

Family Involvement in Children's and Adolescents' Schooling

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We have known for some time that parents play a critical role in both their children's academic achievement and their children's socioemotional development (e.g., Clark, 1983; Comer, 1980, 1988; Eccles, Arbretton, et al., 1993; Eccles-Parsons, Adler, & Kaczala, 1982; Epstein, 1983, 1984; Marjoribanks, 1979). It is only recently, however, that researchers have studied the role schools play in encouraging and facilitating parents' roles in children's academic achievement. Critical to this role is the relationship that develops between parents and teachers and between communities and schools. Although a relatively new research area, there is increasing evidence that the quality of these links influences children's and adolescents' school success (e.g., Comer, 1980; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1982, 1987; 1990; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Zigler, 1979), in part because high quality linkages make it easier for parents and teachers to work together in facilitating children's intellectual development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979; Epstein, 1983, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1988; Jacobs, 1983; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Yet, mounting evidence suggests that parents and teachers are not as involved with each other as they would like to be. Several studies find that parents want to be more involved with their children's education and would like more information and help from the schools in order to meet this goal (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Comer, 1980, 1988; Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Leitch & Tangri, 1988; Rich, 1985). Teachers also want more contact with parents (Carnegie Foundation, 1988; Epstein & Becker, 1982). Furthermore, the situation gets worse as children move from elementary school into

from:

J.D.A. Booth (Ed.), Family - School Links:
How Do They Affect Educational Outcomes?
(pp 3-35). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
Associates.

secondary school, when parents' active involvement at the school declines dramatically (Carnegie Corporation, 1989; Epstein, 1986).

The message, then, seems clear: Both teachers and parents think collaborative involvement in children's education is important. So why are parents and teachers not more involved with each other? This question usually takes the form of "why aren't parents more involved at school?" and we discuss a variety of reasons why this is true (e.g., time, energy and/or economic resources; familiarity with the curriculum and confidence in one's ability to help; attitudes regarding the appropriate role for parents to play at various ages; and prior experiences with the schools that have left some parents disaffected). But, even more importantly, the extent of family-school collaboration is affected by various school and teacher practices, characteristics related to reporting practices, attitudes regarding the families of the children in the school, and both interest in and understanding of how to effectively involve parents. There is mounting evidence that specific school and teacher practices are a major factor influencing parent involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Furthermore, the power of schools and teachers to influence parent involvement and to improve parent-school links has been demonstrated even with hard-to-reach parents (e.g., Comer, 1980, 1988; Epstein, 1990). According to Epstein (1990): "Status variables are not the most important measures for understanding parent involvement. At all grade levels, the evidence suggests that school policies and teacher practices and family practices are more important than race, parent education, family size, marital status, and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education" (p. 109). So why aren't parents more involved at school? Why is it so difficult for schools and families to work together more effectively in educating children?

To fully understand what is limiting parent involvement, a general model of parent involvement is needed. Presenting such a model is a primary goal of this chapter. Another goal is to summarize the results of two studies designed to investigate this model. The first study—The Michigan Childhood and Beyond Study (MCABS)—focuses on the elementary school years. The second study—The Maryland Adolescent Growth in Context Study (MAGICS)—focuses on the junior high school years. For each of these studies we present findings regarding the amount and type of parent involvement in their children's intellectual education. When possible, we compare these findings with parents' more general levels of involvement in other aspects of their children's lives, particularly in the development of their children's athletic abilities. We then summarize preliminary analyses of the predictors of parent involvement outlined in Fig. 1.1. In these summaries, we focus on the proximal influences on parent involvement both at home and school. Finally, we make recommendations regarding better strategies for more effective collaboration between schools and parents in the service of children's education.

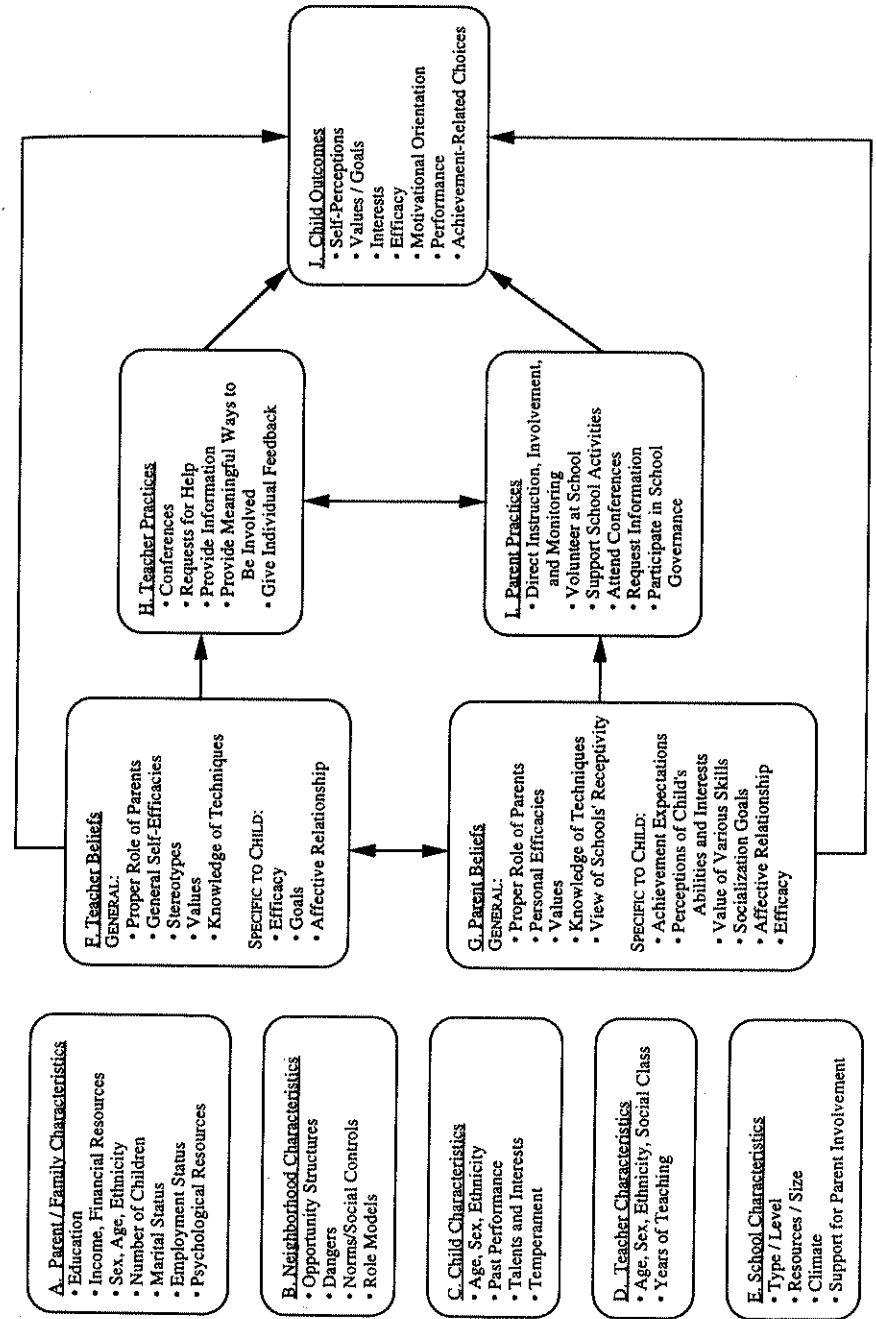


FIG. 1.1. A model of the influences on and consequences of parent involvement in the schools.

INFLUENCES ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

As noted previously, a theoretical framework or model is needed to guide an analysis of effective parent involvement. One such model is presented in Fig. 1.1. This model provides a framework for thinking about the dynamic processes that underlie parents' involvement in their children's education (Eccles & Harold, 1993). It treats parent involvement as both an outcome of parent, teacher, and child influences, and as a predictor of child outcomes. It also suggests a framework for thinking more generally about the ways in which both schools and parents influence children's school performance.

In Fig. 1.1, we hypothesize that there are a variety of influences on parent involvement. The first set of influences (commonly referred to as *exogenous variables*—variables that have indirect or more global and removed effects on parent involvement) are summarized in the left column of Fig. 1.1. They include various family/parent characteristics, neighborhood/community influences, child characteristics, general teacher characteristics, and school-structural and general-climate characteristics. We have included no arrows connecting these five boxes with the others in the model because these variables have both direct and indirect effects on all of the other boxes. The second column (boxes F and G) includes teacher and parent beliefs and attitudes. This model assumes these beliefs and attitudes affect each other and have a direct effect on the two boxes in the third column, namely, specific teacher practices (box H) and specific parent practices (box I). Finally, the variables listed in boxes F, G, H, and I are assumed to affect directly the child outcomes listed in the last column (box J). This model summarizes a wide range of possible relations among the many listed influences. For example, the impact of the exogenous variables listed in boxes A, B, C, D, and E on teachers' practices of involving parents (box H) are proposed to be mediated by teachers' beliefs systems (box F) including their stereotypes about various parents' ability and willingness to help their children in different academic subjects. Some of the child outcome variables listed in box I are identical (or very similar) to the child characteristics in box C. This overlap is intentional and captures the cyclical nature of the relations outlined in the model. Today's child outcomes become tomorrow's child characteristics; so the cycle continues over time. A more detailed discussion of the most important of these many influences follows.

Parent/Family Characteristics

Numerous studies document the relation between parent involvement and such characteristics as family income, parents' education level, ethnic background, marital status, parents' age and sex, number of children, and parents' working status (e.g., Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Bradley, Caldwell, & Elardo, 1977; Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988; Clark, 1983; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1966; Corno, 1980; Eccles-Parsons, 1983; Epstein, 1990; Harold-Goldsmith,

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Radin, & Eccles, 1988; Marjoribanks, 1979). For example, better educated parents are more involved both in school and at home than other parents; parents with fewer children are more involved at home; but family size does not affect the amount of involvement at the school; and employed parents are less likely to be involved at school but are equally involved at home (Dauber & Epstein, 1989). The following parent/family characteristics are also likely to be important:

1. Social and psychological resources available to the parent (e.g., social networks, social demands on one's time, parents' general mental and physical health, neighborhood resources, and parents' general coping strategies).
2. Parents' efficacy beliefs (e.g., parents' confidence that they can help their child with schoolwork, parents' view of how their competence to help their children with schoolwork changes as the children enter higher school grades and encounter more specialized subject areas, and parents' confidence that they can have an impact on the school by participating in school governance).
3. Parents' perceptions of their child (e.g., parents' confidence in their child's academic abilities, parents' perceptions of the child's receptivity to help from their parents, parents' educational and occupation expectations and aspirations for the child, and parents' view of the options actually available for their child in the present and the future).
4. Parents' assumptions about both their role in their children's education and the role of educational achievement for their child (e.g., what role the parents would like to play in their children's education, how they think this role should change as the children get older, how important they believe participation in school governance is, and what they believe are the benefits to their children of doing well in school and having parents who are highly involved at their children's school).
5. Parents' attitude toward the school (e.g., what role they believe the school wants them to play, how receptive they think the school is to their involvement both at home and at school, the extent to which they think the school is sympathetic to their child and to their situation, their previous history of negative and positive experiences at school, their belief that teachers only call them in to give them bad news about their child or to blame them for problems their children are having at school versus a belief that the teachers and other school personnel want to work with them to help their child).
6. Parents' ethnic, religious, and/or cultural identities (e.g., the extent to which ethnicity, religious, and/or cultural heritage are critical aspects of the parents' identity and socialization goals, the relationship between the parents' conceptualization of their ethnic, religious, and/or cultural identities and their attitudes toward parent involvement and school achievement, and the extent to which they think the school supports them in helping their children learn about their ethnic, religious, and/or cultural heritage).

7. Parents' general socialization practices (e.g., how does the parent usually handle discipline and issues of control versus autonomy, and how does the parent usually manage the experiences of their children).

8. Parents' history of involvement in their children's education (e.g., parents begin accumulating experiences with the school as soon as their children begin their formal education. Parents have also had their own experiences with schools as they grow up. These experiences undoubtedly affect parents' attitudes toward and interest in involvement with their children's schools and teachers).

Community Characteristics

Evidence also suggests that neighborhood characteristics such as cohesion, social disorganization, social networking, resources and opportunities, and the presence of undesirable and dangerous opportunities affect family involvement (e.g., Coleman et al., 1966; Eccles, McCarthy, et al., 1993; Furstenberg, 1993; Laosa, 1984; Marjoribanks, 1979). These factors are associated with variations in both parents' beliefs and practices, and opportunity structures in the child's environment. For example, Eccles, Furstenberg, Cook, Elder, and Sameroff are studying the relation of family management strategies to neighborhood characteristics as part of their involvement with the MacArthur Network on Successful Adolescent Development of Youth in High-Risk Settings. These investigators are especially interested in how families try to provide both good experiences and protection for their children when they live in high-risk neighborhoods—neighborhoods with few resources and many potential risks and hazards. To study this issue, they are conducting two survey interview studies (one of approximately 500 families living in high- to moderate-risk neighborhoods in inner-city Philadelphia and the other of approximately 1,400 families living in a wide range of neighborhoods in a large county in Maryland). Initial results suggest that families who are actively involved with their children's development and in their children's schooling use different strategies depending on the resources available in their neighborhoods. Families living in high-risk, low-resource neighborhoods rely more on in-home management strategies to both help their children develop talents and skills and to protect their children from the dangers in the neighborhood; families in these neighborhoods also focus more attention on protecting their children from danger than on helping their children develop specific talents. In contrast, families in less risky neighborhoods focus more on helping their children develop specific talents and are more likely to use neighborhood resources, such as organized youth programs, to accomplish this goal. Equally interesting, there are families in all types of neighborhoods who are highly involved in their children's education and schooling (e.g., Eccles, McCarthy, et al., 1993; Furstenberg, 1993).

Such neighborhood characteristics have been shown to influence the extent to which parents can successfully translate their general beliefs, goals, and values into effective specific practices and perceptions. Evidence from several studies

suggests that it is harder to do a good job of parenting if one lives in a high-risk neighborhood or if one is financially stressed (e.g., Elder, 1974; Elder & Caspi, 1989; Flanagan, 1990a, 1990b; Furstenberg, 1993; McLoyd, 1990). Not only do such parents have limited resources available to implement whatever strategies they think might be effective, they also have to cope with more external stressors than White middle-class families living in stable, resource-rich neighborhoods. Being confronted with these stressors may lead parents to adopt a less effective parenting style because they do not have the energy or the time to use a more demanding but more effective strategy. For example, several investigators find that economic stress in the family (e.g., loss of one's job or major financial change) has a negative affect on the quality of parenting (e.g., Elder, 1974; Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardel, 1992; Flanagan, 1990a; Harold-Goldsmith et al., 1988). Schools could help to relieve some of this stress if they could facilitate more effective parent involvement.

Far less work has investigated the dynamic processes by which these global social factors actually affect parent involvement and children's school outcomes. In addition, it is clear that there is substantial variation in parental involvement within any of these social categories, and that teachers can successfully involve even the hardest-to-reach parents (e.g., Becker & Epstein, 1982; Clark, 1983; Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Scott-Jones, 1987). More research is needed to identify the characteristics of parents that are associated with effective parent involvement, especially in underrepresented ethnic groups and high-risk neighborhoods and especially for adolescent children.

Child Characteristics

Numerous studies indicate that parents vary their involvement in their children's school achievement depending on the characteristics of the child. We know, for example, that the child's sex and age influence the extent of parent involvement (e.g., Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Eccles-Parsons et al., 1982; Epstein & Dauber, 1988; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Age is especially relevant for this discussion. As noted earlier, parent involvement drops off rather dramatically as children move into junior high or middle school. Why? It is likely that some of this decrease reflects a belief held by many parents that they should begin to disengage from their adolescents (Carnegie Corporation, 1989). Parents may feel that young adolescents both desire and need independence, and thus feel that involvement in their children's education is not as important. They may also feel that the children do not want them to be as visible, as evidenced by a common adolescent plea to not have their parents chaperone school activities. Although there may be an element of truth in this belief, it is too extreme. Adolescents may want greater autonomy, but they still need to know that their parents support their educational endeavors. They need a safe haven in which to explore their independence, a safe haven in which both parents and schools are actively involved.

The decrease in parent involvement as their children move into secondary school may also result from a decrease in parents' feelings of efficacy as their children grow older. Parents may feel less able to help their children with school work as it becomes more advanced and technical; children are no longer working on basic reading and spelling skills or drilling on math facts. Parents may feel the method of teaching math, for instance, is very different from the one they learned and if they try to help their children, they will mislead them. Finally, research (Freedman-Doan, Arbreton, Harold, & Eccles, 1993) shows that parents believe they will have more influence over their children when they are in the elementary grades than they will when their children reach adolescence.

At a more general level, it seems likely that the child's previous academic experiences and personality can also affect parent involvement (i.e., parents may be more likely to try to help a child who is having trouble than a child who is doing very well, especially if that child has done well in the past; alternatively, parents of high-achieving children may be more likely to participate in school governance and school activities than parents of lower achieving children. Parents should also be more likely to continue trying to help a child with whom they get along than a child with whom they have many conflicts). Finally, it seems likely that the parents' experiences with helping the other children in the family will impact the parents' involvement with the seventh-grade targeted child in this study.

School and Teacher Characteristics and Practices

It is also important to think about the school and teacher characteristics that influence parent involvement. As noted earlier, work by Epstein and her colleagues (e.g., Epstein & Dauber, 1991) suggests that school factors are a primary influence on parent involvement. In fact, the strongest predictors in several studies are the specific school programs and teacher practices being used (or not used) to encourage parent involvement: When parents feel schools are doing things to involve them, they are more involved in their children's education (Dauber & Epstein, 1989).

Two aspects of school characteristics are especially important for this chapter: the physical and organizational structure of schools, and the beliefs and attitudes of school personnel. Variations in the physical and organizational structure of the school building itself are likely to either facilitate or hinder parent-teacher collaboration. For example, change in the physical and organizational structure is one of the primary differences parents and students confront as children move from elementary into secondary school. Junior high and middle schools are much bigger, they serve a wider range of communities and social/ethnic groups, they are typically more bureaucratic in the governance and management systems, and are more likely to be departmentalized resulting in less personal contact between specific teachers and either students or families. Changes such as these can result

in an increase in parents' feelings of alienation from the school. These changes are associated with greater feelings of alienation on the part of the adolescents themselves (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Parents who are involved in neighborhood elementary schools may see this involvement as a connection with their community and friends. The home elementary school may seem like an extension of the family, particularly in neighborhoods where the population is relatively stable. Parents and teachers get to know each other well over the years their children are in the school. As children leave their home schools and several elementary schools merge into one middle school, there may be a decrease in the extent to which the families feel connected to the school. Junior high and middle schools expand the physical community but may not expand the emotional sense of community. The sense of belonging and investment may decrease and, as a result, parents may feel less able and less inclined to be involved and/or try to affect change in the educational experiences of their children. Additionally, children typically spend 6 or 7 years in an elementary school and only 2 or 3 in a middle school. The attachments, which often form over the elementary years when parent help seems more essential, have less time to form and may feel less necessary in the middle and upper grades.

Alternatively, school personnel may either facilitate or inhibit parent involvement by their own beliefs and attitudes about parent involvement. Like parents, teachers and school personnel at this level may think it is better for the adolescent to have less parental involvement. They may also think it is too much trouble to involve parents at this level because parents are busy, disinterested, or unknowledgeable. As a result, school personnel at this level have been found to actively discourage parent involvement in the classroom and the school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Basslet, & Brissie, 1987; Carnegie Corporation, 1989). This appears to be especially true in low-income and minority neighborhoods where parents are seen as part of the problem in educating their children, rather than as a resource (Comer, 1980). The negative interactions, which these parents are likely to have with the schools, combined with potentially negative recollections of their own educational experiences, can serve as a major barrier to parent involvement in ethnic communities and high-risk inner-city school districts. The following teacher and school characteristics are likely to be important predictors of the school's response to parent involvement and collaboration: (a) beliefs about what is the appropriate amount and type of parent involvement; (b) beliefs about influences on parents' levels of participation, particularly their beliefs regarding why parents are not more involved; (c) sense of efficacy about their ability to affect the parents' level of participation; (d) knowledge of specific strategies for getting parents more involved; (e) their plans for implementing these strategies; and (f) support for implementing specific plans.

In the next section, we summarize two on-going studies designed to assess some of the relations described thus far. These studies focus primarily on the parent and school characteristics that influence parent participation.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF THE INFLUENCES ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The Michigan Childhood and Beyond Study

Eccles and her colleagues (Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1984; Eccles, Blumenfeld, Harold, & Wigfield, 1990) are conducting a large-scale, longitudinal study of development in four primarily White, lower middle to middle-class school districts in Midwestern urban/suburban communities. The study began with groups of children in kindergarten, first, and third grade, and initially followed them for 4 consecutive years (at which time the cohorts were in third, fourth, and sixth grades). The study examined many issues including children's achievement self-perceptions in various domains and the roles that parents and teachers play in socializing these beliefs. Parent involvement in their children's education was also explored and the results are summarized in this section.

During the third wave of the study, 354 children were in the second grade, 375 in the third, and 518 in the fifth grade. Because of variations between the school districts in school structure, 247 fifth graders were in an elementary school setting and 262 fifth graders were in a Grade 5-6 middle school setting. This structural difference allows for exploring differences across the three grades, and within the two types of fifth grade. Questionnaire data were gathered from the children, approximately two thirds of their parents, and from their teachers. Teachers supplied information on their classroom practices including those regarding parent involvement, and completed an individual assessment questionnaire on each child who participated in the study.

Involvement With Teachers and at School. Parent data on parent-school involvement are presented in Tables 1.1 and 1.2. Three scales were formed based on the parent data in Table 1.1. The first (Monitor) deals with the parent's response to teacher requests for helping their child with school work; the second (Volunteer) is made up of items that ask about parent participation in volunteer activities at school; and the third (Involvement) is a report of parent involvement with the child's daily activities. In addition, two single items were asked: Do you contact the school about your child's progress? and Do you contact the school about how to give extra help?

Similar to other studies (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1989), the parents of fifth graders did significantly less monitoring of their children's work than the parents of second and third graders. In addition, parents of fifth graders housed in the middle school did less monitoring than parents of fifth graders housed in the elementary school. Although there is also a downward trend in the percentage of time parents report volunteering in school across the grades, the significant decrease is only found between the elementary and middle school fifth grades, as shown in Table 1.2. As discussed earlier, the grade-level difference may reflect

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TABLE 1.1
Parent Scales and Items: Variable Descriptions
and Reliability Estimates of Scales

Scales/Items	Variable Descriptions	Reliability ^a
Monitor	Parent response to teacher requests and information (1 = <i>never</i> . . . 4 = <i>about once a month</i> . . . 7 = <i>daily</i>) Listen to child read Listen to or discuss a story that child writes Practice spelling or other skills before a test Check to see that homework is complete Check to see that homework is done correctly Do arithmetic problems with child	.88
Volunteer	The rate of parent participation in volunteer activities at school (0 = <i>no</i> , 1 = <i>yes</i>) PTO/PTA participation Leader in PTO/PTA General volunteer work at school	.65
Involvement	Parent report of frequency of involvement with child's daily activities (1 = <i>never</i> . . . 4 = <i>weekly</i> . . . 7 = <i>almost every day for a long while</i>) Help child do his or her homework Check homework after completion Help child prepare for tests	.83
Progress	Do you contact the school about child's progress? (0 = <i>no</i> , 1 = <i>yes</i>)	
Extra help	Do you contact the school about how to give extra help? (0 = <i>no</i> , 1 = <i>yes</i>)	

Note. ^aCronbach's α coefficients as reliability estimates were computed on scales consisting of multiple items.

parents' assumption that their children need and desire less direct supervision as they enter early adolescence. Although a decrease was expected, the difference within the fifth grade suggests that school structure is also a factor. Perhaps parents feel less connected with the middle school outside of their neighborhood and therefore volunteer less often; or perhaps middle schools make less of an effort to connect with parents. The new environment of the middle school may also heighten the awareness of adolescent changes for parents, leading to the difference between the two types of fifth grades. Alternatively, a decrease in feelings of parental efficacy could account for some of the decrease in parental monitoring of school work. As the material children are taught gets more technical, parents may feel that they do not have adequate background to help their children, particularly in math and science.

The amount of reported parent involvement and the extent of contact with the school did not differ significantly by grade. However, the frequency with which

TABLE 1.2
Means, Standard Deviations, and *F* Statistics of Parent Scales and Items by Grade Level and School Type

Scales/Items	Grade					School Type ^a			<i>F</i>		
	2		3		5		elementary			middle	
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)		<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)
Monitor	3.50	(1.78)	3.02	(1.80)	2.67	(1.53)	2.93	(1.60)	2.50	(1.46)	6.17*
Volunteer	.30	(.34)	.28	(.34)	.26	(.32)	.33	(.34)	.21	(.29)	12.79***
Involvement	3.90	(1.30)	3.88	(1.22)	3.72	(1.21)	3.59	(1.16)	3.71	(1.22)	2.76 <i>ns</i>
Progress	.52	(.50)	.52	(.50)	.46	(.50)	.46	(.50)	.46	(.50)	.00 <i>ns</i>
Extra help	.40	(.49)	.38	(.49)	.46	(.50)	.27	(.44)	.40	(.49)	6.13*

Note. ^aAmong the fifth graders; *ns* not significant; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

parents contact the school to learn how to give their children extra help increases significantly among the parents of fifth graders who are in the middle school setting. It may be that the heightened awareness of approaching adolescence also arouses a heightened sense of the seriousness of school and achievement, leading parents to seek new ways to help their children. Alternatively, these parents may feel they are not getting as much information from the schools as they need to help their children and are, therefore, asking for more to bring them back up to the level they had been accustomed to during the elementary school years.

Tables 1.3 and 1.4 present teacher data. The first scale (Help tips) encompasses ideas or tips that teachers send home regarding how parents can help their children with school work; the next scale (Goals) relates to teachers' sharing of information with parents about classroom goals; and the final scale (Requests) assesses the number of requests that teachers make of parents to monitor their children's work. Two single items are also included in the analyses: How often do you encourage parents to get involved? and Did you provide feedback other than regular conferences or report cards for this child?

Consistent with the findings of Epstein and Dauber (1991), there were no significant differences across grades or within the fifth grade in the extent of most types of communications from teachers to parents. The only significant grade-level effect occurred for the extent of evaluative feedback—the fifth-grade teachers, particularly if they worked in a middle school context, provided less supplemental feedback than second- or third-grade teachers. What is especially striking about the communication findings is the absolute low levels of several types of communication: On the average, these teachers provided helpful hints about how to work with one's child less than once a month; furthermore, between 50% and 70% of the teachers provided no supplementary evaluation to parents about how their children were doing in school beyond the information provided at conferences and on report cards.

There are also two interesting school type effects: both the extent to which fifth-grade teachers encouraged parents to get involved in classroom activities and the extent to which fifth-grade teachers provided supplementary feedback on the children's performance were lower for fifth-grade teachers in a middle school than for fifth-grade teachers in an elementary school context. The first finding is consistent with the notion that the school-home connection is not as strong in the middle school as in the elementary school. With regard to the second finding, providing supplementary evaluative feedback, perhaps fifth-grade teachers, particularly those in the middle school, subscribe to the notions that the children should be more independent by this time, and that parents need less child-specific feedback because they are already accustomed to their children being in school and understand the ways that school systems and teachers function. The teachers may not understand that the link between parents and teachers is particularly important during this early adolescent period. This difference may account for the heightened levels in the fifth-grade middle school

TABLE 1.3
Teacher Scales and Items: Variable Descriptions and Reliability Estimates

Scales/Items	Variable Descriptions	Reliability ^a
Help tips	Ideas or tips for how parent can help child (1 = never . . . 4 = a few times a month . . . 7 = daily) Ideas to help parent talk with child about school work Ideas on how to monitor homework Ways to practice spelling or other skills at home before a test	.87
Goals	Sharing information about goals or orientation (1 = never . . . 4 = a few times a month . . . 7 = daily) Learning objectives for the school year Expectations about completion of assignments How report card grades are earned	.72
Requests	Requests of parent to monitor work (1 = never . . . 4 = a few times a month . . . 7 = daily) Listen to or discuss a report or story child has written Practice skills before a test Check to see that homework is done Check to see that homework is done correctly Review materials with child	.87
Encourage	How often to you encourage parents to get involved in classroom activities? (1 = very infrequently . . . 7 = very frequently)	
Feedback	Did you provide feedback other than regular conferences or report cards for this child? (0 = no, 1 = yes)	

Note. ^aCronbach's α coefficients as reliability estimates were computed on scales consisting of multiple items.

parents' contacts with the school seeking information on how to give extra help to their children discussed earlier. Although the teachers may feel these parents need fewer individual contacts or feedback, the parents are responding to the decline with an increased desire for information concerning how to help their early adolescent children.

Involvement at Home. At each wave, the parents were asked to indicate how often they do various activities with their children at home using a scale anchored with specified frequencies (e.g., 1 = never, 4 = once a week, and 7 = almost everyday for a long while). We focus on the data for families with two parents in the home because we want to present and discuss some of the sex of parent effects. Findings from both Wave 1 (when the children were in kindergarten, first, and third grade) and Wave 3 (when the same children were in second, third, and fifth grade) are summarized to provide a full picture of

TABLE 1.4
Means, Standard Deviations, and *F* Statistics of Parent Scales and Items by Grade Level and School Type

Scales/Items	Grade					School Type ^a			<i>F</i>					
	2 (<i>n</i> = 23)		3 (<i>n</i> = 23)		5 (<i>n</i> = 31)		elementary (<i>n</i> = 19)			middle (<i>n</i> = 12)				
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)		<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)			
Help tips	2.79	(1.60)	3.54	(2.51)	2.76	(1.62)	1.28	<i>ns</i>	2.36	(.96)	1.02	<i>ns</i>		
Goals	3.31	(1.93)	4.22	(2.02)	2.95	(1.66)	3.11	<i>ns</i>	3.13	(1.64)	2.64	(1.72)	.61	<i>ns</i>
Requests	4.02	(1.97)	4.57	(2.11)	4.03	(1.81)	.56	<i>ns</i>	4.15	(2.05)	3.82	(1.35)	.20	<i>ns</i>
Encourage	5.17	(1.56)	5.48	(1.44)	4.60	(2.19)	1.63	<i>ns</i>	5.50	(1.58)	3.25	(2.34)	9.93	**
Feedback ^b	.49	(.50)	.50	(.50)	.37	(.48)	6.86	**	.44	(.50)	.30	(.46)	8.06	**

Note. ^aAmong the fifth graders; *ns* not significant; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. ^bThis item is based on the Teacher's Individual Assessment Questionnaire. The sample size of each group is 237, 245, and 358 for the second, third, and fifth grade, respectively. Within the fifth grade, *n* = 174 in the elementary schools and *n* = 184 in the middle school.

developmental changes during the elementary school years. Table 1.5 summarizes the MANOVA results for the time use data from the first and third waves. Table 1.6 summarizes the means and standard deviations associated with each of these sets of MANOVAs.

At each wave, there were substantial sex of parent effects. Mothers were much more involved with their children's intellectual and school-related development than fathers, even for math and science-related activities in the early grades. In contrast, fathers were more involved in their children's athletic development. There were also consistent and stereotypic sex of child effects: Girls did more reading with their parents (primarily their mothers) than boys, and boys did more athletics activities with their parents (primarily their fathers) than girls.

There were also interesting grade-level effects that suggest a curvilinear pattern during the elementary school period. Parents appeared to become more involved in monitoring their children's school work as the children moved from kindergarten to third grade and then became less involved in this type of activity from the third to the fifth grade. This pattern is evident in both the cross-sectional and the longitudinal results.

A different pattern emerged for parents' involvement in less formal activities related to their children's intellectual development. As one might expect, the frequency with which parents read to their children declined steadily over the elementary school years. In contrast, the frequency of parents helping their children prepare for tests, teaching their children general knowledge, and discussing both news events and their children's experiences at school remained stable and fairly high over these years. Finally, the frequency of parents helping their children with homework increased during the early grades and stabilized at a relatively high level from third to fifth grade.

It is interesting to compare these changes to the results for parents' involvement with their children in recreational domains. The frequency of these parents active involvement with their children in both indoor and outdoor play activities declined steadily over the elementary school years. In addition, at virtually all grade levels, parents (mothers in particular) reported interacting directly with their children in school-related activities more frequently than in recreational activities, suggesting that these parents were very involved on a regular basis with their children's intellectual education even though they are not very involved at their children's schools.

Predictors of Parent Involvement. To investigate the model presented in Fig. 1.1, we correlated indicators of several of the parent/family and child characteristics with a composite indicator of parent involvement comprised of both the encouragement and the time-use measures within a specific domain (e.g., reading, math, and sports). Because the results are very similar for the two waves, we only summarize the findings for the Wave 3 data. And because the results do not vary in any meaningful way across grade levels, the findings are

TABLE 1.5
Repeated Measures MANOVA *F* Statistics of Parent Time Spent With Child

Question	Wave 1			Wave 3		
	Between-Subject Effects			Within-Subject Effects—Parents		
	Grade	Sex	Grade by Sex	Parent	Grade by Parent	Sex by Parent
Do math or science activities with child	1.53	—	—	12.73***	—	3.80*
Read to child	43.81***	—	—	98.92***	—	—
Help child with his or her homework	6.03**	—	—	74.26***	—	—
Check child's homework after completed	2.24	—	—	26.19***	—	—
Play sports with child	2.71	23.96***	—	32.69***	—	6.52**
Play indoor games with child	15.54***	—	—	6.58**	—	2.34
Do math or science activities with child	2.01	—	3.35*	1.67	—	—
Read to child	55.68***	—	3.26*	67.57***	3.51*	—
Have child read to you	53.08***	4.51*	—	58.45***	3.59*	2.4
Help child with his or her homework	—	—	2.81	33.32***	—	—
Check child's homework after completed	7.15***	—	—	53.25***	—	—
Help child prepare for test	1.13	—	—	55.31***	4.41*	—
Discuss important news with child	—	—	—	55.60***	2.14	—
Play sports with child	—	31.07	2.33	86.21***	—	3.93*
Play indoor games with child	12.76***	—	—	—	2.18	—

Notes. *N* = 272; sample size may vary slightly due to list-wise deletion. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001. *F* value is less than 2.00.

activities ($r = .23, p < .01$): Higher ratings of competitiveness were associated with higher levels of involvement. Fathers' rating of family mastery orientation was also related ($r = .17, p < .01$). The biggest contrast of this domain with the results for the math and reading domains occurred for the correlations between the sport-specific predictors and fathers' involvement with their children's sports: Fathers were more involved if they rated their child's sport ability and interest high ($r = .42, p < .05$ and $r = .46, p < .01$, respectively), rated the general importance of sports skills high ($r = .51, p < .01$), and were confident of their ability to influence their child's ability and interest in this domain ($r = .45, p < .01$). These effects continued to be quite strong even after controlling for the children's gross motor skills and the father's rating of the family's competitiveness. Apparently, involvement in one's children's sports education is much more idiosyncratic than involvement in one's children's intellectual education among these middle-class families.

We correlated these parent characteristics with the parent-school involvement variables outlined in Tables 1.1 and 1.2. These correlations were quite weak and usually not significant. Only parents' intellectual confidence related to the parents' volunteering at school (more confident parents were more likely to volunteer at school), but this association was quite weak ($r = .13, p < .01$). The strongest associations occurred between mother's and father's education and parents' requests for information from the school about their children's progress: Both mother's and father's education were positively associated with these requests ($r = .21, p < .01$ and $r = .17, p < .01$, respectively). Finally, contrary to what one might expect, both mother's and father's education were negatively related to the extent to which parents' monitored their children's school work ($r = -.14, p < .01$, and $r = -.12, p < .01$, respectively). This latter effect, however, makes sense if teachers make more requests for parental monitoring when a child is having difficulty with his or her schoolwork. Such requests for additional monitoring are probably needed less if a child is performing satisfactorily. In support of this explanation, there is a positive correlation between teachers' reports of making requests for parents to monitor their children's schoolwork and parents' reports of the extent to which they monitor their children's schoolwork ($r = .15, p < .01$). Again, however, this association is quite weak.

The Maryland Adolescent Growth in Context Study

The second study was conducted in Maryland with a population of approximately 1,400 African-American and European-American early adolescents and their parents. All children were enrolled in a 2-year middle school comprised of Grades 7 and 8. The population included a wide socioeconomic range in both the African-American and European-American samples. Data were gathered from the primary caregiver and the target adolescent in their home using both a face-to-face interview and a self-administered questionnaire, and by telephone. The data re-

1. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING

ported here were collected either during the adolescent's seventh grade school year or in the summer immediately following the seventh grade year.

Investigating parents' involvement in their adolescents' education was one of the primary goals of this study. We gathered extensive information regarding parents' involvement both at home and at school. First, we describe the results regarding involvement at school; next we summarize the results regarding involvement at home; and finally, we summarize the results regarding the predictors of parent involvement both at school and at home.

Frequency of Involvement at School. As has been found in other studies, the parents in this study were not very involved at their children's school. Although 61% were members on the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), only 5% to 6% reported playing a leadership role either in the PTSA or other school advisory groups. On the average, all parents reported attending between three and four activities and between two and three teacher conferences per year at school; they also reported doing volunteer work at the school one to two times during the seventh-grade school year. A much higher percentage indicated that they would like to be involved at school and 86% agreed with the statement that schools are more effective when parents are involved. The vast majority (65%) also agreed that teachers should do more to get parents involved.

The parents were asked why they were not more involved at school. The most frequently checked reasons related to work commitments (62% indicated this was an important limiting factor). In contrast, parents rarely rated the following reasons as important: feeling they could not be of help, child not wanting them to come to school, and teachers making them feel unwelcomed.

Our data also suggest that the schools were making relatively little attempt to involve the parents more in educational activities, either at home or in school; the one exception being requests for parents to monitor the completion of homework. For example, the parents reported that teachers had provided information regarding specific homework assignments only one to two times over the year, and regarding meetings and other school activities only two to three times. In response to a question regarding how often teachers gave their children assignments that required getting information from the family, 36% of the parents said this had never happened and another 38% said it had happened only once. Finally, we asked how often the parents thought their children's teachers wanted parents to visit class in order to see what their children were doing; 44% said never and another 43% said once a month or less.

Frequency of Involvement at Home. In contrast, parents were much more involved with their children's education at home. On the average, these parents reported helping their children with homework one to three times each week, more often than they reported doing any other single activity with their children except discussing current news events. They also reported checking their chil-

dren's homework an average of four times per week. Clearly, these parents were reporting relatively high levels of involvement in their children's school-related academic activities at home even though they were not very involved with activities at the school itself.

We asked the youth similar types of questions and received similar responses. When asked about their teachers' efforts to involve their parents in their school work they, like their parents, reported relatively infrequent attempts. For example, they reported that their teachers asked them to get someone at home to help them study for tests, to check their homework, and to help them with school projects an average of one to two times per month. In contrast, they reported that they get help from their parents on their schoolwork an average of one to three times a week. Like their parents, they reported that they work with their parents on their schoolwork as much or more than any other single activity. They also reported that their parents actively monitored their school progress fairly often (averaging between 3.3 to 3.8 on a 5-point scale with 1 = *almost never*, 3 = *sometimes*, and 5 = *almost always*).

Predictors of Parent Involvement in Their Adolescents' Education. We have just begun our analyses of the predictors of parent involvement in this study. As a first step, we have correlated both the parents' reports of their involvement at school and home and the adolescents' reports of their parents' involvement at home with indicators of the following constructs drawn from the model illustrated in Fig. 1.1: (a) family demographic characteristics, (b) demands on parents' time, (c) parents' sense of efficacy to help their children with their schoolwork, (e) parents' perceptions of their children's characteristics, (f) parents' valuing of education in general and of parent involvement in particular, (g) parents' perception of the school, and (h) parents' more general involvement in their children's activities.

The significant relations were all in the predicted direction; but the effects are generally quite weak; the correlations were typically in the range of .12 to .25. In addition, because these data are correlational and represent only one point in time, it would be unwise to speculate about the causal nature of these relations until the subsequent waves of longitudinal are available for analysis. Consequently, at present, one should take these results as food for thought.

In general, higher income, more education, and being married rather than single predicted greater parent involvement at school but not at home. In addition, African-American parents were somewhat more involved at home than European-American parents, whereas European-American parents were somewhat more involved at school than the African-American parents. Both of these effects, however, were very small although highly reliable given the sample size.

As expected, having other demands, like work and family responsibilities, on one's time was related negatively to involvement both at school and at home. In contrast, and again as one would expect, both parents' confidence in their

ability to influence their child's academic performance and school experiences and the importance they attached to being involved in their children's schooling were correlated positively with involvement both at home and at school. These associations were among the strongest predictors of involvement at school—ranging from .15 to .35 with most between .22 to .26.

There was also fairly consistent support for the significance of the parents' perception of the school context as a correlate of involvement at school. Parents who had a positive view of the school in terms of its concern about the families and adolescents in the school, the accessibility of school personnel to parents, and the teachers' desire to actively involve parents were more involved at the school. And, as one would expect, parents who reported more frequent requests from their child's teachers for parent involvement also reported greater involvement in their children's education both at school and at home. Their children also reported greater parental involvement at home.

Finally, parents with a more positive view of their child and higher educational expectations for their child were more involved in their children's education both at home and at school. Furthermore, there was evidence of consistency in parents' involvement in their children's lives more generally. Parents who were actively involved in several different aspects of their children's lives and who engaged in the most proactive encouragement of skill acquisition in other domains were also the parents most likely to be actively involved in their children's academic education.

INCREASING PARENT AND SCHOOL COLLABORATION

Specific suggestions about the ways to improve parent-teacher collaboration on behalf of children's education are now discussed. Epstein and her colleagues (e.g., Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Dauber, 1991) suggested the following six areas of parent-school involvement:

1. Basic obligations of families to provide for the safety and health of their children.
2. Basic obligations of schools to communicate with families about school programs and the individual progress of their children.
3. Parental involvement at school.
4. Parental involvement in learning activities at home.
5. Parental involvement in decision making at school.
6. Collaboration and exchange with community organizations.

In a study of parental involvement in education in Ireland, Morgan, Fraser, Dunn, and Cairns (1992) suggested that involvement can be divided into three levels.

Low level involvement is the traditional parent-school link (referred to in Point 2, just cited), which tends to be of a formal nature and consists of such activities as parent-teacher conferences regarding their individual child and open houses that discuss curriculum. At this level of involvement, parents are primarily interested in their students' progress, and the school's focus is on how parents can support the institutional goals to maximize that progress. The second level of involvement parallels Epstein's third and fifth points: parents extending their relationship with the school beyond their focus on their own children and volunteering in the classroom, helping on field trips, and participating in parent-teacher organizations. This type of involvement, the authors suggest, is more difficult to maintain because the relevance is more limited. Morgan et al. (1992) suggest a final level of "formal, structural involvement" that is more political in nature, such as a school board. Few parents ever become involved at this level.

We focus our recommendations on two areas: communication with parents and involvement in learning activities at home, because these areas are particularly relevant to the concerns raised in this chapter regarding both grade-level differences in parent participation at school, and capitalizing on the ways parents are already participating in their children's education.

Communicating With Parents. Schools and teachers communicate with parents about school programs and the individual progress of their children in several ways: Parent-teacher conferences, curriculum nights, open houses, phone contacts, report cards, and summaries of standardized test results are typical examples of this type of parent-school connection. In order to develop an effective system of communication between the school and the family, however, it is critical that old stereotypes of family be rethought to welcome the variety of persons who now make up students' families (Pennekamp & Freeman, 1988). Who should be invited to school functions? Should schools change father-daughter or mother-son events to parent-child or even significant adult-child events? Who should receive copies of report cards and test scores? Making the definition of family more inclusive in the school's communications home may result in more children having adult parent-type figures participate on their behalf. In addition, schools must be cognizant of working with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and may need to find new methods of forming the family-school connection (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Salend & Taylor, 1993).

School-family communication begins in the earliest grades and usually continues through high school, although the nature and frequency of the contacts may change as the child goes through the school system. As students move to the middle grades and have more than one core teacher, *capsule* nights are sometimes used to provide parents with both information about each class and an opportunity to meet each teacher. Such programs involve attending a miniaturized version of the child's daily schedule, (e.g., 15 minutes in each classroom) and are generally held in the evening to accommodate working parents. Many

school districts also have special programs for parents and students at transitional points like the transition into junior or senior high school. Such an opportunity was provided by the district in the MAGIC study and it was highly successful from the perspective of the parents: 72% of the parents in this sample reported attending this program; of these, 64% reported that it was very useful and another 28% reported that it was mildly useful.

Providing extensive and accurate information regarding curricular choices to parents becomes increasingly critical as their children move into and through secondary school. As children move into junior high or middle school, they begin to make course choices that have short- and long-term implications for the future options open to adolescents. Often, neither the full range of choices nor the implications of various choices are made clear to parents. For example, in one of the school districts we have studied, school administrators explained that parents make the decision regarding which math class their child is to be placed into in the seventh grade at the end of the sixth-grade school year. It was clear from interviews with parents in this school district, however, that they did not know they had this choice. Instead, what actually happens is that the sixth grade teachers send home the course selection form with the seventh grade math course already filled in with the teacher's recommendation regarding the child's math placement. The teachers do not explicitly indicate that this is only a recommendation. In addition, the parents did not know the consequences of being placed in the various seventh grade math courses. Clearly, the school had not communicated their policy clearly enough to the parents for the parents to really play a role in this important decision. Early course choices in subjects like math and science often play a major role in shaping a high school student's curricular track. If parents do not fully understand this connection, they cannot play their role as advocates for their children.

Recent findings reported by Dornbusch (1994) confirms our speculations about the likely consequences of poor curricular choices, making the negative consequences of this lack of communication to parents even more apparent. In a survey of students in four northern California high schools, Dornbusch found that 55% of the students did not know even one entrance requirement of the University of California system and that lack of knowledge was not related to their achievement level. He also summarized the findings that teachers are also uninformed about the entrance requirements of the university system, particularly teachers with a high proportion of students of color in their classrooms. As a consequence, Dornbusch (1994) also found that many students who intend to go to college and have the requisite ability according to eighth-grade achievement tests have not taken the courses required for entrance into the college or university of their choice.

One way to avoid these enrollment mistakes is for schools to make sure parents understand the requirements as well as the implications of not taking particular courses. We asked the parents in the MAGIC study whether the school had provided them with curricular information. The results contain both good

and bad news. With regard to making course selections for their child in the seventh grade, the vast majority (70%) of the parents indicated that the school had provided them with adequate information on the available options. The results for information on college requirements were less encouraging: Only 40% of the parents indicated they thought they knew most of the courses in the college preparatory sequences and 60% the parents indicated they had not received any information from the schools about these issues. These results suggest that the schools in this county, at least, are not doing an adequate job of providing parents with the information they need to help their adolescent children select the courses they will need to get into the colleges they want to attend.

There is growing evidence of the importance of personalized communication with the families, especially during the secondary school years. Two kinds of such communication are needed. First, there is a need for coordination among teachers at this grade level to insure effective monitoring of the child's socioemotional development so that parents and other relevant support persons can be alerted to any danger signs. The ability to provide this type of information is particularly important in early adolescence following the transition into junior high. We have found that junior high teachers are not very good at identifying students who are having difficulty with this transition (Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994). Yet, they are the adults who spend the most time with these youth and thus are uniquely situated to identify danger signs at school early enough to get at-risk students the help they need. Working more closely together with each other and with the parents of their students could help them play this critical role in the lives of early adolescents and their families. Middle schools in some districts handle this issue by organizing each of their student cohorts into *houses*. Each house often has a counselor and secretary who travels with their group of students from sixth through eighth grade. In addition, the students can be assigned to an advisory teacher with whom they meet as a group on a regular basis to discuss a variety of issues. Often this person is also their teacher for one of their core subjects. These advisory teachers can function as liaisons between the parent and the school, and between other teachers and each of their own advisory students.

Teachers are in a unique position to help parents provide appropriate educational and occupational counseling for their children. Because teachers see many adolescents and interact with each student more directly in terms of intellectual skills, teachers are well positioned to help students and parents think about the adolescent's talents and aptitudes in terms of future occupational choices. Parents often do not know very much about the relation of specific academic skills to various future job possibilities, particularly if they themselves do not excel in the same domains. For example, we know that girls are less likely to pursue careers in the fields of applied mathematics (e.g., engineering) and physical science than boys. We also know girls are less likely to take these courses in secondary school than boys. Girls appear to be selecting themselves out of these intellectual domains; they do so at great cost to themselves. By not taking these

courses in high school, they are not eligible to take many college courses, including courses and majors they might be interested in like nursing, economics, or ecological sciences. They also significantly decrease the possibility of deciding in college to major in engineering or the physical sciences. Parents often do not understand these implications. And, parents may not notice that their daughter is exceptionally good in math and science (see Eccles, 1989). Bright girls often do quite well in all of their courses and may not give their parents any reason to think they are unusually good in math and science. In addition, parents may not understand that there are many good jobs in these fields and females are more likely to be paid an equitable salary in these areas. Teachers can provide parents with this type of specific information relevant to their child's future. They can also let parents know about special programs for which their child is eligible. Ample evidence documenting the power of such information to increase the odds that girls and minority students will take advanced courses in math and science in high school, and will consider occupations requiring these courses and requiring a college education now exists (see Eccles, 1989). For example, in a study of the 20 best programs in terms of placement of high numbers of females in advanced placement math and science courses, Casserly (1980) found that direct and frequent encouragement to the parents of talented females was one of the distinguishing characteristics of the most effective teachers. Information such as this is especially important for families who live in high-risk neighborhoods and for families who have recently immigrated to this country or to the state or city in which they are currently living.

Involvement in Learning Activities at Home. The findings reported earlier indicate that parents are very actively involved with their children's education at home, even in middle school. Numerous studies document the importance of this type of involvement for school achievement. Participation, however, does seem to decline with age, according to the reports of the parents in MCABS and the adolescents in MAGICS. Given the importance of this involvement and the fact that this is the type of involvement parents are most likely to do on their own, teachers and other school personnel ought to be doing as much as they can to encourage and support this type of collaboration with parents, particularly during the middle grades.

Schools and teachers try to foster this type of involvement in a variety of ways. For example, in our samples the teachers sometimes asked family members to work with their children on particular learning tasks that might facilitate and promote the child's class work. Parents being requested to monitor their children's homework is another example of this type of collaboration, which was done with some regularity in both samples. Some of the teachers in the studies also provided information on learning goals and ways in which parents may be helpful to their children in achieving these goals, but they did this less frequently than the previously mentioned strategies.

Work by Epstein and her colleagues (e.g., 1987) suggests that these kinds of practices begin in early elementary school and continue through secondary school, although the kind of information provided and the tasks that are targeted for help usually change across grade levels. As children get older, teachers often send home *contracts* at the beginning of a term (i.e., letters that detail their expectations, their grading system, and/or assignments), which both students and parents are asked to sign. Teachers are also less likely to ask for parent help with specific skills such as reading or learning math facts. This may be due to perceptions held by both teachers and parents that (a) students should have mastered basic skills by this point, and (b) parents are less able to help now than they were before. Although neither of these perceptions is necessarily true, teachers seem more likely to describe a larger task, such as a science project, where parents might choose to be involved with a given part of the project. But, given the concerns that many teachers raise about parents' expertise and ability to help their children with homework as the subject matters being taught become more technical, it would be helpful for schools to consider some ways in which they could provide parents with some supplementary educational training so the parents could both be more helpful and could feel more confident in their ability to help. Family Math and Family Computers are two exemplar programs with this goal. Both seek to provide supplementary educational experiences for both students and parents. Both are run at school by teachers in the evenings and on weekends. Both have generated great enthusiasm among both parent and teacher groups. And both are relatively inexpensive to introduce and sustain in a school system.

Teachers could also increase parent involvement in learning activities at home by developing assignments that provide a meaningful role for parents to play. Adolescence, for example, is a time when children are increasingly interested in things like their cultural heritage, their parents' experience while growing up, and their community's history. They are also interested in how people make important life decisions and how people learn from their mistakes. Teachers could take advantage of these interests by giving assignments that involve interviewing one's parents and other community members, or involve accompanying one's parents on important activities like work or volunteer activities. Assignments such as these might accentuate the areas in which parents have special expertise and information rather than highlighting the areas in which the parents' knowledge may be dated or limited. Similar activities can be designed for younger children. For example, teachers can have children bring in stories about the kinds of toys their parents played with and activities they did while they were growing up.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have accomplished three goals: first, we documented the importance of parent involvement in their children's schooling; second, we discussed the various influences on parental involvement and the many barriers to

parent involvement; and third, we provided some concrete recommendations for ways to increase parent involvement in their children's educational development, particularly at home, because this is the place that most parents participate in their children's education. The chapter began by noting the critical role parents and teachers can play if they work together to support healthy development. Unfortunately, the collaborative relationship between parents and schools seems to decrease as children move into their adolescent years and into secondary schools. Ways in which this downward trend might be reversed were discussed. There are effective ways to involve parents in a collaborative relationship with the schools even during the secondary school years. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that parent involvement is just as important, if not more important, than a collaborative relationship with the schools during these years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work reported in this chapter was supported by grants to the first author from the MacArthur Research Network on Successful Adolescent Development among Youth in High-Risk Settings and the MacArthur Foundation Education Program and by grants to both authors by the NICHD. We thank the following people for their help in conducting these studies: Amy Arbreton, Elaine Belansky, Phyllis Blumenfeld, Nick Butler, Diane Early, Kari Fraser, Carol Freedman-Doan, Ariel Kahl, Linda Kuhn, Karen McCarthy, Allan Wigfield, and Kwang Suk Yoon.

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The Structural Context of Family-School Relations

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Eccles and Harold (1994) focused, in their words, on the proximal influences of parent involvement at home and at school. We applaud the central aim of their chapter, which is to examine attitudinal and behavioral processes within families and schools that differ by grade level and form of school organization. The chapter is both informative and provocative.

Let us, in turn, attempt to be provocative by providing somewhat different interpretations of their findings. As sociologists, we bring a slightly different perspective to this conference on family-school links. We place more emphasis on the influence of home and school contexts, focusing on the importance of structural factors within these settings. Our discussion therefore considers a number of different structural factors and their implications for the relations between students, parents, teachers, and schools. In particular, we attempt to show that types of school organization, curriculum tracking, social networks, bilingual education, and ethnic-specific parenting practices each affect the strength and nature of the family-school link. Our emphasis on structural factors will, we believe, assist Eccles and Harold to adapt their analyses so that the recommendations drawn from their excellent study will apply more closely to specific targeted groups.

We start with Eccles and Harold's finding that school organization (elementary school or middle school) was associated with more significant differences in the parent involvement scales than was grade level (Eccles & Harold, 1994, Table 2). What's going on? We agree with the authors that the gradual decline in parental involvement across grade levels probably reflects the widespread belief