

A Longitudinal Study of Parent Involvement In School Across the Elementary
Years: Teacher and Parent Reports

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Abstract

This longitudinal study documents patterns of teachers' solicitation of parent involvement in school and mothers' actual levels of involvement across grades 1 to 6. Teachers reported infrequent use of general strategies to involve the parents of their students with two exceptions: providing parents with basic information about the classroom and requesting parents to volunteer in the classroom. Teachers' requests for direct at-home involvement of parents with their child occurred less than once a month across all grades. In general, mothers corroborated these reports. They reported infrequent solicitations of direct involvement. Mothers also reported receiving less basic information than teachers reported sending home. Despite the lack of school-initiated efforts to involve parents, mothers reported frequently spending time with their child in academic activities at home across the elementary years. Results are discussed in terms of how home-school connections may be facilitated.

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Parent involvement in school is an important factor contributing to children's school adjustment and success. Greater parental involvement in school has been linked to increased academic motivation, achievement, and attendance in children (Comer, 1980; Dwyer & Hecht, 1992; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1994). Currently, widespread consensus about the educational advantages of having parents involved in their child's schooling exists not only among researchers, educators and policy-makers, but also among parents and children themselves (Eccles & Harold, 1994; Epstein, 1994). Unfortunately, a substantial gap exists between this consensus regarding the value of parental involvement in schooling and what actually occurs during the elementary and secondary school years. There is some evidence to suggest that home-school connections are relatively infrequent during the elementary years and even more infrequent in middle and high school (e.g., Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Eccles & Harold, 1994; Epstein, 1994; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

To date, while important theoretical formulations of the different types of parent involvement in school (e.g., Epstein, 1987b), as well as theoretical models of the determinants of parent involvement have appeared in the literature (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1993), there have been few longitudinal investigations of parent involvement. Furthermore, studies have often focused either on teachers or parents in an effort to understand the relationship between school and the home. Few studies, however, have simultaneously assessed teacher and parent perspectives of involvement in order to understand the nature of home-school

linkages (Epstein, 1986). In this study, drawing upon a longitudinal study of elementary school children, their parents, and their teachers, we describe what teachers do to try to involve parents of their students, what mothers perceive teachers are doing to encourage their involvement, and what mothers actually do with their children across the elementary school years. In addition to describing patterns of teacher and parent-initiated involvement over time, we also examine the relations between teachers' involvement strategies and mothers' actual involvement.

Conceptualizing Parent Involvement in School

Epstein (1987a) has developed a useful typology of six major strategies that teachers and schools as a whole can use to encourage and facilitate parent involvement in school. These include: 1) assistance and information given to parents relating to child rearing, child development, and the development of the requisite conditions for learning at home; 2) provisions of basic information regarding the individual child's progress, as well as the programs, goals, and objectives of the school; 3) solicitations of parents to be involved in activities at the school (e.g., field trips, career awareness); 4) solicitations of parent involvement in learning activities with the child at home; 5) inclusion of parents in school decisions, governance, and school-related organizations (e.g., PTA/PTO), and 6) assistance with the incorporation of community resources into the on-going activities of the school and the development of community partnerships that provide learning activities for students outside of the school setting.

Research on Parent Involvement in School: Teacher Reports

To date, cross-sectional research indicates that teachers and principals use some of the types of involvement strategies described by Epstein (1987a), but overall teachers and schools are not very active in soliciting parent involvement. For example, most teachers adopt basic communication and information-sharing practices such as parent-teacher conferences, progress reports on the child, and provisions of information about curricula and classroom goals, objectives, and procedures. However, only a small proportion of teachers initiate involvement with parents beyond these basic obligatory practices of providing information to parents (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Strategies that focus on encouraging direct parent involvement in learning activities at home with the child other than reading, such as participation in enrichment-type activities with their children (e.g., visits to museums, watching and discussing educational television programs, playing academic-type games) are often endorsed by teachers as positive possibilities, but are infrequently used.

In addition to the findings concerning the prevalence of use of different involvement strategies, a few studies have addressed grade-level differences in the frequency of use of these strategies. These studies have focused on whether the frequency with which teachers use different involvement strategies varies by grade level. These studies have been largely cross-sectional in nature and the results have been somewhat equivocal. For example, in a cross-sectional study of grades 1, 3, and 5, Becker and Epstein (1982) found that with increasing grade level, most strategies to involve parents were used less frequently by teachers. This included teachers' provisions of information to parents on tutoring and

monitoring the child and their requests for direct parent involvement at home with the child in reading, discussing schoolwork, and doing other educationally relevant activities. However, with the exception of requests for parents to read with their children, these declines were relatively small. In contrast, no such grade level differences were found in a cross-sectional analysis of grades 2, 3, and 5 conducted with an early wave of the study reported on in this paper (Eccles & Harold, 1994). In this study, there were no differences in the frequency with which teachers provided parents with information on classroom procedures and ways they could monitor and support their child's schoolwork. No differences were found across grade levels in the frequency of teacher requests for parents to work with the child at home or for parents to get involved in the classroom either. Using longitudinal data, this study reexamines the issue of how often teachers use various involvement strategies across grade levels.

Research on Parent Involvement in School: Parent Reports

Although teachers' reports of the strategies they use to try to involve parents is important to understanding home-school connections, teacher data provide only one part of the story. Parent reports of what they perceive they are asked to do by their child's school teacher each year and what they actually do to get involved with their child's education over time are also essential to understanding the relation between the home and school. For instance, whereas teachers report that they often communicate basic information concerning a child's progress at school and basic classroom procedures, goals, and objectives, a surprising number of parents report not receiving even some of these basic communications from the school (Epstein, 1986). Such results highlight the need

for studies that simultaneously assess what teachers report doing to involve parents and what parents actually perceive is being done to encourage their involvement. Here, we surveyed mothers of children at each grade in elementary school concerning their perceptions of whether or not their child's teachers used various involvement strategies. We examine these perceptions in relation to teachers' reports of their use of such strategies during different grades in elementary school.

We were also interested in seeing how involved parents were with their child around school activities and whether or not this was related to teachers' reports of their efforts to involve parents. Studies of actual involvement by parents in their child's school show that with increasing grade in elementary school, parents become less involved in some areas of their child's schooling and stay consistently involved in other ways. For instance, in our cross-sectional work we found that parents of fifth graders were less likely to monitor their child's school work than those with children in the early elementary grades, but that parents' direct involvement at home, parent-initiated school contacts to check on a child's progress, and parents' volunteering for activities at the school did not differ in a statistically significant way across grades 2, 3, and 5 (Eccles & Harold, 1994). How these patterns of actual parent involvement change over time with longitudinal data is another aspect of what we address in this report.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

For purposes of this study, we adopted the descriptive framework of Epstein (1987a) to organize our parent involvement constructs and to describe patterns of change in these constructs across the elementary school years. We

focused on several general involvement strategies, including the amount of basic information children's teachers reported sending to parents, teachers' requests for parents to work directly with their child at home, and teachers' encouragement of parents to get directly involved in their child's classroom each school year. Each year we also asked mothers to report on the amount of basic information they received from their child's teacher, and also the frequency with which their child's teacher requested them to get directly involved in educational activities with their child at home. Finally, each year we asked mothers about their actual at-home involvement with their child around school activities, whether or not they volunteered in the classroom, and whether or not they participated in school organizations (e.g., parent-teacher associations).

Based on the research reviewed above, we hypothesize that teachers' will report sending home a lot of basic information on a child's progress and classroom goals and objectives, but at the same time teachers will report infrequent use other strategies such as requests for direct parent involvement at home. Second, we predict that mothers will corroborate these findings in that they will report infrequent solicitations for involvement from their child's teachers. In terms of change in parent involvement over time, we predict that teachers' use of parent involvement strategies of all kinds will decline with increasing grade level, though the magnitude of these declines will be small. Furthermore, we predict that parents' actual involvement with their child will be greatest in reading in the early grades, and that this strategy and others (e.g., discussing school with child, involving child in educationally-relevant activities) will remain unchanged or decline only slightly with increasing grade (Eccles &

Harold, 1994; Epstein, 1986). Finally, we expect small correlations between teacher requests and parents' actual involvement based on previous findings that suggest although teachers make infrequent requests for involvement, parents nonetheless stay involved in their children's education (Eccles & Harold, 1994).

Method

Participants

The participants for this study include mothers and teachers of children involved in an on-going longitudinal study concerned with the development and socialization of children's achievement motivation and behavior (Eccles, Wigfield, & Blumenfeld, 1984; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold & Blumenfeld, 1990). The first three years of data are used in this report during which the children were followed for three consecutive years (1988-1990) and information was collected from children, their parents, and their school teachers once each year.

The families. In this study we focus only on the responses of the children's mothers. There were between 147 to 378 mothers who had complete data for specific parent involvement measures across these three years of this study. This was due to missing data and the fact that the sample was augmented between the first and second year of the study. Only mothers with complete data for all three years are included. Because of varying sample sizes, these are noted in descriptions of each analysis involving mothers' self-reports. Results contrasting parental involvement of mothers and fathers for this sample were presented in another paper (Eccles & Harold, 1994). In general, the families of the children in the study were mainly two-parent intact (93%), middle class, and

Caucasian (95%). The family income for the sample in 1987 ranged from \$10,000 to over \$80,000, with a mean of \$40,000 to \$50,000. On the average, mothers worked for pay 25.93 ($SD = 15.30$) hours per week while fathers worked for pay 44.45 ($SD = 13.30$) hours per week. Fathers' mean education was between an associate arts degree and a four year undergraduate degree, whereas mothers' mean education was slightly less than an associate arts degree.

The teachers. Children's elementary school teachers were also included in the study each year. Between 70 and 80 teachers participated at each of the three years of the study. Teacher data were linked to each parent of each child in their classroom. These teachers came from 12 elementary schools within 4 primarily White, lower-middle to middle class school districts in midwestern, small city communities. Teachers were predominantly female (ranging from 80% - 89% each year of the study), an average of 43.17 years old ($SD = 8.90$), and had taught full-time an average of 16.04 years ($SD = 8.65$) in year two of the study (1989). Approximately half of the teachers reported having a Master's degree at that time.

Study Design and Analysis Plan

The design of the study was a cross-sequential, longitudinal design. For ease of comprehension, this type of design is depicted in Figure 1. As indicated in Figure 1, we followed three cohorts of children and collected information from these children, their parents, and their teachers each year for three consecutive years beginning in 1988. The first cohort began in first grade and progressed to third grade across the study. The second cohort began in second grade and progressed to fourth, and the third cohort began in fourth grade and progressed through sixth grade. Collectively, these overlapping cohorts of children span

grades 1 to 6 and allow us to describe parent involvement across these grades. Teacher reports of their strategies to involve parents were linked to individual children and their mothers.

In an earlier report, we conducted extensive analyses to examine the similarity of cohorts of children and their mothers who were in the same grades at different years. For instance, we examined whether parents of children in Cohort 1 who were in grade 2 in 1989 were similar to parents of children in Cohort 2 who were in second grade in 1988. Overall, these analyses showed that there were very few differences between cohorts who were in the same grade level at different years of the study (see Roeser et al., 1995). Therefore, we present a description of parent involvement from both teachers' and mothers' perspectives by combining data for each grade (1 to 6) though the data were collected during different years of the study. This means that we collapsed reports from teachers and mothers of children in Cohorts 1 and 2 for grades 2 and 3, and reports of teachers and mothers of children in Cohorts 2 and 3 for grade 4 (see Figure 1).

For the correlational analyses, we examined the relation between teacher and mothers' reports using both the classroom and individual mothers as the unit of analysis. In the first instance, we aggregated all the mother reports together by their child's teacher and correlated this aggregate score with teacher reports. In the second instance, we assigned general teacher measures to each parent of each child in the classroom and examined the correlations.

Measures

Teacher Measures. Teachers filled out a survey each year that included questions about their classroom-wide, general practices aimed at involving

parents of all their students. We recognize these practices may differ from strategies teachers use with parents of individual children who have specific needs. These general parent involvement practices included (1) provisions of basic information to the home; (2) requests that parents get directly involved with the child at home in educational activities; and (3) the frequency with which teachers solicited parents to volunteer in the classroom. Questions to assess the frequency and amount that teachers used various parent involvement strategies were asked in either a 5-point Likert-type format or a dichotomous yes-no format. Scales were constructed on the basis of Epstein's (1987) conceptual framework and factor analysis.

One scale was used to assess the amount of basic information on classroom procedures, goals, and objectives that teachers reported sending home to parents. Teachers responded to whether or not they sent parents seven different types of information, including information on learning objectives, assignments, required skills, interpretations of standardized test results and report cards, and the manner in which ability group placements were determined. A percentage of the "yes" responses to these seven items formed the scale (alphas = .71 - .96 over the three years).

Two scales assessed the frequencies with which teachers requested parents to work directly with their child on academic or other educationally relevant activities at home. These scales ranged from 1 = Never, 3 = About Once a Month, and 5 = Weekly to Daily. The first scale measured the frequency with which teachers requested parents to work directly with their child on academic areas such as class projects, reading, and homework (8 items; alphas = .76 - .91). A

second scale measured the frequency with which teachers requested parents to engage their child in other educational activities such as watching educational television, attending special exhibits, and helping the child with computer skills (3 items; alphas = .75 - .93).

Finally, a single indicator was used to assess how frequently teachers reported encouraging direct involvement of children's parents in the classroom. This item was a seven-point Likert item ranging from 1 = infrequently to 7 = frequently and was recoded into a dichotomous variable indicating if teachers infrequently to somewhat frequently encouraged such volunteering (1 - 4, coded 0) or somewhat to frequently encouraged parents to volunteer in the classroom (5 - 7, coded 1). This was done so that a direct comparison could be made with the average percentage of teachers who frequently requested parent involvement in the classroom and the average percentage of mothers who reported actually volunteering in this way (see below).

Parent measures. Parents were mailed surveys to their home each year of the study. Items used in this report assessed mothers' perceptions of the ways in which their child's teacher tried to involve them each year, as well as their actual involvement in their child's education at home over time. Both 5-point Likert rating scales and yes-no dichotomous items were used. As with the teacher measures above, scale construction was guided by conceptual considerations and factor analysis.

The first set of measures assessed mothers' perceptions of the amount of basic information that teachers sent home and the frequency of teacher requests for their involvement with their child in academic and educationally relevant

activities at home. One scale was created that assessed mothers' perceptions of the amount of basic information on classroom procedures, goals, and objectives that they received. This was similar to the teacher measure. Mothers were asked whether or not they received six different types of information. This included interim performance reports, explanations about how to interpret standardized test results and report cards, information on how to help with school work, and information on how ability group placements were made. The scale was a percentage of "yes" responses to these six items (alphas = .69 - .74 over the 3 waves).

Two scales were also constructed to assess mothers' perceptions of how often the teacher requested them to work at home with their child. These scales were similar to the teacher measures and ranged from 1 = Never, 3 = About once a month, and 5 = Weekly to Daily. The first scale measured mothers' perceptions of the frequency with which teachers requested them to work directly with their child on academic areas such as class projects, reading, and homework (9 items, alphas = .85 - .89 over the 3 waves). The second scale measured mothers' perceptions of the frequency with which teachers requested them to engage their child in other educational activities such as watching educational television, attending special exhibits, and helping with computer skills (3 items, alphas = .73 - .77).

Second, we asked mothers about how often they got directly involved with their child in academic and educationally-relevant activities at home. These items were assessed using the same 5-point Likert format as above though the scale metric was slightly different. These items were scored from 1 = Never, 2 =

Occasionally, 3 = 2-3 Times a Month, 4 = Weekly, 5 = Several Times a Week. One scale measured how often mothers spent time helping their child with school work such as math and science homework and activities and helping their child prepare for tests (4 items, alphas = .74 - .82). We also assessed how often mothers said they spent time reading with their child (2 items, alphas = .76 - .79) and how often they worked with their child on computers (2 items, alphas = .85 - .88). Finally, we asked how often mothers discussed school experiences, current events, and other general knowledge with their child (3 items, alphas = .69 - .79).

Lastly, we asked mothers whether or not they volunteered in their child's classroom and whether they participated in parent-teacher organizations (PTO). Single yes-no items were used to assess these types of involvement (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

Results

Provisions of Basic Information to Parents: Teacher and Parent Reports

Figure 2 displays the amount of basic information concerning classroom procedures, learning goals, and class objectives that teachers reported sending home and that mothers reported receiving from the school ($N = 367$). Teachers across all grades indicated that they sent home a lot of basic information that explained things such as how to interpret test scores, how to understand report cards, and how children's placement in ability groups in reading and math were made. In fact, on average, teachers of all grades reported sending home about 70% (5 of 7) of the kinds of basic information that parents need in order to easily understand their child's progress, group placement, and achievement.

We also asked mothers how often they received such basic information on

classroom procedures, goals, and objectives. Results presented in Figure 2 show that mothers of children in all grades reported receiving less basic information than teachers reported sending to the home ($N = 147$). Specifically, mothers reported receiving only about 33% on the average, or two of the six types of information we asked about. Recall this included information on report cards, interpretations of standardized test results, ability group placements, etc. This figure, 33%, contrasts markedly with teacher reports from each time point in the study in which they said that they sent about 5 out of 7, or 70% or more of these same discrete types of information to parents.

Requests for Parent Involvement in Learning Activities at Home: Teacher and Parent Reports

Next we asked teachers about how frequently they requested parents of their students to get directly involved at home in various educational activities ($N = 347$). We also asked mothers how often they perceived that they were requested by their child's teacher to get directly involved in various educational activities at home ($N = 143$). Results are presented in Figure 3.

Whereas most teachers reported at least some requests for direct parent involvement in core academic activities (e.g., reading with child, practicing skills before tests), these requests were made fairly infrequently (less than once a month). Similarly, teachers' requests that parents engage their child in other educational activities, such as taking them to exhibits and watching educational television with them were made infrequently by teachers. As shown in Figure 3, mothers generally corroborated teachers' reports of their requests for direct at-home involvement. At every grade level, mothers reported that teachers

“infrequently” requested that they help their children with school-related activities and almost never asked them to engage their child in other educationally-relevant activities at home.

Mother’s Actual Direct Involvement with Child at Home

In addition to being interested in what teachers asked parents to do to get involved with their child's education, we were also interested in what mothers themselves reported doing with their child perhaps more or less independently of what teachers requested. Figure 4 displays the frequencies with which mothers reported engaging their child in various educational activities at home. First, despite the low frequency with which teachers requested parents to get involved directly with their children at home, mothers reported that they worked with their child on math and science activities, homework, and preparations for tests about once a week in grades 1 to 5 ($N = 288$). By the upper elementary grades, the frequency of this type of involvement began to decline slightly. Second, as one might expect, mothers reported reading with their children quite frequently during the early elementary grades (several times per week) with the frequency of this activity clearly declining with increasing grade ($N = 235$). Third, mothers of children in all grades reported doing computer activities only occasionally ($N = 291$). Finally, mothers reported that learning-oriented discussions with their child were a frequent activity at all grade levels ($N = 290$). Mothers of children in all grades reported that they discussed school and current events and taught their child other general information or concepts at least several times a week.

School Organization and Classroom Involvement: Teacher and Parent Reports

The final set of descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 5. These show the percentage of mothers who volunteered in the classroom and who participated in parent-teacher organizations (PTO) during the school year. In addition, Figure 5 also displays the percentage of teachers who encouraged parents to get involved in their classrooms “somewhat” to “frequently” during the school year. First, the percentage of mothers who said they had volunteered in their child’s classroom increased from first to third grade, declined briefly, and increased slightly from fourth to sixth grade ($N = 287$). Across all grades, between one-third and one-half of mothers reported volunteering in their child’s classroom. At the same time, one can see that between 80-90% of teachers across all grades said that they frequently encouraged parents to volunteer in the classroom during the school year ($N = 378$). The final set of data presented in Figure 4 concerns mothers’ reports of participation in parent-teacher organizations ($N = 287$). In general, such participation was very stable across grades. On the average, approximately 37% of mothers of children in all grade levels said that they got involved with parent-teacher organizations during the school year.

Correlations of Teacher and Parent Reports

The last series of analyses examined the bivariate correlations among teacher and mother reports of different aspects of parent involvement at each time point of the study. Because there were so few substantive differences in the amount and frequency of parent involvement strategies used by teachers across grades, we collapsing across grades within of the three time points in the study (1988 - 1990) to examine the relations between what teachers said they did to

involve parents, what mothers perceived teachers were doing to encourage their involvement, and what mothers were actually doing with their child at home in terms of academic activities.

The results of these correlational analyses using the classroom as the unit of analysis showed virtually no relations between teacher and mother reports. These correlations were based on 40, 65, and 59 classrooms across the three years, respectively. For instance, the correlations between teachers' reports of the amount of information they provided to the home and mothers' reports of how much of such information they received were not significant at any of the three times in the study (r 's = -.01 to -.13, ns). Similarly, the frequency with which teachers requested direct parent involvement at home and mother's perceptions of the frequency of such requests were unrelated (r 's = -.04 to -.24, ns). Finally, correlations of teacher requests for parent involvement at home and mothers' actual involvement behaviors were not significant at any time point. When we used mothers rather than the classroom as the unit of analysis (where all mothers were aggregated together by their child's common teacher), the same pattern of non-significant results emerged (see Roeser et al., 1995).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that teachers are not very active in their efforts to involve parents of their students at any grade level during the elementary school years. These results corroborate previous cross-sectional work on parent involvement during elementary school. For example, we found that the elementary teachers in this study did not frequently use general, classroom-wide parent involvement strategies very often (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Eccles &

Harold, 1994). Teachers reported that they requested direct at-home involvement of parents in academic tasks or other educational activities with their child very infrequently. Mothers corroborated these teacher reports saying that they were asked infrequently by their child's teachers to get directly involved with schoolwork and were almost never asked to engage with their child in other educational activities (Becker & Epstein, 1982). We did find that teachers reported sending home a lot of information to keep parents informed about the workings of their child's classroom.

However, we also found that even these basic information provisions were not being acknowledged by parents. Similar to previous research by Epstein (1986), we found that mothers reported receiving substantially less of these basic communications from teachers than the teachers reported sending to the home. Finally, we noted very little change across grades in the frequency with which teachers requested direct at-home involvement, in the percentage of teachers who encouraged parents to volunteer in the classroom, and in the amount of information teachers reported sending home. These results, using longitudinal data, also parallel previous cross-sectional studies that indicated little change in teachers' use of different parent involvement practices across the elementary grades (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Eccles & Harold, 1994).

Two other findings are noteworthy. First, despite the general lack of effort by schools to involve parents, our results also indicate that mothers are involved quite frequently in their child's education across the grades that span the elementary years. Specifically, mothers reported that they worked with their children on reading frequently in the early grades, on school activities at least

several times a month across all grades, and engaged them in educationally relevant discussions even more frequently through the upper elementary grades. These findings suggest, as have those of others, that in some communities parent involvement sometimes does occur with little support or encouragement from schools, and as such, may represent a largely untapped resource that could be capitalized upon with certain basic efforts on the part of schools (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Eccles & Harold, 1993; 1994). Furthermore, despite the relative lack of use of parent involvement strategies by teachers, we know that in general, teachers endorse the idea that parent involvement plays an important role in a child's educational success (e.g., Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Second, we found virtually no relationship between what teachers asked of parents and what parents perceived their child's teachers asked them to do. This indicates a substantial lack of communication between teachers' general strategies to involve parents of all children in the class and parents awareness of these efforts. It may indicate that even on those occasions when teachers do reach out to parents, their efforts are ineffective insofar as they are not being acknowledged by parents. This lack of relation may also reflect the fact that these practices are done too infrequently to be noticed by parents, or that there is greater variability among the parents of students in any one given class in terms of perceiving teachers' involvement efforts than there is of parents of students across different teachers.

Towards an Understanding of the Lack of Attempts to Involve Parents

Why, given that teachers view parent involvement favorably, are there so few attempts by teachers to involve parents? First, we know that teachers view

parent involvement as a complex phenomena. While endorsing its utility, teachers often admit that they do not know how to effectively encourage parents to get involved with their child's learning (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Thus, discussing specific ways that teachers can reach out to parents is one important issue that could be addressed in teacher education programs. Epstein's (1989) theoretical paper in which she develops a comprehensive framework for thinking about six different aspects of both school and home life ("T.A.R.G.E.T." - **T**asks, **A**uthority, **R**ecognition, **G**rouping, **E**valuation, and **T**ime) could serve this end. In this paper, for instance, Epstein discusses how teachers can help parents to know what activities are both challenging and appropriate for children at different ages and how such activities might complement the learning that is taking place in school. A framework such as this one could be used to help teachers think about and design specific types of information and requests for at-home involvement that would be developmentally appropriate.

Another explanation for why teachers report such infrequent use of general parent involvement practices could be that their efforts at home-school connections operate more at the individual student level than at the classroom level. For instance, in our data, we also asked teachers to report home feedback strategies they used with individual students. Specifically, we asked if the teacher had ever provided any of their individual students' parents with feedback beyond the normal report card and parent conference procedures. In each wave of data collection, teachers reported doing this for a large variety of reasons with about 45% of their students. Thus, in the absence of comprehensive strategies designed to involve parents of all students in the classroom, teachers' use of this

type of individualistic feedback may be the most widely used type of home feedback. The impact of this particular kind of feedback from school on parents and children represents an on-going goal of our research on home-school linkages and child development.

The use (or lack thereof) of parent involvement strategies needs to be viewed in the context of the total repertoire of strategies that teachers and principals can potentially use to increase the educational success of their students. To the extent that teachers are unknowledgeable about how to effectively increase parent participation in their child's education and are also faced with large class sizes, increasing mandates concerning content coverage, and difficult student populations, there may be little incentive for them to reach out to families. Relatedly, the role of a principal's leadership in fostering teachers' involvement of parents seems important, but may not be a high priority in the current climate where school leaders are trying to address and adjust to myriad mandates for improvement and reform. To the extent that principals do not view parent involvement as a centrally important activity, and encourage and support this outreach activity in tangible ways (e.g., providing planning time), teachers may be less inclined to pursue such strategies (e.g., Maehr, Midgley & Urdan, 1992).

Although such a scenario is unlikely to be operating with the sample studied here, it is important to acknowledge that there are also potential biases that may mitigate against the use of parent involvement strategies on the part of teachers and schools. For instance, although research suggests many teachers and administrators view parent involvement as desirable, there is some evidence that teachers and administrators may believe that parents living in high risk

communities (e.g., low income, minority neighborhoods) are incapable of assisting in their child's education, and thus discourage parent involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Comer, 1980; Eccles & Harold, 1993). Extant evidence suggests that it is not always the case that parents in high risk communities are unwilling or unable to help, and this needs to be brought to the attention of school leaders and teachers alike. Relatedly, teachers may believe that what really determines parent involvement is certain characteristics of the family (e.g., time, energy, economic resources, feelings of efficacy concerning helping a child with schooling) (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Since these characteristics are often beyond a teacher's immediate control, they may be viewed as deterrents to trying to involve parents. Although there is certainly some truth to this perspective, evidence also suggests that some of the most important determinants of parent involvement in a child's can be the school's attempts to include parents in significant ways in their child's education (Comer, 1980; Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1986). Again, this is critical for teachers and administrators to be aware of especially if they are looking for new solutions to addressing some of the needs of their students.

Possible Ways of Encouraging and Capitalizing on Parent Involvement

Given the relative infrequency of parent involvement efforts currently, how might teachers and schools go about trying to encourage more parent involvement if they desired to? Several school-based programs already exist that attempt to provide parents with some supplementary training so that they might be more informed, helpful and feel more confident in their ability to assist their children. Family Math and Family Computers are two exemplary programs with

this goal. These programs, run at the school in the evenings and weekends by teachers, attempt to provide supplementary educational experiences for students and parents alike. They seem to be fairly inexpensive to introduce and sustain in a school system, and seem to have generated enthusiasm among parents and teachers alike (Eccles & Harold, 1994).

Additional ideas come from reports such as the one produced by the Carnegie Corporation (1989) on adolescence. In "Turning Points," the Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents for the Carnegie Corporation provides a blueprint for structured school programs that would assist in the formation of cooperative home-school linkages and clearer communication. Some programs that are recommended in the report aim at improving both students and parents understanding of school policies and procedures such as the use of school orientation programs. Others, such as the inclusion of parents in school governance, aim to empower parents in making decisions that affect all students in the school. To increase student-teacher connections in school, a recommendation to have in-school advisors assigned to each student is made. Finally, to increase parent-child interaction in the home around educational activities, the creation of curricula that require parent-child interaction at home such as projects that draw on family history and culture are recommended.

The results of this study also offer some possible strategies teachers might try to capitalize on parent involvement that may be currently on-going. For instance, providing information on reading lists and library resources in the community may assist parents who are already reading with their child. Teachers could also provide parents with an outline of the current curricula that they are

covering in class to capitalize on informal teaching incidents and discussions that some parents are already engaged in having with their children.

Finally, Epstein and Eccles have provided both specific recommendations to principals and teachers about how to encourage parent involvement, as well as comprehensive models linking home and school structures (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1987a; 1989). For instance, in an article addressed to school principals, Epstein (1987a) recommends sixteen practices designed to include parents such as the creation of academic tasks that require parent-child interaction, ideas on providing parents with information that serves to increase their effectiveness as helpers, and recommendations for schools to invite parents in simply to observe the daily activities of the school and become more comfortable (and perhaps involved) in that setting. Similar and complementary suggestions have appeared elsewhere (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Eccles & Harold, 1993).

Each of the sources discussed above provides important possibilities to experiment with and assess in the current climate of school reform initiatives. As others have noted (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1994; Epstein, 1994), more longitudinal research is needed to help us gain a better understanding of how and when parent involvement strategies impact not only parents, but also children, in terms of motivational and behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, more research should be directed towards understanding how parent involvement strategies compare to other initiatives or innovations that schools might adopt in an effort to more fully accomplish their educational mission. This would allow educators to make informed choices about how best to prioritize their time, effort, and resources in

providing for their students' needs. What seems clear from our results is that many parents may already be doing academic activities with their children and this is one potential resource which schools might better utilize.

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List of Figures

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Figure 1.
Cross-Sequential Longitudinal Design of Study:
Collection of Data From Parents and Teachers

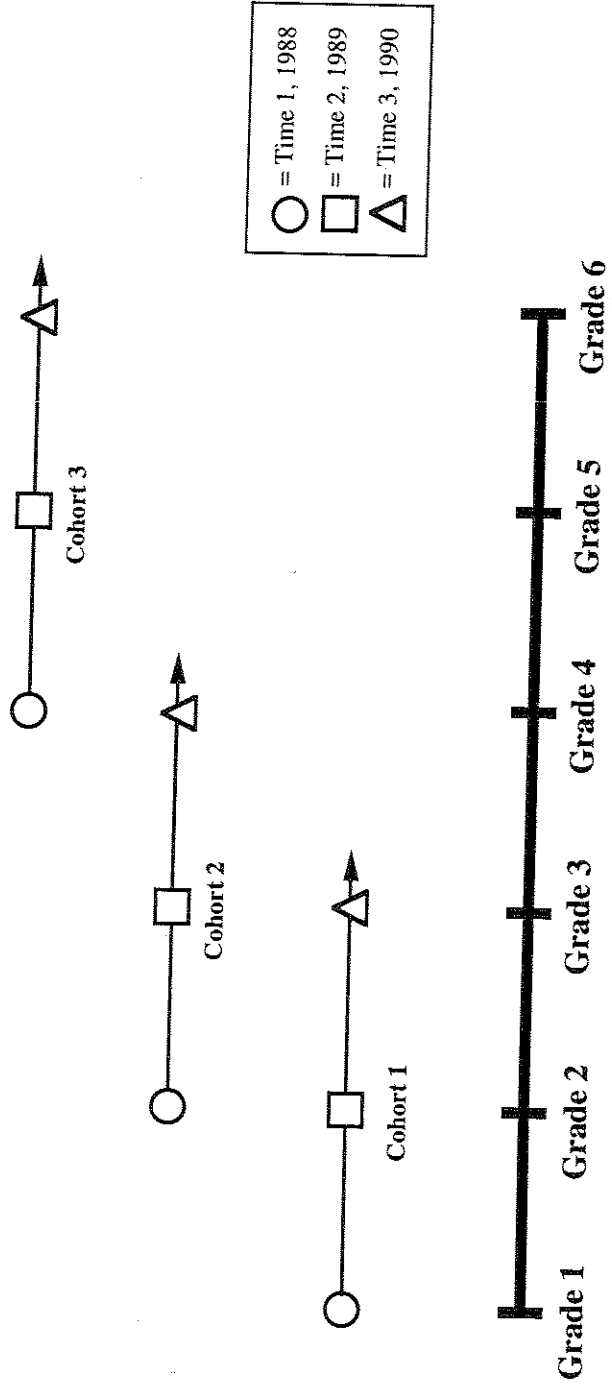
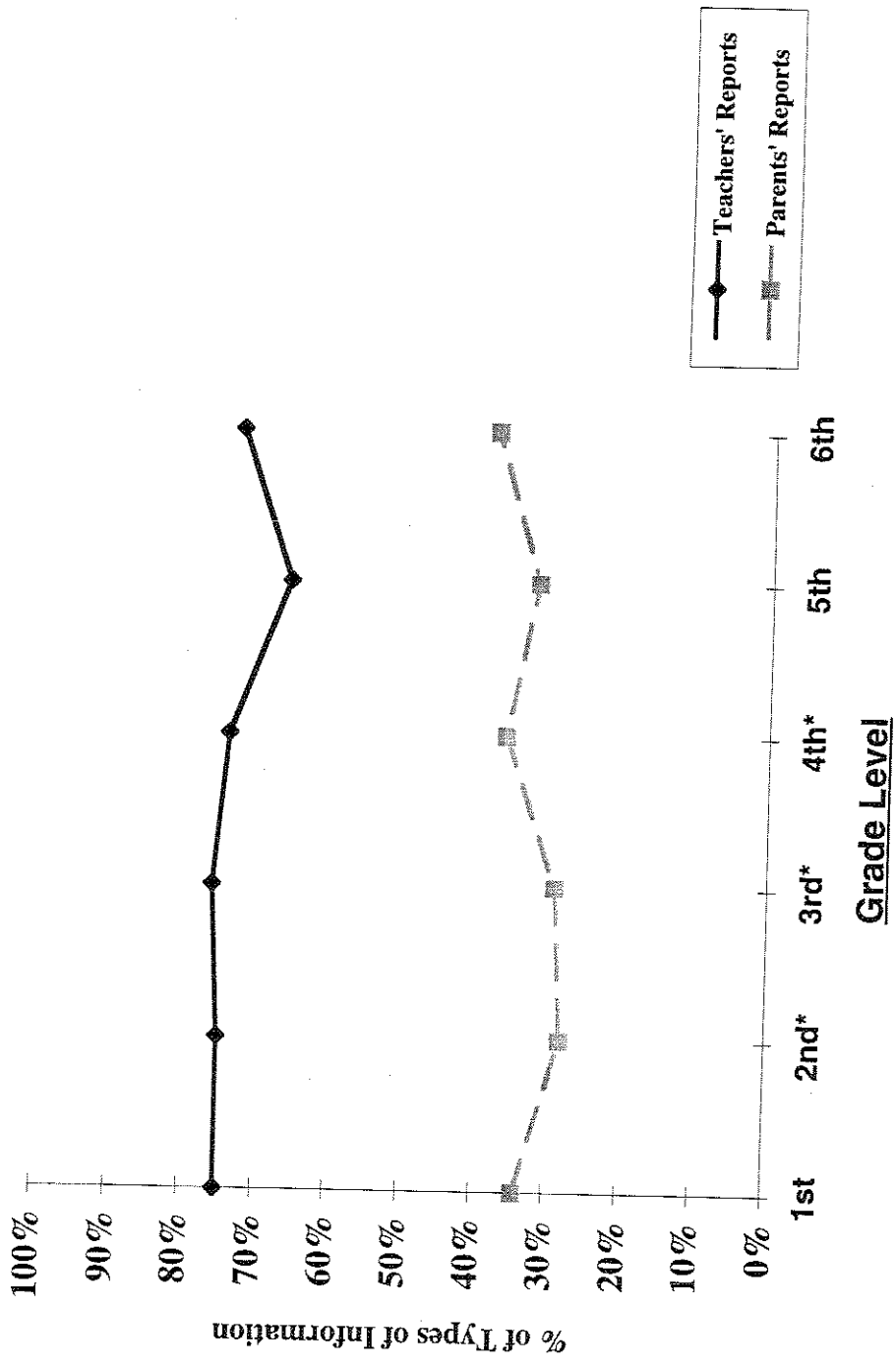
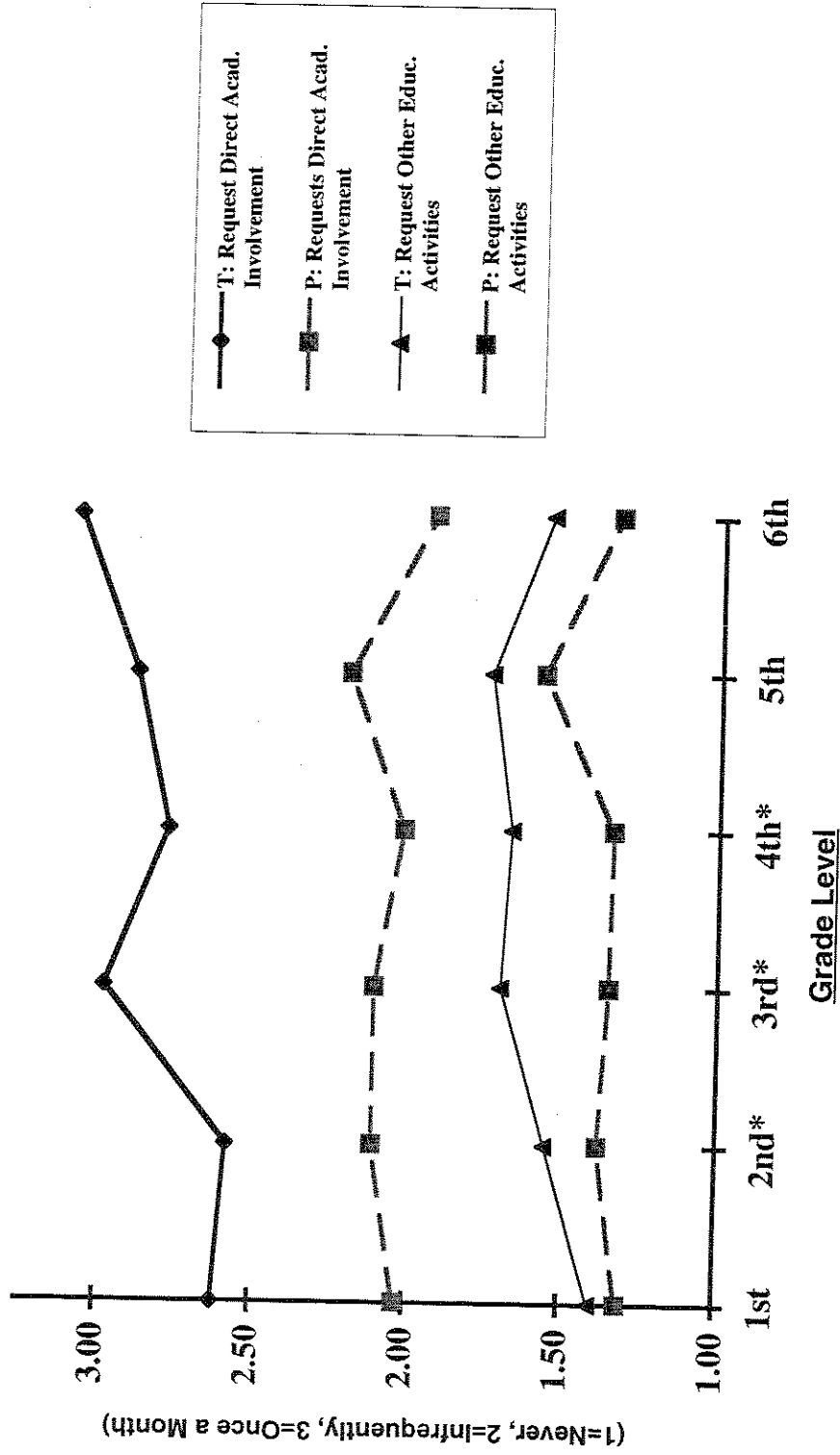


Figure 2.
Percentage of Information Sent Home on
Classroom Procedures, Goals, and Objectives:
Teacher and Parent Reports



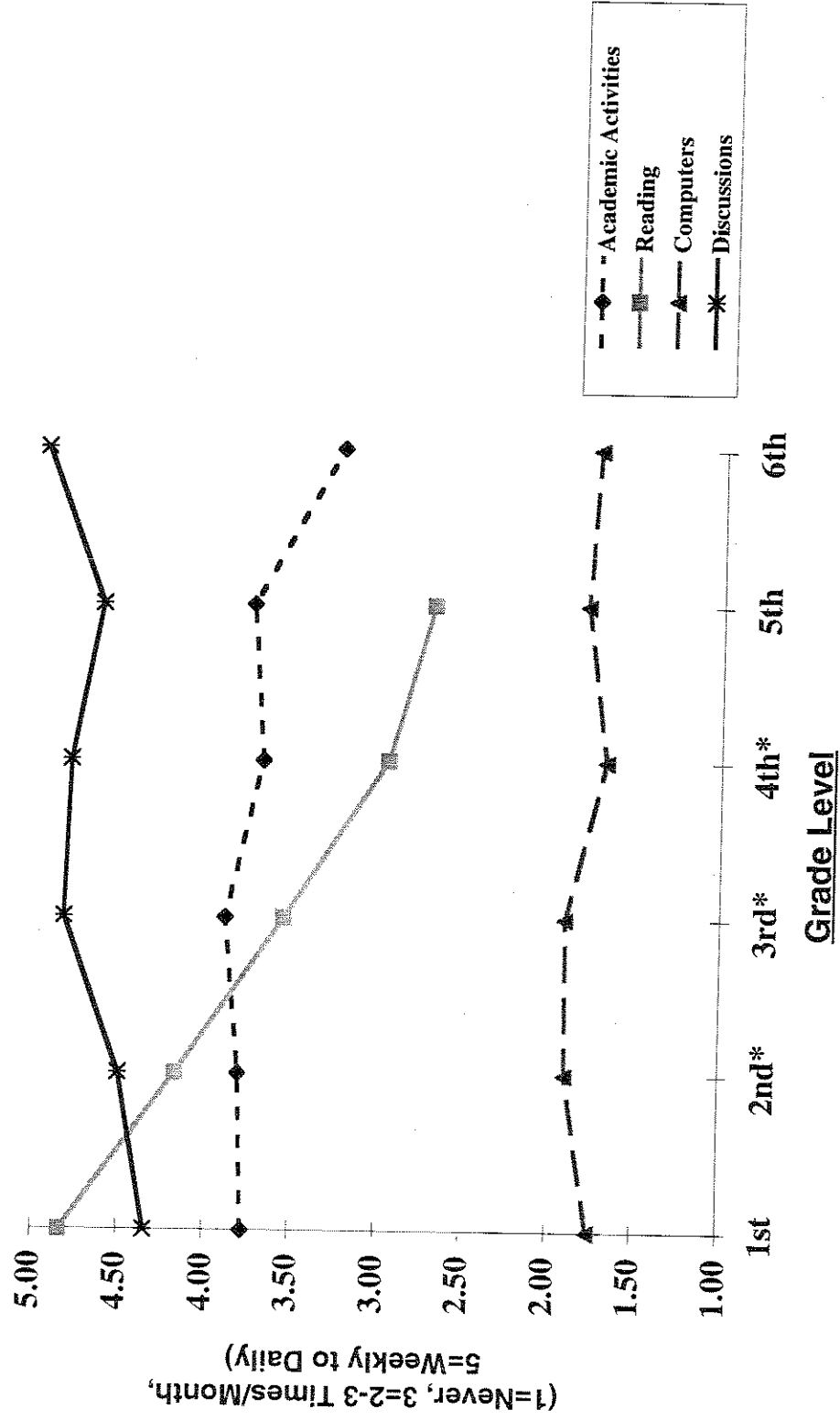
* Indicates Data Was Collapsed Across Cohorts

Figure 3.
Teachers' Requests for Direct Parent Involvement
in Learning Activities at Home: Teacher and Parent Reports



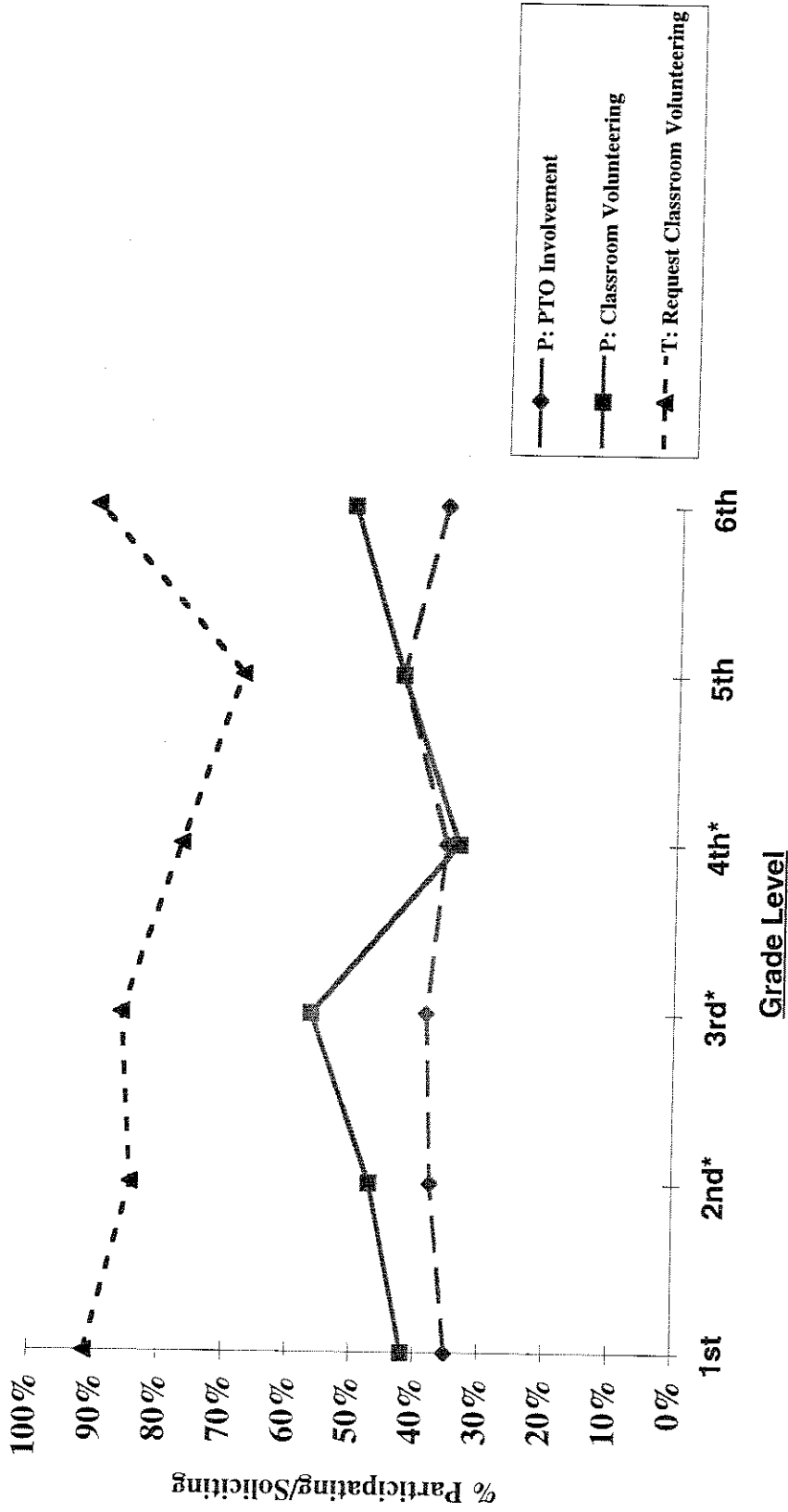
* Indicates Data Was Collapsed Across Cohort; T = Teacher Report; P = Parent Report

Figure 4.
 Mothers' Actual Direct At-Home
 Involvement with Child Across Grades



* Indicates Data Was Collapsed Across Cohorts

Figure 5.
Percentage of Parents Involved in School Organizations and
Actual Classroom Volunteering by Parents:
Teacher and Parent Reports



* Indicates Data Was Collapsed Across Cohorts ; T = Teacher Report; P = Parent Report