

Parent Involvement in Title I Schools 2003-2004

Albuquerque Public Schools

Ranjana Damle Ph.D.
May 2005
September 2006



ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BOARD OF EDUCATION

PAULA MAES
President

MIGUEL ACOSTA
Vice President

GORDON ROWE
Secretary

BERNA FACIO
Policy Chair

MARY LEE MARTIN
District Relations Chair

LEONARD J. DELAYO, JR
Finance/Audit Chair

ROBERT LUCERO
Capital Outlay Chair

ELIZABETH EVERITT
Superintendent

SUSIE PECK
Associate Superintendent

NELINDA VENEGAS
Associate Superintendent

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

930-A Oak Street SE
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106
(505) 848-8710
www.rda.aps.edu
Rose-Ann McKernan
Director

ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

TITLE I PARENT INVOLVEMENT

2003-2004

Executive Summary

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires school districts to conduct an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of their Title I parent involvement policy. NCLB also mandates that school districts include parents' input in their evaluation. RDA conducted an evaluation of parent involvement in APS by carrying out case studies of four schools in Spring 2004. The case studies included interviews of principals and parent coordinators, parent focus groups, and field observations of school activities involving parents.

The case study found different levels of maturation in the parent involvement programs in APS schools. While all schools articulated commitment to parent involvement, one program demonstrated exemplary success in engaging parents at various levels of involvement that suited their needs and abilities, and in securing parental support in their students' education.

A Model of Parent Involvement: The exemplary parent involvement program followed a model that portrayed different levels of involvement and assumed that parents are advocates for their student's education at all levels of involvement. The school administration was receptive and respectful of any level and degree of parental engagement. Ranging from the basic to more complex, the model incorporated a continuum of the following five levels of parent involvement:

- Getting the student to school on time, ready to learn; supporting homework
- Involvement in curriculum and their student's education; attending meetings
- Volunteering
- Self-education
- Taking a leadership role at the school

This model served as the framework for evaluation. Models are visual and they provide a map to articulate goals as well as strategies to achieve those goals. This model of parent involvement suggests a paradigm shift in our conception of schooling and inclusion of parents in schools. It emphasizes that parent support for their student's education is valued at all levels of involvement in school. The model also suggests that parent involvement programs should offer a wide choice of activities allowing different levels of involvement. This model is transferable to other schools, but schools may develop their own model to identify the continuum of parent involvement. A model or a schema provides a common language and expectation for parents, teachers, and administrators to work towards increasing parent involvement. School staff can use a number of strategies to work towards achieving the different levels of parent involvement described in the model of their choice. A model communicates to the parents that there is a place for every parent, and value to that place. A model communicates to the staff that all parent involvement is valued and is one phase of a continuing expectation.

The evaluation found that leadership was one of the most critical components of a meaningful parent involvement. When a school's administrative team articulated a clear model of parent involvement, the teachers and other staff had a direction and focus in their efforts to incorporate parents in their students' education. This evaluation, however, found that the parent coordinators often lacked a clear direction and support from the principals in implementing the parent involvement program. In some schools, parent coordinators spent more time and energy arranging for charitable donations to families and considerably less time implementing strategies to involve parents in their child's education.

This evaluation suggests that the district support for parent involvement should begin with professional development around developing and articulating a model of meaningful parent engagement that helps principals bring the necessary leadership to their school's parent program.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

- Language and cultural barriers may prevent parent involvement in schools.
- Parents and administrators often mention work to be a major barrier to parent engagement.
- Personal and family problems such as health, poverty, or divorce may also prevent parents from supporting their child's education. Another leading cause for parental non-participation is having other young children at home.
- Insufficient opportunities offered by schools may also lead parents to not get involved in schools.
- An absence of positive experiences in their own schooling may make parents reluctant to participate in schools.

Examples of Successful Strategies to Involve Parents

- Schools with extensive parent involvement clearly and vigorously encourage parents to come to the meetings, volunteer, and get involved in the classroom. Schools communicate these messages through meetings, newsletters, bulletin boards, and parent networks.
- Provision of services that support families, such as educational classes or information about accessing health care or other community-based resources, seems to improve parental involvement.
- Schools make translators available to parents to ensure communication with non-English speaking parents. While schools are efficiently providing newsletters and other materials in dual languages, parents often feel unable to communicate with the teachers or other school staff without a translator present.
- A parent room is effective in providing parents a place to assemble or to receive educational classes and workshops, and attracts parents to schools.
- Providing childcare on campus is an excellent way to engage parents in educational, self-improvement, and volunteer activities.
- One strategy to improve parent attendance in the meetings is involving parents in choosing the meeting topics.
- Schools provide child-centered activities such as performances to get the parents to come to the school, as parents like to attend their own children's performances.

Albuquerque Public Schools Parent Involvement in Title I Schools 2003-2004

Introduction

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools receiving Title I funds to develop and execute a parent involvement policy.¹ NCLB also mandates that the LEAs conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of their parent involvement policy, identifying barriers to greater parental involvement.

RDA conducted an evaluation of parent involvement in APS by carrying out case studies of four schools in 2003-04. The case studies included interviews of principals and parent coordinators, parent focus groups, and field observations of school activities that involve parents. RDA conducted the evaluation in Spring 2004.

Research Methods

A Note on Parent Involvement

Educators have experienced positive outcomes for students when parents are involved in their schooling. Over two decades of research shows a correlation between parental participation in their children's school and education, and the educational success of their children.² Research also indicates that students of parents engaged in schools get better grades, stay in school, and enroll in higher education regardless of income and background.³

Research Questions

This evaluation focused on three main research questions at the school level:

1. What are the school leadership's vision and goals about successful parent involvement?
2. What are the components of the school's parent involvement program? What strategies does the school use to involve parents in the school?
3. What are the barriers to parent involvement from the point of view of the parents, school staff, and administrators?

Methods of Data Collection

Using the case study method, this evaluation attempted to develop a systemic picture of parent involvement in schools. The evaluation examined the role of school leadership and obtained insights into the schools' strategies, structure, and practices about parent involvement. Case studies provide data richer in content than ordinarily found in surveys. This case study produced comprehensive information allowing us the opportunity to validate as well as broaden the findings of RDA parent surveys of the preceding years.

This study defined parent involvement in terms of behavioral aspects. Thus, parent involvement included: a) participating in curriculum-focused activities; b) engaging in parent literacy activities; c) attending educational workshops; d) volunteering; e) taking part in recreational activities such as student performances and fairs; and f) serving on planning committees.

The case study produced a couple of hundred pages worth of information detailing components of the parent involvement programs in schools. Information for the evaluation came from interviews, observations, and documents recording parent participation in various activities in each school.

Principal Interviews : The interviews with principals lasted between one and two hours and consisted of pre-defined, open-ended questions. The interviews investigated a) the purpose of parent involvement from the principals' perspective, b) effective strategies to involve parents according to the principals, c) the principals' own assessment of the success of the school's parent involvement program, and d) the principals' perceptions about barriers to greater parental involvement.

Parent Coordinator Interviews : The parent coordinator interviews lasted about an hour and consisted of open-ended questions about their views of the school's parent involvement program in terms of purpose, strategies, and barriers. Educational assistants most often serve as parent coordinators and function as liaisons or links between schools and parents. They organize parent involvement meetings and communicate with parents through newsletters informing them about school events. They also coordinate food bank and other charitable activities for families in need.

Parent Focus Groups : The evaluator conducted parent focus groups to elicit parental responses to topics including communication with their schools, volunteering, involvement in educational as well as recreational activities, and barriers to more pervasive parent participation in school activities.

The evaluator attended parent meetings and other events involving parents, and also collected documented information pertaining to parent activities in schools.⁴ Table 1 shows the type of data gathered in the schools in the case study.

Table 1 Types of data gathered in schools

	Principal Interview	Parent Coordinator Interview	Parent Focus Group	Number of Parents in the Focus Group	Notes from Parent Meetings; Other Supplementary Materials
School 1	√	√	√	12	√
School 2	√	√	√	7	√
School 3	√	√	√	6	√
School 4*	√	Incomplete	Missing	Missing	Missing

*In school 4, information gathering was incomplete because the school did not respond to repeated requests for interviews and conducting a parent focus group.

Strengths and Limitations

The case study included four sites out of the total of 69 Title I public school sites in 2003-04. This was a qualitative case study based on a purposive sample of Title I schools. The case study method produced rich and insightful information, allowing an in-depth view of parent involvement in schools. This evaluation provided triangulation of findings from previous surveys and suggested ideas for future program improvement.

The study contains a very limited amount of information about the fourth school where, despite repeated efforts, scheduling interviews and other data gathering activities remained a challenge. RDA received little assistance from the school in accessing their parents. Therefore, most of the information and analysis provided below pertain to the three elementary schools where the evaluator was able to conduct interviews and attend school events.

Description of Schools

Selection of cases. Three schools were picked arbitrarily and one was chosen because of the school's positive reputation for parent involvement. All four schools have been Title I schools for at least five years, and have a high concentration of students who are low-income and English language learners (ELL).

- Enrollment: Ranged between 400 and 800 students.
- Home Language: 70% or more of the students in each of the four schools reported Spanish as their home language.
- Poverty Rate: Three out of the four schools were characterized by a high poverty rate (85% or more receive free or reduced price meals). The fourth school's poverty rate was slightly below 70%.
- Ethnicity: At least 80% of the students in each of the four schools were of Hispanic ethnicity.

Table 2 describes the schools' accountability ratings for three consecutive years.

Table 2 State Accountability System Ratings

School Performance			
	2002	2003	2004
School 1	Meets Standards	Meets Standards	Meets AYP*
School 2	Probationary	Probationary	Meets AYP*
School 3	Meets Standards	Probationary	Meets AYP*
School 4	Meets Standards	Meets Standards	AYP* not Met

* State Accountability System defined Adequate Yearly Progress rating.

In 2003-04, each Title I school received an allocation of \$2,015 for parent involvement activities. Table 3 shows the amounts schools spent for their parent involvement events and activities.

Table 3 Expenditure from the Title I Parent Involvement Allocation

Actual Expenditure from the Title I Parent Involvement Allocation (\$2,015)	
2003-04	
School 1	\$922.34
School 2	\$1,732.60
School 3	\$1,183.37
School 4	\$0.0

Observations and Findings

This section presents school level information on the unique attributes of each school's parent involvement program by focusing on the following topics:

- General description of the parent involvement program
- The school leaderships' perspectives on the purpose of parent involvement and vision of a successful parent involvement program
- Schools' strategies to get parents involved in school
- The parents' views of the parent involvement program in their school
- Barriers to parent involvement from the parents' and school administrators' point of view

School 1

Images of Meaningful Parent Involvement

Parents always buzzed around the school, some with babies or toddlers. To an observer, such as the evaluator, the parents exuded familiarity and sense of belonging when in and about the school. Parents were in the school's office, hallways, classrooms, cafeteria, and playground. They were talking to the school staff or, as volunteers, attending to other parents' or students' needs. The principal's office was in full view and parents seemed to be able to access the principal. School staff seemed attentive to the parents.

At the end of the day, parents could be seen outside the classrooms, waiting to pick up their children and also talk to the teacher. They asked the teacher questions about the previous night's homework. Even when complaining about the length of the homework, the parent listened to the teacher with attentiveness and interest. The tone was conversational rather than confrontational.

Monthly kindergarten parent-child activities drew nearly all kindergarten parents and filled the cafeteria. The kindergarten literacy activity in May culminated in a book that went home with the family. Moreover, since the school year was concluding, parents took home packets of math and reading practice material for the summer, in anticipation of the first grade.

A large number of parents attended grade-level open houses held for the parents almost every month. Parents learned about the curriculum through the user-friendly and engaging open houses. For instance, parents learned about math in an entertaining way, with games and riddles. The children often provided the answers, making the exercise fun and exciting.

Parents engaged in school governance, policymaking, and planning by serving on school planning, standards and curriculum, or other committees. Parents did outreach to the community by disseminating information to their neighborhoods about the school's educational and other family support services.

Volunteering. Parents assisted in the classrooms. They worked with their own as well as other children. They knew what was going on in the classroom. Parents raised money for the parent organization by selling popcorn, candies, pencils, and so on. Parents helped in the office, assisted with the field trips and book fairs, and organized school fiestas and classroom parties. Parents also helped with charitable activities such as the food bank.

Parent Organization. Parents packed monthly parent organization meetings showing deep interest in the meeting agenda. The parent coordinator worked closely with the parent organization in setting up meetings and other activities. The parent organization invited expert guest speakers and community leaders to address a variety of issues important to the community. At the beginning of each school year, the parent organization asked parents what kinds of information and services they would like to have. The parent meetings every month provided information about issues such as healthcare, driver's licenses, community-based services, domestic violence, and more. The meetings were conducted in Spanish in this school with predominantly Spanish-speaking parents. English translators were also available.

The principal worked with the parent organization to inform the parents about important school news and events. The principal also sought input from the parent organization about important issues.

Description of Services

The school had two parent coordinators, one of whom worked to connect parents to community-based resources. Parents learned where and how to access healthcare, charities, free educational services, etc. The second coordinator functioned as a literacy coordinator and, among other things, conducted a literacy club for the parents. Both coordinators had college degrees and were employed at levels above the educational assistants, indicating the school's commitment and willingness to allocate resources to the parent program.

Parent Room. The school had a Parent room that served many useful purposes. The Parent room served as a classroom for parent classes, an assembly and discussion room, a library from which parents checked out books, and a distribution center for free food backpacks or uniforms.

Workshops and Classes. The school offered helpful workshops that prepared the parents to support their student. The workshops included topics such as how children learn, nutrition, and health issues (e.g. puberty). The school also offered educational and job-related workshops and classes, such as computer Ed, ESL, GED, and applying to jobs.

Childcare. The school provided on-campus childcare to the parents with young children, thereby freeing the parents to take advantage of educational opportunities, attend meetings, workshops, and classes, and volunteer.

Principal's Vision

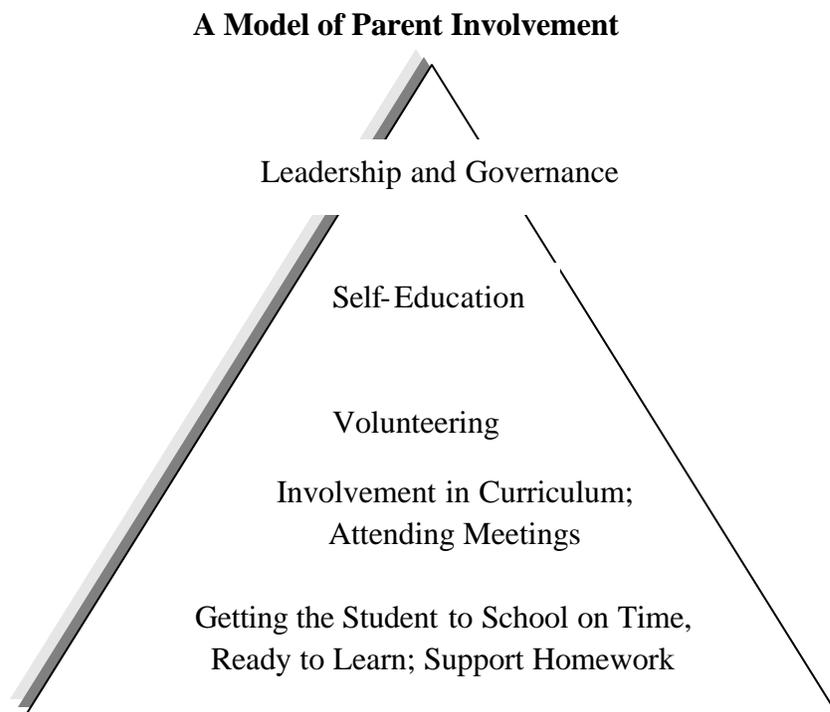
The principal of School 1 projected a strong vision about the significance of parental involvement in schools. The principal explained that when parents become involved in the school and feel that they have a role in their children's education, their child sees that, "all the adults have a vested interest in this process called education." Also, parents may have misperceptions if they only get little bits and pieces of information from newsletters and other school communications. When parents are around the school more, they know what's going on. They put the program, homework, expectations, and even the issues on the playground in a better context. They make more informed decisions. Their questions are more targeted.

To Principal 1, parent involvement is not just attending meetings but being involved along with the teacher and the school in the child's education. The principal declared that involvement is best when parents become advocates for their children's education. S/he portrayed parent involvement as a continuum and argued we have to appreciate everything along that continuum.

"For some parents, involvement means getting their children up and dressed in uniform and to school on time every day. And that is a tremendous support. That is the

biggest step toward being involved. Beyond that if they can come to the classroom and attend a meeting or talk to the teacher about concerns about homework if the child does not understand something that is above and beyond, that is superb. But I think we have to appreciate that for some parents the best they can do is to get their child here, on time, ready to learn. We have a lot of parents who are working on just getting the child to school on time everyday, ready to learn. We have the challenge of promoting that very basic level of involvement and at the same time offering the whole spectrum beyond that.” (Principal in School 1)

Expanding on the theme of the parent involvement continuum, Principal 1 illustrated a five-layer, pyramid-shaped model of parent involvement that integrated from basic to more complex and time-consuming involvement. The first and most important level of parent involvement is getting the student to school on time, ready to learn, and supporting homework. The second level is getting involved in the curriculum and their student’s education, and attending meetings at the school. The third level involves volunteering, while the fourth is participating in self-education. The fifth level of parent involvement includes taking a leadership role at the school.



Strategies to Involve Parents

The principal in School 1 said parent involvement means getting them actually involved where parents can help their child along with the child’s teacher. Involved parents are always in the loop about their child’s progress. Classroom teachers inform them about the curricular activities and seek their support for homework at home. Parents receive packages for the summer months to get their students ready for the next grade level.

The principal said, “We use all types of hooks” to get the parents in to the classrooms and to participate in school. For this principal, the goal was 100% parental involvement at least at the first level. But there were parents who had not reached the basic involvement of getting their children to school on time with enough rest and food. Those parents became the focus of energy.

“We have a truancy program, we provide incentives and try to offer support to families who may have some sort of a roadblock to getting their children here on time. We have a before-after school program – we try, we really try to put in place supports for families to make that big first step toward getting the children here ready and on time. You don’t always make it, but that is a huge amount of effort, and I think that it has to be appreciated that some schools ...have that challenge, that great a challenge just getting children to school on time everyday ready to learn.” (Principal 1)

The school provided school-level, grade-level, and classroom-level parent involvement initiatives. Parents had an opportunity to attend the parent organization meetings, open houses and content area meetings, and parent educational opportunities at the school. There were grade level initiatives in place where teachers invited parents to theme meetings and parent-child activities. For example, one month the 1st grade parents were invited to a math lesson. The principal required each classroom to conduct periodic activities with the parents. Also, if the student did not meet a grade level standard, the teachers got parents involved and worked with the parents so that the parents supported homework and helped the student to work at his or her grade level. Kindergarten teachers sent a packet home for the parents for every new skill.

Parent attendance was remarkably high in all types of activities. The parent coordinator said having parent meetings on a fixed day and time every month created a habit and parents got used to showing up. Parent meetings selected topics chosen by the parents, making the parent meetings extremely popular. Finally, the school newsletter provided reminders that parents could not miss.

One of the most effective strategies was providing on-campus childcare everyday. This allowed parents to attend meetings, workshops, or go to classrooms unencumbered with small children.

According to the parent coordinator in School 1, parent involvement is key to children achieving higher academic standards. When parents took classes in the school, they read books and did homework with their children at home; they modeled how to be a student. They got more involved in the process of education. They wanted to send children to college. This helped the school and the parents, and, above all, the children.

School 1 Parent Focus Group

Parents in School 1 reported that the school communicated with them through school and classroom newsletters, announcements, phone calls, home visits, and kept them informed about school and classroom activities. Parents said they were invited to attend a variety of activities – open houses, parent-teacher conferences, field trips, parent literacy clubs, parent

organization meetings, and fun activities. They were also encouraged to volunteer. Many parents said that they practically 'live' in the school. One parent came from beyond the walking range and took two buses to get to the school.

Parents revealed that the teachers asked them not only to read to the children but also to read themselves to instill a love of reading in the children. Parents received books from the school and were expected to read in both English and Spanish. The school was very strong on literacy and UNM student tutors were available to help tutor children. One parent said that their kindergarten teacher made tapes for the children to listen to at home to improve pronunciation.

In one of the parent organization meetings, the committee asked the parents to write a letter to themselves about their dreams for their children's future, thus helping them conceptualize and verbalize their hopes for their children.

Expectations of services from the school. All parents unanimously indicated that they were receiving a great deal of services along with the education of their children. They had no expectations of additional services from the school.

Communicating with the classroom teacher. Parents attended parent-teacher conferences. Parents in the focus group said that they communicated with their child's teacher about their child's progress on a daily basis. The teacher kept them informed about how to help the child with the educational process. Parents emphasized that they appreciated the fact that classroom teachers involved them when the child was not making progress. When parents did not understand the homework, teachers explained the homework in Spanish, if necessary. The school gave parents reading and other material helpful for their child's education and stressed that children need support at home.

Volunteering. Parents volunteered all the time and wherever they were needed – in the classrooms, on the playground, during performances and field trips, in the office, making and selling popcorn, etc. They worked in the cafeteria, helped with the newsletters, relayed messages, and assisted in the Parent room.

Perspectives on Barriers to Parent Involvement

Previous years' parent surveys at APS repeatedly found that parents reported full-time work as the biggest barrier to their involvement. The principal in School 1 gave a very different perspective on the relationship of full-time work to parent involvement.

The principal said many parents who worked full-time were involved in their child's education and excellent advocates for them. The uninvolved parents were those who did not get their kids to school everyday on time, check the homework, or ask the teacher if they did not understand something. They did not come to meetings.

“The biggest barrier is.... I think the parents that we don't see here are parents who have enormous challenges in their own personal lives. They never had a positive experience in a school setting themselves, and so they never had a model for what it is

like to be expected to attend school regularly, they are antagonistic toward institutions, and that barrier is very challenging to overcome, because you really have to woo those parents in.”

The school has found involving parents whose children have truancy or homework issues to be most challenging. The principal observed that the uninvolved parents tended to come to their child’s performances. The school tried to make sure their children were involved in after-school and in-school activities, and gave performances that got the parents to come.

The parent (literacy) coordinator reported that full-time work, social issues such as drug and alcohol use, and a lack of education in the families were some of the main barriers to parental involvement.

Parents said that work was the number one factor for why they did not get involved in school. Other reasons were health issues or young children at home. Parents also added that the lack of information could be a reason. The parents who did not check backpacks for newsletters did not have the information and failed to participate.

Concluding Remarks

The principal in School 1 had a very well thought-out model of parent involvement that has resulted in a strong and extensive parent involvement in the school. The model provided a clear vision that conceptualized parent involvement from simple to complex and more time-consuming. The goal of parent involvement was to get parents to support their child’s education. The underlying assumption was all types and levels of parent involvement were important and parents were respected for any degree of involvement they were comfortable with. To support the vision there was a large variety of strategies and supports in place for the parents to be involved. The parent coordinators and teachers had a clear direction from the principal about the expectations of parent involvement. Thus, the alignment of the leadership’s vision, the ensuing school culture, strategies, and strong efforts resulted in a high degree of meaningful parent involvement.

While the parents at the most basic level of involvement were respected and welcomed, those with greater motivation were provided opportunities to participate in more complex and time-consuming levels of involvement. School 1 paid attention to the parents and empowered them by including them in decisions. As a result, parents took initiatives to become significant participants in the school’s educational program.

The principal had a clear and functional model integrating different levels of parent involvement. The principal also led the school in setting goals and strategies to achieve parental partnership in enhancing student success in education. The parents seemed very impressed and satisfied with the education and services the school provided to them and their children.

School 2

Images of Meaningful Parent Involvement

Parents were always welcome in the school and they participated in a number of ways. The school saw consistent growth in parent attendance in school activities in the last couple of years. The parent organization in this school held a theme meeting each month. The parent meetings helped keep the parents informed about the news and events in the school. Attendance varied from 40 to as high as 100. Activities for parents and students followed after the business portion of the meeting. The meetings used both English and Spanish as modes of communication with the parents. In one meeting, the children read their creative work either in English or Spanish. Another month's meeting focused on a famous children's poet with children's performances around this theme.

Parents participated in curriculum nights. One night each month, parents came to the school to attend an open house dedicated to a core subject area such as science, math, or writing. Parents also attended honors assemblies, award ceremonies, and fairs.

The school published a newsletter once a month in Spanish and English. Classroom newsletters came out once a week. The parent coordinator, an educational assistant (EA), occasionally organized services and educational activities for the parents, such as a health workshop. The health workshop announcement appeared in the newsletter as well as on the notice board. The parent coordinator published community service announcements such as the one from a charitable agency that offered help to grandparents raising their grandchildren.

The principal talked about the plans to develop other services such as computer classes along with the existing ESL class. A tutorial program was available for parents in Spanish and English to learn about reading strategies. Parents checked out books from the Book Room. Moreover, the library had a before-school program for the parents and students.

The APS high school cluster that the school belonged to also initiated meetings to boost parent involvement. At first sluggish, those meetings were beginning to attract parents. The meetings included discussions about problems if necessary and explanations of school procedures. The cluster parent-meeting format was a lunch meeting every month.

The school had a parent room. The parent room was mainly used for organizing gifts and donations. The parent coordinator raised funds to offer gifts and free goodies to the parents by recruiting local businesses, charities, and parent volunteers. Eligible parents and students received gift baskets, school supplies, uniforms, shoes, and food backpacks. Forty-five students were enrolled in the backpack program based on teacher recommendation.

Volunteering. Parents volunteered in the classroom when asked. Parents volunteered in the Parent room with the charitable activities that the parent coordinator organized. They also volunteered for the book fair and the field trips.

Parent Organization. A growing number of parents attended parent organization meetings each month. Often the school combined curriculum nights with the parent organization meetings, boosting the attendance.

Description of Services

School 2 had an energetic educational assistant serving as a parent coordinator who seemed to have a good rapport with the parents. Once or twice a year, the parent coordinator organized helpful workshops on themes such as healthcare or parenting.

Parent Room. The school's parent room was a hub where a small group of involved parents assembled. A great deal of parent volunteering occurred in the parent room as parents collected and distributed food, uniforms, or other necessities to needy families.

Workshops and Classes. School 2 offered parents a tutoring program in English and Spanish that trained them to teach their child how to read. The school recently started offering an ESL program for the parents.

Childcare. School 2 did not have childcare available to parents on a regular basis. In fact, many parents indicated that parents with pre-school age children found it particularly challenging to attend school events or volunteer because the school did not provide support to the families with young members.

Principals' Vision

The principal in School 2 conceptualized parent involvement as creating partnerships. The principal emphasized that the combined efforts of parents, school, and the students get results. The principal said the school needed the parents to be actively involved in their child's life at school. The principal asserted that parental involvement leads to better student achievement and better student behavior. Also, parental involvement helps the school and all the students since there is more help for different activities. In the principal's view, the ultimate accomplishment was getting the parents to support the homework and teach the children to value education.

The parent coordinator said students benefited when the parent were in the classroom, when they listened to the students read, and when they helped the teacher by giving a student individual attention. The child's behavior changed if the parents were in the school, even if not in the classroom. They knew their parents were around, so they tried to do their best and kept up their grades.

Strategies to Involve Parents

There were many strategies in place in School 2 to bring the parents to the school. The school sent out parent communication and flyers in both English and Spanish. The school offered a tutorial program both in English and Spanish that instructed the parents how to work with their struggling students. The parent room was very popular with the parents and gave them a place to meet.

The school tried to offer the parents what they were interested in. Parents most often attended things that their children did. The school tried to combine curriculum nights or student performances with the PTO meetings. There were five or six curriculum and PTO meeting events throughout the year that included all grade levels. The school developed activities for parents to participate with their student. The overall strategy was to make the parents comfortable coming to the school for the evening activities, so they would feel comfortable and come to school during the day.

The parent coordinator suggested many simple but effective strategies to attract parents' attention: communicating with the parents in their language and offering them food; using flashy, colorful, "razzle dazzle" parent invitations, rolled and with a ribbon, to make them feel special; sending the invitations to school events by mail and following up with telephone reminders.

In one cluster-initiated parent meeting, parents suggested making volunteering mandatory. Instead of giving away things such as the uniforms for free, they would make the parents volunteer in school in return for things.

School 2 Parent Focus Group

Parents expressed satisfaction with the tutoring and reading club programs that encouraged parent involvement and helped students to be better readers. Parents said they attended assemblies, plays, festivals, field trips, book fairs, parent-teacher conferences, and the recognition and award ceremonies for their children.

Expectations of services from the school. Parents claimed that a preschool on campus would be very useful for them to freely participate in the school. Parent perception seemed to be that school discouraged them from bringing their younger children to school when they attended events or volunteered. Parents said they would like the staff to explain the school's accountability status to them. Parents were not clear why the school got their rating and how that can be changed.

Communicating with the classroom teacher. Parents said that they attend the parent-teacher conferences to know how their child is progressing. Moreover, they said they frequently talk to their child's teacher to find out how their child is doing.

Volunteering. Parents volunteered in the parent room with the charitable activities that the parent coordinator organized. They also volunteered for the book fairs and the field trips. Parents also volunteered their time to help with the classroom activities when the teacher asked.

Perspectives on Barriers to Parent Involvement

The principal said work was a barrier as there was less time to participate in school. Language was another barrier. Transportation was often a problem. Also, needing childcare for younger children was an issue for many parents. Other challenges included getting the

staff interested and willing to participate in parental involvement, and making the major time commitment needed to organize activities for the parents to come to the school.

The parent coordinator alluded to cultural and language minority status of some families as a barrier to involvement. S/he emphasized the need to make the parents comfortable in the school so they would be encouraged to participate in school activities. "The parents do not feel welcome. We need to be friendly to them, understand their needs, and answer their questions. As a school, we need to understand differences in cultures," said the coordinator. The coordinator also added that the principal needed to make more frequent contact with the parents, to take the time to visit the Parent room. The principal could come in and talk about the weather. That would make the parents comfortable and feel that the principal cares.

Parents mentioned many issues, including work, as barriers. Parents felt that the school office was not welcoming and warm to the parents. Some parents also believed the school expected them not to bring their young children to school when the parents volunteered or attended functions. Thus, young children at home became a barrier to getting involved in the school for some parents. However, most emphasized that the main barrier was uncaring and disinterested parents.

Concluding Remarks

School 2 seemed to be making progress in increasing parental attendance at meetings, curriculum nights, and recreational activities such as plays and festivals. Volunteering was an area of growth for the school. While a small group of parents was receiving ESL classes, the school was not providing other educational or job related workshops or other helpful services to parents.

The parent coordinator and the regular parent volunteers used the parent room for charitable activities for needy families, displacing the educational focus of the parent involvement program. There was a disconnect between the principal and the parent coordinator about parent involvement and the coordinator seemed to lack direction and vision from the principal to develop meaningful parent involvement in the school.

School 3

Images of Meaningful Parent Involvement

School 3 had a budding parent involvement program that boasted many parent involvement activities – parent organization meetings, science/technology nights, play days, and fairs. School and classroom newsletters communicated news and events to the parents in English and Spanish.

The school took pride in their science-technology education although parent attendance remained low. The librarian conducted a program in the library that involved parents in a literacy activity with their children.

The school's parent coordinator managed a food backpack program for students. The parent coordinator also provided childcare and other support for parents during meetings and open houses. S/he ran a homework club once a week, with parent volunteers.

Parents were always welcome in the school and more parents were getting involved. The school claimed to be taking baby steps towards a successful parent involvement program.

Volunteering. An educational grant to the school required parents to be on the governing board. Parents were getting involved in the management of the new grant and participated in the decisions about the school's use of the grant money. Parents volunteered in the classrooms or in school activities when asked by their teachers or other school staff.

Parent Organization. The parent organization conducted monthly meetings where a Spanish translator was available. The parent organization was beginning to undertake many activities such fund raisers and fairs. The parent organization's growing success in taking a leadership role was evident in their recent campaign and a parent ballot on a policy issue in the school.

Description of services

Parent Room. The school did not have a parent room, but was working on establishing one very soon.

Workshops or classes. While the coordinator was working hard to provide food backpacks to needy families, the school did not seem to be providing educational classes, such as computers or ESL, or other family support services to the families.

Childcare. School 3 was not providing childcare to families with young children.

Principal's Vision

The principal in School 3 asserted that parent involvement helped the parents understand what the children were doing; that involved parents understood why certain policies were in place. They were more likely to adhere to the policies. Experience showed that when the parents

understood the policies, the situation improved. For instance, the principal communicated with the parents through parent meetings and explained to them that the students lost many hours of instruction if they were tardy. The tardy problem decreased after the communication with the parents. The principal relied on the parent organization meetings to communicate about important school-related issues with the parents. The principal helped the parents understand the school's performance according to the state ratings. The school got the parents involved in testing which helped the parents better understand testing and its purpose.

Strategies to Involve Parents

The main strategies to involve parents were parent organization meetings, science/technology nights, parent-teacher conferences, and parent participation on the grant board. The school communicated with the parents through the school and classroom level newsletters. School newsletters went out twice a month and classroom newsletters were distributed once a month.

School 3 Parent Focus Group

Parents appreciated the principal's involvement with the children. Parents said the tutoring program had produced great results for their children, who in some cases progressed from K to 2nd grade reading levels. Parents expected the school to provide extra help when their child was behind and they appreciated the school offering an effective tutoring program.

Expectations of services from the school. Parents argued that the school must give parents free access to get involved in classrooms and school activities. More than one parent expressed a perception that the school administration's goal was to make the children independent and did not show support for parent involvement in the classroom.

Parents also seemed to expect help to overcome the language barrier. Parents said the school needed more bilingual classrooms to meet the needs of monolingual Spanish speaking students. They stated the school should provide information to Spanish speakers in Spanish. Parents in the focus group claimed that many parents could not speak to the principal when they needed to because there was no Spanish interpreter available. According to the parents, the school offered more workshops and ESL classes to parents in the past and they would like to see the school offer classes and workshops again. Finally, parents also said that they would like more information from the school about policies and decisions.

Communicating with the classroom teacher. Parents said they attended parent-teacher conferences and spoke to the classroom teacher very frequently to find out how their child was doing.

Volunteering. Parents emphasized that they helped where and when needed. However, they said they were not clear if the school wanted them to get involved and volunteer or not.

Perspectives on Barriers to Parent Involvement

The principal in School 3 said work prevented many parents from participating in the school, but acknowledged that there were those who stayed involved even when both parents worked. Single parent families had less time. Children were involved in activities and had homework, creating scheduling conflicts for the parents. One of the challenges was working around their work schedules and being able to accommodate everybody.

According to the parent coordinator, language was a barrier for some parents who did not speak English well. The parent coordinator also said that, for some parents, work was a barrier to greater involvement in schools. Other parents had personal problems in life and could not get involved. Their issues could be poverty, divorce, and a variety of other personal issues.

Parents mentioned work and language as barriers to greater involvement in schools. Many parents spoke English and the teachers pushed for English. Communication remained a challenge for the Spanish speaking parents. Parents, however, conceded that there was a limited parent involvement in school because many parents simply were not interested in getting involved.

Concluding Remarks

School 3 was at a formative stage of the parent involvement program that continued to explore different ways parents could be involved in the school. The principal seemed to value parent involvement but did not articulate a compelling vision of parent engagement. The parents maintained they were unclear whether the school wanted them to be involved. The principal may have encouraged students' independence, which the parents misinterpreted as the school being unwelcoming. Perhaps the goal of independent students can be combined with greater parent participation by having the parents help other children. It would be helpful if the school administration sent a clear message to the staff and the community about their parent involvement policy and plan. The parents would benefit from a clear indication from the school that their participation is appreciated, invited, and supported by the school and how their involvement can complement the principal's push for more independence among students. The parents expressed a desire to cross the language barrier with the help of the school and to get more involved in the school.

School 4

Images of Meaningful Parent Involvement

Despite repeated efforts, the evaluator was not able attend school events, view documents, or freely access parents to understand the school's parent involvement program.

Volunteering. The evaluator could not get information on volunteering.

Parent Organization. The evaluator could not get information about the parent organization at the school.

Description of Services

Parent Room. No information became available to the evaluator about a parent room.

Workshops and Classes. The principal said the school has offered a computer class for the parents and the community.

Childcare. It did not seem that childcare was available for parents with young children.

Principal's Vision

The principal said that the purpose of parent involvement was educating the child and believed that parents should become a part of the school learning community. Parents should be involved in decision-making and in homework. However, the principal's elaboration of his/her view of parent involvement all but ruled out a possibility of a significant parent involvement in the school. In the principal's words:

"Our school is out of infancy; it has reached the adult level. Parents are always welcome in the classrooms, at lunch. Today they are planting in front of the school. The school does not do workshops such as on nutrition, etc. We are more sophisticated and focus on standards-based education."

In effect, the principal said that the school did not have a program that attempted to get the parents to school and make them comfortable getting involved. The principal essentially said that the school was sophisticated and advanced and focused on standards-based education, not on the parent program, or even a parent program around understanding standards.

Strategies to involve parents

The principal described the school's reading and math program-related events for the parents. Parents were invited to attend the math training four afternoons through the year. The school was standards-based and parents received progress updates each week. Classroom teachers sent home newsletters every month.

The principal stated the school allowed parents to come at any time to visit. Computer training classes were available to parents. Some community members took the classes as well. The school bought 15 word processors for the parents to check out and take home. Two special events also took place in the year – The Fall and Spring Festivals. According to the principal, testing took away from other recreational events for parents. The 1st grade arranged tea for moms and dads twice a year. The school had a Family Support Team that dealt with referrals and figured out ways to support the family as needed.

The principal said the staff was trained in the Epstein model two years prior. “Now they are past that. Now they are focusing on sharing curriculum and best practices with the parents,” the principal said. The school’s parent organization was a “sophisticated group of parents,” according to the principal, and they knew the Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS). While the principal claimed that the parent organization focused on sharing the curriculum with the parents, the evaluator was never given any concrete evidence of that claim.

School 4 Parent Focus Group

The administration in School 4 never gave the evaluator an opportunity to convene a parent focus group despite repeated attempts to work with the assistant principal to gain access to parents. Hence, the perspectives and opinions of parents in School 4 did not get represented in this evaluation.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

The principal identified transportation, parental work, and single parenting as problems standing in the way of greater parent involvement in the school. The evaluator was unable to access the parent coordinator and never spoke to him/her about barriers to parent involvement and strategies to get them involved.

Concluding Remarks about School 4

The school seemed to have a very limited parent involvement beyond what is prescribed by the reading and math programs. The suggestion box, a family support team to review the referred cases, or standards-focused communication with the parents may not provide the welcoming atmosphere or the support to motivate parents to get involved in their child’s education.

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

While parent involvement programs across schools shared many common features, this case study found different levels of maturation and intensity in the schools' parent involvement programs. Parent programs in three out of the four schools showed a strong commitment to parent involvement and designed activities to engage parents. Nonetheless, schools in the study exhibited a continuum of involvement from very rich to very narrow, with programs making progress somewhere in between.

The most comprehensive parent program was also characterized by a meaningful parent engagement in the school. The principal of this school had a clear and useful model depicting different levels of parent involvement. (See page 7) The underlying assumption was that all types and levels of parent involvement were important and parents were respected for even the basic involvement.

The parent coordinators and teachers worked in unison, following a definite direction from the principal. Thus, the alignment of the leadership's vision with the ensuing parent-focused strategies resulted in a rich parent involvement. While this is not the only model of parent involvement, the success of the school communicates the value of having a schema, a concrete picture of parent involvement. Schools should have some blueprint that shows a continuum and communicates the value of all levels of parent involvement. A model or a schema clarifies expectations for parents, teachers, and administrators to visualize and work towards increasing parent involvement.

Parent involvement programs in two other schools showed promise as parents were participating in schools more frequently than before. RDA found limited evidence of significant collaboration between the principals and parent coordinators to articulate goals and plans to enhance their parent involvement programs. Even when a parent coordinator has innovative strategies to involve parents, a parent program can be only marginally successful without the principal's guidance, support, and a clearly articulated vision.

The fourth school stated that they had an open-door policy for parents. An open-door policy alone does not make for a robust parent involvement program as evidenced by their very limited parent involvement. Remarkably, this was the only school in the evaluation that had not made use of its parent involvement allocation of \$2,015. RDA could not access the parents or the parent coordinator despite repeated efforts.

The accountability status of the four schools tells a very interesting story. When looking at the past three years, it is clear that School 1 made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2004 and successfully met standards in the preceding years. Schools 2 and 3 were probationary at least once between 2002 and 2004, but made the AYP in 2004. School 4, on the other hand, was the only school in the study to fail to make AYP in 2004 although the school met standards in previous years. Although there is no causal connection between the accountability status and the school's parent program, the status brings into focus an association among the school's programs and performance.

The evaluation found that school leadership is one of the most critical components of successful parent involvement. A school's administrative team is responsible for envisioning a clear parent involvement model and strategies to implement the model. A strong parent involvement program values and integrates parents in school and classroom, going far beyond simply hosting parent involvement meetings.

In three sites where the principal had either not communicated or formulated his/her vision, the parent coordinators seemed to lack clear direction and support from the principals in implementing the parent involvement program. In two of these schools parent coordinators spend more time and energy arranging for charitable donations to families and considerably less time implementing strategies to involve parents in providing support for their child's education.

Parents and administrators name a number of barriers to parent involvement. Work is a major barrier that prevents parents from getting involved in their student's school. Language and cultural barriers may discourage parental involvement in schools. Personal and family problems, such as transportation, health, poverty, or divorce may also prevent parents from supporting their child's education. Another leading cause for parental non-participation is having other young children at home. Insufficient opportunities to participate in schools or an absence of positive experiences in their own schooling may also lead parents to not get involved in schools. In one of the four schools in the evaluation, with strong leadership from the principal, there was a plan in place to effectively deal with these barriers. A well-formulated and communicated vision of parent involvement helped mitigate the impact of these barriers.

Provision of childcare is listed in recommendations as a strategy to parent involvement. This warrants further study. While parents view childcare as a great incentive and support for parent engagement, there are issues about liability and abuse of the services that must be considered before blanket acceptance and implementation of this strategy.

Recommendations

Effective strategies to increase parent engagement

- The parent room is effective in providing parents a place to assemble or to receive educational classes and workshops. Having a familiar place that conveys a sense of belonging is critical.
- Services that support families, such as educational classes or the provision of information about accessing health care or other community-based resources, seem to improve parental involvement.
- One strategy to improve parent attendance in the meetings is involving parents in choosing the meeting topics.
- To overcome the language barrier, schools should have translators available to the parents. While schools are efficiently providing newsletters and other materials in dual languages,

parents often feel unable to communicate with the teachers or other school staff without a translator present. Parent-teacher conferences are essential parent engagement. If the language barrier prevents parents from volunteering in the classroom or communicating with the teachers, schools need to explore ways to make parent involvement in the classroom possible.

- Providing childcare on campus is an excellent way to engage parents in educational, self-improvement, and volunteer activities. Providing childcare is a relatively modest endeavor for schools, but the lack of childcare is a significant barrier to parents.
- Offering child-centered activities such as performances to get the parents to come to the school is typically effective. Parents who are otherwise uninvolved seem to like to attend their own child's performances.

Developing and articulating a model of parent involvement

This evaluation suggests that the focus should be on developing and communicating models of parent engagement that help principals bring the necessary leadership to their school's parent involvement. The model helps coordinate the many varied activities into a meaningful whole.

Schools should have some model that shows a continuum, communicates the value of all levels of parent involvement, and provides a road map for a parent program. A model or a schema provides a common language and expectation for parents, teachers, and administrators to view and work towards increasing parent involvement.

District support of parent engagement

The district support for parent involvement should begin with professional development around developing and articulating a model of meaningful parent engagement. To date, much of the parent engagement support has focused on building a repertoire of parent activities assuming that a model was in place.

Implications

This evaluation presents a model of parent involvement successfully used by a school at APS to produce great results for the students. This model of parent involvement suggests a paradigm shift in our conception of schooling and inclusion of parents in schools. While this model is transferable to other schools, any model clearly conceptualized and articulated by the principal is critical to parent engagement.

Notes

¹ Section 1118(d) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). Stipulations of Section 1118 (d) are incorporated in No Child Left Behind Act, enacted by the One Hundred and Seventh Congress of the United States in 2001.

² Critics point to the methodological weaknesses of studies showing a relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. For example, they argue that studies lack true experimental designs with random assignment of families to control and experimental groups, and hence do not establish a causal relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. In general, flaws in existing research fall into four areas: use of non-experimental design, lack of isolation of parent involvement effects, inconsistent definitions of parent involvement, and non-objective measures of parent involvement.

³ Henderson, A. T. and K. L. Mapp (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. In S. Constantino *Engaging All Families* (p.25). Lanham, MA: Scarecrow Education. (2003)

⁴ In one of the four schools, the researcher accomplished only an incomplete data collection since there were many barriers such as unreturned phone calls, scheduling problems, and non-cooperation from schools administrators and staff.