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Parental Involvement: Barriers Hispanic Parents Face

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Parental Involvement: Barriers Hispanic Parents Face

by

Iris Cruz

Degree to be awarded August 2016

A thesis project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of
the College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the
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Parental Involvement: Barriers Hispanic Parents Face

by

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Dedication

The road to this journey has been a long, and many times an arduous one, but one which has instilled a great deal of pride in me. I would first like to dedicate this work to my dear and loving son, Giovanni, whose time with me was often sacrificed as I worked long hours to complete this work. “Mami don’t do work!” as he cried and pleaded for my time and affection, and “Mami not do any work tonight!” with a smile on his face, were words that night after night pulled at my heartstrings. Giovito, right now you are too young to understand and appreciate the sacrifices of time I had to make with you but I want you to know that you were my inspiration and my drive for completing this project, thank you for that. I love you with all of my heart, mi papi chulo!

I would also like to dedicate this work to my loving mom and my dear friend, Mercedes, who were not only always there with kind words of support and encouragement, but who also took time away from their busy schedules and oftentimes rearranged their days to care for my son as I worked to accomplish my goals. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my professor and advisor, Professor Rossi, who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself.

Thank you God for giving me the courage and strength to continue on even when

I wanted to give up and felt I no longer could.

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Abstract

Parental involvement in education is considered to be one of the key contributing factors to students' academic success whose benefits have been well established. In spite of this, lack of parental involvement continues to be one of the leading concerns schools in the United States face, especially among Hispanic parents whose children have long been characterized by low levels of high school completion and highest dropout rates of any other ethnicity. Findings indicate that Hispanic parents face unique barriers, such as language barriers, low levels of education, and economic hardships that hinder their involvement in their children's education and that traditional approaches aimed at increasing parental involvement, which focus on school-based involvement, have proved largely ineffective with Hispanic parents as they fail to consider the factors that dissuade parents from becoming involved. These insights can inform schools and educators' efforts of increasing parental involvement by identifying and creating awareness about the factors that influence and preclude parental involvement among Hispanic parents.

Chapter 1

Problem Statement

Parental involvement plays a very important and critical role in the academic success of students. For clarification purposes, the term “parent” will be used to include all caregivers (grandma, aunt, uncle, sister, etc.) with whom the children reside or whom are legally responsible for the children. Extensive literature attributes parental involvement as a key factor in higher academic gains. For instance, according to a report from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, "When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7).

Furthermore, a review of literature on this topic by Henderson and Berla (1994) reveals that parental involvement is the strongest predictor of student achievement. In addition to these findings, Prosis (2008) asserts, "The best predictor of student success in high school is student success in elementary and middle school" (para. 2). These findings suggest that parental involvement, particularly in the early years, is critical to the future and continuing success of students. However, despite the influential role that parents play in increasing student achievement, lack of parental involvement in schools continues to be a problem across the United States.

For English language learners (ELLs), who constitute the fastest growing population of students enrolled in public schools in the United States (NEA, 2005), the role of parental involvement is of even greater significance. In the 2013-2014 school year, there were 241,138 ELLs enrolled in public schools in New York State (NCELA,

2015). While the graduation rate for all students in public schools in New York State in 2013-2014 was 77.8%, for ELLs, the graduation rate was a disheartening 37.1% (NCELA, 2015). The significance of the disparity in high school graduation rates of non-ELLs and ELL students is an issue that cannot be overlooked and which needs to be addressed.

Although schools have made efforts to involve parents and families of ELLs in their children's education, parental involvement among the ELL population continues to be an area of concern in bilingual education (Prosise, 2008). The researcher's nine years of teaching in bilingual education confirm Prosise's findings. During parent/teacher conferences and student activities, for example, ELL parents seem to be grossly underrepresented. Both at the high school level as well as the elementary level, the researcher has found a lack of ELL parental engagement to be a prevalent issue affecting the academic achievement of ELLs.

The researcher attributes the lack of parental involvement to several reasons. First, the researcher believes that unfamiliarity with the American school system, parental educational levels, and lack of English proficiency may influence the extent of parental engagement. Parents of ELLs who do not understand how the school system functions in the United States, who may have limited literacy skills, and who in addition do not speak English, may feel a sense of insecurity or intimidation about their ability or inability to help their children academically. Second, the researcher postulates that differences in parent/teacher perceptions regarding the role adults play in education is another significant factor affecting parental involvement. Many Hispanic parents view teachers as

authoritative figures and feel it is the responsibility of the adults in the school to address any issues or concerns that may arise in the classroom. Furthermore, the researcher also posits that an unwelcoming school environment, socioeconomic, and family structure are factors that influence parental involvement. Finally, the researcher conceives that parents may not know how to contribute or get involved. At the researcher's school, for example, information on this topic is not readily available or disclosed to parents.

Research shows that when parents of ELLs are actively involved and are active participants in their children's education, student achievement increases (Prosise, 2008). However, ELL parents may not know how they can contribute, and may not realize just how powerful their participation can be in helping their children succeed in school. It has been the researcher's experience that parents who are more involved are those who know their rights and responsibilities, and know how to advocate for their children. By helping parents be more informed, the goal is that their involvement and participation will increase, and in turn, ELL students will be more successful.

Significance of the Problem

To examine whether a correlation exists between ELL parental involvement and student achievement at the researcher's workplace, Abraham Lincoln School 22, for Grades K-3, the researcher created a 12-question survey. The survey was specifically developed to measure the extent of parental involvement, teachers' perception of the importance of parental involvement, opportunities the school presents to engage parents, barriers and other factors that affect parental participation, school-home communication efforts, as well as awareness of ELL parental rights. Respondents were also given the

opportunity to provide suggestions on ways to increase ELL parental involvement. The survey consisted of answering yes/no, scale rating, as well as checking off responses, sometimes multiple responses.

The researcher has worked at Abraham Lincoln School 22 for 1.3 years, but has nine years of experience teaching Bilingual Special Education and three months' experience as a Bilingual Resource teacher. Abraham Lincoln School 22 is a pre-K-6 public elementary school located in Rochester, N.Y. Rochester, the third largest city in New York State after New York City and Buffalo according to the 2010 Census Bureau, has a population of 209, 802 of which 16.4% are Hispanic or Latino, and has the highest concentration of Hispanic children living in poverty (57%) in all of Monroe County (actrochester.org). Furthermore, according to an article in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, "Ninety percent of Rochester School District students are "economically disadvantaged," meaning they or their families are eligible for free or reduced-price meals or participation in some other assistance program" (Riley, 2015, para. 5). Abraham Lincoln School 22 has an enrollment of 602 students, of which 161 are identified as ELLs. The school supports English language learners through a bilingual program.

The parental involvement questionnaire was administered to 15 staff members in the bilingual department as well as to the principal and vice principal who are not bilingual. Ten people responded: the school principal, the bilingual department coach, the parent liaison, and seven bilingual teachers. Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, was used to analyze the results. The data revealed several significant findings. First, data revealed that all respondents regarded parental involvement as an extremely important

factor in students' academic success; however, none of the respondents rated parental involvement as excellent. In fact, only 10% of the respondents rated parental involvement as good, 50% rated it as fair, and the remaining 40% of the respondents rated it as poor. All of the respondents agreed that the school provides opportunities for parents to be involved; however, 70% of the respondents indicated that parents were only sometimes invited to participate in their children's education in the classroom.

Another significant finding is that over half of the respondents, 70%, recorded parents not knowing how to contribute as the principal barrier affecting parental engagement. The next reasons cited were parents having different priorities and low educational level of parents, with a 50% response. Lack of resources, transportation, and childcare was reported by 40% of the respondents as the third reason for the lack of parental involvement with ELL parents among the options given by the researcher. Survey respondents cited face-to-face meetings at the school as the most effective way to reach out to parents.

The survey also asked respondents to answer questions related to school-home communication efforts in the parents' native language and whether they and parents were aware of the rights of ELL parents. While 70% of the respondents reported being aware of the parental rights of ELLs, 60% did not believe ELL parents are at all aware of their parental rights. In regards to increasing parental involvement at their school, 80% of survey respondents indicated that providing parents/teachers with information on resources/organizations that can assist with things such as food and clothing would be the most helpful in improving and increasing parental involvement. Providing information to

parents, educating them about their parental rights, and providing information on how parents can volunteer or get involved were also cited as effective ways to get parents involved.

Furthermore, suggestions were made on improving parental involvement which centered on educating parents on the importance of parental involvement, especially for those parents with limited education who may feel they do not have much to offer. Among the suggestions was to provide guidance, mentorship, and support to parents from qualified personnel. The bilingual coach expressed the need for parents to be well informed of the bilingual program in which their child is participating in. Moreover, she conveyed the need of parents of ELL students to understand that the school system here is different than the one from which they came. She also added that teachers need to reach out and make the effort to know parents. The principal noted that teaching staff must be aware of the challenges ELLs and their parents face and should be careful of passing judgements about parental involvement and whether parents care or not based on their perception. He concluded by stating that parental involvement is more than just attending parent/teacher conferences; it is what they [parents] do at home with their kids, volunteer, and attend school events.

To understand how this survey data analysis relates to student achievement at Abraham Lincoln School 22, the researcher attempted to obtain student data from teacher respondents relating to report card grades and standardized test. However, the researcher was unable to attain such data. As a result, respondents were asked a follow-up question in which they were asked to determine if they believe there is a correlation between

student achievement when parents are actively involved. Although all who responded to the follow-up question indicated that the question of correlation was not an easy one to answer given their lack of formal knowledge regarding the effects of parental involvement, they all reported that their experience has led them to believe that there is in fact, a positive correlation between student achievement and parental involvement. That is, they have noted higher academic gains for students whose parents are actively involved in their education than those who are not.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to identify potential barriers to parental involvement and examine if there is a relationship between parents who actively participate in their children's education and academic achievement. By identifying potential barriers and exploring the correlation between student success and parent engagement, the researcher aims to create a product that will increase the level of parental involvement and thus student achievement at Abraham Lincoln School 22. Furthermore, given that the issue of parental involvement is not isolated to ELLs, it is the researcher's goal that the product or appropriate adaptations of it will go beyond the bilingual department at the researcher's school to benefit the entire Abraham Lincoln School 22 community.

Rationale

As the population of ELLs continues to grow in the United States, it is important that schools make all efforts to provide support and increase the academic achievement of this population of students who continuously and consistently lag behind academically (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). For Hispanic students at School 22, who live in an impoverished

environment, and consequently have limited access and availability of materials, such as books and access to technology, increasing parental involvement would help increase their chances of academic success. Increasing parental involvement, researchers assert, increases student academic gains. Students whose parents are closely involved and engaged in their school and learning generally exhibit fewer behavioral problems, tend to have higher academic gains, and have higher graduation rates than those students whose parents are not actively involved (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The greatest impact of parental involvement, according to several studies, is most evident during the elementary years (Jeynes, 2005; Jeynes, 2007; Prorise, 2008). Parents who are involved are able to observe and keep abreast of what is going on in their child's school, what their child is doing in the classroom, and work with teachers to minimize unacceptable classroom behavior and encourage positive, acceptable behaviors (Hill & Taylor, 2004). When other factors such as undesired classroom behaviors are reduced, more time can be devoted to academics consequently increasing academic performance.

Conclusion

Although the researcher was limited in making comparable observations using student data, the significance of the results from the survey analysis is important as it supports the researcher's premise that ELL parental involvement at Abraham Lincoln School 22 is an area of concern which needs to be improved. Furthermore, the problem of lack of parental involvement and the many factors that impact and influence parents and school efforts to increase parental engagement are not solely localized to the researcher's school; it is an issue prevalent across the United States that warrants further investigation.

A review of the literature will shed light on the importance of parental involvement and student success and will help the researcher explore possible and plausible solutions that can be implemented at Abraham Lincoln School 22.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the positive effect parental involvement has on student achievement as well as to examine the barriers that affect parental involvement among Hispanic parents. The researcher will attempt to answer the following questions: What is parental involvement? What are the main findings/conclusions of research that have investigated the positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement, particularly as it relates to Hispanics? What is known about the characteristics of Hispanic children in education? What is known about the parents of Hispanic children? Does parental involvement look different for Hispanic parents than it does for non-Hispanic white parents? What are the factors that influence and inhibit parental involvement efforts by Hispanic parents? Lastly, what has been done to increase parental involvement, particularly for Hispanic parents? By examining previous and current literature addressing these questions, the researcher will identify barriers to parent engagement in the Hispanic population in an effort to highlight ways these obstacles have successfully been addressed to increase parental involvement and student achievement.

Defining Parental Involvement

The No Child Left Behind Act, a law passed in 2002, which holds schools

accountable for their students' academic outcomes in an effort to close the disparaging achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and minority students and their more advantaged counterparts, define parental involvement in education as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (US Dept. of Education, 2004, p. 9).

Defining parental involvement, however, is not as simple as at first hand it might appear, or as the definition provided under the NCLB Act might suggest: "parental involvement means different things to different people" (Granville & Russell, p. 2). The authors explain that "parental involvement" includes a myriad of variables comprised of various activities that constitute involvement represented by formal and informal involvement: formal involvement refers to those activities that are school-based while informal involvement refers to the activities that are home-based. Furthermore, parents and teachers' perception of parental involvement although similar in ways, vary widely (Herrell, 2011). Parents and educators, for example, may have differing views on what aspects of parent engagement embody parental involvement/participation. Likewise, districts and states may not see eye-to-eye on the elements that define and amount to parental involvement.

Beyond the complexities of elements or defining constituents, the issue is further complicated by ascertaining which aspects of parental involvement correlate with increases in student academic success. Is attending parent-teacher conferences and school events sufficient involvement to have an impact on student achievement? What

about parents not being physically present in the school but being active in the home?

What impact, if any, do these differing types of involvement have on student

achievement?

Moreover, and perhaps the most troublesome aspect in defining the variables that make up parental involvement, is that definitions of parental involvement are generally constructed to address the “White” parents (Zarate, 2007). Although the definition established by the NCLB is far more encompassing in terms of defining the varying levels and degrees of parental involvement than others, it fails to consider and account for discrepancies in the level and types of parental involvement that exist across different ethnicities and races. Zarate (2007) explains that definitions of parental involvement often lack factors relevant to the Hispanic parents and do not factor in how Hispanic parents define parental involvement.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

The positive significance parental involvement has on student achievement is one of the least contested topics in education worldwide, from the US to Europe, Australia, Scandinavia and the UK (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Fan and Chen (2001), for example, have linked parental involvement to student academic success. Their study, which was an examination of elementary students in urban schools, looked to examine how parental involvement and academic achievement are connected. Their findings revealed a strong relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. They also found that parents’ high educational expectations were a strong predictor of student academic success.

A new edition of the publication by *A New Wave of Evidence* (2002), which in the 1980s sought to explore the link between PTA and students' higher academic gains, delve deeper into the issue by synthesizing years of research across 51 studies regarding family and school connections (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). According to this publication, "Regardless of family income or background, students whose parents are involved in their schooling are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school" (Responsive Classroom, 2016, p. 3).

These findings have been echoed by other researchers as well. An article by Grace Chen (2008), highlight some additional and important benefits of parental involvement. In her article, Chen asserts that the positive impact parents have on students are not only noted on student academic achievement, but also on students' attitudes about school. Chen explains that when parents demonstrate and take an interest in their children's education, these factors can translate into students having more positive attitudes toward school, improved classroom behavior, higher self-esteem, less absenteeism, greater student motivation, and increased communication between parent and child. Chen also states that parents are regularly more involved during the elementary school years, a critical period of child development. Early parental involvement, according to research, yields greater academic gains in students (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). It is during these vital years of development that parents can begin building the foundation for later academic success as it is much easier to enforce school attendance, build and instill high academic expectations, and enforce discipline than it is in the later academic years

(Zarate, 2007). Of particular importance is the finding that “the academic achievement of low-income students, in particular, seems to improve as parent involvement increases” (*Educational Research Newsletter*, n.d., p. 7).

In spite of the overwhelming literature supporting academic gains when parents are involved, lack of parental involvement continues to be the “biggest problem facing public schools” (Enterprise City Schools, n.d., p.1). This lack of parental involvement is largely a result of schools’ ineffectiveness and inability in creating successful programs for parents in spite of their efforts (*Educational Research Newsletter*, n.d.). This newsletter cites a study of mostly Mexican-American parents at a Texas elementary school, which revealed that despite school efforts to get parents more actively involved, efforts were futile due to failure to account for factors that dissuaded parents from becoming involved, such as language, parent’s level of education, and educators’ attitudes and perceptions. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) add another contributing factor: parent beliefs (this includes aspects such as the role parents should play in their children’s education, parent perceptions of invitation, and beliefs about parents own ability to help their children academically).

Despite the fact that these factors affect parents across all races and ethnicities, variances do exist. As such, attention will be drawn to how specifically these factors directly impact and influence Hispanic parents’ efforts at becoming involved in their children’s education. First, however, and to fully understand the potential negative impact such factors can have on parental involvement efforts by Hispanic parents, it is important to understand the characteristics of the students who are most impacted by them.

Characteristics of Hispanic Students

Hispanic children, the majority of which come from low-income, disadvantaged families, are the second largest growing population of students in schools in the United States. The latest figures from the United States Census Bureau, indicate that Hispanic children now make up approximately 25% of the population of children in the United States, with the numbers expected to increase to 33% by the year 2050. Yet a plethora of research points to Hispanic students as having the lowest levels of education and the highest dropout rate of any student group (Child Trends, 2014; NCES, 2016; U.S. Census, 2010). In the 2011-2012 school year, the nationwide graduation rate for Hispanics was 73% while non-Hispanic whites graduated at a rate of 86%.

There are several reasons for the disproportionate rates of graduation; the most significant is poverty. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau show as many as 32%, or nearly one in three Hispanic children living with low-income parents whose income, by definition, is less than half the poverty line, barely enough to meet their basic needs, compared to 17% of non-Hispanic white children living in poverty. The implications of these statistics are grave. First, children raised and living in poverty face challenges and constraints that negatively impact learning and academic achievement. Conditions of poor health and well-being, such as “substandard housing, inadequate medical care, and poor nutrition can affect . . . a child's physical and cognitive development. Such factors influence students' ability to benefit from schooling” (Edutopia, 2016, p. 2). In addition, Winters & Cowie (2009), assert that prolonged economic hardship can also have a negative impact on children’s mental health and motivation to do well in school.

It has long been well established and documented that children who live in poverty often lag behind their more affluent counterparts in terms of literacy and language development, an issue that is often compounded for Hispanic students due to language barriers (Ramos, 2014) and limited access and availability of materials, such as books (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). Yet another factor related to the effects of poverty on the academic achievement of low-income children relates to housing instability. That is, students who live in poverty, for reasons beyond their control, frequently relocate from place to place, which according to the article, *How does Poverty Influence Learning?*, “almost always have a negative academic and social impact on students” (Edutopia, 2016, p. 5).

Unfortunately, in the absence of effective interventions, the prospect of countering these challenges only continues to build as children move through the educational system, resulting in lower school performance and Hispanics having the lowest levels of high school completion and highest dropout rates of any other ethnicity as previously stated earlier in this section (Child Trends, 2014; NCES, 2016; U.S. Census, 2010).

Knowledge and understanding about the challenges and factors of poverty that plague the Hispanic community are important and invaluable for educators to be equipped with as they work to support, teach, and advance the academic success of students who live in poverty. Equally important for educators is to understand the differences that exist between different races/ethnicities in the type of and level of involvement and be informed about the factors that influence parental involvement.

Variations in Parental Involvement

All parents, regardless of demographics, face general obstacles from time to time that prevent them from becoming as involved in their children's education as perhaps they might desire. There are, however, marked differences between Hispanic parents and non-Hispanic white parents in the level and type of involvement that are typically associated with demographic factors and perceptions of what constitute parental involvement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Child Trends, 2013).

Data from the US Census Bureau shows that non-Hispanic white parents are generally characterized by higher incomes and higher levels of educational attainment than are Hispanic parents. These disparities in income and education typically result in higher levels of parental involvement by non-Hispanic parents compared to Hispanic parents (Child Trends, 2013). Another significant variance that exists between non-Hispanic white parents and Hispanic parents relates to perceptions of what constitutes parental involvement. Non-Hispanic white parents generally define parental involvement in terms of academic and school involvement. In contrast, when Hispanic parents were asked to define parental involvement in education, Hispanic parents mentioned participation in their children's lives more frequently than academic involvement: teach good morals and respect for others; be aware of child's peer group and interacting with peers' parents; monitor school attendance; warn of dangers outside the home, such as illegal drugs (Zarate, 2007). Essentially, Hispanic parents equate parental involvement in education with home-based activities as compared to non-Hispanic white parents who define it in terms of school-based activities.

Not unlike most other parents, Hispanic parents have high aspirations for their children to succeed and do well in school and thereafter. In fact, a report compiled by Child Trends (2015), shows that these aspirations and expectations tend to be greater among parents born outside of the United States. However, despite high ambitions for their children to flourish and prosper academically, Hispanic children continue to be overrepresented in elevated high school dropout rates and low graduation rates in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

As will be reflected in the pages that follow, lack of parental involvement is more prevalent, critical, and detrimental to children's academic success among Hispanics than is the case for non-Hispanic white students. Understanding and identifying, then, the variables that affect Hispanic parents themselves and hinder their involvement in their children's education is an important and necessary step in helping to create programs and establish relationships that promote and increase parental involvement and academic achievement (Snell, Nola, & Jean, 2009).

Barriers for Hispanic Parents

Unfamiliarity with the American School System

Hispanic parents in the United States regard education as very important. They have high educational aspirations and expectations and genuinely want their children to succeed. However, Hispanic parents “struggle to navigate aspects of a system they are unfamiliar with, and that sometimes fails to “speak their language” (Guzman, et al., n.d., p. 16). Hispanic parents new to the country are often unfamiliar with the differing parental roles and expectations of the American school system and simply do not know

how they can contribute in positive ways to their children's education, factors that can create a great deal of stress and anxiety for parents (Salinas, 1997). They are unaware that being parents of ELL students' guarantees them certain rights, such as the right to an interpreter, and the right to have materials sent home translated in their language, that places them in a position to be better advocates for their children. As a result, Hispanic parents often feel a sense of helplessness about their ability to contribute to their children's education (Good et al., 2010). Furthermore, Hispanic parents face a myriad of other challenges that inhibit and affect their involvement in school related to their children's education. These challenges are typically associated with factors related to parental and teacher perceptions, language, limited education, feeling unwelcomed, socioeconomic, and family structure.

Parent/Teacher Perceptions

The last two decades has changed the face of the American school system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), "Between fall 2003 and fall 2013, the number of White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools decreased from 28.4 million to 25.2 million, and the percentage who were White decreased from 59 to 50 percent. In contrast, the number of Hispanic students enrolled increased from 9.0 million to 12.5 million, and the percentage who were Hispanic increased from 19 to 25 percent" (p. 1). These numbers are expected to climb.

This trend in the growing population of Hispanics in the United States has forced educators to reconsider how the academic needs of this diverse population of students are met. It is important to note, however, that while the number of Hispanic students

continues to surge, the teachers in charge of their education are predominantly white and middle class (LaRocque, 2011). This cultural mismatch can create conflicts that arise out of cultural misunderstandings.

Hispanic parents and educators commonly hold different views about the roles of parents and teachers in the classroom and about what constitutes parental involvement (Guzman et al., n.d.). Their definition of "parental involvement may not align with the white, middle-class norms of the school" (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 79). For example, parents are frequently encouraged to actively participate in their children's education by participating in school events, attending parent/teacher conferences, and asking about their children's progress. However, Hispanic parents believe their role is to educate their children in the home. According to Quezada et al. (2003), Hispanic parents believe that is primarily the school's responsibility to educate their children; they trust, and often do not question, educators' decisions regarding their children's academics (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Vang, 2006) as this may be construed as a form of disrespect (Smith et al., 2008).

Additionally, findings from a research study by Guzman et al. (n.d.) reveal that Hispanic parental involvement is often influenced and dictated by cultural beliefs and "by traditions of respect for authority (*respeto*), which can inhibit behaviors seen as challenging the teacher or school" (p. 19). "Many Hispanic parents perceive their role as providing nurturing, teaching values and instilling good behaviors. They are often reluctant to take on responsibilities they traditionally view as being in the school's domain, regard teachers and schools as "the experts" and deferring to them on tasks related to actual learning" (Arias, & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 10).

While educators would welcome the type of involvement that comes from inquiries about student assignments and progress, Hispanic parents may feel they are being disrespectful (Smith et al., 2008) and as a result, limit their direct school involvement to instances of misbehavior by their children or when educators invite them to come in (Ramirez, 2003). This does not mean that Hispanic parents feel absolved from the responsibility of educating their children; it means that they feel their job is to educate them at home by teaching good values and making sure they are well-taken care of, for example, which they believe are important factors that contribute to their academic development.

Although views regarding parental involvement may be influenced by culture and traditions, educators may view this lack of parental engagement negatively, and erroneously assume that Hispanic parents are simply “uninvolved and disinterested” in their child’s education (Floyd, 2005, p. 127). Cultural misunderstandings between educators and parents can leave the parents feeling a disconnect between their culture and the American school culture, which can unintentionally affect and hinder Hispanic parents’ efforts to become involved (Carlisle et al., 2005).

Language Barrier

Language has been cited as one of the most salient barriers to parental involvement across numerous research studies (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Guzman, et al., n.d; Zarate, 2007). Hispanic parents cannot as effectively help their children with homework or easily communicate with school personnel if they are lacking or limited in English proficiency (Zarate, 2008). This language barrier results in

communication gaps between educators and Hispanic parents that can produce tremendous fear, embarrassment, frustration, and intimidation in Hispanic parents, leaving them to feel disempowered to participate in any decision-making affecting their children's education (Guzman, et al., n.d.).

Hispanic parents are oftentimes unfamiliar with the workings of the school system in the United States, which can generate a great deal of “confusion and frustration with an educational system that not only misunderstands their cultural values and beliefs, but places additional barriers that impede their full involvement in their children's schooling” (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). These feelings are magnified if the educators and school personnel do not speak their language and if the school fails to provide translators and information in the parents' native language (Good et al., 2010; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010; Salinas, 1997). To this end, it is important that schools and educators consider the ways in which they themselves create barriers for parents and increase their efforts to support Hispanic parents in substantial and meaningful ways.

Level of Education

Parents' level of education is yet another obstacle that inhibits Hispanic parents' ability to become engaged in their children's education. Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) assert that limited education among Hispanics is not an uncommon phenomenon. Data from the 2010 Census confirms this: only 66.7% of Hispanics age 25 and older had a high school diploma or more compared to 93.3% for non-Hispanic whites.

Parents with low levels of educational attainment often feel limited in their ability to contribute in positive ways to their children's education, leading to feelings of

frustration and helplessness (Guzman, et al., n.d.). These feelings are heightened as children move up in grades. According to Walker et al. (2011), some Hispanic parents have confidence in their ability to help their children with their academics during the elementary school years, but express concerns as children advanced in grades through the educational system. Furthermore, lack of English or of English proficiency among Hispanic parents makes the task of helping their children with their schoolwork feel like an insurmountable task (Zarate, 2007). Another factor that exacerbates the problem and creates an additional barrier is the high rates of illiteracy among some Hispanic parents.

In addition to the challenges Hispanic parents face in supporting their children academically, Hispanic parents are often overwhelmed with feelings of intimidation and embarrassment when having to address educators, but particularly administrators (Guzman, et al., n.d.). The negative feelings and frustration experienced by Hispanic parents as a result of their limited schooling are amplified by language barriers.

Feeling Unwelcomed

Beyond cultural and language barriers, an unwelcoming school environment, which makes no effort to accommodate the diverse needs of Hispanic parents, is another parental factor that makes it difficult for Hispanic parents to become involved as parents are often left feeling “uncomfortable, intimidated and unwanted in their children’s school” (Guzman, et al., n.d., p. 9). To compound to these feelings, Guzman et al (n.d.), cite several studies in which Hispanic parents also reported feeling ignored, disrespected, judged, and discriminated against. “The effects of these negative attitudes against them creates an uncomfortable environment and results in the absence of Latino parents’

participation in schools” (Guzman, et al., n.d., p. 9).

Socioeconomic

More than half of Hispanic families, 62%, face extreme economic hardships that put them at an educational disadvantage as compared with their more affluent and advantaged counterparts. Economic circumstance can create barriers that impede them from being involved in their children's education. The burden of where their children's next meal is going to come from or the worries of how they will clothe their children necessitates that parents work multiple jobs to meet these needs for their children. As a result, children miss valuable time with their parents that could be spent working on homework, or simply spending quality time together. Furthermore, beyond being unable to be involved in meaningful ways that would foster their children's academic growth at home, issues and concerns related to time constraints due to work demands (long hours and inflexible work schedules) make it very difficult for these parents to attend parent/teacher conferences and other school events and are among the most cited reasons among Hispanic parents for the lack of parental involvement (Freeman, 2010).

Low-income parents often work long hours or multiple jobs and have to weigh the benefits and implications of taking time off work to participate in school events. Unfortunately, becoming involved in school often has to take a backseat to losing a day's pay, possibly even their jobs, and consequently being unable to meet the financial demands of the household (Carlisle, 2005). The inflexibility and demands of their job not only affect school-based involvement (attending parent/teacher conferences and school events, etc.), but it also places limitations on the time parents can spend on home-based

activities (reading, helping with homework, etc.). In contrast to parents from higher incomes, low-income parents do not have the resources or time that would allow them to become actively involved in their children's education. Childcare and transportation are other commonly cited reasons that pose significant problems for Hispanic parents. In addition, other home factors, such as family structure can create additional barriers and influence parents' ability to become involved.

Family Structure

The structure and form of what has in the past constituted the "traditional" family, comprised of the biological parents and their children, has changed and evolved over the years in the U.S. The stark reality of today is that this structure is no longer the norm. A report published by National KIDS COUNT presented data that showed that nearly half of Hispanic children, 42 %, lived in single-parent homes in the year 2014, while only 25% of non-Hispanic white children lived with one parent.

A brief presented by FamilyFacts.org revealed a correlation between family structure and children's education. An important finding is that children who live in households where there are two parents achieve higher academic gains and educational attainment than those children living with only one parent. The children in intact homes (two-parent families) tended to have parents who were more involved in their academics and have higher expectations for them than did single parents. The findings also revealed that children who lived with only one parent believed their parents had lower school expectations for them compared to reports from children who lived with both parents. The children in single-parent households also reported less monitoring of homework by

their parents compared to their counterparts living in intact families.

The findings that parental involvement is negatively affected by family structure is not surprising. What makes these findings more remarkable is the fact that children who live with only one parent are more likely to be raised in low-income households than children who live with two parents, which puts them at greater risk of academic failure. For single mothers living with their children, the effect of poverty is more pronounced.

Data presented by FamilyFacts.org shows that "Among whites, single-mother families are more than six times more likely to be poor than married-couple families. The ratio is also high among . . . Hispanics (more than twice as likely)" (p.1). It is difficult enough for Hispanic parents to become involved in their children's education when there are two parents in the home due to the constraints of work, time, childcare, and transportation brought on by their economic hardship, as previously mentioned, but these concerns are magnified in single-parent homes where the lack of support and resources are even more limited.

What Has Been Done to Increase Parental Involvement

School reforms to increase parental involvement in education have typically centered on the "traditional," white middle-class families where two parents are present, and on "traditional" types of involvement [parent/teacher conferences, volunteering, fundraising, etc.] (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Until recently, such efforts have largely failed to consider the factors that influence parental involvement for Hispanic parents. Today, "many schools throughout the country are implementing strategies to meet the unique needs of Hispanic students. Using sensitive planning, cultural understanding,

community outreach, parental involvement, and appropriate pedagogy, Hispanic students are experiencing academic success” (NEA, n.d., p. 4).

Other strategies that have been employed to increase parental involvement include “promotion of events such as “back to school” nights, to school-based cultural events in areas with large immigrant populations. Large-scale initiatives, such as the community schools’ movement, are also designed to increase disadvantaged families’ involvement in school by making the school a hub of social services for the neighborhood” (Child Trends, n.d., p. 9). In addition, some schools and districts have even implemented school-based training programs for low-income parents that teach parents how to work with their children at home.

Chapter 3 Application

Overview

Analysis of the survey administered to staff members at Abraham Lincoln School 22 revealed a strong need for community resources that would assist parents of ELLs in meeting their children’s basic human needs, such as food and clothing. In addition, staff members also reported a need for parents of ELLs to be educated on the benefits of parental involvement and on the ways they can get involved to help promote their children’s academic success. Finally, staff also indicated a need for ELL parents to be informed about their rights in relation to their children’s education. To address the needs and concerns expressed by staff members, the researcher prepared a brochure for parents of ELL students. The first part of the brochure contains a list of invaluable community resources where low-income parents can receive assistance with food, meals, clothing,

and even household items, free of charge. The second section is dedicated to informing parents about the benefits of parental involvement and provides parents with suggestions on how to get involved. The final section delineates ELL parents' rights.

In addition, the researcher created an informational professional development in the form of a power point presentation for teachers and staff. The professional development is intended to inform staff members of what research says are the benefits of parental involvement on student achievement and to highlight some of the common barriers Hispanic parents face that hinder, and oftentimes inhibit, their ability to become involved in their children's education. Following is a description of both the parent handbook as well as the professional development.

Parent Brochure:

1. Food Pantries and Clothing Closets

Analysis of the survey administered to staff members at School 22 indicated that 80% of the survey respondents felt that providing parents of ELL's with information on community resources and organizations that would help parents meet the basic needs of their children would be the most effective and beneficial way to increase parental involvement among Hispanic parents at School 22. In response, and to address this concern, the researcher created a brochure which includes a list of food pantries and clothing closets as additional resources for parents who are living in poverty and who are faced with economic hardships. Most of the food pantries included are located in the northeast quadrant of the city of Rochester, where School 22 is located, but other areas are included as well. Some community food pantries listed in the brochure also provide

additional resources, such as counseling and help finding employment. Contact information, including addresses and phone numbers have been included. Hours and days of availability have also been included, where available.

Given that the city of Rochester has the highest concentration of child poverty in all of Monroe County where Hispanic children constituted an alarming and staggering 57% of children living in poverty for the years 2010-2014 (actrochester.org), and given the vast amount of research that shows the adverse effects living in poverty and impoverished environments can have on children's health and school performance, these were resources the researcher felt strongly should be included. The unfortunate reality of many Hispanic children living in Rochester is that their basic human needs such as food and clothing are often very limited, and sometimes, even nonexistent. In many cases, parents work multiple jobs to try to make ends meet, oftentimes to no avail, which not only puts stress on them, but takes time away they could be spending at home with their children reading and helping with homework, for example.

These community resources afford parents of ELLs who face economic hardship additional assistance in making sure their children are properly fed, nourished, and adequately dressed. When parents no longer have to worry about when and where their next meal might come for their children, or whether their children are appropriately and adequately dressed, they will experience a sense of release from the mental burden that worrying about these issues can have on them. Such relief frees them up physically and mentally, allowing them to be more present and affording them more time to exert their

energy and time into being involved with their children in the home, and perhaps even in the school.

2. Parental Involvement

Survey analysis also indicated that 70% of the respondents cited parents not knowing how to contribute as the principal barrier affecting parental involvement among Hispanic parents. For this reason, the researcher dedicated a portion of the brochure to informing parents of ELL's about the benefits of their involvement in their children's education as well as to providing suggestions on ways they can become involved. Many of the suggestions in this section are things parents are already doing in the home with their children or that can easily be implemented into their daily routines. It is important for parents to understand that despite the many challenges they face, they can make a positive difference in their children's academic growth.

3. Parents' Rights

The next and final section of the brochure is dedicated to the Parents' Bill of Rights. This section provides information advising and educating parents of ELL's about the rights they have as it relates to their children's education. The information contained in this section of the brochure is in Spanish and was taken from The State Education Department. Following are a few key parental rights that relate specifically to some of the barriers Hispanic parents face.

- the right to an interpreter
- the right to have material that is sent home from school translated in their language

- the right to be informed about the curriculum

It is important that schools make efforts to build strong partnerships with parents. One way to do this with parents of ELLs is to inform and educate them about the rights they have as parents of ELL children. When schools make parents of ELLs aware that they have rights, such as the right to an interpreter, the school is not only creating a culture of respect for these parents and children, but also empowering parents to become advocates for their children. As was discussed in the literature review, one obstacle to parental involvement among Hispanic parents is lack of knowledge: lack of knowledge about a new school system, lack of knowledge about their role and expectations as parents, and lack of knowledge due to just simply not knowing what types of questions to ask or how to get involved. Knowledge is key, however, when parents are informed, educated, and understand their rights, they become empowered and vested in their children's education.

Professional Development Power Point

This power point was created to educate staff about the unique obstacles that Hispanic parents face in becoming involved in their children's education. Oftentimes, educators erroneously believe that the reason for the lack of parental involvement among Hispanic parents is due to a lack of interest in their children's education or because Hispanic parents simply have other priorities. This presentation, however, sheds light on the actual reasons many Hispanic parents are not involved in their children's education. It is the researcher's goal to bring awareness to these issues in hopes that once school

personnel are armed with this knowledge, the necessary steps to build strong partnerships with parents of ELLs will be taken.

The presentation consists of 22 total slides during which staff members will be encouraged to engage in active participation, reflecting and sharing their thoughts and ideas on some of the discussion points. The first few slides are focused on establishing a group definition of parental involvement and seeing how that compares to the definition provided under the NCLB. The benefits of parental involvement are then presented and staff are asked to share some of their own personal success stories where notable academic gains have been observed as a result of parents being involved in their children's education. The focus is then shifted specifically to the lack of parental involvement among Hispanic parents. Staff members are asked to reflect and discuss some of the reasons they feel Hispanic parents might not be as involved in their children's education as non-Hispanic whites. Seven barriers to parental involvement are then introduced and discussed in more detail in each of the following slides. These barriers are: unfamiliarity with the American school system, parent/teacher perceptions, language barrier, level of education, feeling unwelcomed, socioeconomic, and family structure. The next two slides present possible solutions to increasing parental involvement among Hispanic parents. The final slide offers staff members the opportunity to share any final thoughts or questions.

A supportive school environment that cares and addresses the needs of their students and parents is one that will be more effective in getting parents more involved in

their children's education as they will feel that the school and staff truly have a vested interest in their children's overall development, thus increasing student achievement.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Limitations

It was the researcher's goal to identify potential barriers that preclude Hispanic parents' efforts of becoming involved in their children's education and to examine if a correlation between student academic success and parental involvement existed.

Although the researcher was able to highlight some common barriers Hispanic parents of ELLs face and was able to confirm the positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, the researcher faced some limitations that could offer better insight into the prevalence of the problem of lack of parental involvement among Hispanic parents both at Abraham Lincoln School 22 as well as in the Rochester City School District.

One of the limitations relates to the sample size of the surveyed participants. The survey was administered to only 17 staff members at the researcher's school of which only 10 members responded. As a result, the researcher was only able to obtain a very small sample of staff members' perspective on the issue of parental involvement as it related to the questions asked in the survey. Another limitation the researcher faced relates to the collection of student data. It was the researcher's hope to obtain student records relating to report card grades and standardized tests that could prove a definite positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to obtain such information.

Recommendations

It is the researcher's recommendation that future research include a larger sample survey size which is inclusive of other schools in the district and of parents' perspectives on issues related to parental involvement. To get more accurate data, teachers as well as parents should be administered a survey that is more comprehensive and more in depth. In addition, student academic records should be obtained to confirm, at a local and district level, the undeniable benefits parental involvement has on higher gains in student academic achievement. Student academic records from those children whose parents are actively involved should be compared to those academic records of students whose parents are not as involved in their education. Such research that includes a wider and broader perspective along with actual data could provide clearer and more accurate findings that would assist schools in developing appropriate plans and strategies to increase parental involvement.

Conclusions

A review of the literature demonstrated that the remarkable positive effects linking parental involvement to higher gains in student academic achievement are irrefutable but that variances exist between the type and level of parental involvement between Hispanic parents and non-Hispanic white parents, with Hispanic parents being less involved. The most commonly cited reasons for these variances are low-income, limited education, and lack of English or of English proficiency. Therefore, serious consideration should be given to these, and other factors, that create barriers to parental involvement when designing and implementing measures to increase parental

involvement.

Traditional methods, typically aimed at increasing parental involvement at the school level, simply are not as effective for Hispanic parents, who in spite of their desire to support their children and become actively involved in their education, are limited in their ability to get involved. Instead, educators, schools, and districts should be culturally sensitive and knowledgeable about the challenges Hispanic families face that preclude their involvement in the schools. Non-traditional approaches, which acknowledge the needs of the families and the important role parents play in the home should be adopted in schools where there are Hispanic parents if the expectation is to increase parental involvement in order for students to experience and achieve greater gains and academic success. The product the researcher created follows such an approach.

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) has adopted a non-traditional approach as well by establishing a Parent University designed to strengthen parents' skills in supporting their children's education. The University provides workshops designed to equip parents with the necessary skills and strategies to be able to support their children's education and increase parental involvement. Some of the topics covered include, academic-content knowledge, such as homework, test preparation, and curriculum, as well as overall parenting skills, such as child development, parent-child communication, and health and wellness. The Rochester City School District has also implemented the "Fatherhood Initiative Campaign" in efforts to get fathers more involved and active in their children's lives. Furthermore, RCSD has instituted a number of parent organizations that provide parents with more opportunities to become involved

in their children's education, such as Parent/Teacher Associations/Organizations and the Bilingual Education Council.

The task of increasing parental involvement among Hispanic parents can be a difficult one given the barriers they face. It is therefore of critical importance that staff members and educators be cognizant, mindful, and sensitive to these unique challenges when implementing strategies and supports aimed at increasing parental involvement. One of the first and most important steps educators can take to address the barriers Hispanic parents face and to increase parental involvement, is to create a warm, safe, and inviting environment where Hispanic parents will feel welcomed. Other measures require a reexamination of the approaches educators and schools use to increase parental involvement.

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