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THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE USA

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The article defines the role of supporting and encouragement of parents by teachers to participate in the educational process. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of teachers in supporting parents. The author gives theoretical frameworks and models of parental involvement in school. It highlights the role of the school in the system of formation of parents' pedagogical knowledge and culture. The analysis of recent works and publications showed that parental involvement increases academic grades, attendance, leadership skills, graduation rates, self-esteem, esteem among parents and students, and more positive attitudes in school. The aim of the article is to investigate the role of school in parental involvement and define factors that influence parent-school relationships. Numerous studies show how this relationship works. Over the last 20 years Vanderbilt University and John Hopkins University have sponsored the majority of the research on parent involvement. The essential elements from the research work of Epstein, Hoover-Dempsey and Harris include simple steps that schools can implement: welcome parents as volunteers, provide opportunities for parents to learn how to help their children develop academically and behaviorally, achieve social and emotional success, maintain close links of communication between family and school and provide opportunities for parents to be full partners in making decisions directly affecting students.

Key words: parent-school partnerships, parental involvement, schooling process, relationship, parent involvement programs.

Introduction

The practice of encouraging parents to participate in the educational process of their children has gained popularity over the past 20 years. The importance of parent-school partnerships as well as the changes in the education system has increased.

The analysis of recent works and publications showed that parental involvement increases academic grades, attendance, leadership skills, graduation rates, self-esteem, esteem among parents and students, and more positive attitudes in school (J. Epstein, L. Ferlazzo, A. Harris, K. Hoover-Dempsey, E. Pomerantz, K. Mapp, etc). The aim of the article is to investigate the role of school in parental involvement and define factors that influence parent-school relationships [12].



Due to the importance of establishing the quality of relationships, it is necessary to understand what factors influence parents to become involved in schools. Constantino (2003) stated that the key to successful parental involvement is positive and effective communication between parents, teachers, students, and school personnel. Schools and teachers need parents as much as parents need teachers to raise their children to become successful adults [2]. Numerous studies have illuminated how this relationship works. Over the last 20 years Vanderbilt University and John Hopkins University have sponsored the majority of the research on parent involvement.

Vanderbilt University focused the research work on the psychological aspect of family-school relationships. Hoover-Dempsey made theoretical framework that examines factors preventing parents from participation in their children's education. Numerous studies have used Hoover-Dempsey's model to develop a deeper understanding on how parents choose the level in which they become involved in their children's education [10], [11].

These studies give reasons for a lack of parental involvement: lack of understanding of the importance of their role, lack of self-efficacy, language barriers, preexisting negative feelings about school, beliefs that teachers don't care about them unless there is a problem or there is a need in family members for volunteering. Swap identifies four models that describe the relationship between schools, families, and the community [14]. These models include: the protective model, school-to-home transmission model, the curriculum enrichment model and partnership model. Additionally, Connors and Epstein developed a fifth model: the overlapping spheres of influence model [1], [8].

The Protective Model. The protective model is described as the school being responsible for education of children and uses structure and ritual to protect itself from interference of families. The families' responsibilities are at home and the teachers assume responsibility for the children's school-based education. This model was supported by Weber. He believed that families are put in charge of a child's social development while schools are put in charge of the child's educational development and these roles remain separate.

School-to-Home Transmission. The school-to-home transmission model is a very direct approach, where the teacher sets the pace to what parents need to do to support their children's learning at home. In this model, family involvement is requested only when the school needs something.

The Curriculum Enrichment Model. The curriculum enrichment model suggests mutual respect between parents and educators and promotes mutual learning and goal setting. The relationship is limited to curriculum and does not extend to school management or policy development.

The Partnership Model. The partnership model is the ongoing process that involves focusing on collaboration between educators and parents to solve problems and provide support for school success; thus initiating an empowerment process that combines mutual respect, intellectual activity, and inquiry.



The Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model. Connors and Epstein describe in this theoretical model that family, school, community, and peer groups can influence a child's development in different ways and different times. This model recognizes that there are times when the spheres of influence (family, school, community, and peers) remain separate and other times when they overlap and interact with each other. Epstein and Connors explain these overlapping times as being potentially significant in influencing students [8].

Hoover-Dempsey's research work helps us to understand the reasons why parents are involved or not. Epstein identified essential components of quality of parent schoolpartnerships. She has worked for over 30 years at John Hopkins University. Her work has been instrumental in moving parent involvement programs into family-school-community partnerships. The six components of parental involvement have been investigated. These components are:

1. Basic parenting obligations means that parents provide positive home conditions to include health, safety, food, clothing and parenting skills. The school's obligation is to provide parents with workshops, outside resources, printed materials and home visits to support parents in this process.

This type of involvement enables families to share their knowledge about their own culture, background and individual children's needs and talents with teachers and other staff members. Staff members are able to understand family backgrounds, cultures and goals for their children, and develop a respect for families' strengths and efforts and develop an awareness of own skills and ability to share information on child development, to support student success in school.

2. Communication suggests another basic obligation that relies on the school to develop ways of connection between home and school, parent-teacher conferences and school programs. As a result, parents are provided with clear information about school policies and programs, opportunities for interaction with teachers and solutions to students' problems. Children also benefit from this component. They develop awareness of their own role in partnerships, understanding of school policies relating to student success: attendance, behavior, student conduct and academic success. Staff increases opportunities to elicit and understand family views on student performance, develop an appreciation and increase the usage of parent's networks, develop an awareness of their own ability to communicate openly and clearly with families.

3. Opportunities for parent involvement at school. It includes providing opportunities for parents to volunteer and support the school in different ways.

Benefits for parents include further understanding of teacher's job, increasing the comfort level in the school and realizing that families are welcomed there, developing self-confidence about their own ability to work, improving their own education and leadership skills. Teachers and other staff members also benefit from parents volunteering at the school level. These benefits include: an awareness of parent's talents and skills, an increase of communication with parents and students, opportunities for greater support for individual students.



4. Opportunities for learning at home. Parents who include this component in their parental engagement strategies will develop an awareness of their child as a learner, appreciate the work and skills of the teacher, promote discussion with the child of school, homework and classwork, gain knowledge of how to support and help their child at home with homework and classwork. Benefits for the students: an increase of self-confidence in their ability as a learner, greater success in completion of homework, developing a more positive attitude towards school work, viewing parents as partners in learning, gains in skills, abilities and test scores that are linked to homework and classwork, having a better understanding the instructional program each year and expectations of students. The benefits for teachers include understanding the role, responsibilities and abilities of families outside of school, respect of family time, greater sense of satisfaction of parental involvement and support.

5. Opportunities for parents to develop leadership skills as they become involved in decision making, governance and advocacy positions within the school community.

Benefits include developing an awareness of parents' voice in school decisions, have feeling of ownership of school, share experiences and develop connections with other parents, develop an awareness of school, district and state policies and have input into the policies that affect their child's education. Students of these parents also benefit by developing an understanding that the student and family have rights that are protected. Teachers develop an awareness of parent perspective with policy development and decisions and they view family representatives as an equal partner in the decision making process when parents have leadership roles on committees.

6. Opportunities for parents to collaborate with community organizations for improving school-home connections [5], [6].

Parents benefit from this type of involvement by becoming aware of the school role within the community, contributions that the community makes to the school, ability to interact with other community members, becoming aware of community resources and having the ability to utilize these resources to meet the family needs. Students benefit by becoming conscious of careers and options for the future education and work, increase their own skills and talents through extra curricular activities and learn to utilize resources within the community that has specific benefits to student's individual needs. Teachers become aware of community resources, enrich school curriculum, develop partnerships with community resources to utilize services, volunteers, etc. and also have the ability to make knowledgeable referrals to families of services available to them within the community.

Successful parental involvement programs have utilized Epstein's components to develop their programs. Most programs begin with the «learning at home» component [7]. As parents become comfortable with this, teachers and schools can add other components to involve parents. The success of parental involvement program using this approach is that it is a simple way to begin opening the lines of communication between parents and teachers.



According to Hoover-Dempsey the type of parental involvement must be appropriate to the need of parents and students. School administrators need to remove potential barriers for parents to enter the school, provide opportunities for conversations between parents and staff to develop trusting relationships, provide incentives for parents to be involved and create strategies for parents that are meaningful [10]. By providing these opportunities, school will build a strong home-school-community partnership that is essential to the student's academic success [5]. Historically, parents have been considered an integrated part of education.

According to Cutler (2000), in 1853, a book was published by Charles Northend, an educator, to help teachers to develop a better understanding of how to involve parents in their children's education. School asked parents to volunteer in classrooms, become room parents, be active members of fundraising committees, attend school events, and become involved in parent-teacher organizations [3].

Davenport (2005) described parental involvement as «an integral component in the educational environment. Student achievement and parental satisfaction requires ongoing, well-planned series of activities involving parents in home and school based activities to assist teachers and school administrators in the accomplishment of learning objectives and goals» [4, p. 35].

The research of Kidnour (2011) gives the importance to a welcoming atmosphere for parents that motivate them to participate in their children's schooling process in meaningful and appropriate ways [13]. Harris (2009) gave three ways of engaging parents: for learning, through learning, and about learning. When schools engage parents for learning they are connecting with parents through activities, materials and information that they provide and on-line support, tracking grades, school website, etc. Engaging parents through learning not only assists the parent but the community as a whole. Finally, some programs engage their parents about learning. This occurs when the teacher engages the parent in activities to help in understanding the subject matter, the learning process and the cognitive strategies that the student needs to succeed in [9]. The essential elements from the research work of Epstein, Hoover-Dempsey, and Harris include simple steps that schools can implement: welcoming parents as volunteers, providing opportunities for parents to learn effective strategies to help their children achieve academically, behaviorally, social and emotional success, keeping the lines of communication open between home and school and providing multiple opportunities for parents to be full partners in decisions directly affecting students [12].

Conclusions.

As a result, we can draw the conclusion that parent-school partnership is very important not only in formation of pedagogical knowledge and culture of parents, but also in child's successful performance at school. The effective parental involvement help to be aware of home conditions, develop effective lines of communication between home and school, provide volunteer opportunities for parents, afford opportunities for parents to help their child to learn at home through homework activities, encourage them to become involved in school decisions, advocating for student rights through participation in school level committees, teams, councils and other parent organizations.



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