A Longitudinal Assessment of Teacher Perceptions of Parent Involvement in Children's Education and School Performance

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This study examines the ways in which parental involvement in children's education changes over time and how it relates to children's social and academic functioning in school. Teachers provided information on parent involvement and school performance for 1,205 urban, kindergarten through third-grade children for 3 consecutive years. They rated the following four dimensions of parent involvement: frequency of parent-teacher contact, quality of the parent-teacher interactions, participation in educational activities at home, and participation in school activities. As predicted, the frequency of parent-teacher contacts, quality of parent-teacher interactions, and parent participation at school declined from Years 1 to 3. Every parent involvement variable correlated moderately with school performance and parent involvement in Years 1 and 2, and accounted for a small, but significant amount of variance in school performance.

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variance in Year 3 performance after controlling for initial performance level. Participation in educational activities at home predicted the widest range of performance variables. Results suggest that enhancing parental involvement in children's schooling relates to improvements in school functioning.

KEY WORDS: child adjustment; parent involvement; teachers; longitudinal; urban.

A growing body of research suggests that when parents and school personnel collaborate effectively, students are likely to behave and perform better in school (Epstein & Lee, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Reynolds, 1991; Walberg, 1984). Consequently, many educational programs nationwide include components to involve parents (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992), and numerous public policy initiatives promote better collaboration between parents and teachers to enhance children's education (Chapman, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). These developments in policy and research are important for community psychologists who are interested in improving education by changing children's social ecology.

Although current research suggests that building more productive collaboration between parents and schools is a promising primary prevention approach for enhancing children's well-being, many issues still need to be clarified to understand the association between these variables better. Because few programs have rigorously evaluated their efforts to build partnerships between families and schools, it is difficult to make reliable conclusions about the benefits of parental school involvement from the existing body of basic research. In fact, after an extensive meta-analysis of studies measuring the impact of parent involvement on children and parents, White, Taylor, and Moss (1992) concluded that there exists "no evidence that parent involvement . . . has led to greater benefits for children" (p. 120). Thus, more generative research is needed to guide the development of more systematic, well-informed programming efforts (Cowen, 1980).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CURRENT STUDY

This study employed a longitudinal design in seeking to clarify several issues that cloud our understanding of the relationships between home-school collaboration and school performance. First, much of the current knowledge in this area derives from cross-sectional studies that rely on teacher reports (Iverson, Brownlee, & Walberg, 1981; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). While teachers are among the most readily available sources of information and can provide reliable reports on parental school involve-