

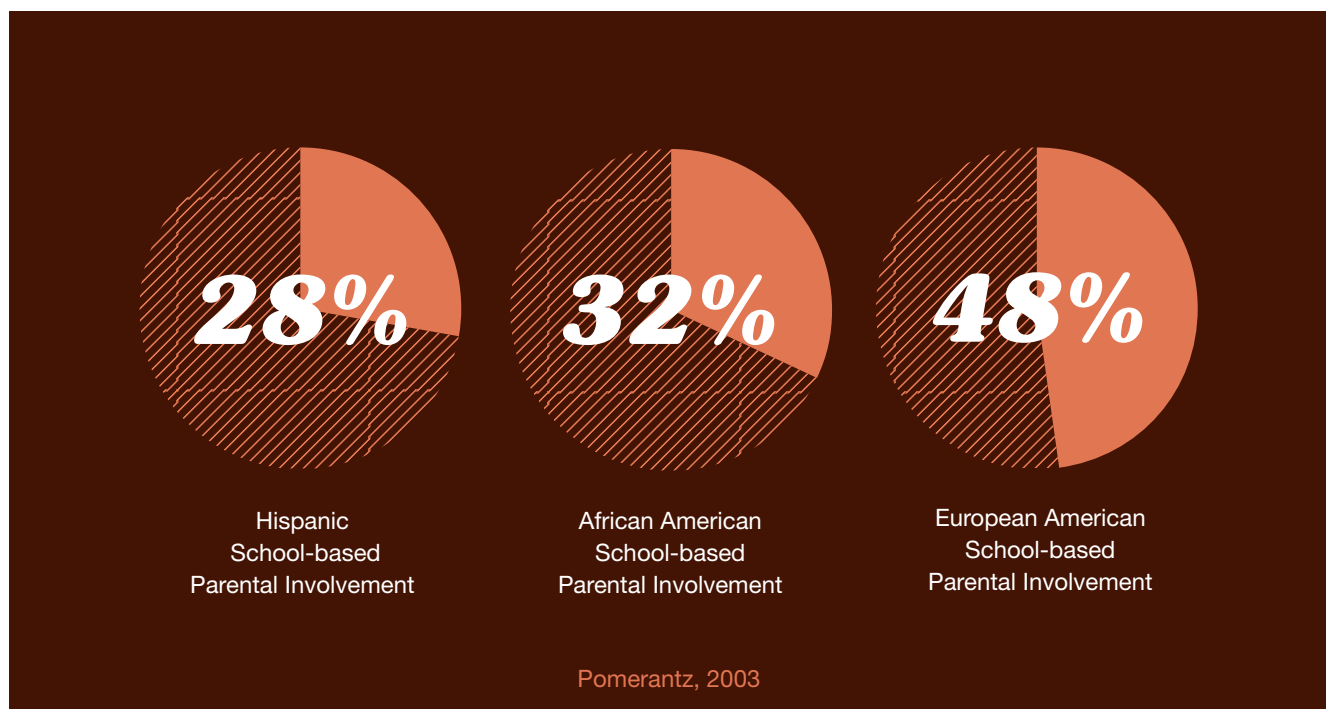


RESEARCH IN FOCUS:

Parental Involvement for Latino and African American Families

INTRODUCTION

Research spanning the past several decades has indicated that parental involvement at all grade levels is beneficial—even crucial—for students' success. However, the vast majority of study samples have been woefully lacking ethnic and income diversity. What little research does exist on minority populations indicates that, though parental involvement is just as necessary to student success, cultural differences mean parental involvement must be envisioned and executed differently to be effective.



DEFINING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND RACIAL/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

Parental involvement can be divided into two main categories: home-based and school-based. School-based involvement is based on involvement. Parental involvement could take the form of attending parent-teacher conferences and school meetings or events and/or becoming involved in school-based parent organizations. Home-based involvement represents any school-related activity the parent is involved in that takes place outside of school (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Home-based involvement can be directly related to school, such as assisting children with homework or course selection, responding to children's academic endeavors, and talking with children about academic issues. However, home-based involvement can also take place outside the home by engaging children in intellectual activities like reading books or visiting a museum.

Beyond these simpler categories, researchers identify more abstract, sociocultural parental influences, terming them “nontraditional” involvement. Non-traditional involvement provides passive assistance to the student, such as finding children a quiet workplace in their homes, excusing children from chores in order to do schoolwork, exposing children to the kind of low-paying work available to people without an education, and making personal or financial sacrifices in support of children's schooling.

Based on these distinctions, researchers can identify trends among different ethnicities; citing the U.S. Department of Education, Pomerantz and colleagues (2007) illustrate that volunteering in school occurs less among Hispanic (28% in 2003) and African American (32% in 2003) parents than with European American

parents (48% in 2003). Furthermore, Seginer (2006) found that immigrant parents tend to prefer home-based involvement to school-based involvement, and therefore tend to limit their participation in schools. However, according to the U.S. Department of education in 2006, about 70% of parents participate in home-based involvement by helping their children with homework, regardless of the parents' socioeconomic status, education level, or ethnicity (as cited by Pomerantz et al., 2007).

LATINO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Studies on the effects of parental involvement across ethnic groups generally indicate that school-based parental involvement does not generate positive academic performance for Latino students in comparison to their peers. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), Valadez (2002) found that school-based parental involvement, such as PTO participation, was positively associated with European American students' math performance, but the same correlation was not present for Latino students.

“Where school-based involvement benefits lag for Latino students, research shows major benefits in home-based parental involvement for Latino families.”

Using a national sample of 388 Latino young adolescents, Eamon (2005) found that three parenting practices predicted both math and reading achievement: providing cognitive stimulation, parent-youth disagreements over rules, and academic involvement. Additionally, the study showed that parent-child discussions about school-related

matters and educational advice are some of the greatest sources of home-based involvement. In a sample of 223 low-income, Latino adolescents, Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, and Aretakis (2013) found that discussions about the future and academic socialization, school involvement, and student awareness of parental gifts and sacrifice had significant, positive associations with academic outcomes. The results suggested that stories about the parents' struggles with poverty and immigration were important components of parental involvement, as they contributed to adolescents' drive to succeed academically and to "give back" to their parents.

A growing body of research also demonstrates that adherence to traditional cultural values is associated with positive academic outcomes. For example, among Mexican American adolescents, endorsing the belief that family is critical and takes precedence over individual needs, or familismo, in addition to upholding the tradition of respect and deference paid to an individual's authority, known as respeto, has been positively associated with academic motivation and self-esteem (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006) as well as lower behavioral problems (Pantin, Schwartz, Sullivan, Coatsworth, & Szapocznik, 2003).

AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Like Latino families, African American parents and students reflect unique needs and approaches to parental involvement relative to Euro-American families. Suizzo, Pahlke, Yarnell, Chen, and Romero (2014) discovered that the Latinos and African Americans in their study showed a tendency to determine solutions and intervene in their students' schooling while Euro-Americans tended to trust the educational institution and defer to educators.

“*In a nationally representative sample of African Americans, Wu and Qi (2006) found that parental expectations of children's highest educational attainment and parental beliefs in children's academic competency had the most significant effects on children's academic performance tests in reading, math, and general knowledge or science.*”

The study also showed that the effects of parental involvement in school and at home were mixed. That is, school-based involvement only showed significant effects on children's academic achievement in the kindergarten year but did not predict achievement in the first or third grade. Instead, home-

based involvement, such as parent tutoring, was positively related to achievement.

Using a sample of 145 African American parents/guardians of urban high school students, Hayes (2012) found that home-based involvement was the only involvement behavior that predicted adolescents' grades and number of school days missed. Furthermore, the study revealed that older adolescents whose parents showed greater home-based involvement had better attendance and fewer discipline referrals.

UNDERSTANDING RACIAL/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Because studies show the home-based parental involvement of African American and Latino families have such a positive correlation to their students' success, it is important to note that these parents likely encounter multiple obstacles that prevent their school-based involvement, which minimizes its effect on their students when compared to Euro-American families.

For Latino parents, demanding job schedules, lack of transportation, a lack of English language fluency, and unfamiliarity with the American school system may all present barriers to attending school functions and understanding the nuances associated with the educational system (Cooper and Crosnoe, 2007; Leidy, Guerra, and Toro, 2010). For example, language barriers and cultural differences between some educators and Latino parents make engagement and collaboration very difficult. Furthermore, taking into consideration the plethora of institutional disadvantages of Latinos in this country, many Latino families are economically focused (López, 2001), which can make school-based parental involvement difficult if not impossible.

African American parents face similar economic and sociocultural barriers to traditional parental involvement. Cooper and Crosnoe (2007) posit that lack of money, time, and energy limit school involvement for economically disadvantaged African American parents. Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005) note that many African American parents also have other children to care for or have work schedules that do not allow them to attend school activities, meetings, or parent-teacher conferences. Furthermore, Lightfoot (2004) reported that many African American parents are reluctant to become involved with their children's school as a result of their own negative experiences as a student.

CONCLUSION

Though studies' outcomes are always debatable, what parents and educators can take away from recent and continuing research is that parental involvement is critical to student success. In order to generate as much parental involvement as possible, educators and parents must bridge gaps in culture and build trust to establish working relationships for the good of their students. Students of all ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from school and home-based parental involvement, and Latino and African American parents can take heart and expand upon ways to make their involvement fit their individual situations while incorporating research-supported interventions.

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