

**Parental Involvement in Inner-City Schools**

by

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### **Abstract**

Research shows that parental involvement is beneficial for children's academic success and positive results are seen when parents, teachers and schools work together to support children's learning. Although parental involvement is important for children's academic performance, many parents in inner-city schools still fail to be actively involved with their children's education. Although some parents may not show high parental involvement, there are many strategies that teachers and schools can implement to increase parental involvement significantly. When parental involvement is increased in a school, there can be benefits for all stakeholders. This paper provides a review of literature relating to parental involvement in inner-city schools. It looks at definitions of parental involvement, positive results of parental involvement and barriers contributing to lack of parental involvement in inner-city schools. Lastly, this paper provides strategies that teachers, parents and schools can employ to increase parental involvement and to establish and develop effective home-school partnerships.

**Keywords:** parental involvement, inner-city schools, children's academic success

**Table of Contents**

	Page
Approval .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
Chapter 1 – The Problem .....	1
Definition of Parental Involvement .....	1
Importance of Parental Involvement .....	2
Statement of Research Question .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Ways to Increase Parental Involvement .....	4
Summary .....	7
Outline for the Remainder of the Paper .....	7
Chapter 2 – Review of Literature .....	9
Introduction to the Chapter .....	9
Definitions of Parental Involvement .....	9
Positive Results of Parental Involvement .....	11
Parental Involvement and Socioeconomic Status (SES) .....	14
Why Aren’t Inner-City Parents Involved? .....	16
What Can Teachers and Schools Do to Increase Parental Involvement? .....	19
Communicate with Parents .....	22
Invite Parents into the School .....	23
Parental Involvement Programs .....	24
Summary of Findings .....	25
Chapter 3 – Summary, Implications, Recommendations, Suggested Research and Conclusion...26	
Summary .....	26
Implications .....	27
Recommendations .....	28
Suggested Research for the Future .....	32
Description of Research Methodology .....	33
Selection of Subjects .....	33
Procedure .....	34
Ethical Considerations .....	35
Limitations .....	36
Conclusion .....	37
References .....	39

## **Parental Involvement in Inner-City Schools**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **The Problem**

It is clear and evident through educational literature that parental involvement is beneficial for children's academic success. Henderson and Berla (1994) state that parental involvement contributes to higher grades and test scores, better attendance and more positive attitudes and behaviours for students. Although parental involvement is an important contributor to children's academic success, many parents in inner-city schools still fail to be actively involved with their children's education. There are many reasons why these parents fail to become fully involved with their child's learning, but there are also innumerable ways that schools and teachers can try to involve these parents that otherwise would not become involved on their own.

#### **Definition of Parental Involvement**

The traditional definitions of parental involvement include activities that take place at home and at school. The Epstein Model continues to be one of the most widely referenced frameworks for parental involvement. Epstein's Model (1995) outlines six concrete types of parental involvement behaviours: demonstrating good parenting skills, communicating with teachers and schools, volunteering at school, helping children learn at home, participating in school-related decision making and collaborating with the community. Other definitions of parental involvement include informal activities at home, such as checking homework, reading and talking with children, getting tutorial help and sending children to school fed, clean and rested (Seitsinger, Felner, Brand and Burns, 2008).

### **Importance of Parental Involvement**

Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed and analyzed eighty-five studies that documented the comprehensive benefits of parent involvement in children's education. This and other studies show that parent involvement can have a positive impact on the lives of students, parents, teachers and schools. When parents are involved with their child's learning, children will consistently complete their homework. They will have better self-esteem, self-discipline and show higher aspirations and motivation toward school. Children will also have a positive attitude about school, which often results in improved behavior in school and less suspension for disciplinary reasons. Middle school and high school students whose parents remain involved usually make better transitions and are less likely to drop out of school.

According to Henderson and Berla (1994), parental involvement can also be beneficial for parents. When parents are involved with their child's learning, they increase their interactions and discussions with their children and are more responsive to their children's social, emotional and intellectual needs. This helps parents become more confident in their parenting and decision-making skills. When parents are involved at their child's school, they gain a better understanding of the teacher's job, school curriculum and are aware of what their child is learning. This knowledge makes parents more likely to help when they are requested by teachers to become more involved in their children's learning activities at home.

When parents participate in their children's schooling, it can have a positive impact on teachers and schools (Epstein, 2001). When schools have high parental involvement, teachers and administrators are more likely to experience higher morale and they earn greater respect for their profession from the parents. Consistent parent involvement in schools can also lead to improved communication and relations between parents, teachers and administrators. When

teachers and administrators learn more about the families in their school, they form deeper respect for parents' abilities and time. Schools that actively involve parents and the community tend to have better reputations in the community and also experience better community support.

Parental involvement is critical for children's academic and social success. According to Henderson and Berla (1994), "

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent to which that student's family is able to: create a home environment that encourages learning, express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers and become involved in their children's education at school and in the community." (p. 160).

This paper will provide information for parents, teachers and administrators about the significance that parental involvement plays in the effort to continually increase children's academic and social success. Family involvement in education helps children to grow up to be responsible members of society.

### **Statement of Research Question**

Increasing parental involvement in schools can be challenging, particularly when the families concerned are economically disadvantaged. Inner-city parents' involvement in school may be hindered by transportation difficulties, lack of time, feelings of incompetence or conflicts with work schedules (Eccles and Harold, 1993). The information obtained in this paper may be used to engage in discussions on decreasing the lack of parents not involved in schools and to provide parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to aid with their children's learning. The



most important question that I am going to examine in this paper is: How can teachers and schools increase parental involvement in inner-city schools? We know parents are busy and some of them don't know how to get involved but "there are a variety of ways for all parents, regardless of background, ethnicity, income, vocation or amount of available time, to be a part of their children's education" (Greene and Tichenor, 2003, p. 242).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine why inner-city parents are not involved with their children's schooling and to find out how teachers and schools can increase parental involvement. Although some inner-city parents may not show high parental involvement, there are many strategies that teachers and schools can implement to increase parental involvement significantly. When parental involvement is increased in a school, it will make teachers' and administrators' jobs easier and improve student performance overall. Some strategies to increase parental involvement are: communicating frequently with parents, inviting parents into the school, creating a warm, respectful and welcoming environment, providing resources for parents and being flexible in accommodating parents and families.

### **Ways to Increase Parental Involvement**

Communicating with parents on a regular basis is an effective way to increase parental involvement. Teachers should communicate with parents frequently by using a variety of methods. Teachers can communicate with parents by phone, email, notes in planner and through face-to-face meetings. A meeting doesn't always have to be formal; teachers can informally talk to parents before and after school. In a study conducted by Loucks (1992), it was discovered that

parents could list the kinds of help they wanted from their children's teachers. Parents stated that they wanted more notes and phone calls from teachers, increased opportunities for one-on-one interaction, assistance in understanding instructional strategies and guidance with how they could help their children with their homework assignments and behaviour.

Many inner-city parents believe that they do not have the ability or skills to make a difference in their child's education. Teachers can change parents' attitudes and beliefs by inviting them into the school for volunteer activities. Parents can come into classrooms to help students with their work and they can provide classroom enrichment activities such as discussing their occupations, hobbies and talents. Parents can also help around the school as a tutor, come on school field trips, assist with school fundraisers and help out in the school's library. When parents volunteer at their child's school, they increase their parenting skills and information. By volunteering, parents start feeling more comfortable at their child's school and they find it easier to approach their child's teacher if they have questions (Hill and Taylor, 2004).

Research shows that parents are more likely to come into schools that have warm, respectful and welcoming environments. Teachers can make parents feel welcome by being positive during conferences, phone calls and during other parent interactions. It is important for parents to hear that their involvement will increase their child's academic performance. When teachers listen to a parent's concerns about their child, it demonstrates that the teachers are interested in listening to what they have to say. Schools can be welcoming by encouraging parents to assist in classrooms and by joining the school's parent advisory committee. Schools can also send personalized invitations encouraging parents to visit the school and develop a personal rapport with parents so they feel more encouraged to get involved with their child's school (Hill and Taylor, 2004).

Researchers have found that many parents want to help their children with their learning, but they don't know what they can do to help them (Gelfer, 1991). According to Hill and Taylor (2004), it is a lot more work to promote parental involvement in inner-city schools because the parents "often need much more information about how to promote achievement in their children, are overcoming more of their own negative school experiences and have less social capital (p. 164). It is necessary for teachers to provide parents with resources, strategies and activities that they can do with their children at home. Activity packs with a variety of worksheets, can be beneficial for increasing parental involvement at home. A reading activity pack can have sample short stories to read and questions that go along with it. Teachers can easily send home activity packs periodically throughout the year. The activity packs would be straight forward for the parents to use and it would encourage them to sit down and work with their children.

There are many ways that parents can be involved productively in their children's schooling on a consistent basis. Some parents are able to help their children at home but they are too busy to come into the school. There are many ways that schools can be flexible in accommodating parents and families. Research shows that parent-teacher conferences can be advantageous for parents, teachers and students (Gelfer, 1991). At times, parents' work schedules can conflict with the school's schedule or parents may be unable to attend meetings due to transportation issues. It may be more convenient for parents if conferences are scheduled during the day, with evening times also available (Musti-Rao and Cartledge, 2001). Interpreters should be provided at conferences for parents who speak English as a second language. In some cases, schools can also try to provide childcare and transportation for some parents so they can be included in various conferences, meetings and activities.

## **Summary**

Research has shown that parental involvement in schooling can lead to academic benefits for children (Epstein, 2001). Parents can show involvement by monitoring their child's time at home, helping with homework, discussing school matters, volunteering at school and attending school events and performances (Finn, 1998). According to Henderson and Berla (1994), when parents are involved with their children's learning, it will be beneficial for children but also for parents, teachers and schools. Eccles and Harold (1993) state that some inner-city parents fail to become involved with their children's learning because they feel incompetent and are confused about how they can help their child. Although some parents may not be involved, there are many strategies that teachers and schools can employ to establish and develop effective home-school partnerships that increase parental involvement.

## **Outline for the Remainder of the Paper**

In the next chapter, I will be reviewing the relevant literature regarding parental involvement in inner-city schools. I will begin the second chapter by looking at definitions of parental involvement. Then I will review the positive effects of parental involvement and look at reasons why some parents are not involved in inner-city schools. Lastly, I will share research that shows what teachers and schools can do to improve parental involvement in their schools. In chapter three, I will discuss my proposed research methodology about using classroom interventions to increase parental involvement in an inner-city school. In the last chapter, I will be summarizing my research around parental involvement in inner-city schools. I will also make

recommendations and look at the implications that the research has for students, teachers, parents, administrators and school districts.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of literature**

#### **Introduction to the Chapter**

There is a vast body of research literature that supports the involvement of parents in their children's learning and schools activities. Parental involvement in children's learning, improves a child's grades and test scores, promotes more positive attitudes and more engagement in classroom learning activities and has benefits for parents, teachers and schools (Christenson and Cleary, 1990). Although parental involvement is beneficial for children's academic success, inner-city schools still struggle with low levels of parental involvement. This literature review will provide a comprehensive review of literature relating to parental involvement in inner-city schools. It will look at definitions of parental involvement, positive results of parental involvement, barriers contributing to lack of parental involvement and ways that teachers and schools can increase parental involvement.

#### **Definitions of Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement has been defined in a variety of ways in the literature with no agreement on a common definition. Teachers and parents usually hold different views regarding the meaning of parental involvement. Most definitions of parental involvement include activities in the home and school. Epstein (1995) defined parental involvement as having six components: demonstrating good parenting skills, communicating with teachers and schools, volunteering at school, helping children learn at home, participating in school-related decision making and collaborating with the community. Epstein's definition of parental involvement recognizes the

role of parents at home and their role of providing an environment where educational activities are encouraged. Other activities that researchers have found to define parental involvement at home include: actively organizing and monitoring the child's time, helping with homework, discussing school matters, and reading with the child (Finn, 1998).

Finn (1998) states that organizing and managing a child's time means that parents help their child organize their schedule and develop regular routines. Parents help their child set aside time for homework, watching television and other non-school activities. Involvement with homework means that parents help their child with their homework and make sure that it is completed correctly. Discussing school matters is when parents are communicating regularly with their child about things that are going on with school. The child should be able to share about difficulties and successes that they are experiencing at school. Reading with their child is an important way that parents can be involved at home. Parents can read to their child or have the child read to them. It is also important for parents to create a positive home setting by having many books to read at home.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) state that there are three components of parental influence on children's educational outcomes: modeling, reinforcement and direct instruction. Modeling is when "parents influence their child's educational outcomes through modeling of school-related behaviours and attitudes" (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995, p. 319). Modeling can be demonstrated by asking questions about school, talking with a teacher after school, coming to a school event and volunteering at school. Parental involvement can also be achieved when parents reinforce specific aspects of their child's school-related learning. Reinforcement could be when parents give their children attention, praise and rewards for school successes. Direct instruction is another way that parents can influence their children's educational

outcomes. Direct instruction is when parents work with their children on their school work and ask them questions about the work that lead to higher-level thinking skills.

### **Positive Results of Parental Involvement**

Increased parental involvement is positive for students, parents, teachers and schools. Parents can be involved with their child's learning by volunteering at their school or by helping at home. Henderson and Berla (1994) state that when parents are involved, "students will have higher grades and test scores, increased homework completion, improved school attendance, more positive attitudes, fewer discipline problems, increased high school completion rates, decreased school leaving rates and greater participation in post-secondary education" (p. 1). Henderson and Berla suggest that parental involvement can have these positive results from early childhood through high school.

When parents participate in their children's education, students may experience more academic and social success. Epstein (2001) suggests that parents who are informed and involved in their children's school can positively impact their child's attitude and performance. Parents' awareness of and interest in their children's education models for their children the importance of school, which may lead to positive behaviors. Epstein's research also shows that parental involvement can have a positive impact on student's academic work at all grade levels. Fan and Chen (2001) indicate that parental involvement has an overall effect on student achievement, rather than a specific effect on one particular subject area. Their research found that parents' expectations and dreams for their children's academic achievement are the strongest factor influencing student's school performance.



Finn (1998) states that when parents are involved with their child's learning at home, this involvement can have a very important influence on a child's academic performance. It helps children when their parents organize their time at home and help them develop daily routines. Research shows that students tend to have better school performance when they have regular routines at home. Students can also benefit when their parents converse regularly with them about their positive and negative experiences at school. Research shows that students perform better academically when they regularly discuss school matters with their parents (Finn, 1998).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) state that parental involvement can have positive effects on children's development of their skills and knowledge. Children improve their skills and knowledge when parents work with them on their homework and discuss school subject topics. Parents can also use modeling and reinforcement to support their children's skill and knowledge development. They can model for their child the importance of working on work or school assignments at home. Parents can also use reinforcement to praise their child for participating in class, getting good grades or completing their homework.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) further assert that parental involvement can also have positive effects on a child's personal sense of efficacy for doing well in school. A child's sense of efficacy is developed through the operation of personal experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal. Parents "offer their child experiential sources of efficacy" by helping them with school work, praising them and providing them with direct instruction (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995, p. 328). Parents can also use verbal persuasion to encourage their children to put more effort into their work and explain the importance of succeeding in school.

When parents are involved with their child's learning, it can be beneficial for the child and the parents. When parents become involved at their child's school, this can increase their skills and information. This information "makes them better equipped to assist their children in their school-related activities" (Hill and Taylor, 2004, p.162). Hill and Taylor (2004) further argue that when parents are at their child's school, they build relationships with the school staff, they learn about the school's expectations and they learn how to help with their child's learning at home. Parents also get an opportunity to meet other parents when they spend time at their child's school. Interacting with other parents is important because then parents can learn more information about school policies and practices.

Eccles and Harold (1993) state that some inner-city parents have had negative school experiences when they were young and this has left them dissatisfied with schools and teachers. When these parents get involved at their child's school, they can develop more confidence in the school. The teachers at the school will start to have higher opinions of them as parents and higher expectations of their children. As a result, parents develop more confidence about helping their children learn at home and about themselves as parents (Henderson and Berla, 1994). When parents participate in decision making at their child's school, they experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004).

Christenson and Cleary (1990) concluded that parental involvement is beneficial in many ways for students, teachers and parents. They stated that parental involvement helps students because it results in more completed homework and more student involvement in classroom activities. Parental involvement benefits teachers because teachers are recognized by parents as having better interpersonal and teaching skills. Teachers also feel more satisfied with their jobs.

Parental involvement is beneficial for parents because they start to show an increased understanding of school functions, they improve their communication with their children and their teachers and they participate in more learning activities at home.

Parental involvement can occur at home, school and even in the community. When parental involvement occurs at school, it can “boost teacher morale and improve the school climate” (Greene and Tichenor, 2003, p. 242). Increased parental involvement in students’ learning can also have other benefits for schools. Schools that work together with parents have “improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, more support from families, higher student achievement and better reputations in the community” (Henderson and Berla, 1994, p. 1).

### **Parental Involvement and Socioeconomic Status (SES)**

It is important to understand and take into consideration the role of socioeconomic status (SES) on levels of parental involvement in inner-city schools. SES generally refers to a family’s relative economic and social standing in the society based on the father and mother’s education levels, occupation and family income (Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry, 2004). Researchers have found socioeconomic status and parental involvement to be positively related (Fan and Chen, 2001).

Research shows that parental involvement is associated with student improvement in a variety of areas including academic performance, attitudes and behavior, attendance and engagement (Henderson and Berla, 1994). However, despite the many benefits to their children, low socioeconomic status (SES) parents show less parental involvement than high SES parents (Benson and Martin, 2003). Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) state that low SES parents may be

less involved because of the demographic and psychological obstacles they face. Some parents may not be able to show high levels of parental involvement because they may have other children or elderly parents to care for at home. Other low SES immigrant parents may show low levels of parental involvement because they speak languages other than English and because they were not expected to show parental involvement in their native countries (Mapp, 2003).

Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates and Pettit (2004) found that parents from higher SES backgrounds are “more likely to see themselves as collaborators with their children’s teachers and tend to presume that they have more rights entitling their involvement in school” (p. 1493). According to Senechal and LeFevre (2002), high SES parents are also more likely to expose their children to a variety of educational activities outside of the school, such as taking them to the library. Senechal and LeFevre also found that high SES parents were consistent with continuous exposure of literature and writing necessary for the development of early literacy skills for children.

In their study, Lee and Bowen (2006) found that parents from different social backgrounds showed different types of parental involvement based on preferences and structural constraints. The parents that showed the highest parental involvement at school were the ones who had a culture and lifestyle similar with the school’s culture and parents who had education levels that were similar to those of the school staff. Lee and Bowen also found that parent-child discussion occurred more frequently in homes that had highly educated parents and homes that were most likely to be culturally similar to the school’s culture. Lee and Bowen state that schools should recognize that there are variations in parental involvement among parents from different backgrounds “in terms of when, why and how they are involved in their children’s education” (p. 214).

Research suggests that high SES parents monitor their children more often; they are able to describe their children's best and worst subjects and are more likely to know their child's teachers by name (Evans, 2004). Evans also adds that low SES children experience less enrichment in comparison to high SES children. Low SES parents compared with high SES parents "speak less often and in less sophisticated ways to their young children, and as the children grow older, low-income parents are less likely than middle-income parents to engage jointly with their children in literary activities such as reading aloud or visiting the library" (Evans, 2004, p. 80).

### **Why Aren't Inner-City Parents Involved?**

The literature says that parental involvement is an effective strategy for increasing student achievement, but schools still struggle with how to effectively involve inner-city families (Bower and Griffin, 2011). Why are some inner-city parents not involved with their children's learning? Eccles and Harold (1993) state that inner-city parents are not involved because of their "lack of time, energy and economic resources" (p. 569). They further argue that some parents don't show high parental involvement because of their "lack of knowledge, feelings of incompetence and failure to understand the role parents can play" (Eccles and Harold, 1993, p. 569). Some parents probably feel that it is not their job to educate their children but it is the teacher's job.

Communication is very important for the parent-teacher relationship. Teachers should make the effort to communicate with parents regularly by using a variety of methods. If teachers develop a personal rapport with parents, they will feel more comfortable approaching teachers when they have questions. Robinson and Fine (1994) noted that sometimes communication between teachers and parents can become impersonal. This can occur when teachers don't take

the time to talk to parents, instead they just send home notes that announce events and make phone calls to parents that have a blaming tone. Robinson and Fine (1994) add that if these types of interactions occur between parents and teachers, then both sides are going to feel “alienated and uncertain of the sincerity of the other” (p. 11).

In some cases, a parent’s feelings about their own experiences in school may act as barriers to their parental involvement (Greene and Tichenor, 2003). Some inner-city parents have had negative school experiences when they were young and this has left them dissatisfied with schools and teachers. Some parents may still “feel a rush of negative emotions” when they interact with their child’s teacher or at their school (Robinson and Fine, 1994, p. 11). Past negative school experiences may make a parent feel that they need to defend their child and they may react in angry ways towards teachers. Robinson and Fine (1994) state that it is up to the teacher to respond to these types of parent reactions in nondefensive and supportive ways.

Some inner-city parents don’t know how they can even begin to help their child with school work and many probably feel that their help won’t be beneficial for their child. This is why it is crucial that teachers provide these parents with very specific activities to do with their children at home. They are not going to know how to help their children unless teachers tell them how to do it. Also teachers can send home resources with parents to help their children with their learning. Teachers need to remember to send home “user-friendly” newsletters, worksheets and report cards for parents. Parents do want to know how their child is progressing at school but sometimes the “professional jargon of educators can leave parents confused and frustrated” (Robinson and Fine, 1994, p.11).

Researchers have discovered that inner-city parents also fail to become actively engaged in their children’s school if they are single parents, employed parents, fathers and parents who

live far from the school. They found that affluent parents tend to be involved in school more often and in positive ways, whereas economically distressed parents have limited contact with schools, and usually in situations dealing with students' achievement or behavior (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn and Van Voorhis, 2002). Other studies have found that "parents who are better educated are more involved in school and at home than parents who are less well educated" (Eccles and Harold, 1993, p. 570).

According to Hill and Taylor (2004), parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be involved in their child's learning than parents of lower socioeconomic status. Inner-city parents face more barriers to involvement, including nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources and stress from living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Hill and Taylor further assert that inner-city parents often have fewer years of education themselves and negative school experiences, so they "often feel ill equipped to question the teacher or school" (p.162). Parents' psychological states also influence their levels of parental involvement. Some parents are not as involved as they would like to be because they suffer from depression, anxiety or if they have negative feelings about themselves. Research studies show that depressed mothers tend to be less involved with their children's learning than non-depressed mothers (Eccles and Harold, 1993).

Research suggests that parental involvement is beneficial for parents, teachers and children's academic success. Unfortunately, "parents are busy, teachers are busy and many parents do not know how to get involved or what to do when asked to get involved" (Greene and Tichenor, 2003, p. 242). Hill and Taylor (2004) state that poverty can also limit some inner-city parents from being involved with their child's learning. These parents may have a lack of

transportation, they may be working two jobs and they may have younger children at home so it is difficult for them to volunteer at their child's school or to help them with homework at home.

Some parents become less involved with their children's learning as they leave elementary school and start to enter middle school and high school. Epstein et al. (2002) state that when students leave elementary school, parents start to feel that they are not as familiar with the curriculum in the higher grades. Sometimes children also don't want their parents to be as involved because they feel that they are more independent now. High school and middle school teachers may also not know how to effectively involve parents at the higher levels. Epstein (1995) believes that parental involvement can start to decline in the higher grades "unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level" (p. 84).

Middle school and high school teachers may inhibit parental involvement by their own beliefs and attitudes about parental involvement. Some of these teachers may feel that it is better for the students to have less parental involvement in the higher grades. They also might think that it is too much work to involve the parents because they are "busy or disinterested or ignorant" (Eccles and Harold, 1993, p. 575). Children go to elementary schools for about six or seven years but they spend less time in middle schools and high schools. Some parents may not feel as connected to the higher level schools as they did to the elementary schools. Children also have only one teacher in elementary school but they have many teachers as they get older.

### **What Can Teachers and Schools do to Increase Parental Involvement?**

When teachers involve parents in their children's learning, it provides many opportunities for success. Research has shown the positive effects of parental involvement on children when



schools, teachers and parents continuously support and encourage the children's learning.

Although some parents may not be involved in their children's learning at home and school, the practices of teachers and schools to involve these parents, can influence their level of involvement (Barton et al., 2004). A study conducted by Lewis, Kim and Bey (2011) observed specific practices and strategies that two teachers used in an inner-city school to encourage more parental involvement in their classrooms. The five main strategies that the teachers used were: practicing parent outreach, establishing a relationship with parents, creating a positive classroom climate, teaching to involve parents and making the community-school connection.

Practicing parent outreach meant that the teachers in the study invited the parents to visit their classrooms so that they could get to know them. They sent home positive and negative notes to parents and told them about their children's successes. They made phone calls to the parents and sent home newsletters that explained what the students were learning about in class. One teacher in the study even made home visits to the students' homes when parents were unable to come into the school. The home visits allowed this teacher to connect with the parents and also learn more about the students (Lewis et al., 2011).

The teachers in the study established relationships with the parents by understanding and respecting them. Some parents didn't understand the techniques that the teachers used at school to teach their children. So the teachers encouraged the parents to help their children with their homework by using whatever strategy they understood. The teachers even encouraged the parents to come into the classroom to observe the exact processes that they were using to teach particular concepts. The two teachers in the study also wanted the parents to be motivated to participate in their children's education. So they invited the parents into the classroom to watch their child learn (Lewis et al., 2011).

Lewis et al. (2011) state that the teachers in their study also encouraged parental involvement by creating a positive classroom climate. The teachers had child centered classrooms and they built relationships with their students. They were able to build relationships with the parents when the parents saw the care and concern that the teachers had for their children. The teachers made it very clear to the parents that they had an open-door policy. The parents knew that they could come and talk to the teachers if they ever had questions about their children's learning or classroom events.

The two teacher participants in the study used teaching to involve the parents. They encouraged the parents to teach their children at home but also asked them to come and volunteer in the classroom. They encouraged the parents to help with classroom activities that they felt comfortable with. These teachers felt that the parents all had special talents that the students could benefit from. One teacher also provided brief training sessions for any parents that wanted to assist in the classroom. This teacher believed that parents would be more willing to volunteer in the classroom if they knew how to perform assigned activities and knew what was expected of them (Lewis et al., 2011).

The last way that the teachers in the study encouraged parental involvement was by making the community-school connection. This meant that they connected the parents with the community by asking them to reach out to other parents in the community. The teachers were able to use some parents to pass on classroom information to other parents who weren't involved in the classroom. The teachers also invited community helpers into their classrooms and this helped them reach out to parents. The teachers felt that if their school had a good reputation in the community then more parents would be willing to come into the school (Lewis et al., 2011).

### **Communicate with Parents**

Research shows that when parents are involved with their children's learning, the child's academic performance improves (Hara and Burke, 1998). Communication between teachers and parents is very important. Teachers should communicate with parents frequently by using a variety of methods and help parents understand why they are so important to their children's school success. Some inner-city parents don't know how to be involved with their child's learning, so teachers need to provide those parents with specific things they can do to be involved. Teachers should have on-going communication with parents; they shouldn't just speak to the parents when a problem arises. Robinson and Fine (1994) state that teachers should develop effective communication skills and problem-solving techniques that allow for collaboration among parents and teachers.

Open and effective communication between parents and teachers is imperative if schools and teachers want to increase parental involvement at their schools. Teachers can communicate with parents by phone, email, notes in planner, by talking to them before and after school and at parent-teacher conferences. Conferences can give parents and teachers a chance to discuss a child's social, emotional and academic achievement. Schools should accommodate parents by offering afternoon and evening conference appointments and by providing interpreters for parents who speak English as a second language. A report by West (2000) discussed an elementary teacher's efforts to increase parent-teacher communication, and its effect on students' success in reading. Findings from this study showed that parent-teacher communication can motivate students to complete their reading homework, which results in better quiz and test scores.

### **Invite Parents into the School**

Teachers and schools can make parents feel welcome by encouraging them to visit and volunteer at the school. Gelfer (1991) states that parents should be encouraged to visit their child's classroom because it "helps parents see the school with their own eyes and enables them to understand how the program operates, the role their child plays, the role the teacher plays and how they can assist their own child's development (p. 167). Hara and Burke (1998) found that student participants in their study stated that they wanted their parents to be involved in various activities at their school. They wanted their parents to attend school performances, athletic events, field trips and school fundraising programs. Epstein (1995) found that improved academic achievement was more likely, if students saw their parents taking an active role and interest in school-related activities.

Many parents tend to know a lot about their child's teacher before they even come into the school to meet them. Gelfer (1991) states that parents learn about the teacher by listening to their child speak about them. They also learn about the teacher's communication style through telephone calls, notes and other items that the teachers send home. Parents will be more likely to come volunteer in their child's school if the teacher is friendly, approachable and makes them feel welcome. Barton et al. (2004) found that parents who spent time in their child's school were able to develop relationships with the school staff. These parents also felt more comfortable talking to teachers when their children were experiencing difficulties. Teachers should be the first to initiate the process of building relationships with parents because most inner-city school parents don't feel comfortable approaching teachers or asking them questions.

Swick (2003) looked at the role that culture plays in the communication process. In his article he states that cultural differences can be used as ways to enrich the relationships between

parents and teachers. Teachers can build their relationships with parents by learning more about their culture and the rituals and activities that they take part in. Teachers can plan classroom activities that will allow their students to learn about different cultures. Teachers and schools should encourage parents to come to the school to share information about their cultural heritage. Schools can hold regular “family nights” at their schools where parents come in and share information about cultural rituals and activities. When parents see that teachers are interested and accepting of their culture, they will be feel more comfortable coming into their child’s school.

### **Parental Involvement Programs**

A lot of research has been devoted to the development of parental involvement programs in inner-city schools to increase parent involvement. It is important for schools to assess the current practices at their schools before beginning parental involvement programs. They could look at what is working well for the school and what is working for certain grades. Epstein (1995) states that it takes five steps to build an effective parental involvement program. She says that schools need to start by creating an action team. Then they need to obtain funds and other support for their program. Lastly, the school needs to identify starting points, develop a three-year plan and continue planning and working to improve the program.

Epstein (1995) states that almost all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but “many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying” (p. 84). Parental involvement programs can be very effective for increasing parental involvement in schools. Some benefits of parental involvement programs are: increased student achievement and in-school participation, improved student attendance, higher self-esteem for students, decline in discipline referrals and more parent support for teachers (Hara and Burke, 1998).

## Summary of Findings

Research shows that students will be successful in school and life if teachers, parents and schools work together (Henderson and Berla, 1994). When parents are involved in their child's learning, it can improve a child's morale, attitude and academic achievement. Parental involvement can also promote better behaviour and social adjustment for children. However, some teachers and schools are not taking the time to build effective relationships with parents. Greene and Tichenor (2003) state that "schools and teachers should welcome and celebrate different ways for parents to be involved in their children's education, as each party benefits" (p. 242).

It is well established that parental school involvement has a positive influence on children's academic success (Fan and Chen, 2001). According to Christenson and Cleary (1990), parental involvement is beneficial for students, parents, teachers and schools. When parents are involved at school and home, children show improvement at school, teachers feel greater satisfaction with their jobs, schools have better reputations in the community and parents benefit because they start to show an increased understanding of school functions. This literature review has attempted to accomplish four goals: First, to look at definitions of parental involvement in literature; second, to document the importance of parental involvement for children, parents, teachers and schools; third, to discuss reasons why some inner-city parents are not involved with their children's learning. The fourth and most important goal of this literature review was to ask the question: How can teachers and schools increase parental involvement in inner-city schools? Although many inner-city parents may not be involved with their children's learning at home and school, there are many strategies that teachers and schools can implement to increase their level of involvement.

### Chapter 3

#### Summary, Implications, Recommendations, Suggested Research and Conclusion

##### Summary

This paper has provided an in-depth look at the significance and need for continuous parental involvement in inner-city schools. Research has shown that many life barriers interfere with inner-city parents being actively engaged in the academic and social elements of their child's life (Eccles and Harold, 1993). Although, some parents may not be involved with their children's learning, there are many strategies that teachers and schools can use to increase their level of parental involvement. Children will be more successful, when parents, teachers, administrators and schools make a commitment to work together.

Many definitions of parental involvement entail parents being involved with their children's learning at home and school. Parents can show involvement at their child's school by volunteering in classrooms, coming on field trips and by communicating with their child's teacher. Inner-city parents who do not have time for in-school involvement, can be involved with activities that take place at home. Parents can be involved at home by reading with their children, establishing daily family routines, by modeling the value of learning, self-discipline and hard work and by providing their children with stimulating experiences. Research shows that children can experience academic and social success when their parents are involved and take an interest in their schooling (Epstein, 2001).

Parents may not be involved with their children's learning, but there are innumerable ways that teachers and schools can help them and increase their level of involvement. The most important thing that teachers and schools can do is provide a warm and welcoming environment

for parents. If parents feel welcome, they will be more willing to approach their child's teacher and more likely to volunteer at the school. Teachers should communicate regularly with parents and keep them informed about what is going on at school and how their child is doing (Robinson and Fine, 1994). Some parents may not know how to help their children at home so teachers can assist parents in understanding how they can work with their children on homework and other activities. Parental involvement is more likely to increase when teachers and schools encourage and assist parents to help their children. If teachers and schools don't make necessary efforts to involve parents then "parents too often become and remain a forgotten treasure" (Greene and Tichenor, 2003, p. 242).

### **Implications**

The information in this paper has strived to make inner-city parents more aware of the daily life challenges they face, that prevent them from being highly involved with their children's learning. The paper has also shown parents how important their involvement is for their child's success and it has provided them with suggestions on how they can become involved. Parents should realize that showing parental involvement does not cost a lot of money and it doesn't mean they have to volunteer at their child's school. Parents can be involved at home by talking to their children, helping them with their homework, having books at home and by setting daily routines for their children. If parents take time to talk to their children's teachers, they can learn more about their child's progress and the resources that teachers and schools can offer them.

This paper has suggested that to reach out to parents, teachers may consider communicating frequently with parents, inviting parents into the school, creating a warm, respectful and welcoming environment, providing resources for parents and being flexible in



accommodating parents and families. Parents are much more likely to become involved when teachers encourage and assist parents to help their children with school work. Most inner-city parents don't feel comfortable approaching teachers and asking them for help and some of them have had negative school experiences so they don't know how to help their children with their learning. It is up to teachers to make the first move! Teachers need to communicate regularly with parents, they need to show parents how to help their children and show them just how important they are to their children's school success.

The research in this paper has shown that there are many ways for inner-city schools to increase their levels of parental involvement. It is important for schools to make parents feel welcome and to encourage them to get involved with volunteering in their child's school by inviting them to: read to classes, help with testing and classroom monitoring needs, be guest speakers, chaperone events and field trips and to work with students to help plan events for fundraisers, field trip days and curriculum-related events. School administrators should be aware of the importance of building a more collaborative and effective working relationship among parents, teachers and the school. If administrators make it a priority to increase parental involvement at their schools, then teachers will be more open and willing to share their vision. Increased parent/teacher/school cooperation is essential if we want to increase parental involvement in inner-city schools.

### **Recommendations**

Parental involvement is critical in order to maximize students' success academically, socially and emotionally. Parental involvement can serve as an effective tool to establish a positive and collaborative relationship among all stakeholders. The following recommendations attempt to address the important issues regarding lack of parental involvement in inner-city

schools. Hopefully parents, teachers and administrators who have limited experience with encouraging parental involvement, will refer to the recommendations described in this paper as guiding examples of how to increase parental involvement.

Some inner-city parents are not able to volunteer at their child's school, so I recommend that they show parental involvement at home. There are many ways that parents can help with their child's academic process at home to ensure that they are learning at an effective pace. Parents can provide their children with a quiet place and time to do their homework. They can also make certain that homework is completed and discuss the specifics of school assignments. It is important for children to have regular routines at home and it is something that parents should enforce. For instance, parents should allocate time for household chores and responsibilities, play time, bed time, family dinners and television viewing. I believe that parents should take time to talk to their children about their day. Parents can even ask their child to share one highlight and one lowlight each day. This will keep parents informed of how their child is doing socially at school.

One last recommendation would be for parents who have limited parental involvement due to life challenges (i.e., busy work schedules, large families to care for, and transportation issues) to establish a high literacy home environment. Parents can show their children that they value learning by having books, magazines, board games and newspapers around the home. Books are not too expensive and can be bought at used book stores or borrowed from the local library. It is also difficult for some inner-city parents to come to their children's school for volunteering and events, so I recommend that they should make a commitment to attend at least one school event each term. If parents are too busy to volunteer in their child's classroom, they can try to assist and attend class field trips. Lastly, parents should try to attend parent-teacher

conferences and come prepared to ask specific questions and address any concerns. This shows the teacher that the parent cares about how their child is progressing at school.

I have been teaching for about eight years and I currently teach Grade 2 at an inner-city school in Abbotsford. I believe that parental involvement is very important for a child's academic and social success and I feel that students will perform better at school when teachers and parents are working together. As a teacher, I try to keep parents informed and involved with their child's learning by communicating with them regularly. I try to talk to parents when I see them in the morning and after school when they are picking up their children. I always try to have a smile on my face so I can build relationships with the parents and so that they feel comfortable approaching me. I encourage parents to come into the classroom weekly to read with their children and I invite them into the classroom at Christmas to help their children with building gingerbread houses. I also invite parents into the classroom at the end of the year for our class poetry reading. Parents enjoy coming to this event because they get to hear their child read poetry and they get an opportunity to socialize with other parents.

At times, teachers have to report to parents about their child's academic and/or behaviour struggles at school. I think it is very important for teachers to tell a parent this information but I think teachers have to remember to also tell parents about the positive successes that their child is experiencing at school. Parents are not going to be motivated to talk to teachers if they are only hearing negative information about their child. Another suggestion for teachers would be to encourage them to make an attempt to learn about parents' strengths, skills, talents and experiences. Parents have a lot to offer and there are many ways that they can help out in their child's classroom.

Although many inner-city parents do not know how to help their children with their education, with guidance and support, it is possible for them to become increasingly involved in their children's learning at home and school. My last recommendation for teachers would be to take the time necessary to show parents how to help their children. If a child is struggling in math, then teachers should show their parents the specific strategies they can use to help their child. Teachers should also send home resources for parents so it can be easier for them to assist their children at home and educate parents about resources that are available for them in the community.

The strongest and most consistent predictors of parental involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs that encourage parents' involvement at school and guide parents in how to help their children at home (Davies, 1991). Schools need to have events and activities at their schools that will attract parents and cause them to want to become involved in ways that they had not previously experienced. At my school we invite parents to the school in September for an open house and family barbeque. We also invite parents to school concerts, assemblies, sports events, seasonal events and other volunteering opportunities at the school. When parents come to our school's events, they learn about the school's expectations, socialize with other parents and get to observe their child's interactive behaviour.

There are many barriers that inhibit inner-city parents from being involved productively in their children's schooling. Robinson and Fine (1994) assert that "it is appropriate and legitimate for parents to have a voice in their children's education" (p. 12). Robinson and Fine (1994) further argue that teachers and schools have a responsibility to educate parents so that they can become "knowledgeable and confident participants in the educational process" (p. 12). I think it

is important for schools to offer parent training classes in inner-city schools. Even if schools only had one parent training class a month, it would give parents valuable advice on how to help their children with their learning. Parent training classes could cover a wide range of topics, such as how to help children with homework, how to deal with behavioural problems, how to help children with reading and writing and other school subjects. Parent training classes would also provide a unique opportunity for parents to interact with other parents to share their ideas and concerns.

Administrators play a very important role in advancing parental involvement in schools. They set the tone for the school, provide an atmosphere for collaboration and help both teachers and parents gain the skills to work together effectively for student success (Epstein and Jansorn, 2004). I think it is important for administrators to be visible at their schools. They need to be walking around their schools and engaging in conversations with parents. Administrators need to remind parents and teachers regularly about how important they are to children's school success. I also recommend that administrators help teachers become more effective in communicating with parents. They can do this by providing teachers with professional development opportunities and by sharing helpful information at staff meetings. Lastly, administrators can increase parental involvement at their schools by allocating school funds for planned activities for parents at the school. School funds can be used towards "family fun nights" at the school, parent appreciation days or towards funding parent training classes.

### **Suggested Research for the Future**

Through my research on parental involvement, I have discovered that parental involvement is beneficial for children's academic success but there are many factors that contribute to many inner-city parents being disengaged from their children's learning. However, I

have also found that there are many strategies that teachers and schools can use to increase parental involvement at their schools. I am currently working at an inner-city school and this is a research study that I would like to conduct in my classroom in the future. The purpose of this study is to determine if classroom interventions can increase parental involvement at inner-city schools. The classroom interventions that I will use in the study are: monthly newsletters, two parent surveys and parents interviews. This study could be helpful for other elementary teachers to use in their classrooms and I feel it can be beneficial for inner-city schools because it could increase parental involvement at their schools. Parents are more likely to be involved in their child's learning if teachers provide them with strategies, resources and specific things to do with their children.

### **Description of Research Methodology**

This research study is a mixed-methods study because it is quantitative and qualitative. The parent involvement surveys in the study make it quantitative, while the open-ended interview questions for the parents make it qualitative. The parent surveys will be beneficial because they will show the parents' level of involvement, offering data from a larger number of respondents and the interviews will be valuable because they will allow the parents to share their parental involvement experiences, gathering more detailed data from a smaller number of participants. Conducting this study will help me understand the parental involvement problem at my school and how I can improve it.

### **Selection of Subjects**

For this research study I am going to use an opportunity sample by using the parents and guardians of my own students as participants. By using the parents from my own class, I will be able to learn more about their parental involvement practices and hopefully increase parental

involvement in my classroom and school. My hope is that the monthly newsletters will encourage and assist parents with getting involved with their children's education.

### **Procedure**

In the study, parents and guardians will receive monthly newsletters with different focuses that will encourage the parents to increase their involvement in their children's education. The monthly newsletters will provide parents with specific strategies and activities to do to assist with their children's learning. The newsletters will encourage parents to become involved in school activities, to check their child's homework assignments, to read with their child and listen to them read, to discuss school matters and many other activities. Participants in the study will also complete two identical parental involvement surveys at the beginning and end of the school year and some parents will participate in a parental involvement interview at the end of the school year.

The first parent survey will be sent home with the students for the participants to complete in September. Parents and guardians will have one week to return the survey back to school in the same envelope it came in. No names will be written on the surveys when they are returned. The survey will contain eight questions and each question will have five choices as a possible response. The survey will be designed by me and I will test its reliability by administering it twice with the same group of parents. The second parent survey will be identical to the survey sent home in September. This survey will be sent home in June after the last parental involvement newsletter has been sent home. Just like the first survey, participants will have one week to return the survey back to school in the same envelope it came in. No names will be written on the surveys when they are returned.

After the September survey is completed and returned by the participants, the monthly newsletters will start being sent home. One newsletter will be sent home every month for a total of ten months in the school year. Each newsletter will have a different focus and will encourage parents to become involved in their child's education. They will be encouraged to check their child's homework assignments and planner, to read with their child, to help them practice for spelling tests and many other activities. Parents will also be given strategies in the newsletters on how to help their children with their homework and how to help them with their reading, writing and numeracy skills. They will also be informed in the newsletters about everything we are learning that month in our classroom.

At the end of the year, a letter will be sent home to parents and guardians asking them if they would like to volunteer to be part of an interview. They will send the letter back to school if they would like to participate. I will then randomly choose five parents for the interview from all the ones that sent back their letters. The interviews will have five open-ended questions and will be no longer than an hour. The interviews will be conducted after school hours in one of the classrooms at our school.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent forms will be sent home with students for the parents and guardians to read over and sign. They will be sent to the participants in manila envelopes and returned back to school in the same way. A letter will be sent home to all parents and guardians and some research information will be disclosed to participants that details the purpose, reasoning, and benefits of the study about parental involvement in children's education. Participants will be told that their participation in the study is voluntary. All participants will be properly informed of the



option to withdraw from participating in the study at any time for any reason without any adverse consequences for them or their children.

The participants' confidentiality will be protected by conducting the interviews after school in an available room at the school. The door will be closed and there will be no one else in the room during the interview. Participants will be assured that they could decline to answer any questions from the interview and they could also discontinue the interview at any time.

Participants will also be told that all information provided in the study will remain anonymous and the raw data for each parent interview will be kept in a secure place for five years and then destroyed.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study will be limited because the study focuses on one class in an elementary school and that prevents the generalization of the study to other elementary classes, middle schools and high schools. Another limitation is that the study represents an opportunity sample, as all of the participants will be the parents and guardians from my own class, which prevents the generalization of the study. The participants also reflect social, cultural and economic conditions that geographically present, and for this reason the data may not be generalizable but this study will hope to provide an in-depth look at the significance and need for continuous parental involvement in inner-city schools, and the data will certainly be applicable to my school. I hope that this study will encourage teachers to welcome parents into their classrooms and to reach out to parents through a variety of methods. This study will also show parents how important and easy it can be to become more involved with their children's education.

## **Conclusion**

The problem being addressed in this paper is the lack of parental involvement in inner-city schools. Research shows that parental involvement is beneficial for parents, teachers, students and schools, yet many schools continue to struggle with how to effectively involve inner-city parents. The goal of this paper was to look at how teachers and schools can increase parental involvement in inner-city schools. The research shows that many inner-city parents do not show high levels of parental involvement but that there are many effective ways for schools and teachers to involve those parents in a collaborative relationship. Teachers, parents and schools can “prove to be a strong, combined force of accountability in education, ensuring that children receive and benefit from an effective education” (Musti-Rao and Cartledge, 2001, p. 21).

It is vital for teachers to assist inner-city parents in understanding how they can help their children with their learning. Teachers can't assume that parents know how to help their children and have content expertise in all school subjects. We as educators need to provide parents with the appropriate strategies, tips and resources so they can be successful in helping their children. I have learned that it is better to assume that inner-city parents don't know how to help their children, than to assume they are lazy and just don't want to. While writing my paper I have started to see the inner-city parents at my school through a different lens. I now understand that some of these parents face many barriers that inhibit them from being involved with their children's learning and there are many things that I can do to increase their level of parental involvement. I believe it is imperative for parents, teachers and administrators to understand that their collaboration is critical for children's success.

At times, teachers who work at inner-city schools find it easy to complain about parents not being involved with their children's learning. Although, it can be difficult when parents are not involved, teachers need to realize that there are many strategies that they can implement to get those parents involved. Some teachers tend to criticize parents for not helping their children learn at home, but as educators we need to realize that we can do a lot to aid our students even if their parents are not involved. As teachers, we are the ones that have degrees, we went to teacher training institutions and we regularly attend professional development workshops to become more effective educators. Some parents may not even have the knowledge and skills necessary to help their children. I hope this paper demonstrates that there is a great deal that teachers can do to help students learn and there are countless ways that teachers and schools can involve parents that wouldn't otherwise be involved.

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