

1

Policy, Theory, and Research on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

In this chapter, we discuss policy, theory, and research on school, family, and community partnerships. This chapter should provide you with a sense of the extensive literature on family and community involvement, and the different outcomes these behaviors affect.



Passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002 aimed, among other things, to raise overall student achievement and reduce ethnicity- and income-based disparities in school achievement. To accomplish these goals, NCLB mandates a wide range of mechanisms including regular standardized testing of students, the presence of high-quality teachers in classrooms, and increased parental involvement in students' education. The law distinguishes between two forms of parent involvement, one

revolving around school choice and the other focusing on improving home-school relationships.

Much of the educational research and discourse about NCLB has focused on the pros and cons of testing standards and requirements (Linn & Haug, 2002), teacher qualifications (Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2006), and school choice (Belfield & Levin, 2002; Goldhaber & Eide, 2002; Neild, 2005). The topic of school, family, and community partnerships, however, has generated relatively little discussion, despite surveys indicating that new teachers rate interactions with parents as one of the most stressful aspects of their jobs (MetLife, 2005). The part of NCLB mandating that schools and school districts receiving Title I funds set up processes and structures to include more families in their children's education remains overshadowed in most discussions about the efficacy of this legislation.

Title I, Sec. 1118 of NCLB requires that schools receiving funds for serving students from low-income families implement activities to help foster greater family and community involvement. For example, schools are required to create policies stating that family and community involvement are valued goals at the school, to include families on school decision- and policy-making committees, to provide information that helps parents understand academic content and achievement standards, to train educators in how to reach out to parents and implement programs connecting home and school, and to communicate in languages and at reading levels accessible to all families. In addition, NCLB encourages schools to develop partnerships with community-based organizations and businesses to help all students learn and achieve in school.

The inclusion of family involvement in federal education policy is not new and is based on previous legislative efforts to incorporate decades of theory and empirical research. Since the mid-1960s, federal education legislation has included some language about the need for schools to involve families in their children's education. As our theoretical and empirical understanding about the effects of family involvement has evolved, so has family involvement legislation.

Many theorists have long recognized the important role strong school-home connections play in child development and education. Bronfenbrenner (1979), for example, argued that children's behavior and development are influenced by their interactions within their homes, schools, and communities, and also by the "social interconnections between settings, including joint participation, communication, and the existence of information in each setting about the other" (p. 6). Also, Epstein's (2001) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence argues that a child's home and school environments each have a unique influence on her or his development. However, it is the degree to which adults in these settings maintain positive relationships with one another that is critical to her or his academic success.

Beyond theory, scientific evidence supports the inclusion of school, family, and community partnerships in efforts to reform education.

Research on effective schools, those where students are learning and achieving at high levels despite what might be expected given family and neighborhood trends of low socioeconomic status (i.e., high performing-high poverty), has consistently shown that these schools have positive school-home relationships (Chrispeels, 1996; Hoffman, 1991; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 1999; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). More important, these high-performing schools put forth strong efforts to reach out and work with their students' families.

Other studies looking at the ability of school reform to positively affect students have also demonstrated the need for school leaders to develop strong relationships with families and community members. Rosenholz (1989) found that schools "moving" in a positive direction were actively working to bridge students' homes and schools. In contrast, schools that showed no improvement were characterized by a feeling among the staff that there was nothing they could do to engage students' families. Similar findings have been reported in studies investigating school reform in Chicago (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998). Effective and improving schools understand the important role parents play in teachers' ability to foster student learning and academic growth.

The benefits of school-home relationships are based on the development of trust between parents and educators. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argued that schools are successful when there are strong and positive relationships among teachers, students, parents, and the community. They also argued that these relationships are especially important in urban settings, where trust across the school community is a critical resource allowing teachers, students, and parents to succeed. In areas where schools have not traditionally promoted student achievement and success, principals and other leaders need to build programs that bridge home and school, enabling families to have faith in their children's school and to support academic excellence.

Even before children enter school, their interactions with their parents and other significant adults shape language and cognitive development. Families provide "environments for literacy" where children are engaged in literacy activities such as being encouraged to talk and sing, reading books with an adult, and writing letters (Edwards, Pleasants, & Franklin, 1999; Leichter, 1984; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). At the same time, children from different families have been shown to engage in different types and levels of literacy experiences (Heibert, 1980; Teale, 1986), providing them with different understandings of word and language functions (Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1996). These findings have contributed to the understanding that children arrive at school with different knowledge and skill levels as well as different understandings about education.

Still, despite existing differences on the first day of school, all students are more likely to experience academic success if they have a supportive home environment. Studies on family involvement during the K-12 school

years have concluded that students' home environments and family involvement are important predictors of a variety of academic and nonacademic outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ho & Willms, 1996; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; McNeal, 1999; Reynolds & Walberg, 1992). In this chapter, we describe the studies showing the effects of family involvement on student outcomes. First, we summarize the extensive literature showing the effects of family involvement on students' literacy development and reading. We then describe the more limited research on family involvement and students' mathematics and science achievement as well as their school attendance, behavior, attitudes, and adjustment.

PARTNERSHIPS AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Effects on Literacy Development and Reading

Research provides overwhelming evidence of the connection between literacy resources at home and children's literacy development. According to the U.S. Department of Education (Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, & Campbell, 2001), children from homes with more books and more reading by parents tend to perform higher on reading achievement tests than children from less reading-rich environments. Because so much research has looked at how family involvement affects children's literacy development, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a full review. Instead, we provide a brief overview of the research, organized according to children's age and grade level.

The Preschool Years

Most preschools provide reading and language experiences to help all students become "ready" for school, and many preschool programs include efforts to involve families with children in literacy activities. Two experimental studies conducted with families of preschool children in Early Head Start (a federal program for infants and toddlers in families with very low income) and Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education) in Minnesota found that parents could be assisted to work with their children on literacy skills and book-related activities. Both intervention projects found that children in the treatment groups improved their pre-reading language skills compared to students in the control groups (Mathematica, 2001). The programs increased parents' reading stories to children, reading at bedtime, and other reading and language-related activities. A study of the HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) intervention to increase mothers' reading aloud and working with children on literacy skills came to the same conclusion (Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998).

Storybook Reading. Parent-child storybook reading is one of the most studied types of parent involvement in literacy. Storybook reading is also

one of the most commonly encouraged forms of parent involvement by teachers and schools. In their review of thirty years of research on the impact of reading to preschool students, Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) concluded that there is a modest impact of shared storybook reading on students' literacy development due mainly to the *quality* of that interaction.

Parent training workshops are a common strategy educators use to help parents improve the quality of their storybook reading with young children. In a study of the effects of parent participation in reading workshops, Jordan, Snow, and Porche (2000) compared the early literacy skills of about 250 kindergarten students whose parents received training versus those who did not. Parents receiving training were taught ways to increase the frequency and quality of parent-child verbal interactions and how to conduct structured activities provided by their child's teacher. Students whose parents were in the training group showed significantly greater improvement on early literacy tests of vocabulary, comprehension, story sequencing, and sound awareness.

Interventions focused on parents with low incomes and limited formal schooling have demonstrated similar results. Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998) compared the effects of a shared reading intervention on preschool children's early literacy skills. Students were randomly assigned to the following groups: (1) teachers reading to a small group of children, (2) parents reading to their children at home, (3) combined teachers and parents reading to children, and (4) a control group of children who received no special intervention. In this study, students who had shared either reading with a parent, small group reading with a teacher, or a combination of the two performed better on reading assessments than did students who experienced no shared reading experiences. In addition, children whose parents were involved in shared reading activities (either solely or in combination with teachers in small group reading) had higher vocabulary levels and oral language use than did children in the teacher-only group.

The results of studies of parent training workshops are important because they show that parents who are assisted to be effectively involved in reading-related activities conduct more and better literacy-focused interactions and that these interactions improve students' reading and literacy skills (see also Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000; Leslie & Allen, 1999; Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996). In particular, Lonigan and Whitehurst's (1998) study provides strong evidence that parents with low incomes and less formal education, who may have weaker reading skills than more economically advantaged parents, can effectively support their children's reading and education.

The Primary Grades

Children's entry to formal schooling marks an important transition in learning and development. The transition to elementary school also has important consequences for parents' roles in their children's literacy

development. Although schools and teachers become significant influences on children's learning to read, the transition to elementary school does not mean that parents cease to influence their children's reading and literacy development. Purcell-Gates (1996), for example, found that in some low-income families, parent involvement in reading *increased* after their children began formal schooling.

Storybook Reading. Storybook reading continues to be an important activity for children after they have entered the primary grades. Studies suggest that there are long-term, multifaceted effects of parent-child storybook reading on children's language development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). In one study, first-grade children whose parents read more storybooks to them during the preschool years (*informal* literacy activities) tended to score higher on vocabulary and listening comprehension assessments. Children whose parents used books more often to teach letters and words (*formal* literacy activities) tended to score higher on emergent literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge, decoding, and invented spelling. These studies showed that, over time, emergent literacy skills predicted children's reading achievement at the end of first grade, whereas receptive language skills (i.e., vocabulary and comprehension) predicted reading achievement in the third grade. The complex results are consistent with other studies indicating that parental involvement with children on varied reading-related activities helps students develop a number of literacy skills important for later reading achievement. Moreover, the findings suggest that parents should be guided to engage young children in a variety of literacy activities.

Literacy activities experienced at home by children from middle- and upper-income families may more closely match the school culture than activities experienced by students from low-income or minority families (Cairney & Rouge, 1997; Heath, 1983). Based on her research about literacy classroom practices with low-income children, McCarthy (1999) suggested that teachers establish and maintain frequent and reciprocal communications with all families. She argued that, by developing a better understanding of children's families and by helping them understand and use reading resources with their children, teachers will increase home-school congruence and continuity for all students.

In addition to training workshops to improve parents' skills, other interventions designed to help teachers incorporate families in their classrooms and in students' reading experiences have proven effective with culturally diverse families. Paratore et al. (1999) trained low-income parents who had immigrated to the United States to observe and become involved in their elementary schoolchildren's literacy activities at home, to construct portfolios of their children's literacy activities at home, and to bring these portfolios to parent-teacher conferences. The researchers also trained teachers to understand family literacy, how to collaborate with

families, and how to use a family literacy portfolio to communicate with their students' parents. Her analyses showed that, during conferences with their children's teachers, parents who developed literacy portfolios with their children at home talked more and provided teachers with more information about their children's literacy activities at home.

Reading Volunteers. Schools often try to bring parent and community volunteers into elementary schools to help children develop literacy skills. Wasik (1998) reviewed empirical research on more than ten adult volunteer programs focused on helping students learn to read. She identified four common features in these programs: (1) a coordinator with knowledge about reading and reading instruction; (2) structured activities for volunteer tutors to use with students; (3) training for the volunteer tutors; and, unexpectedly, (4) poor coordination between tutoring activities and the classroom curriculum. Wasik concluded that these characteristics require evaluation to understand their individual and collective impact on students' literacy development.

In response to Wasik's review, Baker, Gersten, and Keating (2000) evaluated the longitudinal effects of a low-cost community volunteer program on students' reading achievement. After randomly assigning first-grade students to either two years of one-on-one tutoring or a control group, the researchers compared differences in reading achievement at the end of the first and second grades. Students in the tutoring program at the end of second grade had significantly higher oral reading and word comprehension skills than did peers not in the tutoring program. Similarly, Fitzgerald (2001) found that the use of college students as volunteer reading tutors had the potential to improve students' reading outcomes. These studies suggest that community involvement strategies can also have a positive impact on students' reading achievement.

Upper Elementary Grades

Most research on parent involvement and students' reading and literacy skills has been conducted with families of young children in preschool and the primary grades. After the third grade, parents report less involvement in their children's education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996), and educators report fewer efforts to include parents in their children's schooling (Chen, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

A few studies, however, provide important information about the effects of family involvement on the literacy skills and reading achievement of older children. For example, a study of third- and fifth-grade students in an urban school district found that, controlling for prior reading achievement, students in classrooms with teachers who more frequently involved families in learning activities at home had higher gains in reading achievement from one year to the next than did students in other teachers' classrooms (Epstein, 1991, 2001). The data did not identify

the specific practices teachers used to involve parents in children's reading, but follow-up interviews with teachers, parents, and administrators in the schools indicated that most involvement activities focused on reading and reading-related activities.

Other intervention studies underscore the importance of family involvement in literacy activities to improve students' reading skills. Shaver and Walls (1998) reported that workshops for parents of students from second through eighth grade promoted families' involvement with children on reading learning packets. As a result, students increased their reading comprehension skills and total reading scores. Also, a study of seventy-one Title I schools in eighteen school districts found that outreach to parents on several types of involvement, including materials on how to help students with reading at home, improved reading achievement over time as students moved from third to fifth grade (Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001). The authors reported that gains in test scores between grades 3 and 5 were 50 percent higher for students whose teachers and schools reported high levels of parent outreach in the early grades.

Secondary School

Studies are accumulating that indicate that family and community involvement has a positive influence on student achievement and other measures of success through high school (Catsambis, 2001; Simon, 2001). It is still rare, however, for secondary schools to have well-designed interventions to assist families in interacting with their teens on homework or coursework in specific subjects (Sanders & Epstein, 2000a). Family and community involvement is largely absent from discussions about adolescent literacy and how to teach reading to middle school and high school students. Older students with weak reading skills are often given remedial instruction in vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills, but little attention is given to the role that family or community reinforcement, interaction, and support might play in encouraging students to master reading competencies (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001). Research with a nationally representative sample of secondary students shows that, after controlling for prior levels of achievement, students tend to score higher on reading achievement tests and/or earn higher grades in English if their parents have discussions with them about school and their future plans, check their homework, and maintain high educational expectations (Desimone, 1999; Ho & Willms, 1996; Keith, 1991; Keith et al., 1998; Lee & Croninger, 1994; Simon, 2001). These studies suggest that parent interest in and support for reading may play an important role in adolescents' academic development.

Other studies report that high schools' communications with families are associated with higher levels of students' reading achievement. Controlling for prior achievement, schools that communicated more often with students' families tended to have students who gained more on their

reading achievement tests than did schools that did not maintain strong communication practices (Parcel & Dufur, 2001). Parcel and Dufur's work suggests that, if schools establish frequent, positive, and purposeful communications, more parents may be able to provide their children with support for learning that is more closely coordinated with the teachers' goals and that will translate into improved student learning. Clear and helpful communications are essential in secondary schools where parents often feel less confident about their abilities to help adolescents with more advanced curricular activities.

One intervention has been designed to increase family involvement with students on language arts homework in the middle grades. An evaluation of TIPS-Language Arts included 683 students in grades 6 and 8 in two urban middle schools where over 70 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997). The students shared writing prompts, ideas, and drafts of stories and essays, and conducted "family surveys" to discuss their family partners' experiences. Analyses statistically controlled for parent education, student grade level, attendance, fall report card grades, and fall writing sample scores to identify the effects of TIPS interactive homework on students' writing skills in the winter and spring. Students who completed more TIPS homework assignments had higher language arts report card grades. When parents participated, students improved their writing scores from fall to winter and from winter to spring, regardless of their initial abilities.

Effects in Mathematics

Like reading, math is a core subject in schools. This subject matter, however, presents some unique challenges for school, family, and community partnerships. The progressively difficult designs of most mathematics curricula, as well as many parents' own fear of and lack of confidence with the subject matter (Gal & Stoudt, 1995), make it especially important for schools to implement strong partnership programs and activities. Efforts to develop school, family, and community partnerships in math, unfortunately, are relatively rare.

In their review of research on the effects of different types of math interventions, Baker, Gersten, and Lee (2002) found that few programs sought to connect or communicate with students' families, and that when they did, the practices were an "add on" to the program. This failure to incorporate family involvement into mathematics is counter to the findings of much research suggesting that efforts to involve families and community members in students' math learning can improve student performance in that subject.

School-family partnerships are important in math because parents socialize their children in ways that significantly affect their children's self-perceptions of ability and achievement in math. Studies have shown that

children's self-concepts of math ability are more closely related to their parents' perceptions of the child's ability than to the actual grades earned (Frome & Eccles, 1998; Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982). These results are important given evidence demonstrating that children's self-perceptions come to shape their later career decisions (Bleeker & Jacobs, 2004). Schools need to help parents understand when their children are struggling and when their children are excelling in math so that the appropriate encouragement and support can be provided. With this type of parental support, more children will be able to progress further in mathematics.

In addition to shaping children's self-perceptions of math ability, studies show that parental involvement influences children's math achievement. Across all racial groups, students performed better and continued further in mathematics if they participated in parent-child discussions about school and if their parents were active volunteers at the school or members of the PTA or PTO (Catsambis, 2001; Desimone, 1999; Ho & Willms, 1996; Ma, 1999; Valadez, 2002). Also, across racial and ethnic groups, higher parental expectations for their children tended to predict higher math achievement (Hong & Ho, 2005; Yan & Lin, 2005). Using a variety of math outcomes, as well as a wide variety of parent-child interactions, studies clearly demonstrate that families have a strong influence on students' math achievement.

There also is ample evidence that families need help interacting with their children around math. Lerner and Shumow (1997), for example, found that parents tend to believe in the value of more progressive instructional strategies in math (i.e., making children talk about their math work and learning from mistakes) but provide help that is directive and offers few opportunities for students to discover solutions to math problems on their own. Similarly, Hyde and colleagues (Hyde, Else-Quest, Alibali, Knuth, & Romberg, 2006) found significant variation in the ability of mothers to help their children with math homework. In both cases, the researchers concluded that school-family partnerships are needed to help all families understand how to interact with their children on math homework in ways that provide children support and encouragement for learning math.

One effective strategy in this regard has been teachers' use of interactive homework. Balli, Demo, and Wedman (1998), looking at the effect of assigning homework requiring parent-child interactions, found that students receiving this type of homework reported more parent involvement in math. Also, Sheldon and Epstein (2005) found that schools assigning interactive homework in math experienced greater improvement in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient on standardized math tests than schools that did not assign this type of homework.

Perhaps the strongest evidence to support assigning interactive homework in math has come from Van Voorhis (2007), who used a quasi-experimental design to compare the math achievement of students in classrooms where teachers assigned interactive math homework (treatment) to

the achievement of students in classrooms where the teacher did not (control). She found significant differences between students and families in the treatment and control groups. Students assigned interactive math homework reported greater family involvement in math, as well as higher levels of achievement, compared to students in the control condition. This study provides some of the best evidence that teachers can help all families support students' learning in math, and that this support may translate into higher levels of student math achievement.

Other research suggests that schools can improve their students' math achievement by developing a school climate that is welcoming and has the support of the parent community. School climate—the tone or atmosphere of a school—has been associated with leadership style, sense of community, expectations for students, an ethos of caring, and a variety of student outcomes (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; National Research Council, 2003; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Studies show that a more positive school climate exists in schools that are more welcoming to parents and community partners (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; Griffith, 1998; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989). Schools with a stronger partnership climate experience higher levels of achievement on standardized math tests, after controlling for prior levels of math achievement and poverty (Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, *in press*). Taken together, the research on math achievement shows that families influence students' attitudes about math and their desire to succeed in math. It also demonstrates that school strategies to help structure parent-child interactions around math and positive school climates that include strong home-school connections can result in improved student performance in mathematics.

Effects in Science

Compared to reading and mathematics, there is far less research about the effects of school, family, and community partnerships on science achievement. Given the current interest in student achievement on science tests, however, it is important to understand findings from the few studies that examine the effects of family and community involvement on students' science achievement.

Family involvement may be especially important for students most at-risk of failure in the area of science. In a national study, Von Secker (2004) found that students from low-income families tended to perform less well in science than their more affluent peers. More important, however, she found that factors such as parent education and home environment helped compensate for the risk of low science achievement associated with lower family income. Finally, Von Secker found that, without these family resources, students from low-income families are likely to see the achievement gap between them and more affluent students widen as they move from fourth to twelfth grade.

Like math, the benefits of family involvement on students' science achievement may occur through the development of positive attitudes about science. George and Kaplan (1998) found that parents play an important role in the development of children's science attitudes through their engagement with science activities and by taking their children to libraries and museums. In perhaps the only study to assess teacher efforts to increase parent-child interactions around science, Van Voorhis (2003) used a quasi-experimental design to test the effects of interactive science homework on parent involvement in science and students' science achievement. She found that families who received weekly interactive homework in science tended to be more involved in science, and students in these families tended to have higher grades in science compared to students whose teachers did not assign the interactive homework. These findings suggest that schools can help more students experience higher achievement in science by encouraging more science-focused family involvement at home.

PARTNERSHIPS AND NONACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Student Attendance

Improving student attendance is an important goal for schools because being at school provides children greater opportunities to learn. A key to improving student attendance at school is using a holistic approach that addresses school and classroom factors, as well as factors related to students' families and communities (Sheldon, 2007). Although most schools have not collaborated systematically with families to reduce student absenteeism, home-school connections are recognized as an important strategy to increase student attendance (Cimmarusti, James, Simpson, & Wright, 1984; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams, & Dalicandro, 1998; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Weinberg & Weinberg, 1992; Ziesemer, 1984). This approach to improving student attendance is based on research identifying specific parental behaviors such as monitoring students' whereabouts, parent-child discussions about school, volunteering at school, and PTA/PTO membership as important predictors of lower levels of truancy among students (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Duckworth & DeJung, 1989; McNeal, 1999).

Previous research found that several school partnership practices were associated with student attendance, including communicating with families about student attendance, providing families information about people to contact at school, conducting workshops on attendance, and providing afterschool programs for students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). That study suggested that student attendance would improve if schools took a comprehensive approach by implementing activities that support good attendance,

by conducting effective home-school connections, and by remaining focused on the goal of improving and maintaining student attendance.

In a follow-up study with a larger and more diverse sample, Sheldon and Epstein (2005) found a reduction in chronic absenteeism associated with the use of communication strategies to inform parents of their children's attendance, as well as the implementation of a partnership program using a diverse set of partnership strategies and activities. The association between school-family communications and reduced absenteeism is consistent with other studies that found that phone calls to parents of absent students are associated with improved student attendance (Helm & Burkett, 1989; Licht, Gard, & Guardino, 1991). Also, providing timely information to families about attendance helped improve attendance rates in high schools (Roderick et al., 1997). Keeping parents informed of their children's attendance at school allows parents to monitor and supervise their children more effectively.

Effects on Student Behavior

Children's behavior, whether in school or out, is related to their home environment and family dynamics. Two decades ago, in their review of the literature, Snyder and Patterson (1987) concluded that certain parenting styles, disciplinary approaches, parental monitoring, family problem-solving strategies, and levels of conflict within the home are all predictive of delinquency among juveniles. Furthermore, they found that the association between socio-demographic characteristics and delinquency is greatly reduced or disappears when these types of family interaction patterns are statistically accounted for. More recently, Davalos, Chavex, and Guardiola (2005) showed that family communication patterns and parental supports of schooling are associated with lower levels of delinquency in secondary students, regardless of ethnicity. Analyzing data from a large national database, Domina (2005) concluded that parental involvement activities reduce behavioral problems and that the favorable effects on student behavior are higher for children from low-income families than for those from high-income families. Many educators understand the relationship between students' family life and school behavior, and many schools include improved student behavior as an important goal and focus of their partnership program efforts.

In addition to improving student behavior at school, implementing partnership practices focused on student behavior also may help improve academic achievement. In a study of 827 African American eighth graders, Sanders (1998) found that student perceptions of family support for school achievement positively influence students' school behavior, which, in turn, has a positive and significant influence on their school grades. Other studies have also demonstrated that students with more parent involvement behave better in school and that school behavior helps predict academic achievement over time (Beyers, Bates, Pettit, & Dodge, 2003; Hill et al., 2004).

Unlike many of the other student outcomes discussed in this chapter, the connection between student behavior and the community context has been understood for a long time. Many have argued that the social and cultural organization of neighborhoods shapes the socialization processes of families and schools (Elliott et al., 1996; Wilson, 1987). Adolescents' exposure to violence in the community, for example, is associated with poor school attendance, low grades, and problem behavior in school (Bowen & Bowen, 1999; Bowen, Bowen, & Ware, 2002). The impact of communities, however, is not always negative. School-community collaborations such as mentoring, safety patrols, and business partnerships may improve school programs and affect student achievement, behavior, and attitudes toward school (McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Nettles, 1991; Sanders, 2001; Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

Although many have suggested that school, family, and community resources could help reduce problem behavior and improve learning in school (Adelman & Taylor, 1998; Epstein, 1995; Noguera, 1995; Sanders, 1998; Taylor & Adelman, 2000), most interventions to improve student behavior have focused on what educators need to do in school to ensure a safe environment. Parents have been given only modest roles in helping to improve student behavior, such as being asked to reinforce school programs (e.g., Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993), despite evidence that families and community partners can help schools become safer and more focused on student learning. A study of elementary school students, for example, found that school social workers who helped families and schools communicate with one another improved students' behavior and academic skills (Bowen, 1999). Others have shown that higher levels of family involvement (e.g., attending workshops, volunteering at the school, helping with homework, and being involved with school policy reviews and revisions) are associated with better behavior for middle and high school students (Ma, 2001; Simon, 2001). Also, Sheldon and Epstein (2002) found that schools with improved programs of school, family, and community partnerships reported decreases in the percentages of students sent to the principal, given detentions, and given in-school suspensions. They also found that the implementation of activities to increase parent volunteering and support parenting practices was associated with lower levels of disciplinary actions taken in schools. All of these findings highlight the importance of developing school, family, and community partnership programs to improve students' school behavior.

Effects on Student Attitudes and Adjustment

Family involvement also plays an important role in students' social-emotional development. Students whose parents and family members are more involved in their schooling have been shown to have higher levels of school engagement and achievement motivation (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems, &

Holbein, 2005; Simons-Morton & Crump, 2003). In some cases, students' motivation was shown to mediate the effect of parent involvement on academic achievement (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). In addition, Sanders and Herting (2000) found that family and church support were positively associated with African American adolescents' academic self-concept, which, in turn, was positively related to these students' academic achievement. Family involvement, therefore, may affect achievement through its impact on the development of students' attitudes about and engagement with school, as well as students' perceptions of their academic potential.

These benefits may be most notable during times when children transition to new schools. Studies show that students more successfully transitioned into middle school and high school, measured by grades and test scores, when they had family members who more frequently discussed and monitored their schoolwork (Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Also, Schulting, Malone, and Dodge (2005) found that, controlling for prior achievement and family background, kindergartners in schools that implemented activities designed to promote family involvement had higher achievement than those in schools that did not conduct this type of partnership outreach.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR PRINCIPALS

The importance of families has been shown in relation to children's and adolescents' academic and nonacademic school outcomes and is acknowledged in both educational policy and standards for professional educational practice. The wide range of benefits to students that result from family involvement makes partnership outreach a necessary part of how we should define the responsibilities of educators. Nearly all parents want their children to succeed in school and want to help them realize that success (Lareau, 2000; Mapp, 2002). However, because many families face significant barriers to involvement that arise from job constraints, time and income limitations, limited knowledge of the school system, or language and cultural differences, schools need to adopt an organized approach to school, family, and community partnerships that explicitly addresses these challenges.

Studies show that when schools organize involvement activities that specifically address these and other partnership challenges more families are involved in their children's schooling (Simon, 2004; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). In one study, Epstein and Dauber (1991) showed that the association between family income and involvement disappeared once school outreach was taken into account. Together these studies suggest that more families are likely to be more involved in their children's education if schools provide them with greater partnership opportunities, support, and information.

Schools, therefore, should develop strategic and comprehensive partnership programs to facilitate the academic achievement of all students. Principals are essential to this process and need to lead their staff in reaching out and working with students' families and communities. Through principal leadership, schools can develop strong programs of school, family, and community partnerships and create and sustain cultures of academic achievement and success. In the following chapter, we discuss schools as community organizations and the role of principals in building partnership programs that support students' well-being and school success.

Action Steps for School Leaders

- ✓ Understand federal, state, and local policies on family and community involvement.
- ✓ Develop a critical understanding of research on family and community involvement.
- ✓ Create opportunities for faculty and staff to examine the research on family involvement for important student outcomes and school goals.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is the research on school, family, and community partnerships helpful to you as a school leader? Explain.
2. Are most educators knowledgeable about the relationship between family and community involvement and students' school outcomes? Should such information be more broadly shared? If so, what would be the most effective strategies for doing so? What role should school principals play?
3. Are students in your school "successful"? What role does family and community involvement play?