Parent involvement for Hispanic families

Patricia Pina Freelove

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT FOR HISPANIC FAMILIES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Educational Administration

by
Patricia Pina Freelove
September 1993
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ABSTRACT

Parent Involvement for Hispanic Families

The purpose of this paper is to make educators aware of the link between improved student educational achievement and parent involvement; the reasons for the low level of Hispanic parent involvement; and effective strategies for Hispanic parent involvement. Educators need to reach out to involve Hispanic parents in their children's education because of the benefits to students, parents, and teachers. Unfortunately, low-income Hispanic parents' interaction with the schools is low to nonexistent for several reasons. Limited skills and knowledge, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers on the part of both parents and school staff emerges as the real inhibitors of communication and collaboration for effective parent involvement programs.

This paper contains the following: (1) "Benefits of Family Involvement"; (2) "Hispanic Profile"; (3) "Barriers To Successful Programs"; (4) "Elements of Successful Programs"; (5) "Parent Involvement Recruitment Strategies"; (6) "Keeping Parents Involved".
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INTRODUCTION

According to the 1990 United States Census Bureau, the Hispanic population is the nation’s fastest growing minority and by the year 2030, it is predicted that Hispanic children will make up 20 percent of U.S. school populations (Hancock and Duany, 1991). Presently, most Hispanic children attending public schools are being educated in schools oriented toward white middle-class values (Boykin, 1986), taught in contexts not adaptive to minority styles of learning (Jordan, 1984) and evaluated by teachers whose appreciation of their abilities may be constrained by stereotypes (Comer, 1988).

The two year study conducted by the Rand Corporation suggest that public schools are unprepared to deal with the rapidly growing number of Hispanic children who are underachieving academically and who also have the highest school dropout rate (Chavkin, 1992). Four in ten Hispanics leave school without a high school diploma and half of these dropouts have not completed the ninth grade. In September 1990, President Bush (mainly because of the concern over the Hispanic dropout rate) issued an Executive Order on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, committing the federal government to monitor the progress of Hispanics toward national education goals and to promote promising action strategies (Haycock and Duany, 1991).

A promising action strategy for enhancing students'
educational achievement, recognized by parent organizations, educators and policy makers at the federal, state and district level is parental involvement in public education. Since the mid-1960’s educators and policy makers have tried through various federal and state legislative mandates, to replicate the conditions of middle-class parent involvement in schools serving largely low-income students. In the past, the main purpose of including parent involvement policies in regulations governing a variety of federal initiatives— including Head Start (1964); Follow Through (1967); the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965); the Bilingual Education Act (1968); and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) was to improve student achievement in public schools. In California, with the goal to also improve student achievement in public schools, the legislature mandated parent participation in early childhood education programs in 1972 and expanded parent participation requirements in 1976 when the state school improvement program was established. The California State Board of Education adopted a policy on parent involvement in January of 1989 (Chrispeels, 1991).

Even though most educators support parent involvement in education and most schools maintain the traditional middle-class parent involvement programs, Hispanic families have a history of low participation in parent involvement activities
(Williams and Chavkin, 1989). If educators hope to make a
difference in improving Hispanic students' school achievement,
by facilitating more Hispanic parent involvement, it is
essential that educators become more knowledgeable about both
research findings and practice on the issue of involving
Hispanic families in the education of their children. There
is the need for educators at every level of schooling from
preschool to high school to find ways to increase the
involvement of Hispanic parents because research shows
Hispanic students can benefit from effective approaches to
parent involvement. Few administrators and teachers are
offered guidance or training on how to involve Hispanic
families in their children’s education and as a result
Hispanic families, who want to be involved, find that
appropriate structures and strategies do not always exist for
involving them. Teachers who have not been prepared to work
with Hispanic parents, do not understand the importance of
establishing a partnership with them that would allow teachers
to collaborate with parents on their children’s education.
Hispanic parent involvement in education is necessary for
improving Hispanic children’s educational achievement, but it
will require a concerted effort on the part of educators first
to gain a clear understanding about Hispanic parents and their
relationship to schools and then to develop specific plans to
involve them.
Educators continue to misread the reserve, the non-confrontational manners, and the non-involvement of low-income Hispanic parents in the education of their children, to mean the parents are passive, uncaring and uninterested in their children's education. Teachers see the children are not learning and the parents are not helping. The traditional middle-class strategies and methods for parental involvement continue to fail to elicit a response from low-income Hispanic parents and many teachers assume since these families have failed to participate in their children's education in the past, it is not worth making the effort to reach out to them.

Yet, schools have to take the initiative to reach out to Hispanic families and involve them in their children's education because the research shows a positive relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. There is no doubt that parent involvement in education is directly related to a significant increase in student achievement (Dornbusch and Ritter, 1988). Parents who show a strong interest in their children's education will promote in their children the development of attitudes and expectations that are a key to achievement (Henderson, 1981).

The Hispanic Policy Development Project spent three years working with agencies and schools at various sites to find out the characteristics that set apart successful Hispanic parent involvement programs from unsuccessful programs and to
identify specific strategies for recruiting Hispanic parents and keeping them involved (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990). One major finding of the project was that a successful education for low-income Hispanic children requires that schools and Hispanic families function as full partners in the education of their children. A second finding was that the interaction of low-income Hispanic parents and schools ranged from low to non-existent due to educational, emotional, political, and professional barriers. Other obstacles to parent involvement were simply due to ignorance, lack of awareness and misunderstanding for both parents and professional educators.

Most Hispanic families do care about their children, contrary to popular belief, and will participate in parent involvement programs. Since the interaction of low-income Hispanic parents and schools is low to non-existent and is directly related to specific school practices, then school practices need to change (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990).
The most powerful argument in favor of parental involvement in the schools is the fact that everyone benefits; children, parents, and teachers. For the low-income Hispanic families who have the most to gain, parent involvement provides both children and parents the opportunity to realize their potential.

The evidence that parent involvement activities enhance children's school success is overwhelming. Henderson concludes: "...the evidence is now beyond dispute; parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school, and go to better schools" (Henderson 1987, p. 1). The form of parent involvement is not as important as the fact that parent involvement needs to be reasonably well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting (1987).

In regards to parent involvement, the research is clear: Recent acknowledgements of the importance of parent involvement are built on research findings accumulated over two decades that show children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities. Research regarding family environments has consistently documented the importance of parent involvement at all grade levels... (Epstein, p. 1).
When parents are involved in their children’s education, studies report the following: improved student academic achievement; improved student behavior; greater student motivation, improved student attendance; lower student dropout rate; more positive attitude towards homework; increased parent and community support (Hester, 1989).

Several research studies are based on inner-city schools with large populations of poor and minority students. Henderson’s update of The Evidence Grows (1987), showed that in eighteen new studies, as well as thirty-five original studies concluded that parent involvement in any form appears to produce measurable gains in student achievement. The research studies by Henderson (1988) also indicate that:

1. If there is a strong component of parent involvement, it will produce students who perform better than those programs with less parent involvement.

2. Children whose parents are in touch with schools score higher than those children of similar aptitude and background whose parents are not involved.

3. Parents who help their children learn at home nurture in themselves and their children attitudes that are crucial to achievement.

4. Children who are failing in school improve
dramatically when parents step in to help.

Another strong claim on the benefits of parent involvement comes from the evaluation of preschool programs particularly Head Start where the program variable that contributed most to improved school achievement was parent involvement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Perry Preschool Program demonstrated better grades, fewer failures, fewer absences and fewer special education placements during public school years for those children whose parents had been involved in a weekly home visitor program in addition to the preschool program. A change in the home environment which supports student achievement occurs as parents become more familiar with program expectations and the importance of their role as supportive parents. Active family involvement is critical to program success because it reinforces and helps sustain the effects of school success (Bronfenbrenner 1974).

Parents also benefit by being involved in their children’s education. They develop a greater appreciation of the important role they play in their children’s education, a sense of adequacy and self-worth, strengthened social networks, and motivation to continue their own education (Davies, 1988).

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1972) concludes that through parent involvement parents not only become more effective as parents but they become more effective as people. Once they see they
can do something about their children's education, they see they can do something about their housing, their community and their jobs (Amundson, 1988).

Epstein (1986) has shown that teachers discover that their lives are made easier if they get help from parents, and that parents who are involved tend to have more positive views of teachers. Parents tend to rate teachers' interpersonal skills higher, appreciate teachers' efforts more, and rate teachers' abilities higher. Parents also believe that they should help their children, get most of their ideas on how to help from teachers and change their behavior at home to be more supportive of their child.

The research on the effects of parental involvement has two important messages. First, parent involvement is important for low-income Hispanic children because the cultures of home and school are markedly different for these children. This is unlike the experience of children from middle-class homes for whom school is similar in values, expectations, and environments to their own homes and families.

When children live in two worlds, or when school and home are "worlds apart," as Sara Lightfoot (1978) has stated, children cannot be expected to bridge the gap and overcome the confusion of from whom to learn from. The predictable consequence in such situations is that children usually
embrace the familiar home culture, including the academic components and goals.

It may be difficult to imagine how distinct these two worlds really are for these children, particularly for low-income Hispanic children. It is important for parents to become involved with their children's schools and teachers, because such involvement helps children function in a school setting where shared goals and values develop. The children's teachers are not expecting something from them that conflicts with family expectations.

Susan Ziegler (1987) draws on research from Joyce Epstein and Anne Henderson to explain the gap in school achievement so often found between working-class and middle-class children. She attributes this to substantial differences in attitudes and expectations in child-parent patterns and in parent-school interactions.

The evidence is clear that parental encouragement activities and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development when their families emphasize schools, let the children know they do, and do so continually over the school years (Epstein, 1986 p. 1-2).
Parents who show a strong interest in their children’s education, promote the development of attitudes that are key to achievement and attitudes that are more a product of how the family interacts than of its social class or income. If schools treat parents as powerless or unimportant, or if schools discourage parents from taking an interest in their children’s education, this will promote the development of attitudes in parents and consequently in their children, that inhibit school achievement (Henderson, 1981).

A second message from parental involvement research is that school personnel can intervene positively, effectively and efficiently to teach most parents to make a difference in their children’s education. Even though socioeconomic status and family background correlates with achievement, other home factors are important too. For example: parents interest in school; involvement in their children’s education; reading to their children; and positive attitudes about learning will influence school achievement (Sattes, 1985).

In the late 1970’s, the effective schooling movement tried to convince educators that public education could no longer be tied to whether or not parents were induced to be involved in their children’s education. Seeking to lift blame for school failure from the poor and minority families, Edmonds insisted that some schools succeeded with their children, partly because of the school’s determination to
serve all their pupils without regard to family background (Edmonds, 1986). He also believed that without parent participation, schools cannot move to the excellence that is the ultimate objective in public education. Parent involvement was eventually added to the list of requirements for an effective school after the founder, Ronald Edmond's death, because it was finally realized by the effective schooling movement that parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. "What parents do to help their children learn is more important to academic success that how well off the family is" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 7).

At the national level, benefits of parent involvement have been recognized and parent involvement has been endorsed as a strategy for school improvement. For example, the first national goal for education listed in America 2000: An Education Strategy states that "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 3). Parents are believed to be their child's primary teacher.

California was one of the first states in the nation to acknowledge the benefits of parent involvement. California has both a state board of education comprehensive policy on parent involvement and a state law mandating parent involvement in school districts and schools. The policy of
the California State Board of Education, adopted on January, 1989, outlined the following six researched-based types of parent involvement for districts to implement:

1. Help parents develop parenting skills and foster conditions at home that support children's efforts in learning.

2. Provide parents with the knowledge of techniques to assist children in learning at home.

3. Provide access to and coordinate community and support services for children and families.

4. Promote clear, two-way communication between the school and the family as to school programs and children's progress.

5. Involve parents, after appropriate training, in instructional and support roles at the school.

6. Support parents as decision makers and develop their leadership in governance, advisory and advocacy roles (California Department of Education, 1992, pp. 3-5).

Further support for parent involvement came with the passage of California Assembly Bill 322 (Waters). Effective in January, 1991, Assembly Bill 322 mandates that parent involvement policies and programs are required in the federal amendments to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and makes the implementation of parent involvement a
contingency for receipt of state school improvement and economic aid funds.

The dismal fact is that as effective as parental involvement is in children's education and as effective as most parents can be as co-educators, many low-income Hispanic families will never realize their potential (hence neither will their children) unless schools take the initiative to reach out to parents.

But the key point is that for many parents who are poor and from minority and immigrant families, the initiative has to come from the school and a diverse and persistent strategy is needed to break down barriers and establish trust (Davies, 1987, p. 157).
HISPANIC PROFILE

Nationally, the Hispanic population now exceeds twenty-two million people according to the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau. Since 1980, the Hispanic population has increased by 53 percent.

Among children enrolled in U.S. elementary schools, about one in ten is Hispanic (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans of Spanish origin). The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and the College Board (1991) predict that the number of Hispanics enrolled in elementary and secondary schools will increase from 3.3 million to more than 5 million students in 1994-95. In 2030, Hispanics will make up 20 percent of the school population (Haycock and Duany, 1991).

Approximately 89 percent of the Hispanic population reside in the urban centers of nine states; Florida, New York, Illinois, Texas, New Mexico, New Jersey, Colorado, and California. Mexican Americans account for two-thirds of the Hispanic population and is the group that is growing the most rapidly. Most Mexican Americans live in the southwestern United States.

Hispanics are not a homogeneous group even though they share a common language and heritage of Spanish colonization. They differ on such variables such as race, age, socioeconomic status, geography, the nature of arrival in the U.S.
(immigration, migration, exile, or asylum), the length of their residence in the U.S., and their country of origin (Liontos, 1992).

Nicolau and Ramos (1990) note U.S. Hispanics' country of origin is as follows: 63 percent are Mexicans; 13 percent are Central and South Americans; 20 percent are Puerto Ricans; 5 percent are Cubans. In addition the differences among Hispanic subgroups is greater than the overall differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics (Haycock and Duany 1991).

**Poverty and Unemployment**

Of course, not all Hispanics are poor. There is a growing middle-class. However, the Hispanic community has lower average incomes and higher rates of unemployment and poverty than does the general population. The median U.S. income for Hispanics is $21,769, compared to a national median family income of $33,915 for Whites (Statistical Abstracts of U.S. 1990). Poverty for Hispanic children (38 percent) is nearly twice as high as it is for American children in general (21 percent) according to the U.S. Census Bureau 1991 figures.

Since unskilled jobs of the past are disappearing, most of today's new jobs require employees who can read, write, and compute at high levels, analyze and interpret information, draw conclusions, and make decisions. Many Hispanic students, do not have the skills needed for employment. (Ochoa, 1990).
High Dropout Rates and Low Academic Achievement

Hispanics have the highest school drop-out rate. Four in ten Hispanics leave school without a high school diploma and half of these dropouts leave school before completing ninth grade (Haycock and Duany, 1991). Fewer than 48 percent of Hispanic males and 65 percent of black males graduate compared to 75 percent white males (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Of the 55 percent of Hispanic students who do graduate, only 10 percent have sufficient skills to continue on to college (Ochoa, 1990).

Not only are Hispanic dropout rates among the highest, they do not show any of the recent improvements seen in other racial/ethnic groups. For example, according to the September 1991 National Education Goals Panel report card, between 1975 and 1990, high school completion rates for 19 and 20 year-olds improved 12 percentage points for Blacks, and the completion rates for Hispanics remained consistently low.

In 1984-85, the California State Department of Education, reported that 46.3 percent of California Hispanic twelfth graders attended schools where the average reading scores ranked in the states lowest twenty-fifth percentile (compared to 11.8 percent of white students). Only 9 percent of Hispanic students attended schools with the average reading scores in the top twenty-fifth percentile (compared to 34.1 percent of white students). The statistics are similar for
math scores of third-to-sixth-graders (Ochoa, 1990).

A mother’s educational level is a good predictor of her children’s school success only when the mother is actually involved with the school (Ziegler, 1987). If the statement is true, Hispanics are at another disadvantage, because Hispanic mothers most likely to have school-age children are over three times as likely to have dropped out of high school as are other American women in that age group (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990). One-third of Hispanic children have parents with less than nine years of schooling (Haycock and Duany, 1991).

Hispanic children enter school with readiness skills only slightly behind other children, the gap grows as they progress through the grades. The average Hispanic student is about six months behind by the third grade, two years by the eighth grade and more than three grade levels by the twelfth grade if he makes it there at all (Haycock and Duany, 1991).

Unprepared for Public Schools

As a result of their socialization and cultural background, many low-income Hispanic children are unprepared for U.S. Schools. Many of them lack the necessary motor, cognitive, and social/emotional development experiences that help ensure success at school. A federally sponsored survey found that Hispanic parents were less likely than their white or black peers to talk with their children about school, which may be due in part to the division which their culture makes
between school and home (Rothman, 1990). In fact, Hispanic parents do not talk with their children about many subjects that parents in other cultures discuss with their children, and the reason is that Hispanic children are socialized differently than other American children. Hispanic culture does not promote casual conversations between parents and children in most low-income Hispanic families. As a result, teachers may find it hard to understand or reach Hispanic children who have been socialized differently from middle-class children.

Because of their limited schooling, many parents are not be able to provide their children with learning experiences that foster successful entry into the schools (Kurtz, 1988). Although they teach their children essential social skills such as cooperation, most low-income parents are unaware of specific practices such as talking and reading to children, and encouraging their curiosity. These practices must begin at home and must be carried out by a child’s first and most important teachers - the parents.

Hispanic parents can learn how to help their child succeed in the public schools. Most families are unaware of the powerful role they can play in their children’s education by getting involved in the education of their children. The only way Hispanic families will be able to help their children is for the schools to take the initiative to reach out to
them.

**Interest in Education**

The low level parent involvement of low-income Hispanic parents has led many educators to conclude Hispanic parents lack interest in their children's education. Yet, it seems that factors associated with poverty and limited education influence parent involvement more than ethnicity (Black and Hispanic). Parents without a high school education are less likely to be involved in their children’s education than parents with a college degree (Harris, Kagay, and Ross, 1987). Families with incomes of $7,500 or less are three times less likely to be involved in their children’s education as those with incomes over $50,000 (46 percent vs. 16 percent). No difference has been observed between White, Black, and Hispanic parents in level of parent involvement in education. The findings suggest that poverty and limited education has a greater influence than ethnicity.

In 1979-80 a study of four large federal programs examined specific kinds of contacts by low-income and minority parents (Melaragno, Keesling, Lyons, Robbins, and Smith, 1981). The four programs; Title I (now Chapter I), Follow Through, Bilingual Education, and the Emergency School Aid Act (desegregation assistance, now abolished) were designed to serve low-income and minority students, including those with limited English proficiency. More than fifty local projects
of these four programs were selected for case studies. Even though most of the projects had advisory groups with parents in the majority, the parents had little influence in the schools.

Most of the projects provided some kind of parent education, but these were usually one-time efforts and not well attended. While almost all projects attempted to strengthen parent-teacher relationships, the most common form of communication was messages sent home. Few of the projects helped parents teach their children at home or held face to face discussions between parents and staff (Melaragno et. al., 1981).

Parent involvement studies from the 1970's and 1980's surmise that low-income and less educated parents have lower levels of parent involvement in education than middle-income and more educated parents (Moles, 1993). Unfortunately, even the programs especially designed and financed to serve low-income and minority families and their children failed to actively encourage and recruit parent participation at home or at school.

In three national surveys of teachers, parents' lack of interest and support was the most frequently mentioned educational problem (Gallup and Clark, 1987). Many teachers say they do not try to involve low-income and poorly educated parents because these parents lack the ability and interest to
help their children. In the United States, low-income and poorly educated parents are more likely to be Black and Hispanic parents. The United States Census Bureau reports that in 1990, 44.8 percent of all black children were poor compared with 15.9 percent of white children. Among Hispanics, 38.4 percent of children under eighteen are poor. One out of every five children lives in poverty, and the rate is twice as high among Blacks and Hispanics.

Several studies (Laureau, 1987) confirm that almost all parents are intensely interested in their children's education. In a southwestern regional survey on parent involvement in elementary schools, 97 percent of black and Hispanic parents agree that they should make sure children do their homework and wanted to spend time helping them get the best education. Almost all low-income parents (97 percent) in this survey said they cooperate with their children's teachers. Hispanic, black, and low-income parents also showed strong interest in going to school performances, helping children at home with schoolwork, and assisting in school events (Chavkin and Williams, 1988).

In the Metropolitan Life Survey, over two-thirds of black and Hispanic parents agreed that having parents spend much more time with their children in support of schools and teachers would help a lot to improve education, and 84 percent of teachers agreed (Harris, Kagay, and Ross, 1987). The
survey also found that inner-city parents were less satisfied with the frequency of their contacts with teachers and wanted to communicate with them more. These studies indicate a strong interest in their children's education among low-income and minority parents.

Research at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, found that principals and teachers believed that parents would help their children more at home if they knew what to do and that principals should take the lead in helping parents and teachers to work together (Williams and Stallworth, 1982). Nearly 80 percent of parents nationwide with school age children would be willing to spend an evening a month at school learning how to improve their children's interest and performance in school work (Gallup, 1981). In the Maryland study, 85 percent of elementary parents said they spent a half hour or more an evening helping their children when requested by the teacher and were willing to spend even more time if asked (Epstein, 1983). Low-income parents in the Southwest also wanted to be involved in school decisions such as evaluating their child's progress, determining how much homework is assigned, and selecting methods of classroom discipline. They were as interested as parents with higher incomes in being involved in such decisions (Williams and Chavkin, 1989).
BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

The consistently strong interest among low-income and minority parents of being involved with their children's education and the schools suggests other factors may explain the lower rates of parent involvement. At least three factors may account for this low level parent involvement: these are limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration; restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools.

Limited Skills and Knowledge

Both educators and low-income and minority parents suffer from limited skills and knowledge for interacting effectively. For low-income Hispanic parents, a serious handicap in supporting their children's education is their limited education or lack of fluency in English. Besides restricting employment and interaction in the community, this also impedes effective interaction with teachers, understanding of schoolwork, and ability to assist children academically at home. In a study of two inner-city junior high schools, it was found that parents felt a need for more information on their children's progress and a better understanding of their schoolwork, and wanted parent support groups for assistance (Leitch and Tangri, 1988). The Southwest regional survey found that most low-income parents (97 percent) wanted help in
understanding the subjects being taught to their elementary-school children, and also wanted teachers to give them ideas to help their children with homework (Williams and Chavkin, 1989).

In a Maryland survey (Becker and Epstein, 1982) parents voiced similar concerns. Most parents wanted more ideas from schools and teachers to help their children at home and a better understanding about their children’s schoolwork and teacher’s expectations of the students.

Teachers receive little help in developing their skills and knowledge for collaborating with parents. Few teachers receive training on involving parents in their children's education. Only 4 percent of teacher-training institutions in the Southwest offered a course on parent-teacher relations, and 15 percent of teacher-training institutions provided part of a course. When asked if a course in working with parents should be required for undergraduate students in elementary education, 83 percent of teacher educators, and 83 percent of principals, and 73 percent of teachers in the region agreed (Chavkin and Williams, 1988). Since few school districts provide teachers in-service training on involving parents in their children’s education, most teachers must rely on their past experiences in dealing with parents.

Communication problems can occur within the school as well. Davies (1988) states that communication between school
and low-income and minority parents is primarily negative and is focused largely on academic and behavioral problems. In a study of parents in inner-city black neighborhoods, it was found that even though these parents had talked about their children’s problems with school counselors or administrators, these persons often did not relay the information to teachers, although parents assumed they did. When they met, parents and teachers did not plan strategies for each to pursue to deal with the behavioral or academic problem, nor did they agree to re-evaluate situations at a later date. The parents and teacher merely exchanged information. The lack of mutual understanding, coordination, and planning, rather than misperceptions by teachers and parents of each other, turned out to be major barriers to parent involvement (Leitch and Tangri, 1988). National survey data reveals that 60 percent of all parents favor the school giving more guidance to teachers on involving parents better. Parents want to be able to help their children. However, only 41 percent of teachers believe such outreach training would help greatly to improve education (Harris, Kagay, and Ross, 1987). The reluctance of many teachers to endorse this training is baffling because parents’ are voicing a strong interest in receiving further assistance from teachers. It might be that further training and reaching out to parents may be seen as an extra burden of added responsibility, or teachers may believe parents will not
benefit from the assistance offered.

**Restricted Opportunities for Interaction**

Both parents and educators must also contend with other demands on their time and school policies and practices that restrict their ability to communicate and collaborate with each other. In many families, both parents work outside the home, making it difficult if not impossible to attend conferences and meetings scheduled during the day. Many low-income families are simply struggling to survive. About 70 percent of mothers of school aged children are now in the work force. Many parents cannot attend school functions without losing a day's pay. A Metropolitan Life Survey noted that parents could not attend school activities during the day because activities were scheduled during work hours (Harris, 1987). Teacher contract and custodians' hours also limit meeting times and places.

Even the most convenient meeting times may still mean that families need care for young children or transportation to the school. For many low-income families child care and transportation may be non-existent or too expensive. Car pool and child care at the school can help alleviate these logistical problems. Some schools can hold weekend meetings to attract more parents (Dauber and Epstein, 1989). None of these changes will suffice, however, if parents are notified of the meeting too late. This is a serious complaint in some
low-income areas (Leitch and Tangri, 1988).

Although mothers who work outside the home usually cannot volunteer to get involved in daytime school activities, they nevertheless show as strong an interest in their children’s education as non-employed mothers, helping their children just as much at home with homework as non-employed mothers (Leitch and Tangri, 1988).

Educators are parents too and experience some of the same competing home responsibilities that keep many parents from the schools. Evening meetings can be a serious burden for teachers, especially if they live far away. Concerns for personal safety after dark in low-income areas make both staff and parents hesitant to attend evening meetings. The demands of teachers’ school responsibilities also limits their time for additional tasks, like working to involve parents in their children’s education.

Other school policies beyond meeting times and staff working hours also tend to restrict opportunities for interaction. The traditional fall open house gives parents little chance to discuss children’s progress. The open house typically consists of a brief overview of school programs and courses when it could be an evening for both teachers and parents to plan parent involvement activities throughout the school year.

Locked doors and notices to check in immediately at the
office makes many parents feel like intruders. Many parents perceive the policy of checking in the office immediately on arrival to the campus as a sign of mistrust (Liontos, 1992). The school staff needs to make parents feel welcomed. One Hispanic parent in a speech to school administrators stated the importance of a welcoming attitude when the parent walks into a school building. Bob Chase, vice-president of the National Education Association, says many schools have made parents feel unwelcome. Conferences are restricted to certain days and parents are not allowed to visit classrooms without prior approval from the teacher (McCormick, 1990). Written school policies tend to discourage parent activities at all levels throughout school districts. Unfortunately, there seem to be very few written policies at any level supporting parent involvement in the schools (Chavkin and Williams, 1988). Schools continue to maintain traditional patterns of interacting with parents with the following ritualistic events; short conferences, large open houses, parent association meetings, fund raising activities, and children's performances.

**Psychological and Cultural Barriers**

Low-income and minority parents and teachers may be entangled by various psychological obstacles to mutual involvement such as misperceptions and misunderstandings, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidation, and
distrust. They may also be victims of cultural barriers reflecting differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definitions of appropriate roles (Chavkin, 1993).

Regarding psychological barriers; certain inherent tensions between teachers and parents must be considered. Parents are primarily concerned with the educational development of his or her child, whereas teachers are concerned with the progress of the whole class. This difference in perspective is compounded for the low-income and minority parents, who are likely to feel threatened by the authority of the teacher; perceived socioeconomic-status differences, and their lack of formal education (Lightfoot, 1978). Suspicion and misunderstanding may affect both parents and school staff. Teachers are overwhelmed periodically with a sense of futility regarding the limitations of low-income minority parents. Many parents are resentful of schools that are depriving their children of a quality education parents believe middle-class children are receiving (Ascher, 1987).

The limited education and difficulties low-income minority parents have experienced in school lead many parents to fear and mistrust the schools; not expecting schools to help their children succeed (Davies, 1989). In addition, schools tend to communicate with these parents mainly when their children are in some kind of trouble. Surveys show that
most teachers do not contact low-income parents unless there is an academic or behavioral problem and as a result the parents are more likely to support their child than the teacher who up to this point is a stranger (Lindle, 1990). The frequent educational difficulties of low-income and minority children and the predominance of bad news from schools only reinforce parents’ anxiety and defensiveness when dealing with the schools (Lightfoot, 1978). The evidence is mixed whether teachers maintain different kinds of relationships with low-income parents and middle-class parents (Laureau, 1987). In a detailed ethnographic study, teachers were shown to project onto children the stereotypes they held of their parents, setting the stage for self-fulfilling prophesies about the child’s abilities (Lightfoot, 1978). Many teachers form judgements about the children’s cognitive ability by just talking to the parents (Davies, 1988). The operation of stereotypes can be seen in a National Education Association survey (1979) asking who is most to blame when children do poorly in school. Teachers blamed children’s home life much more often (81 percent) than the children (14 percent), the school (4 percent), or the teachers (2 percent). Teachers tend to see low-income minority parents as overwhelmed with problems and have little faith in the parents’ ability to follow instructions and take action on problems (Ascher, 1987).
The parent-teacher conference can be teeming with psychological barriers for parents. Invitations, as well as other communication to parents, are frequently written in educational jargon, big words and lengthy prose. The school setting itself is uncomfortable for many low-income minority parents for various reasons. Many low-income parents carry memories of school failure or of being intimidated by administrators and teachers. Some parents experience feelings of inadequacy and poor self worth when dealing with educators. Even though many parents question their ability to become involved in their children’s education, parents want to learn how to help their children, (Davies, 1989). Actions such as asking parents to review the child’s progress, bringing their questions, discussing strengths before problems, formulating with parents a joint plan of action, and following up the conference with further contacts are some suggestions to reduce hostility and ambiguity in the conference (Chrispeels, 1988). In general, parents prefer a personal rather than a professional or businesslike approach. Parents want to be treated with respect (Lindle, 1989).

Cultural differences may also impose barriers between low-income and minority parents and the schools. Racism in the school appears in both verbal expression and more subtle forms such as paternalism and lowered expectations of minority students (Leitch and Tangri, 1988). Cultural and social
groups may also have different views on the best approaches to teaching and value patterns regarding academic achievement. In one white working-class community, parents turned over the responsibility for education to teachers, whereas middle-class parents in another community saw education as a collaborative effort (Laureau, 1987).

In many Latin countries, the role of parents and the role of the school in education are sharply delineated and divided (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990). Decisions are made by a ministry of education with no input from parents. Parents are not expected to question the work of educators and often feel inadequate to contribute to school matters, especially if their own education is limited and they do not understand what is being taught in the schools. Many Hispanic parents believe educators have the right and expertise to make all the decisions about how to educate their children. Many Hispanic immigrant parents believe they are being helpful by maintaining a respectful distance from the education system (Liontos, 1982).

For many low-income Hispanic parents, the school represents an alien and impersonal environment managed by Whites who are insensitive to the Hispanic's language and culture. Consequently, they often feel uncomfortable and fearful in the school especially when they cannot communicate effectively in English or have suffered from discrimination in
their own school experience (Moles, 1992).

Although most schools have some form of parent involvement, in practice it offers families limited opportunity for parent participation (Amundson, 1988). Educators view parent participation as desirable but not necessary. Principals and teachers favor more parent involvement in the traditional ways like attending class, plays, or holding bake sales to benefit the band uniform fund. But a substantial majority of teachers and principals do not view the parental role in educational decisions as either useful or appropriate (Williams and Stallworth, 1984). Teachers frequently comment about the failure of getting parents involved in the schools. The euphemism heard over and over is "They are hard to reach." Based on twenty-five years of work with minority parents across the nation, Rich (1993) believes parents do care about their children and want deeply to help. But the question that each teacher need to ask is, Do I really want to involve the parents? Smith (1970) says when the answer is an unqualified "Yes", the means to involve low-income and minority parents will become a reality.

Rhoda Becher (1984) found that some teachers worry that parents involvement in the form of parent volunteers in the classroom might mean losing control of their classroom. They fear that parent volunteers will undermine their authority, disrupt their classrooms, take over their teaching
responsibilities and refuse to follow teachers instructions and school regulations. Sandra Feldman, president of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, reports that teachers are concerned that parents will interfere, cause confusion, and not work productively with children (Jennings, 1990). They also believe that some parent volunteers will speak little English, will use non-standard English or demonstrate other undesirable characteristics in the classroom.

Teachers report they are uncertain how they can involve parents and still keep their role as experts (Ziegler, 1987). Parents continue to express interest in more active roles such as being co-learners with their children, functioning as advocates, and participating in decision making in the school (Slaughter and Kuehne, 1988).

Overcoming the barriers for involving low-income and minority parents in the education of their children will require the efforts of parents and educators. Who should make the first move? Schools need to make the first move.
ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

From 1986-1988 the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory gathered information concerning the elements that make parent involvement programs successful by interviewing key informants with expertise in the area of parent involvement programs and visiting programs in a five-state region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas). Seven essential elements were found in all successful parent involvement programs (Williams and Chavkin, 1989).

1. Written policies. Programs had written policies that legitimized the importance of parent involvement and helped frame the context for program activities. The policies helped both staff and parents understand how parents would take part in the program. In addition, the policies gave superintendents leverage with central office, building, and classroom staff for ensuring that parent involvement was central to the school program.

2. Administrative support. Administrative support was provided in three ways. First, funds were designated in the main budget for implementing the programs. Second, material/product resources—meeting space, communication equipment, computer, duplication/medial equipment were made available to
complement specific program activities. Third, people were designated to carry out program efforts or events.

3. Training. Programs provided training for staff as well as parents. The training for both teachers and parents occurred over time and focused on developing collaboration skills as well as working with children.

4. Partnership approach. The partnership approach was reflected in both teachers and parents involved in activities such as joint planning, goal setting, definitions of roles, program assessment, development of instructional and school support efforts needs assessments and setting of school standards.

5. Two-way communication. Communication between home and school occurred frequently and on a regular basis. Parents felt comfortable coming to schools, sharing ideas and voicing concerns. Staff did not feel threatened by parent input but welcomed it and used it to plan learning activities for students. Schools developed their own means of communication that best served parents.

6. Networking. Programs networked with other programs to share information, resources, and technical
expertise. It also helped program staff identify additional resources for their own use.

7. Evaluation. Programs had regular evaluation activities at key stages as well as at the conclusion of a cycle or phase. It enabled parents and staff to make program changes on a continuous basis to ensure that activities strengthened the parent-teacher partnership.
PARENT INVOLVEMENT RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Most low-income Hispanic families are hesitant to get involved in their children's education. The first challenge for the school is to convince the parents to attend the first meeting. The following recruitment strategies are adapted from Nicolau and Ramos (1990), Liontos (1992), Krasnow (1990), Davies (1988), Haycock and Duany (1991), and Swap (1990), and Hester (1989).

Assign a Parent Liaison

Assign a parent liaison who is genuinely interested in working with the Hispanic community. The person assigned to work with the Hispanic community must be someone who speaks the language, knows how to work with Hispanic families, understands and is sensitive to the culture, and is sincerely interested in involving parents in school activities.

Survey the Community

The parent liaison needs to become familiar with the families in the school and can do so by gathering information about the families' interests, needs, and concerns. The information gathered is needed to make decisions about whom to invite to which kind of affair and at what time. The parents can be surveyed, possibly when they register their child or during a home visit by the parent liaison. The following are questions that can be asked: Are they single parents, welfare parents, working mothers, intact families, large families,
immigrant families, native born families? Do they speak English? Who are the primary care takers of the children—the mother, the father or the grandparents? Are the neighborhoods dangerous? Do they live near or far from the school? Is transportation available? Do the fathers permit the mothers to go out alone? Are there places or institutions in the neighborhood where the families gather or feel comfortable? Do many of the families appear troubled? Where do they work? Do they belong to any organizations? Do they have spokesperson or leader?

Use a Variety of Recruitment Techniques

It is best to use a variety of techniques to recruit parents to attend school parent involvement activities. Some techniques are: home visits; telephone calls; flyers and handwritten notes from teachers given to students to take home; notices posted on school bulletin boards and in local neighborhoods; health centers; social service agencies; announcements at Sunday Spanish-Language church services; on local radio and television programs; neighborhood sound tracks; in schools monthly calendar and newsletters; articles in local newspapers; child made invitations; Spanish speaking volunteers posted at school doors and yard gates during drop-off and pick-up times; distribution of Spanish-language posters throughout the community.

The personal approach, talking face to face with the
parents, in their primary language, at their home or at the school is the strategy which may be most effective in gaining their confidence and getting them to attend a school activity. Most Spanish speaking parents will assume an invitation to a school activity will be in English so they need to be told otherwise.

**Arrange Home Visits**

A single home visit or conversation may not be enough to get a parent to attend a school activity so two or three visits may be necessary. Home visits serve two purposes. First, it is one way to convince the family to at least attend one activity. Second, it provides an opportunity to receive answers to questions that are basic to the formation of a successful program.

**Follow Up Visits or Invitations**

The parent liaison can follow up home visits with a friendly telephone call or invitation to parent involvement programs. Many Hispanic parents do not read or choose not to open a letter from school because of the fear it might be bad news. If an invitation to a school activity or follow up invitation to a school activity is sent home, it must be in the family's primary language, non-intimidating and appealing. It may helpful to follow up invitations to school activities with a telephone call one or two days before the event.
Post Teachers and Principals Outside the School

The principal and teachers can greet parents when they drop off and pick up their children. By being friendly towards the parents, they are more likely to perceive the school a cordial and caring place.

Parents to Recruit Parents

Parents can be used to recruit parents by building parent networks. If some parents are already involved in school activities, encourage them to bring neighbors or friends to school events. Survey where families live. Try to involve groups of parents living in the same neighborhood. Use a core of involved Hispanic parents to serve as the motivational center for organizing other parents. Parents are effective when they receive special leadership training, programs objectives, and school procedures and regulations. Post parent volunteers at school gates, in yards, or in hallways to greet other parents in their native language to personally give them information about upcoming events.

Ask Parents What They Would be Interested in Doing

It is more important to ask parents what they would be interested in doing, so the first parent involvement activity planned is something that is important to the parents. Parents will attend when they believe they are offered an activity of interest to them. If activities are planned to accommodate parents' needs and concerns, the parents will soon
respond to the schools' concerns.

**Schedule the First Event Outside the School**

It may be best to schedule the first event at a site other than the school. The school is not a place in which many low-income Hispanic parents feel comfortable and can be threatening to parents with little or no education. In that case, it may be best to choose a site within the neighborhood, perhaps even a neighborhood home. Nicolau and Ramos (1991) give two examples from their research where the first event was held outside the school for low-income Hispanic families. The first meeting was held at McDonald's then later at the public housing project where many of the families lived. Another project operated much like a Tupperware party in the parents' homes where the principal, teacher, counselor and school nurse went to the home. Once the parents feel comfortable with the school staff, the next meeting can be held at the school.

**Make the First Event Fun**

Plan on making the first event fun. Start with a social event or ice breaker. A formal meeting or conference for the first activity can intimidate and scare many parents away. The first activity needs to be warm, comfortable, non-judgmental, and beneficial to the parents.

**Use the First Event to Capture the Parents' Attention**

Use the initial event to capture the parents' attention
by planning an activity or issue with broad appeal. The goal for the first event is to lessen the parents' nervousness and gain their confidence. Then for the next event offer the parents some carefully considered options that are similar to their expressed needs and interest. They need to believe they are gaining something out of the activity and their feelings are respected and concerns valued.

**Summary**

There is no recipe nor blueprint for parent involvement programs that can be commonly applied to every school setting, but there are effective practices that can be applied to all parent involvement programs.

The most critical dimension in providing educational programs for parents is to make sure the programs offered are responsive to parents' needs and interests as the parents perceive them. Some form of needs assessment is critical, whether it be through interviews, questionnaires, group meeting or some combination of these activities. Gathering information from parents is important because it demonstrates that parents' concerns and needs are of interest to school personnel.

Once data is collected, programs should reflect the parents' priorities. If possible, an advisory committee of parents and educators should get together to review priorities, develop programs and evaluate programs that are
presented. Someone needs to be assigned to take responsibility for coordinating tasks such as finding out what parents want, identifying and securing resources, and publishing and evaluating the programs.

When presenting activities, parents' concerns about transportation, scheduling, and child care should be taken into account. Inviting parents to evaluate activities shows an interest in program improvement and gives parents the feeling of ownership of the activities. Provide a variety of activities but in general it is best to offer a few high-quality, well planned activities than a lot of mediocre events.
KEEPING PARENTS INVOLVED

To keep parents involved in parent involvement programs, every meeting has to respond to some need or concern of the parents. Parents will come when they believe they are getting something out of the activities; their feelings are respected, and they are a valued and needed resource (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990).

The following ideas for keeping parents involved are from Lontos, (1992), Nicolau and Ramos, (1990), Krasnow (1990), Haycock and Duany (1991), Swap (1990), and Davies (1988) and Hester (1989)

Give Parents A Sense Of Ownership By Consulting With Them

Survey parents' interest on subject matter by consulting with them to give them a sense of ownership in regards to the planned parent involvement programs. Spend time asking the parents what is important to them because it is necessary that the parents' interests are respected and addressed. Parents' concerns, for example, might be AIDS, teen pregnancy, drugs, spouse and child abuse. The school concerns, for example, might be of homework, study habits, and discipline.

Pay Attention To Format

Parents are more comfortable and less intimidated in a small informal group setting. They should be actively involved in such things as: role playing, group discussions, making things, going places. Events should be made as
participatory as possible. Meetings that require parents to passively listen to a speaker are seldom effective.

**Establish A Caring Environment**

Recognizing that it is important to establish a caring environment, giving parents a sense of ownership and making them feel welcome, a school can create a parent center (a converted classroom) that is seen by the parents as theirs. The center can be used for informal social gatherings as well as workshops and courses.

Making the parents feel welcome and comfortable at activities is essential in maintaining attendance. Some other ways to promote a caring environment are:

- Talk with parents, not at them.
- Share personal experiences that you have had with your own children.
- Refrain from asking questions that can be seen as having "wrong answers" or that may make parents appear foolish; never judge parents or make them feel judged.
- Provide child care, interpreters, and transportation when necessary.
- Offer refreshments, however modest, at all events, unless the event takes place in the classroom.
- Recognize the efforts of parents.
- Establish a warm friendly climate.
- Set aside a parents' room in the school that has
comfortable furniture, desk, and reading material.

Stock the parents' room with applications and forms that relate to parents' needs (such as license renewal forms, food stamp forms, voter registration cards) and provide someone at specific hours who can help parents fill out the forms.

Make it easy for parents to develop new friendships and social support (Liontos, 1992, p. 143).

**Choose Different Times To Schedule Events**

Choose different times to schedule the events because it is essential that activities are scheduled with consideration for the parents' availability. Be more flexible in arranging parent involvement activities and parent conferences. Many working parents may not be able to attend during the day and many Hispanic women may not be able to attend when it is time to feed their families.

**Prepare Staff With In-Service Workshops**

Prepare the staff with regular in-service training so they can have an understanding of the community they are serving. Appropriate training can make a difference to teachers readiness to involve parents in parent involvement programs and the level of communication and collaboration skill teachers need for effective parent involvement programs. In-service workshops are needed in such areas as human relations, cross-cultural training, conferencing, career counseling, family structures, family processes, parental
roles in education and working effectively with parents.

Involve Parents In Activities They Can Later Duplicate And Share With Their Children

Involve parents in programs to enrich their children’s educational experience for example: offer trips, picnics, cultural and social events. Provide parents with a list of suggestions of activities they can do at home with their children.

Organize Special Interest Groups Or Other Popular Projects

Organize popular projects or special interest groups to involve parents. Popular projects might include the following: parent activity centers in children’s classrooms; "Make and Take" workshops where parents learn to make educational games and how to use them at home; community projects, such as planting gardens and building playground equipment; sewing, gardening or craft clubs.

Also popular are tutoring and homework centers where students receive assistance with homework, and parenting classes. Provide informal workshops on issues first identified by the parents and then by the schools. The ever popular childrens’ performances always draw parents to the school.

Discover Parents’ Talents

Discover parents’ talents and abilities. Give them the opportunity to demonstrate their talents at school. When
parents contribute their time or talent, let the community
know by publicizing the parents' accomplishments in every way
possible.

Avoid Telling Parents They Should Change The Way They Are
Rearing Their Children

Never criticize Hispanic parents' child-rearing
practices. Many low-income and immigrant Hispanic parents
need to become familiar with the U.S. Schools and what they
need to do to help their children be successful in school.
Parent involvement activities can be one of the ways Hispanic
parents can learn about the school and how to improve their
children's school achievement. It is important to identify
the Hispanic parents' positive qualities and praise them.

Be Generous With Recognition And Awards

Parents and children need positive recognition. When
parents give of their time and expertise to the school it is
important that their recognition be publicly acknowledged.
The school might choose to offer certificates, a celebration
dinner, a school assembly where children express their
appreciation, an article in the local newspaper or a program
on local television explaining what the individuals have
contributed.

It is also difficult for parents to resist involvement
when the school acknowledges their child's accomplishments.
Incorporate tangible rewards for parents and students.
Examples are: stickers, balloons, pins, refrigerator magnets, pencils, bookmarks, t-shirts, and coffee mugs.

Communicate Positively And Frequently

Communicate positively and frequently with parents. Some ways to communicate are: teacher thank you notes; sixty second phone calls; star of the week; newsletter; parent-teacher conference; home-school notebook; good news notes; and home visits.

If a meeting or workshop is essential and a parent cannot attend, one way of getting the information to the parent is to videotape the event and then providing a viewing of the videotape for that parent.

Try New Ideas And Projects

Being innovative is necessary because it provides variety and renews interest in parent involvement activities. For example, a new and successful approach to parent involvement took place in Texas. It was called "Rewards" and involved gift certificates redeemable at local stores. The idea behind the rewards was to motivate parents by rewarding them and their children with tangible items for fulfilling specific obligations (attending parent meeting, conferring with teachers, supporting teachers in the classroom). In fact, the teacher's cooperation was also rewarded (Nicolau and Ramos, 1990).

The rewards attracted parents to school activities but
once the parents felt comfortable about coming to school the rewards were no longer important.

**Flexibility and Creativity is Vital**

Be flexible and creative when developing programs that are responsive to the particular needs of the parents. Be ready to change program operations to respond to families changing needs. Parents should be involved in evaluating educational programs.

**Keep Records Of Events**

Keep records of events and raise expectations for future events by taking pictures at events and making displays. Some of the events may be open house, audio-visual presentations, potluck supper, spring fling, end of the year picnic, and gym show.

**When Ready, Involve Parents In Decision-Making Groups**

Be aware and supportive of parents who may be interested in being a member of the parent advisory committee, PTA or task forces. Some parents may need leadership training in order to feel ready to be involved in a decision-making group.

**Organize Retreats**

Organize retreats for a strong core group of parents. Retreats offer cohesion and clarify the goals and objectives of the school's parent involvement program.

**Establish A Network Of Contacts With Community Resources**

Build a strong relationship with a community-based agency
in the neighborhood. Provide information to parents about community resources available to help them. It may be the most efficient way of helping the families.

Welcome New Faces

The school staff needs to make a genuine effort to always welcome new parents. Parents need to feel accepted and valued.

Hang In There If The Initial Response Is Not Overwhelming

It takes time to generate interest. Program development will not occur overnight. Do not expect everyone at every event. Parents will choose what works for them. If a core group of parents can be recruited and then keep coming, the word will spread to other parents.

Summary

Educators need to be aware of and to avoid three common pitfalls in designing parent involvement programs. The first occurs when educators develop activities based on what they think parents should know or be interested in. If the parents' interests are not respected and addressed, they will not attend parent involvement activities. A second pitfall is to plan many single session activities on different topics. Although the strategy will meet everyone's needs it often has the opposite effect. The approach is time-consuming, and often the activities are attended by different groups so the parent involvement is not enhanced over time. The third
pitfall is to provide activities which parents have little or no opportunity for parent interaction, feedback and adaptation of new ideas over time. These activities seldom change attitude or behavior (Swap, 1990).
CONCLUSION

A successful education all students requires that schools and families function as full partners in the education of their children. Since the research shows a strong, positive connection between student achievement and parent involvement, low-income Hispanic families need to get involved in their children's education and public schools need to actively encourage Hispanic parent involvement for the benefit of everyone concerned (students, parents, teachers and community). Despite the known benefits, the failure of many schools to involve low-income Hispanic families is due to educational, emotional, political and professional barriers on the part of both parents and school staff. Even though the obstacles are many, educators need to re-examine prevailing beliefs about Hispanic families, their capabilities and interest.

Educators need to get away from the tendency to think of traditional parent involvement programs as the only form of involvement like parents attending meetings and informational workshops planned by the school. Research shows that the traditional forms of parent involvement have been ineffective in convincing low-income Hispanic parents to get involved in their children's education. The research findings show that different strategies may be more appropriate with certain kinds of schools and families, and some kinds of parent
involvement programs may be more easily applied and more beneficial for student learning than others. There are known specific strategies that have been proven to be useful and recommended in recruiting and keeping low-income Hispanic parents involved in the education of their children.

Although there are many creative and successful ideas and parent involvement programs upon which to draw, there is no single recipe for home-school collaboration. Joint planning and mutual respect between school staff and parents are the norms for home-school collaboration. Good communication between home and schools is the key to parent involvement, and the key to good communication is an attitude that welcomes all parents as adult peers in a context of mutual respect.

"Program development is not quick," says Epstein (1991). Schools and parents working together will require an investment of time and sensitive work before progress is evident. It took seven years before progress was evident in San Diego, California (city schools) and is now known nationally for its excellent educational partnership program (parent involvement programs). A successful parent participation program is the whole-hearted commitment of teachers, public schools, and school system.
BARRIERS/SOLUTIONS TO HISPANIC PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Barriers

Possible Solutions

Communication Problems

- Language differences.
- Tradition/cultural differences.

- Conduct meetings, seminars, and workshops in Spanish.
- Have bilingual aide available when Hispanic parents visit the school.
- Encourage parents to bring a bilingual relative or friend.
- Sensitize school personnel to the Hispanic community, its culture, and its special needs.
- Use cultural enrichment activities to bring school and families together.

Feelings of Inferiority

- Limited or no education.

- Involve parents in decision-making, planning, and implementation of activities. Let them know they are important partners.
- Give parents opportunities to demonstrate and use their special skills and talents.

Feelings of Alienation

- Not welcome at school.

- Welcome parents by conveying a positive attitude when they visit the classrooms and at meetings and activities.
- Let parents know you appreciate their presence and the time they are devoting to school.

Lack of Understanding of the Educational System

- Belief that school is an omnipotent force much wiser than parents.

- Hold workshops for Hispanic parents on the mechanics of the school system, and on school curriculum. Remove the mystery from "the system".
- Have parents instruct other parents.

Lack of Time

- Fathers and mothers who work full time find attending daytime activities very difficult.

- Attempt to accommodate working parents and mothers of small children by holding activities and workshops in the evenings or on weekends. Hold some of the functions in their neighborhoods.
Problems Finding Child Care

- Affordable child care or babysitting is difficult to find, especially for low-income parents with more than one child.
- Provide child care for parents who want to attend meetings and workshops.
- Plan activities in which parents and children did not have to be separated.
- Utilize extended family members or teenage siblings to provide child care at meeting site.

Transportation Problems

- Many low-income families may not be able to afford transportation to and from activities.
- Provide transportation, if possible, to and from activities.
- Set up carpools.
- Get help from people and groups in the community.
- Hold activities in the community.

Source: Nicolau and Ramos (1990)
APPENDIX B
ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED
WITH HISPANIC FAMILIES

For additional information you may wish to consult the following organizations.

*ASPIRA: Hispanic Community Mobilization for Dropout Prevention (Janie Petrovich, National Executive Director), ASPIRA Association, Inc., National Office, 1112 16th Street NW, Suite 340, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 835-3600. ASPIRA focuses on creating community awareness and providing practical information to Hispanic parents to help them be more effective participants in their children's education. ASPIRA collaborates with other Hispanic community organizations. The national office provides technical assistance, training, and materials to enhance strategies and models for parent participation.

* Hispanic Policy Development Project (Siobhan Nicolau, President), 250 Park Avenue South, Suite 500A, New York, NY 10003. (212) 529-9323. HPDP has published the booklet Together Is Better: Building Strong Partnerships Between Schools and Hispanic Parents and also has an appealing pamphlet for Hispanic parents (with one page in English, one in Spanish).

* The Home and School Institute, Inc. (Dorothy Rich, President), Special Projects Office, Suite 228, 1201 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 466-3633. Offers publications and help on how parents can get involved in their children's education; has had success in working with at-risk families.

* Institute for Responsive Education (Don Davies, President), 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215. (617) 353-3309. IRE is a nonprofit public interest organization that is studying new approaches to improving relations among schools, parents, and the community. Publishes reports, handbooks, and other publications, including the magazine Equity and Choice.

* The Language Minority Program (Richard Duran and Alejandro Portes, Codirectors), Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218. (301) 338-7570. The goal of the program is to identify, develop, and evaluate effective learning programs for disadvantaged Hispanic, American Indian, Southeast Asian, and other language minority children. The program focuses on rigorous evaluations of practical, replicable programs that can increase the language
skills of language minority children in their home language and in English and can accelerate their learning in traditional school subjects.

* Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (Antonia Hernandez, President and General Counsel), 634 South Spring Street, 11th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014. (213) 629-2512. This civil rights organization conducts a Parent Leadership Program for promoting the participation of Latino parents as leaders at their children's schools. The program involves a twelve-week course, including parent-teacher conferences and meetings with school district officials.

* National Coalition of Title I/Chapter I Parents (Robert Witherspoon, Executive Director), National Parent Center, Edmonds School Building, 9th and D Streets NE, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 547-9286. This organization provides a voice for Chapter I parents at the federal, regional, state, and local levels. The coalition publishes a newsletter, provides training, and sponsors conferences.

* National Committee for Citizens in Education (Carl Marburger and William Rioux, Codirectors), 10840 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 301, Columbia, MD 21044. (301) 997-9300 or 1-800-NETWORK. NCCE seeks to improve public education for all children through increased involvement of parents and citizens in the community.

* National Council of La Raza (Raúl Yzaguirre, President), 810 First Street NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 289-1380. This research and advocacy organization works on behalf of the U.S. Hispanic population and provides technical assistance to community-based organizations. NCLR's Project EXCEL is a national education demonstration project that includes tutoring services and parental education.

* National Research and Development Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning (Don Davies and Joyce Epstein, Codirectors), Boston University, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215. (617) 553-3309. Funded in 1990 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the center will carry out research in family involvement and related issues.

* National Rural Development Institute (Doris Helge, Executive Director), Western Washington University, Miller Hall 359, Bellingham, WA 98225. (206) 676-3576. The institute has recently published a study, The National Study Regarding Rural, Suburban, and Urban At-Risk Students, which shows that rural children are more
likely to be at risk than their counterparts in cities and suburbs.

* Parent Training and Information Centers, and Technical Assistance to Parent Projects (Mildred Winter, Executive Director), 95 Berkeley Street, Suite 104, Boston, MA 02116. (617) 482-2915. The Office of Special Education Programs supports a network of sixty Parent Training and Information Centers in all fifty states and Puerto Rico to enable parents to participate more effectively with professionals in meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities. Technical Assistance to Parent Projects (TAPP) provides technical assistance and coordination to the sixty PTICs and to developing minority programs in urban and rural locations.

* Tucson Dropout Prevention Collaborative (Ralph Chavez, Coordinator), TUSD Starr Center, 102 N. Plumer, Tucson, AZ 85719. (602) 798-2047. The Tucson Dropout Prevention Collaborative functions as an advisory board to the district's dropout prevention coordinator. Part of the collaborative is the innovative parent leadership program called Compadre Network.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


