvement in elementary school were similar to those given in the table for grade 8. Some researchers condensed this list into parent involvement at home and at school, using definitions like these:

- Engaging in learning activities at home, including helping with reading skills and checking homework.
- Supervising children and monitoring how they spend their time out of school
- Talking about school and what children are learning.
- Attending school events, going to parent-teacher conferences, meeting with teachers, and volunteering in the classroom or school.

In their analysis of middle grades achievement, for example, Esther Ho Sui-Chu and Douglas Willms (1996) identified four basic types of involvement. Two are based at home, two at school:

1. Discussing school activities.
2. Monitoring out-of-school activities.
3. Contacts with school staff.
4. Volunteering and attending parent-teacher conferences and other school events.

Rebecca Marcon (1999) put an interesting spin on this distinction in her study. She grouped involvement by whether parents were active and “in charge,” or passive and “reacting to the school.” Deborah Bugg Williams (1998) used an educational productivity model based on Herbert Walberg’s research (1984):

- Parent effort: contacts with school, expectations of student, and discussions with student.
- Instructional support: how much time student spends learning outside school.
- Environmental support: learning at home, quality of school (parent rating), knowing student’s friends, and out-of-school activities.

The studies that consider community-based initiatives to improve schools take into account the social and political context that leads to poor performance. These movements for better schools take a political approach, demanding more resources, higher teacher quality, smaller schools, and new programs to improve student achievement. Underway mainly in urban areas, these parent and community-driven efforts are focused on holding the school system accountable for low student performance.

How do the studies define student achievement? The studies were fairly uniform in how they defined and measured student academic achievement. Measures of student achievement and other outcomes most commonly used were:

- For young children: teacher ratings (using instruments like the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales) of school adjustment, vocabulary, reading and language skills, social and motor skills.
- For school-age children: report card grades, grade point averages, enrollment in advanced classes, and standardized test scores.
- Attendance, staying in school, and being promoted to the next grade.
- Improved behavior and healthy development (for example, less substance abuse and disruptive behavior).

Studies on the Impact of Parent and Community Involvement on Student Achievement

From these studies, one overarching conclusion has emerged:

It takes more than engaged parents to produce high student achievement.

Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages. Although there is less research on the effects of community involvement, it also suggests benefits for schools, families, and students, including improved achievement and behavior.

Among the studies reviewed here, the benefits for students include

- higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales,
- enrollment in more challenging academic programs,
- more classes passed and credits earned,
- better attendance,
- improved behavior at home and at school, and
- better social skills and adaptation to school.

Contributing to this conclusion are several key findings that clarify and deepen our understanding. Before presenting them, however, we would like to sound a caution. As we point out in the introduction, it takes more than engaged parents to produce high student achievement. Many studies of high-performing schools identify several key characteristics associated with improvement. These include high standards and expectations for all students and curriculum, as well as instruction and assessments aligned with those standards. They also include effective leadership, frequent monitoring of teaching and learning, focused professional development, and high levels of parent and community involvement.

As expected, while the effect sizes in many of these studies are statistically significant, they are small to moderate. A number of studies found that some forms of parent involvement with the school (communications with school, volunteering, attending school events, parent-parent connections) appeared to have little effect on student achievement, especially in high school. A few found that parent involvement with homework and parent-initiated contacts with school were negatively related to grades and test scores (Catsambis, 1998; Fan and Chen, 1999; Izzo et al., 1999; Shumow and Miller, 2001).

What does this mean? Does helping children with school work, monitoring their behavior, or contacting the school impel them to get lower grades and scores? Are there other factors that influence both achievement and parent intervention? Do parents offer more guidance to children who are struggling? In her study of 13,500 families, Sophia Catsambis found that certain forms of involvement (contacting the school, encouraging teens to graduate from high school rather than go to college, and supervising behavior) were associated with lower student achievement. When she controlled for problem

behavior (coming to school late or unprepared, cutting classes), the negative effects disappeared.

Lee Shumow and Joe Miller (2001) found that at-home involvement is related to students' positive attitudes toward school but negatively related to grades and test scores. They interpreted their findings to mean that parents of struggling students provide more help at home than parents of successful students. In their analysis of data from 25 studies, Xitao Fan and Michael Chen (1999) found a similar pattern. They also suggest that parents impose more controls when children are not doing well. These studies suggest that parents whose children have academic or behavior problems tend to supervise them more and seek help from the school.

The Gutman and Midgley (2000) study of fifth- and sixth-grade students from 62 families in a Michigan district found that parent involvement as a single variable did not appear to be related to students' grades. It is interesting, however, that their definition of parent involvement (talking to students about school, checking homework, attending events and volunteering) contains factors that Catsambis and others found were not significantly related to achievement.

Having expressed these cautions, let's take a closer look at the findings on the relationship between parent and family engagement and improvements in student outcomes.

Key Finding

Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement.

Almost all these programs are aimed at families with younger children, from birth through kindergarten, then in elementary school. Two studies, developed by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues, examine Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) in middle school. TIPS was originally designed for elementary schools, but now includes designs for seventh and eighth grades. The studies on parent involvement for middle and high school students look at family processes and family-school interactions and are drawn mostly from survey research. These findings are presented under the next set of findings.

Birth through preschool. Early Head Start is a federal program that serves low-income families with infants and toddlers. Either through home visits or classes at a central location, mothers learn ways to stimulate their children's mental, physical, and emotional development at home. The program includes early education, parenting education, health services, and family support services. In an experimental study, Mathematica Policy Research and the Center for Children and Families at Columbia University (2001) examined initial results from this new program.

The research team looked at programs in 17 sites, studying about 3,000 children and their families. At each site, children were randomly assigned to the program or to a control group.

When they were two years old, the Early Head Start children scored higher on cognitive development scales, used more words, and spoke in more complex sentences than control-group children. The program families were also more likely to support their children's development and literacy skills than families of control-group children.

Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education) is a literacy program in Minnesota that offers home and school activities for kindergartners and their families. In sessions at school, trained parent educators coach mothers in developing literacy skills. Then teachers send home book-related activities for parents to do with their children. Gail Jordan, Catherine Snow, and Michelle Porche (2000) looked at the project in four lower-income schools in a mostly middle-class district. Over one year, the students in Project EASE made significantly greater gains on language scores than children in a control group. The more activities a family completed, the higher their students' gains. Children who started out with the lowest skills gained the most.

HIPPY, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, is a program with similar goals but delivered entirely through home visits. It is aimed at poor and immigrant families with four- and five-year-old children. During biweekly home visits, a trained paraprofessional models the lesson through role-play. Mothers read books to their children, then engage them in learning activities. The home visitors, recruited from backgrounds similar to their assigned families, are trained and supervised by professional HIPPY coordinators.

Amy Baker, Chaya Piotrkowski, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (1998) examined outcomes for 182 HIPPY program and control-group children in two cohorts in a New York school district. The study extended through the two-year program and followed up one year later, at the end of first grade. The results were mixed. For Cohort I, the researchers found positive gains in the HIPPY children's school performance, both during the program and in first grade, compared with the control group. For Cohort II, there were no significant differences between the HIPPY and control children.

Baker and her colleagues concluded that these results are promising but tentative. Programs that develop young children's learning skills are important because children who start out as high performers tend to remain that way, while children who have a poor start tend to remain poor students. From their analysis of the data, the researchers concluded that "we may be seeing naturally occurring variations on the effects of programs within communities. . . . Our findings also alert us to the importance of replication studies and caution us about generalizing positive or negative results from single-sample, single-site evaluations" (p. 584). They call for further research on HIPPY.

For 10 years, a team of researchers in Turkey studied a program based on HIPPY (Kagitcibasi et al., 2001). In an experimental study, children were randomly assigned to the HIPPY program or to three other settings. The four programs or settings studied were

- home care provided by mothers with training, home visits, and discussion groups (HIPPY);
- home care provided by mothers with no support;

- childcare without education; and
- educational nursery schools.

In the short term, children in both HIPPIY and nursery school settings made greater progress than children in the other two groups. Seven years after completing the programs, however, the HIPPIY children showed greater gains than children in the other groups, including those who had gone to nursery school. They earned higher scores in reading and math and in social development. They also were more likely to stay in school. As with the Baker study, these results should be treated with caution, for there may be unidentified cultural differences that influenced the outcomes.

Studies of a program to develop math skills in Head Start children found more consistent results. Prentice Starkey and Alice Klein (2000) did two experimental studies of a four-month intervention. At two sites in the San Francisco area, one serving African-American families and the other Latino families, staff gave classes for mothers and children and loaned math activity kits to use at home. About 30 families were involved at each site. Half were randomly assigned to the program, and half to a control group. In both sites, the researchers found that parents were willing and able to work with their children on math when given training and materials. The children in both programs developed greater math knowledge and skills than the control-group children.

Elementary and middle school. A study of standards-based reform practices done by Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) for the U.S. Department of Education looked at their impact on student achievement in 71 Title I elementary schools. (Title I is the largest federal program for elementary and secondary education. It is aimed at improving the academic skills of low-income students.) The study used an advanced statistical method to analyze the relationship between student test scores and these practices:

- Visibility of standards and assessments.
- Basic or advanced teaching techniques.
- Teacher preparation and teachers' skills in math instruction.
- High or low ratings (by teachers) of professional development.
- Focus on assessment and accountability.
- District standards policies.
- Outreach to parents.

Outreach to parents measured how much teachers communicated with parents of low-achieving students through

- meeting face to face.
- sending materials on ways to help their child at home.
- telephoning both routinely and when their child was having problems.

In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

The researchers found that teacher outreach to parents of low-performing students was related to improved student achievement in both reading and math. Of the eight other practices studied, only professional development that was highly rated by teachers was as consistently linked to student gains in both subjects. In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

Does offering workshops at school enhance parents' skills to help their children? Ann Shaver and Richard Walls (1998) looked at the impact of school-based parent workshops on the achievement of 335 Title I students in nine schools in a West Virginia district. In addition to attending sessions designed to their interests, parents received learning packets in reading and math, as well as training in how to use them. The students' gains were compared with pretest scores, then measured against average national gains, on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. The researchers found that

- students with more highly involved parents were more likely to gain in both reading and math than children with less involved parents. This finding held across all income and education levels.
- younger students (grades 2–4) made greater gains than older students (grades 5–8).
- parents were more likely to be involved when their children were in elementary school (grades 2–4) than in middle or junior high school.
- students from lower-income families made fewer gains than students from higher-income families, no matter how involved their families. However, low-income students with more involved parents made greater gains than low-income students with less involved parents.
- a family's income level did not affect its level of involvement. Low-income families were as likely to attend regularly as higher-income families.

Do school efforts to engage families make a difference in student achievement? A study by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues of a family-school partnership program adopted by 80 Baltimore elementary schools found positive results. These schools are members of a network that receives technical assistance to develop six types of partnership, from working with children at home to being engaged in school decisions (see Table 9, p. 91). In schools with more highly rated partnership programs, students made small but significant gains on writing and math tests, compared with schools with lower-rated programs. Attendance also improved at the more highly rated schools (Epstein, Clark, Salinas, and Sanders, 1997).

Do programs that engage families in children's learning at home have effects on older children? Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University have developed an interactive homework program called TIPS (Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork). TIPS can be adopted by both elementary and middle schools. In a study of TIPS for Writing in two Baltimore middle schools, Epstein and her colleagues found that parent involvement in TIPS boosted sixth- and eighth-grade students' writing scores. Almost 700 sixth- and eighth-grade students and their families took part in the study. The more TIPS homework students completed, the better their grades in language arts (Epstein, Simon, and Salinas, 1997).

In a quasi-experimental study of TIPS for Science in a suburban middle school, Frances Van Voorhis (2001) found similar results. Three classes from two sixth-grade teachers and two classes from two eighth-grade teachers, a total of 253 students, took part in the study. The students were a cross-section of those in the school (about half white and half a mix of African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Russian). In sixth grade, they were in low, average, and honors classes; in eighth grade, they were in average and honors classes. The teachers assigned TIPS homework to six classes and non-interactive homework to four classes. The study covered two marking periods. After controlling for prior grades, family background, and amount of homework turned in, TIPS students earned significantly higher grades in science than the control group.

A study with a similar design on interactive math homework is discussed in the next section (Balli, Demo, and Wedman). Although the authors found no significant differences in posttest math achievement, they did discover that families of students assigned interactive homework were significantly more involved in math homework than families who did not. The researchers noted that the small sample size may have affected the results.

Summing up. Early childhood, preschool, and kindergarten programs that train parents to work with their children at home tend to have significant, positive effects (Baker et al., Kagitcibasi et al., *Mathematica*, Starkey and Klein). Children's grades and ratings from teachers tend to improve the longer they are in the program, and they make greater gains than children not in the program (Jordan et al., Shaver and Walls). The studies that compared levels of involvement found that achievement increased directly with the extent to which parents were engaged in the program (Jordan et al., Epstein et al., Shaver and Walls, Westat/Policy Studies Associates). Children from all family backgrounds and income levels made gains. In some cases the children having the most difficulty in school made the greatest gains (Jordan et al., Westat/Policy Studies Associates).

Older children benefit as well. Such simple programs as weekly homework assignments in which students engage their parents are linked to improved grades for elementary and middle grade students (Epstein, Simon, and Salinas; Van Voorhis). One study shows that if schools fully adopt well-designed practices to engage families, their students' test scores tend to rise and attendance improves (Epstein et al.). Standards-based reform practices are more likely to have a positive effect on students' test scores when teachers communicate regularly with parents (Westat/Policy Studies Associates).

One study, on the HIPPOY program, reported inconsistent results (Baker et al.). The first cohort of students made significant gains compared with the control group, but the second did not. All the treatment and control groups attended a high-quality preschool program. Baker and her colleagues attributed the uneven result to natural variations in program impact. The HIPPOY study done in Turkey found comparable results between the HIPPOY group and the nursery school control group at the end of the program intervention (Kagitcibasi et al.). Several years later, however, the HIPPOY graduates were doing significantly better in school than the control-group students. It may be that the influence of the program on the home environment helped to sustain longer-term effects.

The studies that compared levels of involvement found that achievement increased directly with the extent to which parents were engaged in the program.

Another study mentioned briefly in this section, the Balli, Demo, and Wedman study of interactive math homework, found no significant test score gains in the treatment group. The researchers speculate that the small sample size and short term (18 weeks) of the study may have influenced the results.

Taken together, we feel that these studies make a solid case that programs to engage families can have positive effects on student academic achievement and other outcomes.

Taken together, we feel that these studies make a solid case that programs to engage families can have positive effects on student academic achievement and other outcomes.

Key Finding

The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through our complex education system. The more families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.

A three-year study of 1,200 urban students in a New England district by Charles Izzo and his colleagues (1999) found that parent involvement, both at home and at school, was related positively to student achievement. They followed randomly selected students in 27 schools from kindergarten to third grade. Each year, teachers rated the parents' involvement using these measures:

- the frequency of parent-teacher contacts each year
- constructive working relationships with parents (agree/disagree)
- parent participation in activities at school (yes/no)
- parents' educational activities at home (yes/no)

Parents' home activities were related to the widest range of gains on math and reading tests, compared with the other forms of parent involvement. The researchers also found that involvement at home remained steady, while involvement at school declined over time. This consistency, they concluded, may explain why the home activities had a stronger influence (Izzo et al., 1999).

Another study compared students whose parents are more highly involved with students whose parents are less involved. Rebecca Marcon (1999) looked at 700 African-American preschoolers in Washington, D.C. Using teacher reports of parent involvement, she compared students' grades and skill ratings. Parents with high involvement ratings, compared with those with low or median ratings, tended to have children with higher grades and scores. This finding held across all family income levels and backgrounds.

In their retrospective study, Wendy Miedel and Arthur Reynolds (1999) analyzed interviews from 700 parents of eighth graders in Chicago. In addition to their background and expectations for their children, parents reported on their involvement when their children were in preschool and kindergarten. Seventy percent had been engaged in Chicago Parent Centers, which offered workshops and information about children's learning, as well as activities to help parents be involved at school. To confirm parents'

reports, teachers rated parents' participation in school activities. These teacher ratings closely matched what the parents said.

Miedel and Reynolds compared results for students based on how much their parents had been involved. Between first and eighth grades, students whose parents took part in a greater number of activities did consistently better in school. They tended to earn higher scores on reading tests, spend less time in special education, and pass from one grade to the next. These findings held across all family backgrounds.

How do families' practices at home relate to middle and high school students' achievement? Several studies use data from a long-term study of eighth graders, called the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS:88). NELS:88 provides an easily available source of information for researchers. Starting in 1988, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) followed 25,000 eighth graders from 1,000 schools. It surveyed them at two-year intervals through 1994, and again in 2000. NCES also surveyed their parents, teachers, and school principals and collected data from high school transcripts. In 1988, the base year, and in follow-up years, students also took tests in math, reading, science, and social studies. The other studies of middle and high school students also use large national databases, such as the Survey of Parents and Children, done by the National Commission on Children, and the Longitudinal Study of American Youth.

These studies asked questions like these:

- What form does parent involvement take as children move from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school?
- How are parents involved at school versus at home?
- Do some forms of involvement have different effects than others? Under what conditions?

Exploring these layers beneath the surface has led to a richer, deeper definition of parent involvement. It has also allowed us to see that different types of involvement have different effects, at different ages, and in families of different backgrounds. Results from these studies will be covered under this and the next two key findings.

Support from home and school. What helps students through the transition to middle school? Looking at low-income African-American students from 62 families during the transition between fifth and sixth grades, Leslie Gutman and Carol Midgley (2000) asked what helped them through the change. They found that the combined effect of parent and school support had a significant impact on middle school grades. Students reported on three key influences:

1. Parent involvement: talking to students about school, checking homework, attending events, and volunteering at school.
2. Support from teachers: taking time to help students and being supportive rather than critical.
3. Belonging at school: feeling accepted, respected, and included at school.

Parents with high involvement ratings, compared with those with low or median ratings, tended to have children with higher grades and scores. This finding held across all family income levels and backgrounds.

Relating these factors to grade point averages, the researchers found that no single one appeared to have an effect. When the researchers combined parent involvement with the other two factors, however, another picture emerged. Students reporting high parent involvement and a high sense of belonging, or high parent involvement and high teacher support, had higher average grades than students who reported low support at home and school.

Table 5. Combined Effect of Teacher Support and High Parent Involvement on Grade Point Averages

GRADE POINT AVERAGES (ON A 0–4 SCALE)		
Teacher Support	High Parent Involvement	Low Parent Involvement
High	2.5	0.5
Low	0.6	0.7

Table 6. Combined Effect of Student Sense of Belonging and High Parent Involvement on Grade Point Averages

GRADE POINT AVERAGES (ON A 0–4 SCALE)		
Student Sense of Belonging	High Parent Involvement	Low Parent Involvement
High	3.4	1.0
Low	1.8	0.8

This study suggests that if children don’t feel connected to school, parent involvement alone will not make a significant contribution to student achievement. Students must also feel that they belong at school and that their teachers support them.

Sanders and Herting (2000) looked at similar influences for 800 urban African-American middle-grade students. The question they addressed was why African-American girls tend to do better in school than African-American boys. On a 1–5 scale, students rated these factors:

- Support from teachers (like feeling comfortable asking the teacher for help).
- Support from parents (like giving praise for doing well in school).
- Involvement in church (like belonging to a church group).
- Attitudes toward school (like feeling it’s important to work hard in school).
- Academic self-confidence (like feeling they do good work in school).
- Behavior in school (like being sent out of class for misbehaving).

Support from teachers and parents and involvement in church were positively related to attitudes, self-confidence, and behavior. These, in turn, influence achievement. The girls in this study felt more support from their family and teachers, and are more active in church, than the boys. The researchers were not surprised that African-American girls also reported more positive attitudes about their ability, less disruptive school behavior, and higher achievement than the boys did.

As mentioned earlier, some studies found that parent supervision, involvement with homework, and contacts with school seemed to be *negatively* related to grades and test scores (Catsambis, Fan and Chen, Izzo et al., Shumow and Miller). The consensus among the researchers was that parents are more involved in these ways when their students are struggling. In their analysis of data from 25 studies, Xitao Fan and Michael Chen (1999) suggest that parents impose more controls when children are not doing well. It is not clear if this strategy helps or hinders their children, because survey data are not designed to identify cause and effect. Catsambis and colleagues conclude, “the most effective types of parent involvement are not those geared towards behavioral supervision, but rather, those geared towards advising or guiding teens’ academic decisions” (p. 24).

Efficacy. Parents’ sense of their efficacy influences how they are involved during middle and high school. Efficacy means the power to produce an effect. In a study using a national sample of 900 families with children aged 10–17, Shumow and Lomax (2001) examined parents’ feelings of success in guiding their children. Parents have a high sense of efficacy when they believe that they can

- help their children do well in school, be happy, and be safe.
- overcome negative influences and keep their children away from troublemakers, illegal drugs, or alcohol.
- have a positive impact such as improving quality of the school and making the neighborhood a better place.

The higher parents’ sense of efficacy, the more closely they monitored their children and the more they were involved with school. The researchers then related efficacy to student outcomes. They used parent reports of their children’s grades, academic level (high, medium, or low), and behavior at school, and students’ reports of well-being (optimism, worries). They found that the higher parents’ feelings of efficacy, the more their children reported doing better in school and feeling happy, safe, and stable. Families who live in safe, higher-income areas with good programs for young people had more sense of efficacy than families living in lower-quality areas.

A protective effect. When students report feeling support from both home and school, they tend to do better in school. They say that they have more self-confidence and feel school is more important. Data indicate that they also are less disruptive, earn higher grades, and are more likely to go to college (Gutman and Midgley, Sanders and Herting, Shumow and Lomax, Trusty). Although several studies compare home *versus* school settings for parent involvement to see which have stronger effects, it is clear that both are important:

- At school, parents learn how to engage their children in learning at home, get help if their children are struggling, and form a constructive relationship with teachers (Izzo et al., Miedel and Reynolds).
- At home, parents guide their children toward postsecondary education, make sure they read and do their homework, and stress the value of education. They also steer children away from risky behavior, help them maintain positive attitudes, and support them through problems at school (Catsambis, Fan, and Chen; Shumow and Lomax; Trusty).

Families with high achievers reported more time engaged in home learning activities than families with low achievers. For example, high-achieving children spend more time on homework, reading, and using materials like the dictionary.

For many children, home and school are two very different worlds. Comparing forms of parent involvement in the primary grades (K–3), Izzo and his colleagues found that taking part in activities at school was positively related to students' school engagement. The quality of parent-teacher interactions (as rated by teachers) was positively related to students' social and emotional adjustment. When their parents are involved at school, in other words, children are more likely to adjust to school, take part in class, and feel they belong and fit in.

In his analysis of NELS:88 data, Jerry Trusty found a similar protective influence. Parent involvement in eighth grade, as reported by students, influenced students' expectations to finish college six years later. Students who felt that their parents communicated with them and supported their learning were more likely to continue studies past high school. In other words, the more students felt their parents' involvement and support, the longer they planned to stay in school. For students, families are a continuing presence, while schools are shorter-term resources.

In their study of African-American eighth graders, Sanders and Herting focused on why girls do better in school than boys. African-American girls felt they received greater support from parents and teachers and were more likely to belong to church groups. They also reported higher grades, better behavior, and more self-confidence in school. For both boys and girls, family, church, and teachers were positive influences that were connected to higher achievement.

Further, higher levels of parent involvement appear to have more impact than lower levels. This does not just mean that more is better than less. It also means that active types of involvement may have a stronger effect than more passive types. In her study, Marcon classified the four types of involvement in her study as active (volunteering and visiting the classroom) or passive (getting information from the teacher at conferences or home visits). She found that active involvement in preschool was related to higher marks both on teacher ratings and report cards.

Key Finding

Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on learning and homework. In other words, all families can, and often do, have a positive influence on their children's learning.

In a study of how families manage their children's time, Reginald Clark (1993) surveyed families of 1,171 third graders of all backgrounds in Los Angeles. After dividing the students into high and low achievers based on standardized test scores, he correlated the ways they spend their out-of-school time with grades, family background, and other factors. He found that the way children spent their time at home, not the family's income or education level, predicted their success in school. Most parents reported that they talk to their children about homework, read to their children, and make sure they do their assignments. However, families with high achievers reported more time engaged in home learning activities than families with low achievers. For example,

high-achieving children spend more time on homework, reading, and using materials like the dictionary.

Clark identified four variables that comprise what he calls “parents’ press for academic success.” Together, these factors explained 47 percent of the variation between low- and high-achieving students in the study:

- Parent knowledge about homework assignments.
- Parent perception of child’s engagement in homework.
- Child knowledge of how to use a dictionary.
- Parent expectations for child’s education.

Low achievers tended to come from homes where the parents were younger, did not work outside the home, had not been to college, and were low-income. Even though higher-achieving students often had parents who were not home to monitor their late afternoon activities, having parents in the workforce was related to higher test scores.

Despite the relationship between achievement and family resources, Clark found that high achievers came from a wide variety of family backgrounds. “Let us recall that 51.3 percent of the mothers of high achievers possessed no more than a high school education. Almost 40 percent . . . lived in single parent households. Almost 43 percent of the high achievers were Hispanic and 21.8 percent were Black” (p. 103).

In their study of NELS:88 data, Esther Ho Sui-Chu and Douglas Willms (1996) found that involvement at home had the greatest effect on student achievement. Compared with volunteering and attending school activities, parents’ talking about school with their children and helping them plan their education programs were more highly related to higher grades and test scores.

Although children from higher-income families tend to do better in school, students of all backgrounds gain when their parents are involved. Ho Sui Chu and Willms found that higher-income families were slightly more involved in some ways, but the effect was small. On the whole, the researchers concluded, higher-income and two-parent families were not more involved with their children’s education than lower-income and single-parent families. The types of involvement vary somewhat, however, by race and ethnicity.

An interesting twist is that children from all backgrounds tend to score higher in both math and reading if they attend a school where the average family income is higher. Ho Sui-Chu and Willms surmise that this is because schools in higher income areas appear to have a culture of greater parent involvement.

Using NELS:88 data, Sophia Catsambis (1998) studied 13,500 families whose children stayed in school through 12th grade. She measured the connection of six types of involvement (see Table 4, p. 22) with high school student achievement. Enhancing learning at home, she found, had the strongest effect.

- Forms of involvement with *less* effect: Parenting practices, communications with school, attending school events, and contacts with other parents.
- Forms of involvement with *more* effect: Expressing high expectations, discussing going to college, and helping students prepare for college.

When their families guided them to classes that would lead to higher education, students were more likely to enroll in a higher-level program, earn credits, and score higher on tests. The connection was somewhat greater for math and science than for English, and for earning credits than scoring well on tests. Looking back from parent involvement in grades 8 through 12, Catsambis found that parents' expectations for their students to do well and attend college had the strongest effect on grade 12 test scores in all subjects. These findings held across all family backgrounds.

In their meta-analysis of 25 studies, Xitao Fan and Michael Chen (1999) also found that parents' aspirations for their children were associated with higher grades, test scores, and passing rates. By aspirations, they mean expectations for their children to do well in school, graduate, and go on to higher education. In describing the connection, they explain,

The overall relationship between parent involvement and students' academic achievement is close to .30. Although an average correlation of .30 may appear low to many people . . . this represents a medium effect size in social sciences . . . certainly a meaningful effect. (p. 18)

In practical terms, this means that students from families with above-median parent involvement showed success rates that were 30 percent higher than those from families with below-median parent involvement. "This is not trivial by any standard," Fan and Chen conclude (p. 18).

Gender influences. Is gender a factor? In their study of 60 middle school students' families, Lee Shumow and Joe Miller found that involvement at home contributed to positive attitudes toward school, while involvement at school contributed to higher grades. Relating gender to different types of involvement, the researchers found:

- Fathers and mothers were equally involved at home, but mothers were more involved at school than fathers.
- The higher their education level, the more mothers were involved at school. Fathers of all education levels were less involved at school than mothers.
- Student gender did not make a difference in the level or type of parent involvement.
- The more parents were involved at home, the more students felt it was important to perform well in school.

Taken together, Shumow and Miller found that parent involvement in both settings had a significant effect on all student outcomes.

A NELS:88 study of gender pairs (mother-son; father-daughter; mother-daughter, father-son) in the middle grades also found some interesting variations. Deborah Bugg Williams (1998) found that parents' expectations for their children's education and their out-of-school activities are positively linked to all measures of their children's achievement. These effects occurred in all pairings of parents and children. Mothers and fathers had varying influence, however, on their sons' and daughters' academic performance. For example, mothers' involvement was more strongly related to math and reading achievement for both sons and daughters. Fathers' involvement also had an effect, but it was not as significant.

Racial ethnic, class, and cultural variations. Several NELS:88 studies found that Asian, Hispanic, and African-American parents were as active in their middle and high school children's education as white parents, but in slightly different ways (Catsambis, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, Keith and Keith). This finding is repeated in a few more focused studies of lower-income and African-American students (Gutman and Midgley, Miedel and Reynolds, Sanders and Herting). The program studies covered under the first finding also show that low-income families and families of color responded readily to training and home visits to assist them in helping their younger children learn (Baker et al.; Epstein, Simon, and Salinas; Mathematica; Shaver and Walls; Starkey and Klein; Van Voorhis; Westat/Policy Studies Associates).

While families of all backgrounds maintain rules about grades and homework throughout high school, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms found some variations by ethnicity in the NELS:88 data:

- African Americans reported slightly higher involvement than whites reported in all types of involvement at home. At school, the levels of involvement reported was about the same.
- Hispanics reported slightly higher levels of home supervision than whites did, but reported about the same in all other types.
- Asians reported more supervision at home than whites reported. Asians also reported spending less time discussing school, communicating with school staff, and volunteering and attending PTO meetings than white families reported.

Families of all income and social levels are involved at home, but families with higher income and social class tend to be more involved at school. In their study of NELS:88 data on more than 21,000 families, Timothy Keith and Patricia Keith (1993) found that "parent involvement has a strong effect on the learning of eighth grade youth" (p. 486). (Each standard deviation change in parent involvement leads to a .287 standard deviation change in eighth-grade test scores.) The effect was slightly greater for math and social studies than for other subjects. By using path analysis, they found that most of this effect was through encouraging homework, at-home reading, and other academic activities.

Keith and Keith found contradictory trends when correlating family background with levels of involvement. Parents with higher income appeared to be more involved than those with lower income. Yet families from ethnic groups often labeled "at risk"

Asian, Hispanic, and African-American parents were as active in their middle and high school children's education as white parents, but in slightly different ways.

(African American, Hispanic, and Native American) reported more involvement than those from advantaged ethnic groups. They recommend further study of this issue. Shumow and Miller, using data on 60 families from another national database (Longitudinal Study of American Youth) found a similar contradiction. As parents' educational level increased, so did their involvement, but parents of struggling and average students reported more involvement at home than did parents of successful students.

Why families with more income and education tend to be more involved at school is addressed in a case study by Annette Lareau and Erin Horvat (1999). The researchers observed that white, middle-class families are more comfortable with school staff because they share “social and cultural capital.” These families have culturally supportive social networks, use the same vocabulary as teachers, feel entitled to treat teachers as equals, and have access to childcare and transportation. This allows them “to construct their relationships with the school with more comfort and trust” (p. 44). We will look more closely at this study in the next section on successful practice to engage families from diverse backgrounds.

Key Finding

Parent and community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.

Programs designed to engage families of young children in improving literacy and math skills are examples of this principle. As we saw in the findings about such programs, they tended to accomplish what they set out to do (Baker et al., Kagitcibasi et al./HIPPY, Jordan et al./Project EASE, and Mathematica/Early Head Start). An interesting confirmation of this point appeared in Starkey and Klein's study of math skills in Head Start children. Although the intervention was designed to engage families only in helping children develop math skills, the researchers also measured literacy skills. They found that the program children improved on math skills, but not literacy development, and concluded that curriculum supports should be tailored to specific areas of learning.

In elementary school, workshops that inform parents about what their children are learning and how to help their children at home are also connected to gains in achievement. The workshops for Title I parents described in the Shaver and Walls study included:

- updates on their children's progress.
- training on topics responding to their interests, such as supporting children through crisis, discipline strategies, and increasing your child's vocabulary.
- learning packets in reading and math, as well as training in how to use them.

It can be difficult to isolate the impact of parent involvement from the impact of other features of Title I and similar programs. The Westat/Policy Studies Associates study

used advanced statistical methods to distinguish the effects of several different standards-based reform practices. It found that students made greater and more consistent gains when teachers were “especially active” in outreach to parents. Outreach is defined as:

- meeting with parents face to face.
- sending materials on ways to help their child at home.
- telephoning both routinely and when their child is having problems.

The researchers do not suggest that the standards-based practices were ineffective, but that engaging parents helped the entire program work better. This suggests a reciprocal relationship: Engaging parents in ways that are linked to improving achievement may contribute to the success of school reform. Likewise, improving teaching and standards may contribute to the effectiveness of engaging parents in raising student achievement.

Another example is Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), an interactive homework program designed by Epstein and her colleagues. The two studies on TIPS included in this review focus on writing and science. TIPS for middle school writing was linked to higher grades in language arts and higher test scores in writing (Epstein, Simon, and Salinas). TIPS for middle school science contributed to higher grades in science (Van Voorhis). In her study of Baltimore schools with partnership programs, Epstein explicitly notes that future researchers might find greater gains if they develop measures for partnership practices that are focused on writing, reading, and math.

Most studies examined the effects of parents’ working directly with their children. An exception is Don Moore’s study about local school councils. The 1988 Chicago school reform law requires every public school to elect a local school council (LSC). A majority of members must be parents with children in the school. Among other tasks, LSCs select the principal and develop a yearly school-improvement plan. Moore found that schools “substantially up” in reading scores tended to have strong councils, while schools with level or declining reading achievement tended to have weak councils. Weak versus strong ratings were made using 27 indicators of LSC contribution to the school’s educational program, leadership, and climate. The author found a strong relationship between “cooperative adult effort” among the teachers, parents, community members, and administrators involved in the school and “a trend of substantially improved achievement” (Moore, 1998, p. 79).

Studies of programs based in the community or operated by community groups also illustrate the point about links to learning. Marcia Invernizzi and her colleagues (1997) looked at a program called Book Buddies, which trains community volunteers to tutor first and second graders in reading. Compared with their baseline scores at the start of the program, the students made significant gains. Students who took part in more than 40 sessions made greater gains than students attending fewer than 40 sessions. There was no control group in this study.

Community school programs often offer academic assistance, such as tutoring, after-school learning programs, and homework clinics. (“Community school” is a term that includes a number of school-community initiatives, such as Caring Communities,

Communities in Schools, Beacon Schools, and many others.) Joy Dryfoos (2000) reviewed evaluations of community schools to document their impact on student outcomes. Community schools are open year-round, and their programs are designed with input from families, young people, educators, and local residents. A typical program has these features:

- Before- and after-school learning programs.
- A family support center that can assist families with health and social services.
- Volunteers and local partners from the community.

In community school programs that were specifically focused on learning and achievement, 36 of 49 studies (73 percent) indicated that students in the program improved their performance in school. (Some community school programs focus on health care, teen pregnancy prevention, and other non-academic outcomes.) In general, students in programs that were focused on learning made gains in reading and math test scores over two to three years. Very few of these evaluations, however, used rigorous research methods. For example, a community school in Long Beach, California, integrated academic standards into its extended-day activities. In one year, grades and test scores improved for students in grades 1–3, so that the percentage of students scoring below average on tests dropped from 49 percent to 30 percent. The percentage of students with above-average grades rose from 19 percent to 34 percent. There was no control group (Dryfoos).

An early evaluation report of the California Healthy Start program looked at 40 program sites that offer health, education, and social services to needy families. Lynn Newman (1995) studied a core group of 270 students served by the programs for just under a year. She found four different Healthy Start models:

- School-site family resource centers, where families can come for a variety of services.
- Satellite family service centers, serving more than one school and not based at a school.
- Family service coordination teams, working directly with families.
- Youth service programs aimed at teenagers, based mostly at schools.

When results were broken down by program type, only students served by the family service coordination teams showed significant increases in grades. These team-based programs involved school staff and teachers more heavily than the other programs. They also worked more directly with families and were more focused on students. Newman also found that students in programs with a stated goal of improving student learning were more likely to show gains than students in programs without such a goal.

Clark (2002) compared how 1,058 high- and low-achieving students of all ages and backgrounds used their out-of-school time. Students scoring at the 50th percentile or above spent at least nine hours a week in such “high-yield activities” as reading, writing, and study guided by adults. In contrast, students scoring at or below the 25th percentile spent much more time on unstructured leisure activities, such as “hanging out,” talking on the phone, playing games, and watching television. This gap in learning

time adds up. In elementary school, it can amount to 80 more hours of learning in a year. The difference in how time is spent also grows wider as students get older. For example, the gap between high- and low-achieving students' time in weekly learning activities is about two hours in elementary school and seven hours in high school.

Clark found that academic success (as measured by standardized test scores) is more likely when

- students spend at least 15 hours per week doing high-quality learning activities with teachers.
- students spend 8–15 hours a week fully engaged in out-of-school learning activities.
- adults with high standards for achievement guide students' out-of-school activities.
- students know how to study, plan, and complete projects and have access to libraries and reference materials.

Studies on Effective Strategies to Connect Schools, Families, and Community

In the previous section, we presented findings about the relationship between various forms of family and community connections and student achievement. The findings offered valuable information about the kind and level of family-community connections that positively relate to higher levels of student achievement.

This section reviews what we learned from the research about how these connections can be formed and sustained. As we reviewed the research, the number of studies that examined how best to make connections among school staff, families, and community members to support student achievement excited us. This body of research was not present in the literature for the 1994 edition of *A New Generation of Evidence*. Many new studies focus on an area of great interest to educators: how to create and sustain connections between families and school staff from diverse cultural and class backgrounds.

We debated whether this group of studies on effective practices to cultivate connections between schools, families, and communities belonged in this synthesis. We decided that these studies offer critical information for school staff, parents, and community leaders attempting to create initiatives that engage families and communities in student learning. How can we implement the programs identified in the previous section if we cannot bring the key groups to the table? These studies shed light on the processes needed to make and sustain connections among schools, families, and communities. These studies offer the procedural knowledge, or the “how to” information, about forging connections among school staff, family, and community members that can support student achievement.

Many of the studies were conducted at school sites that were either high achieving or were making steady gains in student achievement. Others focused on families of high-achieving students. The majority of the research in this section consists of descriptive case studies using small sample sizes. The researchers, therefore, make no claims that the results of their studies apply to all schools or families or that their results imply cause and effect between school, family, and community connections and student achievement.

The 16 studies in this section identified effective practices to connect families and communities to schools. Several ask the following questions:

- Why and how do parents get involved in their children’s education?
- What are the factors that influence parents’ involvement?
- What matters when trying to connect school staff and families?

A smaller number of studies in this group ask questions about effective practices to engage community with schools. From these studies, one overarching conclusion emerged:

When programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they are effective in creating and sustaining family and community connections with schools.

What these studies told us was that *relationships matter*. How parents and community members are viewed and treated by school staff—as assets to the process of raising student achievement rather than liabilities—surfaced as a theme throughout the studies. Charles Payne and Mariame Kaba (2001) state that the level of *social trust*—the quality of staff-to-staff and staff-to-parent relationships at a school—can predict the quality of a school. Payne and Kaba report on a study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. The group surveyed staff at 210 schools in an attempt to identify the characteristics shared by the schools that were improving. “When the 30 most highly rated schools were compared with the 30 poorest, a battery of questions about the quality of relationships proved to be one of the best predictors” (p. 5). Teachers at the top 30 schools reported sensing a great deal of respect from other teachers, while teachers at the bottom 30 schools stated that they do not trust each other. In addition to staff-to-staff relations, this pattern repeated itself in *teacher-to-parent* relationships. The authors state that social trust—the quality of the relationships—is the key factor associated with improving schools.

These studies suggest that the quality of the relationship influences whether connections among schools, families, and communities will be formed and sustained.

The studies in this section echo the findings of Payne and Kaba. These studies suggest that the quality of the relationship influences whether connections among schools, families, and communities will be formed and sustained. How then, are these respectful relationships created between schools, families, and communities? The following findings offer more detailed information about specific relationship-building strategies to create these connections to support student achievement.

Key Finding

Programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs.

How do schools go about making connections with families and community?

Families

Several studies try to answer to what practices are effective by asking parents how and why they are involved in their children’s education. Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler (1997) conducted a literature review to learn why parents become involved in their children’s learning. From their analysis, they developed a theoretical model to explain why parents are involved. Their model suggests that parents’ involvement decisions and choices are based on several constructs.

The first construct is parents’ “personal construction of the parent role”—what parents believe they are supposed to do in relation to their children’s education. This defines the activities that parents feel are important, necessary, and permissible to be involved in on behalf of their children. How parents construct this role stems from expectations

and influences of groups that parents belong to or with which they identify. These groups can be other family members, the child's school, and their workplace. Parents' beliefs about child rearing and about appropriate parent home-support roles also influence their role construction. This construct suggests that different cultural and class contexts shape how parents define their role about how to engage in their children's education.

The second construct focuses on parents' "personal sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school." This has to do with whether parents believe and are confident about their ability to be helpful to their child. Parents' beliefs about whether

- they have the skills and knowledge necessary to help their children,
- their children can learn what they have to share and teach, and
- they can find alternative sources of skill or knowledge if and when these sources become necessary shape their sense of efficacy and therefore their involvement.

The third construct influencing parents' decisions about their involvement comes from "general invitations, demands, and opportunities for family involvement." The question examined by the authors was, "Do the parents perceive that the child and the school want and are interested in their involvement?" In this construct, the child's age and developmental level, overall level of performance, personality qualities, and the general enthusiasm about parents' involvement at the school all influence parents' decisions about participation. Thus school staff and children signal their expectations about involvement to parents. These signals ultimately influence parents' decisions about involvement.

Once parents decide to become involved, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that parents' choices about how they are involved are shaped by three additional constructs:

1. parents' perceptions of their own skills, interests, and abilities;
2. parents' experiences of other demands on time and energy; and
3. parents' experiences of specific suggestions and invitations for involvement from children, teachers, and schools.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that schools and communities can better engage families by working actively to invite and welcome parent involvement and by developing programs that support and enhance parents' efficacy for involvement in their children's schooling.

Karen Mapp (2002) explored how and why parents, specifically those from economically distressed circumstances, are involved in their children's education. Her study examined the factors that influence parents' involvement. Mapp conducted the study at the Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School, an urban school serving a racially and socioeconomically diverse population of approximately 220 students.

Mapp conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews with 18 O'Hearn parents whose children, based on family income level, qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. This

group consisted of sixteen women and two men: nine African Americans, eight whites, and one Hispanic American. Mapp also interviewed seven members of the O'Hearn School staff: the principal, the secretary, the custodian, and four teachers to gain important information about the school's culture and history. Observations were done at activities such as special events for parents, school plays, and school committee meetings.

According to the 18 parents, *social* and *school* factors influence how and why they are involved in their children's education. Social factors from parents' own experiences and history included

- parents' own educational experiences in school,
- their own parents' involvement when they were students,
- their beliefs about family involvement as shaped by cultural norms and values, and
- the burden of family responsibilities and time commitments.

An important finding was that school factors, specifically those that are relational in nature, have a major impact on parents' involvement. When school staff engage in caring and trusting relationships with parents that recognize parents as partners in the educational development of children, these relationships enhance parents' desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children's educational development.

Parents described a process by which these relationships were formed. This process has been adopted by the O'Hearn staff so that the school community *welcomes* parents into the school, *honors* their participation, and *connects* with parents through a focus on the children and their learning.

Borrowing a concept from family systems literature, Mapp calls the strategies of welcoming, honoring, and connecting families "the joining process." Parents state that this process creates a school culture and community where they feel like "members of a family." Parents respond to this culture by participating in their children's education in ways that they themselves had never foreseen and by becoming loyal members of the school community.

Delores Peña's (2000) study also explored how parents in one urban elementary school in Texas were or were not involved in their children's education and the factors that influenced their involvement. The school population was 95.5 percent Mexican. Peña interviewed 28 parents of children in prekindergarten/kindergarten and third-/fourth-grade classes. She also conducted observations of a range of meetings and activities and examined school documents regarding parent involvement.

Her study found that parent involvement was influenced by many factors. These include language, parent cliques, parent educational level, attitudes of school staff, cultural influences, and such family issues as childcare. Peña emphasizes that it is important for school staff to take the time to gain the trust of parents and to inform them of how they can be involved. In the study, parents not only identified factors that they felt

influenced their involvement, but they also offered suggestions for improving parent involvement:

- Make the parents feel more welcomed.
- Change the attitudes of school staff so that they recognize the advantages of teachers and parents working together.
- Consider the educational level, language, culture, and home situation of parents.
- Give teachers time to plan and organize parent activities.
- Take parents' interests and needs into consideration when planning activities.
- Recognize that even if parents cannot be present at school, helping their children at home is also a valuable contribution.
- Provide parents with knowledge about how to be involved in a range of involvement opportunities.

Starkey and Klein (2000) underscore that parent programs and interventions work best when the strategies respect the needs of families.

Starkey and Klein (2000) underscore that parent programs and interventions work best when the strategies respect the needs of families. They studied the impact of a math intervention with Head Start parents on prekindergarten children's math development. The study showed that children of parents participating in the program developed more extensive math knowledge than children in a control group. The study also reveals important information about the type of intervention that engages parents. The intervention respected the needs of parents by addressing such barriers to parent involvement as childcare, transportation, and scheduling conflicts. These barriers were overcome by

- providing childcare at the program during the class,
- arranging carpools,
- encouraging family members to send a substitute family member to a class when necessary, and
- providing math kits for use at home.

When the programs honored the needs of parents, they readily participated in the activities.

Do different kinds of invitations and prompts to parents make a difference? Some studies looked closely at the types of invitations or prompts made by schools to involve families. The Westat study (2001) discussed in the previous section revealed that certain types of teacher invitations and outreach strategies work better than others to engage parents. The study pointed out that in schools in which teachers reported having high levels of outreach with parents—meeting face-to-face with parents, sending parents materials on ways to help their child at home, and telephoning routinely—the test scores of students grew at a 40 percent higher rate than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

Mavis Sanders, Joyce Epstein, and Lori Connors-Tadros (1999) examined whether particular types of parent involvement activities influence parent attitudes at the high school level. They analyzed survey data from 423 parents at six high schools in Maryland—two urban, two suburban, and two rural. The surveys were administered to

help the high schools examine their partnership programs with families and to determine areas that needed work. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the independent effects of the schools' existing parent involvement programs on parents' attitudes about the high schools and on involvement in their teens' education at home and at school.

Ninety percent of the parents surveyed agreed that parent involvement is necessary at the high school level. The findings suggested that different types of school practices result in different involvement behaviors reported by parents:

- Involvement at home is positively and significantly influenced by school practices that assist parenting and facilitate interactions with teens on learning at home.
- Involvement at school is most strongly influenced by school practices that encourage volunteering and participation in school decision making.

The authors conclude that “high schools that develop strong programs of partnership that include practices for different types of involvement are likely to improve parent attitudes towards the school and encourage greater family involvement at home and at school” (p. 17).

Simon (2000) also studied family and community connections with high schools, the effects on students' success, and the influence of high school outreach on family involvement. This study used NELS:88 (National Educational Longitudinal Study) data for about 11,000 students. Simon tested how parents' reports on their high schools' outreach activities predict involvement in parenting, volunteering, and learning at home activities. She then tested how administrator reports of schools' outreach predict their ratings of families' involvement in parenting, volunteering, and decision-making practices.

Simon found that families and community members do participate in a range of partnership activities to support students through high school. Parent involvement increases with support from the school. For example, when school staff members contact parents about these opportunities, parents are more likely to

- attend planning workshops and talk to their teenagers about college and employment.
- volunteer as audience members at school activities.
- work more often with their teenagers on homework.
- talk with teenagers more often about school.

Sandra Balli, David Demo, and John Wedman (1998) looked at a mathematics homework intervention designed to increase family involvement in homework. They investigated how differences in levels of family involvement in homework and in student achievement on a posttest were related to differential prompts for involvement in homework.

The study was based on three math classes taught by the same teacher, with students who were similar in achievement level. Participants were 74 white sixth graders

(31 boys and 43 girls) and their mostly middle-class families. The three math classes were nearly identical in terms of students' previous math achievement, with similar ranges of academic ability and family background.

In the three sixth-grade math classes, the teacher distributed 20 homework assignments that required students to interact with a family member. By random selection, some students received assignments prompting them with directions on how to involve a family member or some students received assignments that also prompted families to write comments and requested a parent signature. Some received no prompts. Although the authors found no significant differences in posttest achievement, they did discover that families of students who received prompts were significantly more involved in mathematics homework than families who did not.

Community

Mavis Sanders and Adia Harvey (2000) studied how one urban elementary school was able to develop partnerships with community organizations. The study identifies the types of connections and factors that supported the development of the connections.

Data was collected over the course of six months through semistructured individual interviews with the principal, assistant principal, teachers, parents, and the school's community partners. The researchers also held focus groups with students and made field observations. Researchers conducted a qualitative data analysis to identify key themes and processes. They found that these factors contributed to successful community partnerships:

- the school's commitment to learning,
- the principal's support and vision for community involvement, and
- the school's willingness to engage in two-way communication with potential partners about their level and kind of involvement.

The importance of dialogue ("two-way communication") and respect ("receptivity and openness") in creating partnerships were emphasized, as well as the leadership of the principal and the support of the district.

Key Finding

Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.

How do schools connect with families from diverse cultural and class backgrounds? Annette Lareau and Erin McNamara Horvath (1999) studied the type of school-parent interactions that can hinder parent engagement with the school. They looked at the involvement of black and white parents with their third graders as well as their relationship with the school staff. This descriptive case study was conducted in a Midwestern town of approximately 25,000 people. The authors chose a sample of 24 third graders—12 white and 12 black. Interviews were conducted with the students' parents (40 interviews) and with nine educators.

The importance of dialogue ("two-way communication") and respect ("receptivity and openness") in creating partnerships were emphasized, as well as the leadership of the principal and the support of the district.

Lareau and Horvath found that the white families' social and cultural background gave them skills and assets—the authors called these “social capital”—that were more aligned with those of the predominantly white school staff. This alignment enabled the white parents to work more easily with school staff than with black parents.

Even though school staff thought they welcomed all families, the researchers found that the educators recognized only a narrow band of acceptable behaviors. Teachers liked parents who deferred to them and accepted their opinions about their children. When black parents challenged teachers' perceptions about their children or criticized teachers, their behaviors were rebuffed as “unacceptable” and “destructive.” This “social capital” disconnect between black parents and school staff has a negative influence on the parents' relationship with the school. The authors suggest that social capital, and how schools value and react to it, perpetuates inequality in schools and therefore in society.

Several studies offer suggestions about how this disconnect can be addressed when school staff and families come from different social and cultural backgrounds. A study by Jay Scribner, Michele Young, and Anne Pedroza (1999) looked at the relationships between parents and school staff at high-performing Hispanic elementary and secondary schools located in the Texan borderlands. Through the qualitative data gathered for this study, the researchers identified five “best practice” strategies used by school staff and parents to build collaborative relationships:

1. Build on cultural values of Hispanic parents.
2. Stress personal contact with parents.
3. Foster communication with parents.
4. Create a warm environment for parents.
5. Facilitate structural accommodations for parent involvement.

Gerardo López (2001) studied the involvement patterns of immigrant/migrant families in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. A purposeful sample of four immigrant/migrant families was selected from four separate school districts. The families identified had children who were highly successful in school. All the children in these families graduated in the top 10 percent of their class. López conducted a series of observations and in-depth interviews with both immediate and extended family members in each household. Forty observations and 32 interviews were conducted over a period of six months.

López found that the parents perceived themselves as being *highly* involved in the educational lives of their children. The families rarely, if ever, went to functions at the school. For each of the families, “involvement” was defined as teaching their children the “value of education through the medium of hard work.” All the families in the study reported taking their children at an early age to work with them in the fields and giving their children *consejos* (advice) as to the limited opportunities available if they dropped out of school.

López concludes that if these parents were to be seen through a “traditional” involvement lens, “they would appear to be largely uninvolved in their children's education—

Even though school staff thought they welcomed all families, the researchers found that the educators recognized only a narrow band of acceptable behaviors. Teachers liked parents who deferred to them and accepted their opinions about their children.

López challenges educators and policymakers to develop parent involvement programs that are “more organic and sensitive to an expanded, as opposed to a limited, definition of involvement.”

since there was little formal interaction between the parents and the school, and since they rarely (if ever) reinforced particular school lessons in the home.” He challenges educators and policymakers to develop parent involvement programs that are “more organic and sensitive to an expanded, as opposed to a limited, definition of involvement.” He also challenges them to recognize and build on the ways that parents from diverse backgrounds and cultures are already involved in the educational lives of their children (pp. 15–16).

Janet Chrispeels and Elvira Rivero (2000) studied the impact of a program intervention called the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) on a group of Latino immigrant parents. The overarching research question was, “How do Latino parents define their role and perceive their place in their children’s education and their relationship with the school?” The authors examined the impact of PIQE by assessing parents’ perceptions of their role and place in their children’s education before and after their participation in the program.

The program consists of eight 90-minute sessions using a prescribed curriculum translated into the parents’ language. An important component of the training is the use of PIQE instructors who acted as “cultural brokers.” The researchers adopted this term from Delgado-Gaitán (1996), who used it to refer to a white educator who, because of his long affiliation with the Latino community, was able to translate between his ethnic and cultural group and the Latinos. The instructors selected for the program were from backgrounds and life experiences similar to the participants, had succeeded in the U.S. system, and could interpret this system to the Latino parents.

Data collection included pretest and posttest survey data from 95 parents participating in the program, observations and videotapes of the training sessions, in-depth interviews, and a review of artifacts.

The findings from the Chrispeels and Rivero study suggest that parents developed higher levels of engagement with their children and with the school, especially with teachers, as a result of participation in the PIQE program. All families in the survey reported shifts in their parenting styles as a result of their participation in the program. Parents attributed changes in their discipline methods, communication within the family and with teachers, and awareness of how to build their child’s self-esteem to the information PIQE gave them. The study demonstrated that parents’ concepts about their place and role in their children’s education are not fixed.

Chrispeels and Rivero suggest that the role and importance of the cultural broker be more closely studied. They propose that through the instructors the PIQE program is playing the role of cultural broker between parents and the schools. The study demonstrates that “a cultural broker can be effective in helping parents learn strategies for interacting with teachers and expanding their role construction.” The authors add, “Little has been done to understand if such a role could similarly facilitate teachers’ interactions with immigrant and diverse parents” (pp. 47–48).

Key Finding

Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise among parents, school staff, and community members.

Some of the study findings suggest that school, family, and community connection initiatives work best when they embrace a philosophy of partnership and are integrated into a comprehensive approach to improve student achievement. Margaret Wang, Jane Oates, and Nancy Weishew (1997) report on three “case scenarios” to illustrate the potential of the Community for Learning program (CFL) to improve student learning in urban schools.

Described as a “broad-based, school-family-community-linked coordinated approach,” the CFL design is based on two programs, the Adapted Learning Environments Model and James Comer’s School Development Program (p. 176). Wang and colleagues write, “A centerpiece of CFL is a framework for a collaborative process of uniting people and resources in initiating schoolwide restructuring efforts to ensure the schooling success of every student” (p. 10). In the area of parent involvement, CFL supports a “shared partnership approach.” The program encourages schools to actively involve families through “communication and cooperation between home and school” (p. 17).

The reported findings are based on student surveys and district standardized test scores in reading and math.

The achievement data over two years show that in schools and classrooms that implemented the CFL program, fewer students than expected were in the bottom 20 percent of reading and math. More students than expected scored in the top 20 percent (with one exception). Attendance increased in the middle school. Student perceptions about the learning environment in their classroom and school were generally higher than those of students in comparison schools/classrooms.

The program’s approach links comprehensive school change to “rooted connections with family and community.” The findings are attributed to a combination of successful practices in an “integrated system of delivery” specific to each school. The authors emphasize that no one practice of the CFL approach can account for student improvement. Rather, the integrated system of delivery where several practices are combined, including family involvement, is key.

The findings of a study by Claire Smrekar, James Guthrie, Debra Owens, and Pearl Sims (2001) support the Wang et al. findings that parent and community involvement programs should be part of an integrated, comprehensive plan to support student achievement. The researchers conducted a three-year study of how Department of Defense schools have achieved high levels of student achievement among all of the students that they serve. On average, minority students account for 40 percent of the Department of Defense enrollment. The gap between test scores of African-American

or Latino students and white students is lower among students in the Department of Defense schools than in states.

The study attributes the achievement of high academic standards to the existence of a culture where parents and teachers work as a team to support students. The authors state that the Department of Defense schools reflect an elevated “corporate commitment” that expects and supports parent involvement in at-home and school-based activities. “Military and school staff often refer to the ‘village’ culture of support associated with military base life, in which families closely linked by membership and motivation to ‘move up in the ranks’ develop a sense of shared responsibility for children’s safety and well-being.” The military environment supports “community conditions” that construct a productive set of educational opportunities for all students (p. xi).

Michael Rubenstein and Jessica Wodatch (2000) conducted a policy study of the Title I program. The purpose of the study was to

1. describe practices in 18 improving and high-performing secondary schools that serve disadvantaged students,
2. determine how Title I functioned in these schools, and
3. identify issues related to improvement in secondary schools with concentrations of disadvantaged students.

The schools in the case studies were chosen because they were engaged in comprehensive research-based school-improvement efforts to raise student achievement, enrolled a significant proportion of low-income students, and had student achievement that was either consistently high or steadily improving. The selected schools used a variety of approaches to school improvement and reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of their varied geographic regions. Data were collected through three-day site visits, interviews, school documents, and observations of classroom instruction and daily student life. The researchers who visited the sites wrote the case studies.

Parent involvement was found to be one of the non-instructional services that all the schools identified as an important component of their programs. The study recognized that parent involvement is difficult to achieve and maintain at the secondary level, but suggest that the involvement is an integral part of the program design.

Studies on Parent and Community Organizing Efforts to Improve Schools

Parent and community organizing is a renewed area of activity and research. We included these studies because they forecast developments in this field and because the initiatives they cover are aimed at improving student academic achievement and other outcomes. There is one major finding:

Key Finding

Organized initiatives to build parent and community leadership to improve low-performing schools are developing in low-income urban areas and the rural South. These community organizing efforts use strategies that are aimed at establishing a power base to hold schools and school districts accountable for low student achievement. They have contributed to changes in policy, resources, personnel, school culture, and educational programs.

In a growing number of districts across the country, community groups are organizing a power base of parents and residents in low-income communities. In addition, related constituency-building efforts are engaging the larger community, including business leaders and public officials, to build public support for changes in education policy. The goal of these efforts is to improve outcomes for all students through increased funding and educational resources.

In low-income urban and rural areas, many schools are underfunded, overcrowded, and poor performing. Schools in these districts are more likely to have crumbling facilities, undercertified teachers, and out-of-date textbooks and learning materials. Students attending these schools are shortchanged.

Across the country, community organizing groups have begun to address these issues. Of the 66 groups surveyed by the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University (Mediratta et al., 2002), 50 have begun organizing since 1994. A related and growing field of work is constituency building for school reform. Jacobs and Hirota (in press) defined constituency building as organizing and engaging people with a stake in public education. This work uses a variety of approaches, including mobilizing organizations, holding public debate and discussion, and organizing parents and community members.

While community organizing around poor schools is not new, this recent round of activity has important differences from the past. During the 1960s, African-American and Latino communities began wide-scale mobilization in response to chronically failing schools. One memorable result was the demand for community control in cities throughout the country—notably New York City, Detroit, and Chicago. While the anger and frustration are similar, what is different is who is doing the organizing.

The mobilizations of the 1960s and 1970s were ad hoc and community-wide, often citywide, and part of the grassroots civil-rights movement. The organizers were usually

The more-recent wave of organizing is spurred by neighborhood-based community organizations that had previously focused on housing, economic development, and youth service. Now they are turning their attention to school improvement.

not trying to build a permanent base or work intensively one school at a time. The more-recent wave of organizing is spurred by neighborhood-based community organizations. Many are established groups that had previously focused on housing, economic development, and youth service. Now they are turning their attention to school improvement.

What is community organizing? Kavitha Mediratta, Norm Fruchter, and their colleagues developed five criteria that define groups doing community organizing. Such groups are

1. building a base of parents, young people, and/or residents who engage in collective action to address poor performance and create excellent public schools for all children.
2. focusing on winning concrete changes in schools and employing such strategies as mobilization (bringing together large numbers of people), direct action (picketing and demonstrations), negotiation, training, and forming coalitions with other groups.
3. supporting democratic decision making by members in all aspects of the organization.
4. developing leaders from within an ever-growing membership.
5. building a strong, lasting organization to alter the power relations that lead to failing schools.

This work is markedly unlike the forms of parent and community involvement considered in the other studies we have just reviewed. First, it is based outside schools, and is designed, led, and controlled by parents and community members. Second, it is overtly political—that is, it seeks to change the power relations that create and sustain poorly functioning schools. A key goal of community organizing and constituency building is to give parents and residents more power over what happens in schools and in the distribution of resources among schools.

Third, it aims to change conditions that underlie poor student performance. These include low standards and expectations, mediocre teaching, inadequate learning materials, and weak instructional leadership. These stem, in turn, from poorly distributed resources, insufficient funding, and policies that tend to place highly qualified teachers and administrators in more advantaged schools. Fourth, its ultimate goal is creating the local leadership and skills needed to rebuild troubled communities. Community groups, churches and other religious organizations, and local residents are heavily involved.

How are results defined? The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform worked with Research for Action in Philadelphia to develop indicators of success for community organizing groups (Gold, Simon, and Brown, 2002). The researchers interviewed 19 community organizing groups working on school reform and selected five for more-detailed case studies: the Alliance Organizing Project in Philadelphia, Austin Interfaith in Texas, Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago, ACORN (Association of Communities Organizing for Reform Now) in New York City, and Oakland Community Organizations in California.

Taken together, the indicators used in this study create a framework for understanding the work of community organizers and for measuring their contribution to improved student learning and stronger communities. The indicators are based on the work of the 19 groups and are drawn from their strategies and goals, as well as the accomplishments reported by some of the groups (see Table 7).

Table 7. Examples of the Reported Impact of Community Organizing, by Indicator

INDICATOR	MEASURES OF IMPACT
Leadership development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Parents and/or community members hold leadership positions – Parents, youth, and school staff lead meetings, design agendas, speak in public – Public officials are aware of issues that concern parents, youth, and school staff and are responsive to them
Community power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Political and district leaders acknowledge issues important to community groups – Groups of parents and community representatives monitor new programs and policies
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increase in parents' sense of efficacy – Greater number of parent/community candidates for school councils – Increased participation in local organizations
Public accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – District data on schools and student performance become public – Parent and community representation on review board, panels, and oversight committees – Increased sense of ownership of local schools
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increased funding for underfunded schools – Increase in GED graduates – Equity in distribution of credentialed teachers – Equity in availability of advanced courses – Reduction and equity in class size, suspensions, and expulsions
School-community connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increase in variety and number of community-oriented programs based at school – Increase in participation in programs
Positive school climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pride in school – Signage in other languages – Student perception that teachers care
High-quality instruction and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improved test scores – Increased acceptance of students into magnet programs – Availability of challenging courses – Increase in teachers' sense of efficacy – Increase in student perception that school is "relevant" and respectful of their culture

“In practice, it became apparent that it was most reasonable to expect parents to take actions that had a logical, rather than a causal, connection to student achievement. This is mostly because it is statistically impossible to tease out the relative effects of a single initiative on student learning.”

A word about this research. Of the five studies included here, four were commissioned by foundations to explore what is going on, who is doing it, and what they are accomplishing. The other is Dennis Shirley’s book (1997) on community organizing in Texas. These studies are looking at early developments in a rapidly growing field. They are descriptive, and they do not attempt to evaluate the work or measure effects on student achievement. In all the studies, the main methods of gathering data were surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies. The only study that presents student achievement data is Shirley’s book on the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The data were not analyzed in any detail, and Shirley was cautious about interpreting them.

The researchers are clearly sympathetic to what they are studying. At this stage, the studies are trying to describe the variety of organizing efforts and to create some frameworks for understanding them. The indicators framework developed by Gold, Simon, and Brown, for example, is intended both to make the work more visible and to gauge its progress.

The complexity of this work may require advanced research methods, such as path analysis, to assess its impact. For example, Mothers on the Move (MOM) in the Bronx decided to challenge the long tenure of the district superintendent and ultimately forced his removal. The district was divided into two areas, one white and middle class, the other poor and Latino. For years, the superintendent resisted making changes to improve achievement for Latinos and neglected their area of the district. The new superintendent, a Latina, has adopted several MOM-endorsed reforms. These included replacing ineffective principals and revising funding formulas. The new school leaders adopted more effective programs for teaching and learning. Since then, test scores have risen in about a third of the schools. The extent to which these gains can be credited to MOM would be difficult, if not impossible, to determine through experimental methods.

In their study of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Kentucky, Wilson and Corbett (2000) acknowledge this problem. “Knowledge, confidence, and willingness were the primary indicators of the [CIPL] program’s success. In truth, these fell short of the Institute’s original intention, which was to have the parents directly and measurably affect student achievement. In practice, it became apparent that it was most reasonable to expect parents to take actions that had a logical, rather than a causal, connection to student achievement. This is mostly because it is statistically impossible to tease out the relative effects of a single initiative on student learning” (Executive Summary, p. 12).

Studies on parent and community organizing. For their national scan of organizing, Eva Gold, Elaine Simon, and Chris Brown (2002) found 150 urban and rural community organizing groups working on school reform. In their mapping study, Mediratta, Fruchter, and their colleagues at Designs for Change, California Tomorrow, and Southern Echo found 66 organizing efforts in the eight sites they studied (New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Area, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and the Mississippi Delta). A key focus of all the groups is improving student achievement.

Mediratta and Fruchter found three major reasons for this growth:

1. New groups are emerging.
2. Older groups organizing in other areas, like housing or public safety, are taking on education issues.
3. National networks, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation and ACORN, are moving into new sites.

In Mediratta and Fruchter's view, many of these groups have had "significant success." They are training new leaders, both young people and adults. They are also focusing on the skills and knowledge needed to demand accountability and engage others with an interest in better student performance. Some accomplishments documented in this study are

- upgraded school facilities,
- improved school leadership and staffing,
- such higher-quality learning programs for students as whole-school reform models,
- new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum, and
- new funding for after-school programs and family supports.

Dennis Shirley studied the work of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, which has built a network called Alliance Schools in low-income urban areas. In a partnership negotiated with the Texas Education Agency, these schools are eligible for extra funding and waivers of state regulations that may block needed changes. On the Texas Assessment of Academic Standards (TAAS), students made uneven gains in the 22 schools in the Alliance network between 1993 and 1996. Ten schools made gains above the state average, some well above, but half were below. Shirley concluded:

Even though the Alliance Schools have made headway in many areas, they have not provided a "magic bullet" solution to the myriad problems of school reform in low-income communities. . . . Yet on the other hand, as the case studies demonstrate, a host of teachers, parents, administrators, and community leaders credit the Alliance School Network with revitalizing their schools and neighborhoods, and test scores hardly provide a comprehensive measure for assessing cognitive development or community improvement. (p. 220)

Studies on community engagement and constituency building. The study by Lauren Jacobs and Janice Hirota (in press) provides an overview of constituency building for school reform across the country. The researchers interviewed and met with seven national, state, or regional Ford Foundation grantees and representatives from 14 local efforts selected by the grantees. The grantees included the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Interfaith Education Fund (Texas), National Coalition of Advocates for Students, Parents for Public Schools, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, the Public Education Network, and the 21st Century Fund. Their work sites ranged from rural Kentucky to large cities like Houston and Chicago.

Although the settings are diverse, Jacobs and Hirota found that all the groups aimed to achieve three objectives:

1. Build understanding, common frameworks, and a sense of common values.
2. Create political will and establish the school system's accountability to the community.
3. Shift the dynamics of power toward more community ownership of the schools.

These organizations, and their parent and community partners, employ several key strategies:

- Build relationships so that those holding power become more willing to share it.
- Build the capacity of local school leaders to expand shared decision making.
- Broaden the power base of families and community members, including working in coalitions.
- Use the rights of free speech, assembly, due process, and access to the courts to improve the quality of schools.
- Change governance policies to give parents and community members a voice on key issues.

At Harper High School in Chicago, for example, local ACORN members identified the need for recruiting and retaining more highly qualified teachers. Looking at conditions in the school, they realized there was no working science lab, an essential for science teachers. More than 400 parents and area residents met with the chief executive officer of the Chicago schools to demand improvements. In part as a result of this pressure, the school is now undergoing a \$5 million renovation, including new science labs.

The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), a parent leadership training program in Kentucky, is offered by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a statewide citizen group. The institute is designed to help parents understand how Kentucky's education reform law works and how to use the law to press for better results in their schools. The six-day curriculum covers the state academic standards, data on student progress, action planning, parent engagement, and effective communications with teachers and school staff.

Bruce Wilson and Dickson Corbett (2000) assessed the impact of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership. Based on survey and interview data, the researchers found that CIPL has been an effective vehicle for

- equipping parents with valuable information about how schools should and do operate.
- instilling confidence in themselves as credible education stakeholders.
- giving them a willingness to act on the behalf of all students, not just their own.

Out of 800 CIPL participants, more than 350 sit on school-based decision-making councils or other school committees and 18 have been elected to local school boards. Over 50 percent have completed projects to improve student achievement in their schools. About 40 percent are engaged in school-improvement activities by working with the

principal and parent groups or by developing a school-improvement project. Wilson and Corbett, however, caution: “We do not know if any of this service was influenced by CIPL involvement. We certainly would not make any causal argument, although there was some anecdotal evidence to suggest that they were now more comfortable in leadership roles” (p. 41).

Strategies. The community-organizing and constituency-building studies found a number of innovative strategies (Mediratta et al.; Gold, Simon, and Brown; Jacobs and Hirota). These include:

- Analyzing data on poor student outcomes to press for change and address school and district deficiencies, including low expectations, inequitable resources, and overcrowded and poorly staffed schools.
- Employing democratic methods—direct action (picketing, demonstrations), the electoral process, public meetings, and the media—to make their case to a broader public.
- Working to gain access to such decision-making groups as advisory boards, task forces, and committees to represent parent and community viewpoints. Developing a family and community agenda for change by submitting proposals and program designs.

In Texas, Shirley found that IAF organizing differs from traditional parent and community involvement in three ways. First, traditional involvement avoids issues of power and gives parents a passive role. IAF organizing develops a model of parent *engagement*, where citizens become leaders and agents of change in schools and neighborhoods. Second, the work is based in neighborhood churches. Instead of holding that churches have no role in public education, the IAF contends that religious groups are an untapped resource for community development. Third, the work is about building social capital, through grassroots strategies such as house meetings, Walks for Success, and Parents’ Assemblies.

Although the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) in Kentucky offers a less confrontational approach than community organizing, Wilson and Corbett found that CIPL’s parent engagement was “out of the box.” CIPL-trained parent leaders developed projects to benefit their schools by

- making schools more welcoming to parents.
- easing students’ transitions between schools.
- promoting literacy skills of both adults and children.
- boosting schools’ technology resources.
- encouraging schools to examine achievement and attendance data for clues about pressing needs.
- bringing teachers and parents together to discuss mutual hopes for their schools.

There is a strong inside-outside tension in this work. Most research on parent and community involvement in education examines programs and practices that have been designed and run by schools. The community organizing described in these studies is

designed and implemented by community groups. It is focused on schools that are very low performing and have little or no parent and community engagement. Because it is based outside schools, is focused on accountability, and is demanding of improved performance, school administrators and teachers may see organizing as threatening and hard to control.

Certainly community organizing defines poorly performing schools and districts as ineffective and demands that the people in charge make improvements or leave. Many groups also offer to work with school and district staff to help make those improvements. The Alliance School Network in Texas is an example. The ultimate goal is collaboration, but confrontation may be required to get there. The organizers see this as democracy at work, and they are aiming to make insulated professional cultures more accountable.

The explosive growth of organizing to improve public education, particularly in low-performing schools and districts, makes it imperative to look intensively at this burgeoning field. Understanding the methods, strategies, and achievement of organizing groups can help build broader support for education organizing, and give new groups a road map and . . . field-tested tactics for improving their schools. (Mediratta et al., p. 6)

Recommendations: Putting These Findings into Action

The studies in this review hold important implications for educational practice and research. Drawing on these, we make a series of nine recommendations. The first eight are aimed at a general audience—this includes administrators, program developers, parent and community leaders, teachers, and other school staff. The ninth is aimed specifically at researchers.

Recommendation 1. Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background, are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well in school.

Every study in this review that compared levels of parent involvement found that families of all backgrounds are equally involved at home, although the forms of involvement varied somewhat by culture and ethnicity. Every study that assessed programs to engage low-income families found that almost all were willing and able, with training, to implement practices linked to improved achievement. And every study that looked at high-performing schools in low-income areas found that parents were highly engaged. Furthermore, most studies showed that children's gains were directly related to how much their families were involved.

Always proceed on this assumption: All families can help improve their children's performance in school and influence other key outcomes that affect achievement. Families will respond to information and support about how to do this. If school staff do not agree with this statement, take a close look at staff attitudes and the reasons for them. Presenting evidence that contradicts their assumptions can help staff examine what they think.

Adopt a no-fault policy. Refrain at all times from blaming families for their children's low achievement. Never assume that families don't care about their children. High expectations should apply not just to students, but to teachers, school staff, and families. Everyone is responsible for raising achievement, and together you can do it. Consult the recommendations that follow for ideas about how to engage families who may seem reluctant.

These are ways to learn from families:

- Ask families about ways they encourage their children at home and ways to share their cultural traditions. Explore ways to enhance what families are already doing. Create small, friendly settings during occasions such as class meetings, teacher-parent conferences, grade-level potluck dinners, and family breakfasts that will encourage families to speak.
- Invite families to class to tell their education stories—what were the schools they attended like? How were their parents involved in their learning? What people and experiences helped them to learn?
- At every conference with families, ask about their expectations for their children's education. Make sure their children are enrolled in the program and taking the courses that will prepare them for that future.

Never assume that families don't care about their children. High expectations should apply not just to students, but to teachers, school staff, and families.

Recommendation 2. Create programs that will support families to guide their children's learning, from preschool through high school.

Most programs that engage families in supporting children's learning are aimed at families with young children, from birth through preschool. More programs are needed at the elementary level and especially in middle and high school.

Adopt features from programs that are linked to gains in children's learning. Families with young children will readily respond to outreach and practices like these:

- Home visits from trained parent educators with cultural backgrounds similar to their own or with knowledge of their culture.
- Lending libraries that offer games and learning materials to build skills at home.
- Discussion groups with other families about children's learning.
- Classes on how to stimulate their children's mental, physical, and emotional development.

With families of elementary and middle school children, these practices are effective:

- Interactive homework that involves parents with their children's learning.
- Workshops on topics that parents suggest, like building their children's vocabulary, developing positive discipline strategies, and supporting children through crisis.
- Regular calls from teachers, not just when there are problems, about how their children are doing in class. Lead with something positive.
- Learning packets in reading, science, and math, as well as training in how to use them.
- Meetings with teachers to talk about their children's progress and what they're learning.

With families of high school students, offer this kind of support:

- Regular meetings with teachers and counselors to plan their children's academic program.
- Information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and postsecondary education options and how to plan for them.
- Explanations of courses students should take to be prepared for college or other postsecondary education.
- Information about financing postsecondary education and applying for financial aid.

At all levels, work with families to support children in making transitions. Children of all ages do better when they make a solid adjustment to school. By adjustment, we mean that students feel comfortable and respected, feel they belong at school, and feel supported by teachers.

- Offer families and students tours of the school and opportunities to visit and observe in the classrooms.

- Meet with students and families at the feeder schools or programs to introduce staff; explain the school's programs and answer questions.
- Make home visits the summer before school starts to build a relationship with each family.
- Work with families to prepare children for the next level and help them plan for the future.

Recommendation 3. Work with families to build their social and political connections.

The lack of social and political capital can seriously restrict families' capacity to support their children's learning and make sure they get a high-quality education. When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, children tend to do better in school. Their parents are also better equipped to help them. When schools work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the schools and advocates for public education.

Develop families' social capital. This capital consists of connections with neighbors, other parents in the school, and teachers. It also includes having the same vocabulary, shared rules of behavior, and resources that make these connections possible, like transportation and childcare. These activities will help build social capital:

- Promote families' connections with each other, with teachers and other school staff, and with community groups.
- Translate all communications with families into their home languages and provide an interpreter at meetings.
- Offer childcare, meals, and transportation for major activities at school.
- Ask families about the best times for them to attend events at school. Ask what kind of events they would like to attend. Ask what they think would make the school better.

Develop families' political knowledge and skills. Political capital consists of assets like understanding how the system works and how to have an effect on public decisions. It also means having access to the people who run the school system and a voice in the policymaking process. These activities will help build political capital:

- Make the school a laboratory of democracy. Support families' involvement in decision making. If you have a school governance council, offer training for parent and community members of the council.
- Ask the superintendent, board members, and district staff to meet with families at the school and explain what they do. Work with families to develop an agenda for the meetings so they can voice their concerns.
- Give families information about how the education system (and local government) works. Make field trips to district offices and school board meetings.

When parents feel they have the power to change and control their circumstances, children tend to do better in school. Their parents are also better equipped to help them. When schools work with families to develop their connections, families become powerful allies of the schools and advocates for public education.

- Keep voter registration forms and information about local government agencies in the school office or family center. Develop a student-run voter registration drive.
- Invite candidates for school board and other local offices to speak to families at the school.

Support families' efforts to improve the school and community in these ways:

- Open the school to community meetings.
- Make home visits to ask parents their ideas about the school.
- Go with families to approach local officials about needed funding, programs, or law enforcement.
- Work with families to develop action research skills to document problems in the neighborhood.
- Approach local banks and businesses and invite them to talk with families about their services, loan programs, and employment opportunities.

Develop families' efficacy. Efficacy comes from feeling confident that they can help their children do well in school and be happy and safe. It also comes from feeling they can overcome negative influences on their children and have a positive impact on the school and neighborhood. These activities will promote families' sense of efficacy:

- Engage families in planning how they would like to be involved at school.
- Consult a representative sample of parents and families, not just the PTO leadership, about school policies and proposed actions.
- Involve families in action research. Ask them to develop and conduct surveys of other families. Invite them to observe in the classroom, review books and materials, and visit other schools to gather ideas.
- Make it easy for parents to meet and discuss concerns with the principal, talk to teachers and guidance counselors, and examine their children's school records.
- Invite families to attend staff development sessions and faculty meetings.
- Facilitate families' connections with programs for young people and youth groups.
- Work with families to help them monitor their children's activities. Create a school directory, so they can contact other parents, especially those of their children's friends.
- Offer workshops on communicating with their children with topics parents suggest, such as talking with children about drugs, dating, problems with friends or family, and values.

Recommendation 4. Develop the capacity of school staff to work with families and community members.

Increase opportunities for professional development on how to connect with families and community members. Several studies highlighted the importance of the relationship between school staff and families and school staff and community members as key to developing effective connections.

In several studies, an intervention was introduced to teachers or other school staff that shifted the level and nature of the contact between themselves and families. These shifts changed the way families felt about the school, affected their relationship with teachers, and influenced how they were involved in the educational life of their children. School staff need more support in developing ways to reach out to families and use the resources available to them in the local community.

Few teacher preparation programs include instruction on how to partner with parents and community. Such programs should be developed to include a focus on the importance of partnership with parents and community to improve student achievement. All school staff, from the principal to the custodian, need opportunities to learn more about this area.

Design preservice and inservice educational opportunities for all school staff that

- help all staff recognize the advantages of school, family, and community connections.
- explore how trusting and respectful relationships with families and community members are achieved.
- enhance school staff's ability to work with diverse families.
- enable staff to make connections with community resources.
- explore the benefits of sharing power with families and community members.

Recommendation 5. Link family and community engagement efforts to student learning.

To be effective, programs and practices that engage families should be focused in some way on improving achievement. This does *not* mean that the school should abandon engaging families in school-improvement committees or stop holding open houses and family nights. Nor does it mean that family activities should be test-preparation drills. Aim for a balance. Some activities should be designed especially to assist students to develop their knowledge and skills. Other activities can have different goals, such as building working relationships between families and teachers or connecting families to community programs. There are few activities, however, that could not focus on learning in some way.

Develop or adopt programs to engage parents in working with their children to develop specific skills. Examples of programs that are linked to learning include family literacy programs, TIPS (Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork) interactive homework, and Family Math and Family Science. Use features of programs that research has linked to gains, like this sequence:

- Demonstrate an activity for parents, engaging parents in role-playing the parts.
- Give materials to each family, offering advice as they use them.
- Help parents assess children's progress and steer children to next steps.
- Lend materials to use at home.

The studies suggest that educators should make every attempt to learn about the concerns of the families and how they define and perceive their role in the school.

Work with local after-school programs to link their content to what students are learning in class through activities like these:

- Form a partnership between after-school program staff and teachers. Encourage them to share ideas and knowledge about the students, observe each other at work, and attend staff development sessions to update and build their teaching skills.
- Inform them about the school's curriculum and learning programs (especially math and reading).
- Share textbooks and other learning materials.
- Give program staff information about students' progress and academic needs.

Link the school's traditional staples of parent involvement to learning with activities like these:

- Incorporate information on standards and exhibits of student work at open houses and back-to-school nights.
- Engage parents and students in math and reading games at Family Nights. Explain where students' skills need to be stronger. Use scoring guides in such projects as making kites to let parents know what a scoring guide is and how to use it.
- Use the school newsletter to discuss test results and how students are doing to meet higher standards.

Recommendation 6. Focus efforts to engage families and community members in developing trusting and respectful relationships.

A theme repeated again and again in the studies is that relationships are key. Any attempt to form genuine collaborations among school staff, parents, and community members must start with building relationships of respect. The building of relationships must be intentional and consistent. When outreach efforts reflect a sincere desire to engage parents and community members as partners in children's education, the studies show that they respond positively.

Respect cultural and class differences. Increasingly, the communities served by public schools are diverse in terms of class, ethnicity, and culture. The studies suggest that educators should make every attempt to learn about the concerns of the families and how they define and perceive their role in the school. If parents don't attend activities arranged by school staff and held at the school, the school should not assume that "parents don't care."

Instead, educators should explore other avenues that better reflect the communities' priorities. Parents and community members feel respected when educators attempt to understand and relate to their needs. Chrispeels and Rivero (2000) point out the value of teachers' learning how to become cultural brokers and cross cultural boundaries.

Allocate resources to build relationships and support parent and community involvement. This work takes time and consistent financial support. Outreach to families, materials to lend, and referrals to social and medical services all require extra staff support. Multiple pressures on school budgets often mean competition for resources. When test pressures increase, parent and community involvement may be seen as expendable, unless there is line-item protection in the budget. Time and patience are also required.

Adopt simple but effective practices of teacher outreach to families. One study found three practices that were related to gains in elementary students' reading and math scores:

- Meeting face to face.
- Sending materials on ways to help their child at home.
- Telephoning both routinely and when a child was having problems.

Allow school staff the resources and time to create programs that

- invite and welcome parents and community members.
- honor the contributions and accomplishments, no matter how large or small, of families and community members.
- connect families and community members to learning goals for children.

Recommendation 7. Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families. Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise.

Adopt a philosophy that family and community engagement is a key component of your whole school reform plan. Several studies found that when school, family, and community connection initiatives were a part of a comprehensive plan to improve student achievement, the programs engaged and sustained the involvement of families and community members and organizations. Some of the studies found a relationship between these more comprehensive approaches and better outcomes for students.

Find workable ways to involve families and community members in planning, establishing policy, and making decisions. Partnership means sharing power with families and community members. Both lose interest in partnering with schools when their participation is token. Try the following:

- Explore national school reform initiatives with a comprehensive approach that includes a school, family, and community component.
- Provide training for school decision-making groups on how to work effectively.
- Avoid using parents and community members to merely rubberstamp decisions.

Partnership means sharing power with families and community members. Both lose interest in partnering with schools when their participation is token.

Recommendation 8. Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.

Connections to community groups can expand the resources available to schools for both staff and families. The community-organizing studies are full of examples of collaboration between school leaders and community groups that have contributed to improved facilities, more funding resources, higher-quality academic programs, improved social and health services, and new after-school programs.

Work with community organizations to offer programs that encourage reading, writing, and studying during evenings, weekends, and summer. Involve them in your school council or school-improvement team. Youth-serving agencies (like the Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA) and religious organizations can help schools support student achievement by:

- providing tutoring and academic support linked to the school's curriculum.
- helping students to organize and manage their time effectively.
- teaching study skills and how to use reference materials and other educational materials.
- advising families about planning for their children's future education and career.

Open the school to community groups and agencies that can offer services to families through a family resource center. Invite them to serve on your school council or school-improvement team. Here are examples of supports and services they can offer for families and community members:

- Health care and mental health services.
- Targeted academic assistance to struggling students.
- Family literacy, adult education, and high school equivalency programs.
- Job training, career counseling, and other vocational services.
- Recreation, arts, and social activities.

Collaborate with community-organizing groups that want to improve the school. Be willing to let them help set the agenda for change. They can put pressure on the school district and elected officials for new resources in ways that school staff cannot. Teachers and principals in low-performing schools in urban areas have worked with local organizers by:

- Opening the doors to community action research teams seeking to assess the quality and safety of school facilities.
- Meeting with parents, family members, and community residents organized by these groups to discuss making improvements to teaching and learning at the school.
- Assisting parents and community members in researching and adopting academic programs that will enrich the school's curriculum.
- Designing new, improved school facilities that include science labs and family centers.

- Writing grant proposals to the National Science Foundation and other funders for new programs.
- Developing designs for new small schools in existing schools and other facilities.
- Negotiating with district officials to create school-improvement zones eligible for increased professional development, more resources for parent engagement, and new reading programs.

Coordinate efforts to reach families with community organizations, including religious groups. Such groups have worked to engage families by:

- Conducting house calls and neighborhood walks to identify the key issues in the neighborhood and school and identify local leaders.
- Holding focus groups and other small meetings to discuss pressing concerns and talk about how to solve them.
- Providing training for parents and residents about how the system works, the larger context for their issues, and how to use their power.
- Showing demonstrations of support for the local school.
- Arranging large meetings for parents and residents and inviting public officials to meet with the community. The goal is to obtain support for a community-developed agenda (repairs, increased funding, after-school programs) and show the strength of the community.

Recommendation 9. Design and conduct research that is more rigorous and focused, and that uses more culturally sensitive and empowering definitions of parent involvement.

The recently published book, *Scientific Research in Education* (National Research Council, 2002), puts forward some criteria for research to be balanced and rigorous. We recommend following this useful framework:

- Pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically.
- Link research to relevant theory.
- Use methods that permit direct investigation of the question.
- Provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning.
- Replicate and generalize across studies.
- Disclose research to encourage professional scrutiny and critique.

Use different types of research methods to shed light on all the questions and issues in this complex field.

- Develop a more balanced array of descriptive, correlational, and experimental studies. Include more policy studies that look at the links between local, state, and federal policies, including funding.
- Increase experimental studies, using random assignment to treatment and control groups. Be sure the two groups are evenly matched and that related interventions

are not made with control-group children during the study period. Seek or provide additional funding and develop new partnerships between practitioners and researchers to allow for experimental studies.

- Look at achievement data when conducting case studies on family-school interactions and effective practice in high-performing schools. Several studies we considered neglected to examine whether practices that were successful in increasing parent and family engagement were related to improvements in student outcomes.

Include more information about school practices to engage families in future federal data collection. Add questions about how parents are involved in advocacy and decision making, in analysis of student performance data, and in school improvement.

Explore how practices to engage families can enhance reform measures to improve achievement and close the achievement gap. For example:

- How do school reform programs engage families? Do those practices (or lack of them) have an impact on their results? Would increasing the amount of family engagement in ways that are linked to learning improve these results?
- Small schools and smaller class sizes are considered promising approaches to improve achievement. Is there solid evidence that they do? If so, is it related to increased capacity to engage families? What are small schools' practices to engage families and connect to community groups? Do teachers with smaller classes make more connections with families? Do these practices appear to have an impact on achievement?

Expand how parent and family involvement are defined in the research. Current definitions are limited and outdated. Studies that use only one or two markers for involvement (for example, frequency of contacts with the school and attendance at activities) miss the broader and more realistic range of activities that might be part of a more inclusive definition.

- Recognize that the forms of parent and family involvement shift constantly, from home to school, as children move through the grade levels, as family social and economic status changes, and as children do better or more poorly. For many children, other relatives and neighbors play a parent's role.
- Probe cultural variations. What are the concerns of families from diverse cultures? How are they involved at home? How do they feel about being engaged at school? How do their home cultures contribute to student learning? What are some ways that schools can learn more about their families, understand their values, and build on their strengths?
- Look at issues of family and community power and influence. Develop deeper, stronger definitions of decision making and advocacy. In many recent studies, participation in the PTO and contacts with school staff are the only ways these roles are defined.
 - How are parents advocates for their children—speaking out for them, intervening if they are doing poorly or being treated unfairly, working with school

staff to solve problems? Do schools have processes and procedures to support this role?

- How are families involved in decisions about their children’s program and placement? In decisions about efforts to improve achievement? In other policies that affect their children?
- How do schools recognize and act on their accountability to families? Do they report on student progress? On school-improvement plans?

Investigate a greater variety of forms of family and community engagement. The No Child Left Behind Act and state standards-based reform laws have changed the framework for family-school relationships.

- How are schools and districts implementing new policies that require them to engage families in more substantive ways? How are they sharing school performance data? What roles do families play on decision-making councils and school-improvement teams? How are families involved in improving student achievement and school performance?
- What is the impact of new practices such as community discussions, deliberative dialogues, focus groups, and study circles?
- Do family resource centers, by connecting families with social services and creating more ways to engage with schools, have an impact on student achievement?
- Do general school policies and practices rather than just specific programs and interventions engage families?
- What kind of family and community engagement policies have been adopted by schools and districts? Do they support specific practices? If so, which ones? Are the policies linked to programs and other efforts to raise student achievement? Are they backed by resources and other policies?
- What practices are in standard use by most schools? Are they effective in engaging diverse families? Are they related to improved outcomes for students?
- What changes or additions to these practices would make them more effective, both in engaging families and improving student achievement?
- How could these practices be better linked to learning?
- What do parents think about these practices? What do they feel schools could be doing to support them to be more involved in their children’s learning?

Study how families attempt to influence schools and become more involved. Look at the variations by race, class, and cultural background.

- How do parents act as advocates for their children? What is their experience as they try to work with teachers to make sure their children are learning to high standards? To get help for their children if they are falling behind or experiencing problems in school? To guide their children toward more challenging programs and placements? To plan for their children’s future education?
- In what kinds of decisions do parents and families seek a voice? What do they see as their proper role in selecting a principal, adopting a whole school-reform pro-

gram, designing a school-improvement plan, and increasing students' test performance? What happens when they try to have an influence?

- How do parents try to collaborate with educators? What do they want to know about new teaching methods and learning programs? About standards and school reform? How would they like to learn more about education? What support would they like to be able to examine data on student performance and other outcomes and use school report cards and state Web sites more effectively?
- In what ways are families engaged in school improvement? How do they respond to opportunities to join school councils and committees? What supports do they need to take part effectively? Are schools receptive to this kind of engagement, and in what ways? Are families active in building more community support for better schools? What are the important issues in the community?