

A Guide to Increasing African American Parental Involvement in Early Education

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....page 2

Glossary.....page 2

Case Study.....page 2-4

Discussion Questions.....page 4

Frequently Asked Questions.....page 4-5

Annotated Bibliography.....page 5-11

Introduction

African American parents show extremely low levels of parental participation in their child's education. By discovering some of the reasons for low levels of participation, parents and professionals can determine how to increase the participation of African American parents.

Glossary

- a. **Involvement within the school** -- The continuous and active participation in their child's education within the school.
- b. **Involvement within the home** -- Active participation in facilitating education in the home setting.
- c. **Involvement within the community** -- Communication with other parents and community leaders.

Case Study

Janelle is an African American female in the third grade at a school in the Tangelo Park community. Her mother, Patrice, is single and has a job that requires her to work long and odd hours. Patrice started receiving letters from Janelle's teacher saying that she was struggling in school. Patrice began helping Janelle with her homework. The letters stopped, so Patrice assumed that Janelle's school work was improving. Patrice was shocked one day when she looked at her daughter's report card and seen that she had C's in all subjects. Janelle complained

that she didn't understand the information, and that her teacher just didn't like her. Patrice took the next day off of work and decided to go in after school and talk to the teacher, Mrs. Maxwell.

Mrs. Maxwell was shocked at how angry Patrice was. Patrice told Mrs. Maxwell that if Janelle was continuing to struggle in school she should have been informed that the problems were continuing. Mrs. Maxwell said she had sent letters home that stated the child's progress. Patrice and the teacher concluded that a way to help Janelle improve on these subjects was for Patrice to get more involved in her daughter's education. Patrice knew that it was a difficult task given her circumstances, but she discussed with Mrs. Maxwell some of her options for increasing her own participation in her daughter's education. Mrs. Maxwell decided that since Patrice didn't have the means to come to the school often, they would have to determine the most convenient method of communication.

They determined that phone was the best method, and agreed that any time Patrice had questions she could call and leave a message for Mrs. Maxwell. Mrs. Maxwell agreed that along with each notice sent home, she would call to inform Patrice where exactly Janelle was struggling. Mrs. Maxwell would also call to inform Patrice when she began to see improvement in Janelle's school work. Mrs. Maxwell told Patrice that in order for Janelle to improve, education could not end once she leaves the classroom. She suggested including educational activities in the home, such as games or worksheets. She also suggested that she and Janelle frequent the community library.

Patrice and Mrs. Maxwell kept in contact via telephone frequently. Patrice suggested that once or twice a month a calendar of the class activities could be sent to parents. Patrice said that by knowing what activities are going on, she would be able to actively engage Janelle in conversations about school. Mrs. Maxwell thought this was a great idea, and she started sending

out bi-weekly schedules of activities. Patricia made sure to ask Janelle about school and what she was learning in class every day. Patricia also took Janelle to the library a couple nights a week. Janelle was able to check out books and play some fun educational games, while Patrice was able to use the parent resources to discover recreational opportunities, get advice from other parents in the community, and learn how to develop educational activities at home with limited resources. By the end of the school year, Janelle's grades were dramatically improved.

Discussion Questions

1. Should there be any immediate reinforcement offered to parents for their participation in school activities?
2. Will children benefit from other parents' increased school participation if their own parents are not actively involved in school activities?

FAQs – Frequently Asked Questions

Q. At what ages can parental participation affect academic achievement?

A. Parental participation can be beneficial to children in all grades. The way that parents can participate changes with each age group.

Q. How long will it take to see the affects that parental participation has on academic achievement?

A. The affects can be seen as soon as the parent effectively engages in parental participation within the school, at home, and in the community.

Q. What are the long term affects of increasing African American parental participation?

A. A possible decrease between the achievement gap among black and white students.

Annotated Bibliography

Harry, B., Allen, N., & McLaughlin, M. (1995). Communication versus compliance: African-American parents' involvement in special education [Electronic version]. *Exceptional Children*, 61, n4. p.364(14).

Dr. Beth Harry is a professor at the University of Miami School of Education. Her research is focused on the cultural differences between families with children in special education. Her co-authors also hold established and high positions in the field of education. Their study is the first longitudinal study of its kind to examine the significance of minority parents' involvement in the educational decisions of their children in special education. The article's main objectives were to determine parents' expectations of early education, identify changes in their expectations over time, observe the amount of participation of the parents, and compare the data between the parents. The authors used interviews and observational data from the parents and the professionals. The study found that parents were disillusioned to the objectives that the school had with regards to the special education programs. The study also found that the parents felt welcome in the preschool classrooms, but this feeling decreased almost entirely by the 1st grade. The authors concluded that some major deterrents of communication between parents and teachers was the inflexibility and limited time of the conferences, an increase of attention paid to documents as opposed to

participation, the use of jargon, and an implication that the professionals were the only ones with the capability to make decisions about the children. Although this article focuses on minority parental participation in special education, it is very useful because it focuses on parental perceptions of their own involvement in the education process and includes evidence on why minority parents may not be getting involved in the education of their children.

Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(3), 740-763. doi:10.1037/a0015362

Dr. Nancy Hill is a professor in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard. She focuses on the consequences of family socialization on a child's educational accomplishments. Her co-author was one of her graduate students in psychology and neuroscience. This article is a meta-analysis of the different types of parental involvement that influence academic achievement. There are two foci for this article. The first is how related are parental involvement and achievement in early education. The second focus is on which types of involvement most influence achievement. The three types of parental involvement examined are home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization. A small focus is placed on African American cultural differences and explanations of the variations between the scores of different ethnicities. The authors searched through major databases and chose 50 articles from seven peer reviewed journals. The study found that school-based involvement was only moderately positive in relation to achievement. They found that home-based involvement was most

positively related to academic achievement. The single type of parental involvement not related to achievement was checking homework. Though the meta-analysis did not provide any concrete evidence for the relationship between parental involvement and achievement differences between ethnicities, this is still a useful study. It is very important to know which type of parental involvement produces the greatest affect on achievement so that these can be applied to African American families.

Jeynes, W. H. (2003). A meta-analysis: The effects of parental involvement on minority children's academic achievement. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(2), 202-218.

doi:10.1177/0013124502239392

Dr. Jeynes is a professor at California State University. He has written many books and conducted three meta-analyses on parental involvement. This specific meta-analysis has four research questions. These questions address the amount of influence parental involvement exerts on the achievement of urban students, the influence of school programs that focus on parental involvement in urban education, the most helpful aspects of parental involvement, and the effect of parent involvement on different race and gender groups. Dr. Jeynes used every major social science research database and found 41 studies that pertained to the relationship between student achievement and parental involvement. He narrowed his parental involvement variables to general parental involvement, specific parental involvement, communication, homework, parental expectations, reading, attendance, participation, and parental style. The study found that parent involvement is associated with higher achievement for minority students. The

study also found that parental support programs were positively related to achievement for urban children. The final finding of this study is that the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement holds across race. This implies that there is a solution to the reduction of the achievement gap between white and minority students.

This article examines which aspects of parental involvement help achievement the most. It also involves the study of school programs developed specifically to increase parental involvement. Dr. Jeynes found that both parental involvement and academic achievement holds across race, so his finding can be applied to the topic of African American parental involvement in education.

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 40*(3), 237-269.

doi:10.1177/0042085905274540

This is another meta-analysis by author William H. Jeynes. In this meta-analysis, he uses 21 studies to statistically analyze the specific components and effects of parental involvement. He analyzes communication between parents and children about school, checking homework, parental expectations of academic success, encouragement of reading, attendance and participation in school functions, household rules, and parenting style. He analyzed six different racial groupings, one being all African American participants, the other being mostly African American participants. To achieve measures of academic achievement, he included grades, standardized tests, and teacher rating scales. His results were that all of the different categories of parental involvement had a positive and significant effect on achievement for African American families. He also

found that parental involvement significantly influenced all of the different categories in academic achievement. His findings suggest that African American students benefit more from parental involvement than do Asian American children. In his explanation, he gives insight as to why parental involvement is so important to the African American community, which in turn has direct implications for teachers.

McKay, M. M., Atkins, M. S., Hawkins, T., Brown, C., & Lynn, C. J. (2003). Inner-city African American parental involvement in children's schooling: Racial socialization and social support from the parent community [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(1/2), 107.

Dr. Mary McKernan McKay is the director of Social Work Training at the University of Illinois. Her co-authors hold established positions in the educational field as well. The authors examine correlates between parental involvement at home and at school. They also examine contextual variables such as perceptions of racism. The three measures that they used were School and Family Partnership Scale, Parent/School Social Support Scale, and the Racial Socialization scale. Parental reports of their involvement at home were positively related to formal contact with staff and racism awareness. They were negatively related to social support from the parent community and African American cultural pride. Parental reports of their involvement at school were positively related to opportunities for formal contact at school, perception of school climate, and social support from the parent community. They were negatively related to racial awareness. The study discovers some helpful ways to increase parental involvement both at school and at home. The authors also suggest ways to increase communication between parents

and schools. This information will be useful to professionals who have a goal of increasing parental participation.

Smalley, S. Y., & Reyes-Blanes, M. E. (2001). Reaching out to African American parents in an urban community: A community-university partnership. *Urban Education, 36*(4), 518-533. doi:10.1177/0042085901364005

Dr. Maria E. Reyes-Blanes is an assistant professor at the University of Central Florida within the Department Special Education and Physical Education. Her focus is on multicultural families. Dr. Smally was also an assistant professor in the same department at the University of Central Florida. She is now an assistant pastor, but she has been a teacher, director, assistant principal, principal, and also a program specialist. They speak first about the involvement and challenges of African American parents in schools. The rest of the article is focused on a program called Parent Leadership Training (PLT). The PLT was implemented in Tangelo Park, Florida. The objective of the PLT is to teach parents to discover the importance of their involvement in the community and the school. A total of 37 participants were recruited by telephone from all of the public elementary schools that served the Tangelo Park community. There were 5 two hour training sessions, with a posttest at the end of the fifth training session. A follow up session was held 3 months after graduation, where a questionnaire was distributed. They found that this training program gave the parents the confidence they needed to play a more active role in their children's education. Both parents and school professionals were impressed with the change in the communications between families and schools. This is a great

example of a successful way that African American parental involvement in education can be increased.

Trotman, M. F. (2001). Involving the African American parent: Recommendations to increase the level of parent involvement within African American families. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 70(4), African American Children with Special Needs), 275-285.

Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3211280>

The purpose of this article is to explain ways to increase parental involvement in the African American community. Michelle Trotman has been a superintendent of a charter middle school and a director of a charter elementary school in Ohio. These previous jobs qualify her to write about this specific topic because of her experience. She begins this article with different definitions of parental involvement from different sources and organizations. She then goes on to explain why there has been a decrease in parental involvement, and explains a new and alternative approach to increasing it. After explaining a few teacher, child, and family benefits of parental involvement, Trotman cites some laws that have been implemented to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education. She then speaks about some of the reasons that parental involvement has decreased in African American families. She concludes her article with a list of 10 recommendations that will increase the likelihood of parental involvement in African American families. The conclusion is helpful in solving the dilemma of a lack of parental involvement within African American families. It also gives examples of how to solve the problems that many teachers face.