



1984

## An Analysis of Parent Involvement Practices Which Are Designed to Promote Successful Academic Performance by Students in Catholic Secondary Schools

Michael N. Riley  
*Loyola University Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Riley, Michael N., "An Analysis of Parent Involvement Practices Which Are Designed to Promote Successful Academic Performance by Students in Catholic Secondary Schools" (1984). *Dissertations*. 2260.

[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/2260](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/2260)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 1984 Michael N. Riley

AN ANALYSIS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT PRACTICES  
WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO PROMOTE SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE  
BY STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

Michael N. Riley

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate School  
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

May

1984

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Dr. Steven Miller for helping to shape the focus of this study, Dr. Max Bailey for serving on the dissertation committee, and Dr. Karen Gallagher for serving on the committee and for offering advice and assistance on the dissertation and other aspects of the doctoral program.

A special note of thanks is extended to Dr. Melvin Heller, who as dissertation and program advisor has been very generous with his time, energy, and many talents.

While completing the research for this study, it became apparent to the author how instrumental his own parents, Michael and Elizabeth Riley, have been in his education. Without their consistent and enthusiastic encouragement, the author's schooling would not have been nearly as enjoyable or successful as it has been and would probably have concluded long before this.

Finally, to Judith Jean and Michelle Marie Riley, the author's wife and daughter, this work is dedicated. Their patience, support, and gift of love has been extraordinary, and it is hoped that the author may now begin to repay the many hours stolen from them.

## VITA

The author, Michael N. Riley, is the son of Michael Riley and Elizabeth (Bellheimer) Riley. He was born in Chicago, Illinois on October 4, 1950.

His elementary and secondary education was completed at St. Augustine Elementary School and St. Rita High School, both in Chicago. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Lewis University in June of 1972 and a Masters of Arts in English from DePaul University in February of 1975. After receiving his masters degree, he completed an additional 36 graduate hours in English and educational administration before entering Loyola University's Ph.D. program in educational administration and supervision in the summer of 1982.

He began teaching in January of 1973 at St. Rita High School, was appointed the school's admissions director in 1977, and now serves as the school's assistant principal in charge of studies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
VITA.....	iii
CONTENTS OF APPENDICES.....	vi
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose.....	6
Procedure.....	7
Limitations.....	11
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	13
The Effect of Parental Attitudes and Behavior on Student Motivation and Performance.....	14
Characteristics of the Relationship Between Parents and Schools.....	42
Parent Involvement Practices.....	57
III. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	82
Survey of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago.....	84
Presentation of Survey Data.....	86
Analysis of Survey Data.....	100
Interviews of Administrators of Seven Catholic Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago.....	117
Institution A.....	121
Institution B.....	130
Institution C.....	138
Institution D.....	144
Institution E.....	152
Institution F.....	157
Institution G.....	166
Analysis of Interview Data.....	172
IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	200
Summary.....	200
Conclusions.....	202
Recommendations for Developing Effective Parent Involvement Programs.....	207
Recommendations for Future Research.....	210

	Page
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	212
APPENDIX A.....	217
APPENDIX B.....	222

CONTENTS OF APPENDICES

	Page
APPENDIX A Parent Involvement Questionnaire.....	217
APPENDIX B An excerpt from <u>The Home-School Connection/Selected Partnership Programs in Large Cities</u> , by Carter H. Collins, Oliver C. Moles and Mary Cross.....	222

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a recent address to public and nonpublic school administrators, Ernest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, referring to the Foundation's study of American high schools, stated, "All the schools we saw to be successful had active parent involvement," but other evidence the researchers examined indicated a trend of increasing detachment between schools and parents.<sup>1</sup> In his address to the same group, Chester E. Finn, Jr., Professor of Education and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, suggested that the lack of parental interest is not an obstacle to achieving excellence in education "but channeling that interest is."<sup>2</sup>

The call for effective parent involvement in the education of children is not a new one, however, nor is it the desire of a vocal minority. In fact, parents, administrators, and teachers, as well as students have been citing the need for parent involvement to improve academic performance for quite some time. In a synthesis of research on parent involvement, Oliver Moles cited the 1978 Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward education in which 80% of the parents with

---

1

Boyer, Ernest L. "High Schools: A Report on Secondary Education in America," an address to the Public/Nonpublic School Administrators Conference, February 1, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Finn, Chester E., Jr. "Obstacles to Achieving Excellence in American Education," an address to the Public/Nonpublic School Administrators Conference, February 1, 1984.



school-age children agreed with the idea of parents' attending school one evening a month to learn how to improve children's behavior and interest in school work. Gallup's finding led him to the following conclusions:

A joint and coordinated effort by parents and teachers is essential to dealing more successfully with problems of discipline, motivation, and the development of good work habits at home and in school.

For little added expense (which the public is willing to pay) the public schools can, by working with parents, meet educational standards impossible to reach without such cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

In Gallup polls in other years, the use of evening classes to teach parents how to help children in school was supported by 81% in 1971 and 77% in 1976, while the practice of parents' conferring with school personnel at the start of each semester was supported by 84%.<sup>4</sup>

Discipline has been cited as the major problem facing public schools by Gallup poll respondents for fourteen of the last fifteen years<sup>5</sup>; in the 1983 survey, respondents were asked to list reasons they thought were most important in explaining why there is a discipline problem in schools. The reason most often listed was "lack of discipline in the home," selected by 72% of the respondents.<sup>6</sup>

---

3

Moles, Oliver C. "Synthesis of Recent Research on Parent Participation in Children's Education," Educational Leadership, Vol. 40, No. 2, November 1982, pg. 44.

4

Elam, Stanley M. "The Gallup Education Surveys: Impressions of a Poll Watcher," Phi Delta Kappan, September 1983, pg. 27.

5

Ibid, pg. 30.

6

Gallup, George H. "The 15th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, September 1983, pg. 37.

In the mind of the public, then, problems in the schools are closely linked to problems in the home; research also indicates that school administrators share this perception. In a national survey of secondary school administrators conducted in 1978 by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 78% of the principals surveyed reported that apathetic or irresponsible parents are roadblocks to the successful administration of schools. The authors of the study stated:

The most important (community) issues would seem to be reducing parent apathy and increasing student motivation. With the demands for accountability, principals will have a serious need to discover effective strategies for accomplishing useful parent involvement. Secondly, they will need models for using this involvement to motivate student performance.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers join the ranks of those calling for increased parent involvement as indicated in a 1981 National Education Association poll in which over ninety percent of teachers surveyed throughout all parts of the country stated that more home-school interaction would be desirable.<sup>8</sup>

Students also see that the relationship between home and school has an important impact on student academic performance. In the 14th Annual Survey of High Achievers, conducted by Who's Who Among American High School Students, "more parental involvement in their children's academics" was cited by 59% of the respondents as a factor students think would help raise academic achievement.<sup>9</sup>

---

7

Byrne, David R., Susan A. Hines, and Lloyd E. McCleary. The Senior High School Principalship Volume I: The National Survey, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia, 1978.

8

Moles, pg. 44

9

Who's Who Among American High School Students, "14 Annual Survey of High Achievers," 1983.

In a study which compared the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students concerning academic achievement, Bar-Tal and Guttman concluded that parents receive a meager amount of the praise and a considerable amount of the blame for student performance.

Teachers tended to attribute pupils' success mainly to pupils' diligence, effort, interest and their own quality of explanations; pupils tended to attribute their own success mainly to their own efforts, their teacher's explanations, and their own diligence and ability; and parents tended to attribute their children's success mainly to home conditions and teacher's explanations. Failure was attributed by teachers mainly to pupils' low efforts, difficulty of the material, and home conditions inappropriate for studying; by pupils mainly to lack of parents' help and difficulty of tests; and by parents mainly to inappropriate home conditions and child's low level of interest and ability.<sup>10</sup>

What emerges, then, from an examination of the attitudes of parents, administrators, teachers, and students is that all of these groups perceive a significant relationship between parents and the academic performance of students.

Although the link between home and school has been much discussed and suggestions for improvement in the relationship often made, few gains seem to have occurred in secondary schools. As Becker and Epstein indicate:

Most researchers who have studied parent involvement in learning activities, as well as those who have developed programs for parent involvement, have viewed the parents of preschoolers and early elementary-aged children as their primary targets. It may be that procedures and tasks for useful parent participation for older children simply have not been worked out.<sup>11</sup>

---

10

Bar-Tal, D., and J. Guttman. "A Comparison of Teachers', Pupils' and Parents' Attributions Regarding Pupils' Academic Achievements," British Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 51, 1981, pg. 304.

11

Becker, Henry Jay, and Joyce L. Epstein. "Parent Involvement: A Survey of Teacher Practices," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1982, pg. 96-97.

Moles drew the following conclusions from his synthesis of the research.

1. Interest in parent participation is clear, strong, and specific from all sides.
2. Educators need to re-examine prevailing beliefs about parents, their capabilities, and interests.
3. There is a growing interest in parent participation beyond the elementary grades.
4. The nature of research information on parent participation is incomplete and evolving.
5. The actual development of parent participation programs and practices in schools has begun, but further evaluation and refinement are needed.

The relationship between home and school today can be summarized as the authors of the NASSP survey summarized it in 1978: "Few people disagree with the desirability of parent involvement, but equally few people have answers for how to achieve it. Principals and those who advise them will need such answers in the future." As long as a strong working relationship between parents and schools remains simply a hope rather than a reality, an important resource in producing successful academic performance by students will remain untapped.

---

12

Moles, pg. 47.

13

Byrne, pg. 62.

### Purpose

In his comparison of public and private schools, Coleman states that private schools "operate in a different relation to parents, who have spent money to enroll their child in the school and thus can be expected to be more involved with the school and to reinforce the school's demands."<sup>14</sup> It may be further assumed that the philosophical commitment to the concept of community which is so important to the Catholic faith might encourage Catholic secondary school administrators to recognize the importance of parent participation in education and to develop specific programs to achieve that participation. For example, the school handbook of one of the Catholic secondary schools of the Archdiocese of Chicago asserts that the school "assists the parents in the education of their daughters."<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of this study is to analyze the parent involvement practices of Catholic secondary schools which are designed to produce successful academic performance by students. Although Catholic schools often elicit parent involvement in activities like fund raising, faith development, and athletic programs, parent involvement practices not pertaining to student academic performance are not considered.

---

14

Coleman, James S., Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore. High School Achievement/Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1982, pgs. xxvii-xxviii.

15

Unity Catholic High School Handbook, Unity Catholic High School, 1983-84.

The following major questions guide this study:

1. Which areas of parent responsibility do principals of Catholic secondary schools consider significant to student academic performance?
2. What is the frequency in Catholic secondary schools of programs to encourage parent responsibility in these areas?
3. What are the principals' assessments of their programs for encouraging parent involvement?
4. What means of measurement do the principals use when rating the effectiveness of parent involvement programs?
5. What characteristics of parent involvement programs do principals consider most significant for achieving parent involvement?
6. According to these principals, what areas of parent involvement need further development?

#### Procedure

This analysis of parent involvement programs of Catholic secondary schools is divided into three major sections:

1. A review of the literature on the relationship between parents and the schooling of their children;
2. A survey of the principals of Catholic secondary schools in the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago;
3. Interviews with selected principals of Catholic secondary schools.

The review of the literature focuses on (a) the effect of parental attitudes and behavior on student motivation and performance,

(b) the characteristics of the current relationship between parents and schools, and (c) an examination of parent involvement practices in upper elementary grades and secondary schools.

The subjects of the survey portion of this study include all the principals in the Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the nation's largest Archdiocese. This sample includes fifty-nine lay and religious, male and female administrators from a wide variety of secondary schools. The schools include institutions which are all male, all female, and coeducational, which range in size from 108 to 2,648 students, and which serve communities with diversified socioeconomic and racial components. The survey focuses on twelve areas of parent responsibility suggested by the review of the literature. These twelve areas are:

1. Parents' possessing an understanding of the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures;
2. Parents' possessing an understanding of their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests;
3. Parents' possessing an understanding of occupational and post-secondary educational opportunities and requirements;
4. Parents' setting high academic achievement levels for their children;
5. Parents' setting high educational and occupational aspiration levels for their children;
6. Parents' regularly communicating with school staff members to monitor their children's progress;

7. Parents' initiating communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect academic performance;
8. Parents' supporting school staff members in child-school conflicts;
9. Parents' providing a proper study atmosphere in the home;
10. Parents' supervising their children's homework performance;
11. Parents' assisting with their children's homework;
12. Parents' seeking educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school.

The survey examines (a) the opinions of principals about the significance of each of the twelve areas in determining the academic success of students, (b) the frequencies of formal programs in these secondary schools for encouraging parent responsibility and involvement in the twelve areas, and (c) the principals' assessments of their parent involvement programs.

Drafts of the survey instrument were submitted for review to four Catholic secondary school administrators (two principals and two assistant principals) as well as three professors of educational administration, and their suggestions for improvement were incorporated into the instrument used to gather information from the secondary school principals.

The third phase of this investigation involves interviews of administrators of seven schools selected from the schools under investigation. The purposes of the interview portion of this study are to (a) expand on information provided by the survey; (b) gather more



specific and detailed information about parent involvement programs used in Catholic secondary schools; (c) examine the means of assessment principals use when evaluating their parent involvement programs; (d) study the common characteristics of parent involvement programs which principals consider most significant for achieving effective parent involvement; and (e) consider school characteristics which might have an impact on the development, implementation and effectiveness of parent involvement programs.

In determining both the amount of schools and the specific schools to be examined by the interview process, the following criteria were used:

1. The selected schools should have parent involvement programs with high assessments from their principals relative to other surveyed schools.
2. The selected schools should provide a sufficient diversity of size, type (i.e., all-male, all-female, and coeducational), location, and racial and ethnic composition of students to adequately represent the Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago.
3. The principals of the selected schools must be willing and available to discuss at length their school's parent involvement programs.

The principals were interviewed through the use of a non-schedule standardized interview, "in which certain types of information are desired from all respondents but the particular phrasing of questions and their order are redefined to fit the characteristics of each

respondent." <sup>16</sup> The areas examined in the interviews are suggested by Collins, Moles, and Cross in their report of site visits to large city schools with successful parent involvement programs. <sup>17</sup> The interviews examine the following areas:

1. Rationale, focus, and objectives of parent involvement programs;
2. Implementation: practices used to achieve parent involvement;
3. Personnel and training;
4. Total costs of parent involvement;
5. Supports for and barriers to parent involvement;
6. Methods of assessment;
7. Findings;
8. Transferability.

A descriptive analysis of the survey and interview data is presented.

#### Limitations

Because this study focuses on Catholic secondary schools, it will not be possible to make generalizations, draw conclusions, or offer suggestions about parent involvement programs in other types of private or in public high schools. There can be no assurance that the study has applicability beyond its population.

---

16

Denzin, Norman K. The Research Act/A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1978, pg. 115.

17

Collins, Carter H., Oliver C. Moles, and Mary Cross. The Home-School Connection/Selected Partnership Programs in Large Cities, The Institute For Responsive Education, Boston, Massachusetts, 1982.

Secondly, a certain degree of caution must be exercised in analyzing the information gathered by the survey. The purposes of the survey are (a) to give some indication of the attitudes of principals toward the importance of selected areas of parent responsibility to the academic success of students; (b) to detect the frequency of formal programs to encourage parent responsibility in these areas; (c) to determine the attitudes of the principals about the effectiveness of their parent involvement programs; and (d) to aid in the selection of principals to be interviewed. The analysis of survey results, then, is useful only to the extent that it fulfills its somewhat limited purposes.

Finally, the interview method of conducting research has the following inherent limitations identified by Denzin:

All interview forms are susceptible to the error of tacit assumption of understanding. Unless investigators become fully entrenched in a group's way of life, they have no assurance that they fully understand what is communicated. The second difficulty is that people do not always tell the interviewers what they know. While it is easier to broach difficult 'conversational subjects' with the USI (the type of interview used in this study), even with it that may sometimes be impossible. The third difficulty relates to the fact that groups create their own rules and symbols, a factor immediately complicated when it is realized that persons occupy different positions within their own groups, and hence have their own interpretations and even distortions of what the group's values are.<sup>18</sup>

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that this study will make a contribution to the ongoing search for effective parent involvement practices.

---

18

Denzin, pg. 121-122.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature on parent involvement practices in upper elementary grades and secondary schools can be divided into three general areas of investigation. The first of these is concerned with the nature of the influence parents exercise on the academic performance of their children. Researchers working in this area hope to explain how parental attitudes and behaviors affect children's motivation and performance in school. The second area of investigation examines the characteristics of the relationship between parents and schools; this research focuses on attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators on one side and parents on the other as the two relate to one another in matters concerning children's schooling. The remaining area of investigation is concerned with actual parent involvement practices; researchers examine methods of involving parents in the schooling of children and the effectiveness of these programs at achieving intended outcomes.

This review of related literature follows the organization offered by these three categories of research.

The Effect of Parental Attitudes and Behavior  
on Student Motivation and Performance

Researchers have long been pointing to the important impact of parents on the educational aspirations and motivation of children. In fact, contemporary researchers in this area make frequent reference to the landmark work of Joseph A. Kahl, which first appeared thirty-one years ago. Kahl's work deserves close attention in this present study because many of the concepts he discussed are selected for more intricate study and elaboration by later researchers. In "Educational and Occupational Aspirations of 'Common Man' Boys,"<sup>1</sup> the author presents the results of an interview study of twenty-four high school boys and their parents in which he explored the social influences which help to account for differences in school motivation and performance among students of similar background and intelligence level.

Of the twenty-four families, Kahl found fifteen who could be said to "espouse the core value of 'getting by'" and nine families who "could be said to believe in 'getting ahead.'"<sup>2</sup> Those who "get by" are those who feel satisfied with their lot as common people, who feel satisfied to have "regular" jobs, and who hope their sons will follow their lead. Those who hope to "get ahead" see

an occupational world stratified according to the basic principle of education, and education was something you got when you were young.

---

1

Kahl, Joseph A. "Educational and Occupational Aspirations of 'Common Man' Boys," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1953, pgs. 186-203.

2

Ibid, pg. 192.

These people felt vaguely guilty: they accepted the middle class value of getting ahead, they knew they had not gotten ahead, and thus they felt they were to some extent inadequate.<sup>3</sup>

Those parents who wanted to get ahead imposed pressure on their sons to perform well in high school and to attend college, while those who were content to get by did not pressure their sons to have high academic aspirations. When the parents were rated on this "get by or get ahead" factor, a strong relationship between the factor and student aspirations became clear.

The interviews indicated that boys learned to an extraordinary degree to view the occupational system from their parents perspective. They took over their parents' view of the opportunities available, the desirability and possibility of change of status, the techniques to be used if the change was desired, and the appropriate goals for boys who performed as they did in school.<sup>4</sup>

The attitudes of the parents had an effect not only on the college aspirations of the boys, but also on the boys' motivation and performance in secondary school and on their eventual selection of careers.

The children (of the "get by" parents) were told to stay in high school because a diploma was pretty important in getting jobs nowadays, but they were allowed to pick their own curriculum according to taste. The value "doing what you like to do" was applied to schoolwork, to part-time jobs, and to career aspirations. Rarely was the possibility of a college education seriously considered: "we can't afford such things," or "we aren't bright in school." Indeed their perception of college and the kind of jobs college-trained people held were exceedingly vague; they understood that such people were professionals and made a lot of money, but they did not know any such people socially and had no concrete images of what such a life might be.<sup>5</sup>

---

3

Ibid, pg. 193.

4

Ibid, pg. 202.

5

Ibid, pg. 193.

Kahl also offers a series of quotations from his interviews to shed light on the attitudes of parents toward school. A few comments from the "get by" parents are interesting in light of the present study.

I suppose there are some kids who set their mind to some goal and plug at it, but the majority of kids I have talked to take what comes. I don't think a high school diploma is so important.

I don't go to see the teachers. I figure the teachers know what they're doing. When I go up there I can't talk good enough.

And the teachers, they'd just as soon not have you get in their way, I figure.

I hate to push the kid. I figure he'll get his knocks later on, and he should do what he wants to now.

I don't make them do homework or anything. I figure they're old enough to know what they want to do and they'll get their work done by and by.<sup>6</sup>

The attitudes of the parents affect the motivation and performance of the boys and divide them into similar "get by" or "get ahead" categories.

The boys who believed in just "getting by" generally were bored with school, anticipated some sort of common man job, and found peer group activity to be the most important thing in life. They were gayer than those who felt a driving ambition to do things and be successful. By contrast, the strivers who believed in "getting ahead" seemed to take schoolwork more seriously than recreational affairs.<sup>7</sup>

Kahl also offers an explanation of how parents and children develop their school expectations over time.

In many ways, the grammar school years were crucial in defining the situation. From his experiences in those years, each boy gradually formed a conception of himself as a pupil based on his estimate of his intelligence and his interest in books.

---

6

Ibid, pg. 195.

7

Ibid, pg. 197.

Each boy's performance defined the situation for his parents as well as for himself. The parents in this sample had not studied Gesell; they had no scientific standards for estimating the intelligence of their children. Parents used early school performance as their main criterion for placing their children. If a boy did well, his parents expected him to continue doing well; if he did poorly, they usually decided that he was just one of those who was not smart and good at books and often emphasized his other qualities, such as skill with his hands or ability to get on well with people.

These common man parents seemed to have more tolerance for individual differences than do middle class parents. Often they themselves had done poorly in school and felt that they could not expect all their children to be brilliant.<sup>8</sup>

Kahl offers four motivational sources that inspire common man children to overcome the hurdles to good school performance and high educational aspirations.

1. If a student is successful in school in the early years and has built up a self concept in which good school performance is vital, he or she will work hard to maintain that good record.
2. Other pleasures are more frequently and easily sacrificed for the discipline of school work if those other pleasures are not important to the student.
3. If the child's family rewards good school performance and punishes poor performance, the child is more likely to strive for good performance.
4. If the child has a rational conviction that schoolwork is important to the success of the child's future, the child is more likely to strive for school success.

---

8

Ibid, pg. 198.

9

Ibid, pgs. 200-201.



The importance of parents is apparent in this list of motivational factors. Kahl found, for instance, that the "rational conviction" mentioned in point four does not develop unless the parents have emphasized it to the child. In fact, Kahl found that "behind all the reasons (for college aspirations among common man students) stood one pre-eminent force: parental pressure."

Parents who believed in the value of getting ahead started to apply pressure from the beginning of the school career. They encouraged high marks, they paid attention to what was happening at school, they stressed that good performance was necessary for occupational success, they suggested various occupations that would be good for their sons. Their boys reached high school with a markedly different outlook from those who were not pushed. The strivers tended to have more specific occupational goals, they had educational aims to match, they worked harder in school, they thought more of the future, they were more sensitive to status distinctions, and they believed they could somehow manage to pay their way through college and reach the middle class.<sup>10</sup>

Some sixteen years after Kahl's study, Kandel and Lesser supported Kahl's conclusion that parental aspiration is a more important determinant of children's educational aspirations than is social class membership. They found that when mothers have college aspirations for their children, 80% of the middle-class and 67% of the lower class adolescents have plans to continue their education, but when mothers have no college aspirations, the percentage of children with college plans drops to 20 for middle class children and 16 for lower class ones.<sup>11</sup> The authors explain the differences between the educational plans of middle class and lower class adolescents as follows:

---

<sup>10</sup>

Ibid, pg. 201.

<sup>11</sup>

Kandel, Denise B., and Gerald S. Lesser. "Parental and Peer Influences on Educational Plans of Adolescents," American Sociological Review, Vol. 34, No. 2, April 1969, pg. 218.

Parents of different social classes vary not only in the educational goals they have for their children, but also in the encouragement they give their children to continue their education, with middle-class mothers providing more encouragement than lower-class mothers. When the mother's educational plans and strength of encouragement are controlled simultaneously, the social-class effects on the child's own plans disappear almost completely. Thus the social class differences in adolescents' educational plans can be explained mostly by the facts that parents have different levels of aspiration and provide differential encouragement to pursue education.<sup>12</sup>

The work of Sewell and Shah conducted around the same time offers further evidence that parental encouragement is more significant than socioeconomic status in determining the educational aspirations of students:

Where parental encouragement is low, relatively few students, regardless of their intelligence or socioeconomic status levels, plan on college (even highly intelligent students with high social class origins who are not encouraged by their parents are not likely to plan on college); where parental encouragement is high, the proportion of students planning on college is also high, even when socioeconomic status and intelligence levels are relatively low. Thus, it may be concluded that while social class differences cannot be entirely explained by differences in parental encouragement (or intelligence) among the various socioeconomic classes, parental encouragement makes an independent contribution to social class differences in college plans of both males and females.<sup>13</sup>

Rehberg and Westby's study of parental encouragement and adolescent educational expectations also reinforces Kahl's notions about the relationship of socioeconomic status to student aspirations:

It has been demonstrated by Kahl and others that lower-status adolescents are more likely to pursue a post high school education if their parents urge them to do so. Our data suggest that a

---

12

Ibid, pg. 220.

13

Sewell, William H., and Vimal P. Shah. "Social Class, Parental Encouragement, and Educational Aspirations," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 73, 1968, pg. 571.

somewhat stronger statement may be in order: parental encouragement comes close to being a necessary condition for the continuation of education beyond the high school level in all strata and not just in the lower classes.<sup>14</sup>

Rehberg and Westby also touch on an area which would become a central focus to Conklin and Dailey fourteen years later: "the more frequently an expectation is expressed, the more likely is the adolescent to internalize it as his own."<sup>15</sup> Conklin and Dailey agreed with this concept when in a longitudinal study of high school students they found that the consistency of parental encouragement is an important factor in the determination of college attendance.<sup>16</sup> The authors labeled their measure of parental educational encouragement "TFG" for "Taken For Granted," and found that educational activity is influenced by the consistency of parental encouragement and the amount of positive perception by the student over time. Lack of consistency raises the probability of student attendance at a two-year rather than a four-year college, and the longer uncertainty persists the greater the probability that the student will not attend college. The authors also hazard a guess at how parental encouragement is communicated to the student.

---

14

Rehberg, Richard A., and David L. Westby. "Parental Encouragement, Occupation, Education and Family Size: Artifical or Independent Determinants of Adolescent Educational Expectations?" Social Forces, Vol. 45, 1967, pg. 371.

15

Ibid, pg. 371.

16

Conklin, Mary E. and Ann Ricks Dailey. "Does Consistency of Parental Educational Encouragement Matter for Secondary School Students?" Sociology of Education, Vol. 54, October 1981, pgs. 254-262.

It might become apparent to the adolescent through the frequency of discussions about college attendance, or the parents' position on post secondary education may be apparent to the child through ingrained assumptions concerning future schooling that are so taken for granted they are not verbalized.<sup>17</sup>

The work of Parsons, Adler, and Kaczala sheds further light on the transmission of parental attitudes to children. Their study focuses on two important questions:

1. Do parents influence their children as role models or as conveyors of expectancies?
2. Do children's self concepts have more direct relationship to their own past performance or to their sex than to parental beliefs about the children's aptitude?

Kahl indirectly raised this first question when he argued that parents who felt inadequate about their own lack of education were able to inspire their children to continue their education. If parents' main influence on their children's academic motivation and performance came about through the parents serving as role models, children whose parents felt inadequate about their own education should logically feel inadequate about academic pursuits. Parsons, Adler and Kaczala found that parents do not influence their children's achievement attitudes through their power as role models, but rather that parents have their major impact as conveyors of expectancies. They further found that

---

17

Ibid, pg. 261.

18

Parsons, Jacquelynne Eccles, Terry F. Adler, and Caroline M. Kaczala. "Socialization of Achievement Attitudes and Beliefs: Parental Influences," Child Development, Vol. 53, 1982, pgs 310-321.

children's self concepts were more directly related to their parents' beliefs about their aptitude than to the children's own past performance or their sex.

Parents who think that math is hard for their children and who think their children are not very good at math have children who also possess a low self-concept of their math ability, see math as difficult, and have low expectations for their future performances in math. In addition, the magnitude of the relations between parental perceptions of their child and their child's beliefs and behaviors did not vary as a function of the child's sex.<sup>19</sup>

20

Picou and Carter offer an interesting perspective on a debate which is central to the Kandel and Lesser work: namely, which has a greater impact on student aspirations, parental or peer influence? The findings of Kandel and Lesser on this point may be summarized as follows:

1. Parents are more influential than peers in the determination of an adolescent's life goals.
2. The majority of adolescents hold plans which are in agreement with those of their mothers and their friends.
3. Perhaps friends reinforce parental aspirations in so many cases because adolescents choose their friends on the basis of their agreement with the adolescents' parents on important issues.

21

In a work that followed Kandel and Lesser's but preceded Picou and Carter's, Trevor Williams found that the influence of adults as

---

19

Ibid, pg. 316.

20

Picou, J. Steven and T. Michael Carter. "Significant-Other Influence and Aspirations," Sociology of Education, Vol. 49, January 1976.

21

Kandel, pg. 217.

reference figures far exceeds that of the student's peers. The author concludes, "The data seem to suggest that the educational decision to be made has adult-world references (by virtue of its future occupational and socioeconomic implications) that establish adults as the appropriate reference figures."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Williams found that parents also influence their children's educational aspirations in a more indirect fashion by encouraging them to associate with peers whose educational goals match those the parents hold for their own children.<sup>23</sup>

Picou and Carter heighten the sophistication of the Kandel and Lesser study by examining the different means through which parents and peers influence adolescents and by considering type of community as an important variable in the discussion. Their results indicate that parents have more influence on aspirations than peers in the role of "definers," but that peers have more influence than parents as role models. Their findings are consistent with Parsons, Adler, and Kaczala to the extent that both studies agree that parental influence is delivered mainly through parents serving as expectancy socializers rather than role models. The unique contribution of the Picou and Carter work is that it suggests that the type of community is significant in predicting whether or not peer modeling will be of greater significance than parental encouragement.

---

22

Williams, Trevor H. "Educational Aspirations: Longitudinal Evidence on Their Development in Canadian Youth," Sociology of Education, Vol. 45, Spring 1972, pg. 125.

23

Ibid, pg. 128.

The findings suggest that community origins are important for the amount and type of significant-other influence received by youth. Specifically, urban youth apparently develop educational aspirations more in terms of parental definer behavior than rural youth. Aspirations of urban respondents appear to come from two sources of significant other influence -- parental definer behavior and peer modeling; on the other side of the residence continuum, rural youths' aspirations are influenced less by parental definer considerations and more in terms of the modeling of peers.<sup>24</sup>

A number of other studies have examined various aspects of the relationship between parental attitudes and behavior and children's academic aspirations, motivation, and performance. Herriott found, for example, that the father as well as the mother can play an important part in influencing the educational aspirations of children;<sup>25</sup> Smith found that "paternal influence upon offspring's educational goals may require more active efforts than are needed for maternal influence";<sup>26</sup> while Kerchoff and Huff's research led them to conclude the following:

With respect to their fathers, sons seem to be less well-informed, to assume greater agreement than there really is, and to reply as if their fathers were responsive to the same factors to which the sons are responsive. In short, the sons seem to know more about their mothers' goals and to assume more about their fathers', and their assumptions reflect their own standards of goal-setting.<sup>27</sup>

---

24

Picou, pg. 20.

25

Herriott, Robert E. "Some Social Determinants of Educational Aspiration," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 33, No. 2, Spring 1963, pgs. 157-177.

26

Smith, Thomas E. "The Case for Parental Transmission of Educational Goals: The Importance of Accurate Offspring Perceptions," Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 44, No. 3, August 1982, pg. 672.

27

Kerchoff, Alan C., and Judith L. Huff. "Parental Influence on Educational Goals," Sociometry, Vol. 37, No. 3, 1974, pg. 321-322.

Kerchoff and Huff's study also led to the following conclusions:

1. Parents' goals influence their son's goals beyond the influences of the family's socioeconomic status, the boy's IQ, and the boy's academic performance.
2. The general quality of the parent-child relationship is unrelated to the degree to which the son adopts his parents' educational goals.
3. In the absence of wholly adequate information about parental goals and with a limited understanding of the educational attainment process, ninth-grade boys use the father's social status to establish their own goals.
4. As boys get older their goal-setting process becomes more like that of their parents at least partially because they become better informed about their parents' goals and tend to  
28  
adopt them.

These last two points relate directly to the earlier discussion of parental influence when parents serve as role models or as expectancy socializers. Kerchoff and Huff indicate that parents have greater influence as role models when the children are less informed about the parents' expectations, but as the children become more aware of their parents' goals for them the parental influence established through role  
29  
modeling becomes less important.

---

28

Ibid, pg. 313.

29

Ibid, pg. 324.



Kerchoff and Huff also raise an issue that plays a significant part in the research of Thomas Smith, namely, the actual goals of the parents versus the perceptions of parental goals by children. Kerchoff and Huff found more evidence of parental influence when perceived parental goals are used than when actual parent goals are used. <sup>30</sup> In other words, what a child perceives to be his parents' goals for him or her has more of an influence on the child than what the parents may actually believe but which is in turn concealed from the child. Smith, on the other hand, focuses on the importance of the child understanding the actual goals of the parents if those goals are to have a significant influence on the child.

The specific variables used in this and other studies as indicators of the "quality" of the parent-child relationship appear not to affect parent-offspring concordance. We must face the possibility, therefore, that such variables as parental support or acceptance and the overall amount of parental communication with the offspring have little or no effect upon offspring agreement with particular parental orientations.

The present findings suggest that parent-offspring agreement on a particular orientation may be affected mainly by the clarity and persuasiveness of parental communication relevant to that specific orientation. The strong effects of accuracy of offspring perceptions show the importance of the offspring's clear understanding of the educational goal advocated by the parent. <sup>31</sup>

Here again the work of Kahl sounds an interesting note in the discussion. Kahl made the point that many "get by" parents did not have specific goals for their children and were not well acquainted with

---

30

Ibid, pg. 315.

31

Smith, pg. 673.

possible educational and occupational opportunities. Given Smith's conclusion that parents must clearly and persuasively communicate their goals to their children if these goals are to be accepted by them, it is likely that "get by" parents will not inspire their children to continue their education since these parents' goals are not clear even to themselves. What Smith's work adds to Kahl's, then, is the notion that parents must have clearly defined goals which they can offer persuasively to children before children will accept them. If the parents goals are unclear, vague exhortations to children to continue their education, to "get ahead," will be unsuccessful since the encouragement will lack the persuasiveness associated with clearly developed goals. Rehberg and Westby's consideration of the frequency with which expectations are expressed and Conklin and Dailey's emphasis on consistency are also relevant here to the extent that it can be assumed that parents who consistently communicate with their children about continuing their education or performing well in school are more likely to be perceived as clear and persuasive by their children than those who offer only inconsistent encouragement about schooling.

Most of the research cited above was conducted in order to test the hypothesis that parental expectations are significantly related to student academic aspirations, motivation and performance, with the primary emphasis falling on aspirations. In a recently published article, Rachel Seginer adds some new insights to the topic by focusing on academic achievement rather than student aspirations, and

by investigating the antecedents of parental expectations and the specific avenues by which parental expectations are transmitted to children.<sup>32</sup>

Seginer's review of the literature confirms that parents' expectations affect not only student aspirations but also their academic performance.

Empirical studies on the relation between parents' expectations and academic performance generally support this contention (i.e., that high achieving children tend to come from families who have high expectations for them, and who consequently are likely to set standards and to make greater demands at an earlier age), despite variations in definitions of parents' expectations and academic achievement, respondents' characteristics, and data collections methods.<sup>33</sup>

Seginer suggests that two changes take place in the nature of the research in this area. Since the majority of the studies use a one-shot bivariate model, Seginer believes that the time is right for more longitudinal assessments of parents' expectations and their children's achievement: "This will enable the estimation of the effects that the two have on each other at different points along the child's school career, possibly pointing to periods at which academic achievement is particularly susceptible to the affects of parents expectations."<sup>34</sup>

The second change she suggests is that the parents' expectations-academic achievement link be expanded to include the antecedents of parents' expectations and the factors by which these expectations affect

---

32

Seginer, Rachel. "Parents' Educational Expectations and Children's Academic Achievements: A Literature Review," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 1983, pgs. 1-23.

33

Ibid, pg. 4.

34

Ibid, pg. 4.

their child's achievement: "Interrelations among parents' expectations, their antecedents, the mediators through which expectations affect academic achievement, and the outcome of academic achievement comprise a model of the course of parents' educational expectations." <sup>35</sup> The remainder of Seginer's work is dedicated to the creation of such a model and deserves careful attention in this present study.

Seginer's model suggests three antecedents of parents' educational expectations:

1. School feedback: information schools send to parents about the academic achievement of their children;
2. Parents' own aspirations: academic achievement goals they set for themselves;
3. Parental knowledge: the information parents use when they act as "naive psychologists and educators." <sup>36</sup>

According to Seginer:

These (three antecedents) follow from the definition of parents' educational expectations as consisting of three dimensions: realistic and idealistic expectations, and standards of achievement. Realistic expectations are the predictions made by parents that their child will attain a certain level of academic performance. Idealistic expectations are the dreams, wishes, and hopeful anticipations that parents hold for their child in academic realm. Standards of achievement are the implicit measures by which parents evaluate their child's academic achievement as excellent, satisfactory, or unacceptable.

---

35

Ibid, pg. 5.

36

Ibid, pg. 6.

So defined, realistic expectations would seem to draw predominantly on school feedback, such as information parents receive from their children's report cards. Idealistic expectations may be the result of parents' own aspirations. Finally the standards of achievement reflect parental knowledge, that is, the concept or image which parents hold of their child's personality, ability, and behavior, and also of children in general.<sup>37</sup>

Seginer also suggests three factors through which parents' expectations affect the achievement of their child;

1. Achievement supporting behaviors;
2. Differential reinforcement;
3. Children's educational aspirations.

38

These factors will be more closely examined after a discussion of the antecedents of parental expectations.

In her discussion of school feedback, the first of the antecedents she considers in detail, Seginer relies heavily on the work of D. R. Entwisle and L. A. Hayduk, researchers who studied the relationship between school performance of first and second graders and their parents' expectations. According to their study and the results of two other studies cited by Seginer, "School feedback has a 'corrective' effect on parents."<sup>39</sup> In other words, parents adjust their expectations to match the feedback they receive from school authorities, and this adjustment takes place quite early in a child's schooling. In fact, Entwisle and Hayduk conclude that the adjustment begins between the child's first and second years in school. This finding reinforces

---

37

Ibid, pg. 6.

38

Ibid, pg. 7.

39

Ibid, pg. 9.

Kahl's suggestion, cited earlier in this review and later referred to in Seginer's review, that parents involved in his study "had no scientific standards for estimating the intelligence of their children," and as a result "used early school performance as their main criterion for placing their children."<sup>40</sup>

Of parents' own aspirations, the second antecedent of parents' expectations, Seginer states:

Parents' aspirations -- and especially those unfulfilled -- play a central part in the explanation that dynamic theories accord relationships between parents and their children. The process by which parents incorporate their own aspirations into the expectations they have for their children no doubt also pertains to the educational domain.<sup>41</sup>

Seginer admits that the data available to verify this hypothesis are scarce and cites, among others, Kahl's study as evidence. However, she does offer a valuable contribution when she discusses Rodman's "value stretch" and offers two other studies which seem to support the general conclusions of this theory. Value stretch is a means by which parents who have unfulfilled aspirations lessen the blow of not living up to their own measurement of success. They continue to support the goals of status success -- high educational and occupational attainments, for example -- while stretching their concept of success so that other lesser successes also become desirable. According to this theory,

---

40

Kahl, pg. 198.

41

Seginer, pg. 10.

parents in the lower classes would be expected to have a wider range of expectations for their children than parents in other classes. Quoting Seginer:

Anecdotal evidence is provided by Strodtbeck, McDonald, and Rosen (1957) who described the occupational aspirations of two matched samples of parents, Italian-American and Jewish; for their adolescent boys. Both wanted their son to go on to college and become a doctor. The Italian-American parents, however, would also be satisfied if he became a postal clerk while the Jewish parents held on to a high prestige choice.<sup>42</sup>

Kahl provides a bridge between school feedback and parents' value stretch by indicating that parents whose child received low grades in the early years of schooling assumed that their child was "just one of those who was not smart and good at books and often emphasized his other qualities, such as skill with his hands or ability to get on well with people."<sup>43</sup> In other words, these parents adjust their expectations according to the feedback they receive from school and stretch their values in order to compensate for the mediocre school achievement they now expect from their children. It is important to recall here the findings of Rehberg and Westby and Conklin and Dailey about the importance of the frequency and consistency of parental encouragement to children's achievement. If parents of children who receive low grades in the first years of their schooling lower their expectations and stretch their values (which results in a lessening of the emphasis placed on the value of high academic achievement), it would seem logical that they would not provide the frequent and consistent encouragement to

---

42

Ibid, pg. 10.

43

Kahl, pg. 198.

do well in school that these researchers conclude is related to high student aspirations and performance. Said another way, if a child is given the impression by his parents that becoming either a postal clerk or a doctor is a satisfactory occupational goal, it is unlikely that he or she will feel the parental pressure (Kahl) or frequency of encouragement (Rehberg and Westby) or the consistency of encouragement (Conklin and Dailey) to perform well enough in school to become a doctor. Furthermore, it would also seem logical to assume that parents who have a wider range of educational and occupational expectations may exhibit less of what Smith refers to as clarity and persuasiveness of parental communication about their goals for their children than parents who have a narrower range of expectations. In other words, parents who have stretched their values are less likely to convince their children of the importance of high educational aspirations and performance than those parents whose focus on these goals excludes other values.

In her discussion of the final antecedent to parents' expectations, parental knowledge, Seginer argues that middle class as well as lower class parents lack scientific standards on which to evaluate their children's intellectual abilities. Furthermore, the tools of evaluation many parents do use, folk wisdom and natural indicators, may be inappropriate for assessing potential for school performance.

Parental knowledge, as presented by folk wisdom and natural indicators, does not necessarily help parents to become better forecasters of their child's school performance. Under some conditions, parents' own criteria of ability may even interfere with the accurate prediction of their child's school performance.<sup>44</sup>

---

44

Seginer, pg. 13.



Even parents who seek additional standards for evaluating their children are likely to be frustrated according to Seginer.

Clarke-Stewart's review of reading material available to American parents reveals that these books and articles cannot help parents to establish standards concerning academic ability and performance: 90% of the published books are devoted to infancy and early childhood. Viewed from another perspective, only 5% of the magazine articles reviewed discuss children's intellectual development. Thus Clarke-Stewart's report supports Kahl's observation that lower-class parents have no access to intellectual development and school performance standards established by the professionals, but also rejects the tacit assumption that this information is more readily available to middle-class parents.<sup>45</sup>

In a study of parents who maltreat their children, Twentyman and Plotkin arrived at the following conclusion about parental knowledge.

The results of this study substantiated the a priori hypotheses that parents who have abused or neglected their children are less knowledgeable about their children's developmental processes than are matched controls. These data clearly support the view that informational deficits exist. Moreover, a model that stresses educational deficits is intuitively appealing given that parents who have been reported for abusing and neglecting their children are often young and have not been provided with adequate professional counseling during pregnancy and their children's early development.

The abusing and neglectful parents did not expect more from their children than the matched controls. Indeed, the abusing parents stated they expected less from their children than the average child.<sup>46</sup>

Although the focus of Twentyman and Plotkin's work is different than that of the present study, it does reinforce Seginer's finding that parental knowledge is related to parental expectations. Furthermore,

---

45

Ibid, pg. 12.

46

Twentyman, Craig T., and Ron C. Plotkin. "Unrealistic Expectations of Parents Who Maltreat Their Children: An Educational Deficit That Pertains to Child Development," Clinical Psychology, Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1982, pg. 501.

Twentyman and Plotkin's article indicates how parental expectations when based on inappropriate standards of child development can have a detrimental effect on the relationship between the child and parent and on the child's actual development.

The first of the mediating factors of parents' educational expectations on their children's achievement is achievement supporting behavior. In this area of her review, Seginer relies on the finding of the studies of self-fulfilling expectations in the classroom to make the following conclusion:

Applied to the home, these findings suggest that parents' educational expectations affect academic performance both directly through the desirable goals and behaviors they define for their children, and indirectly through the achievement supporting behaviors associated with parents' educational expectations. Examples of such behaviors in the home are the interest and involvement that parents have in their child's learning and school activities, and the extent to which parents act as models of learning and achievement for their child.<sup>47</sup>

Seginer agrees, then, with researchers cited earlier in this review that parental expectations affect children's achievement through parents performing as both expectancy socializers and role models.

In her consideration of differential reinforcement, the second mediating factor, Seginer discusses the studies of home-based reinforcement programs which will be examined in more detail in Parent Involvement Practices, the third section of this review. Basically, home-based reinforcement programs mediate parents' expectations to student performance by parents rewarding behavior which conforms to

---

47

Seginer, pg. 16.

their expectations and/or punishing behavior which does not conform to expectations. For purposes of the present discussion, the following conclusion by Seginer is sufficient.

Overall, these reviews indicate that home-based reinforcement of school behavior is effective for a wide range of ages (preschool to adolescents), educational programs (special education as well as mainstream education), target behaviors (behavior problems as well as academic performance), and types of reinforcement (praise, privileges, money). It can be managed successfully with low cost both to teachers and parents; however, its effectiveness after program termination is not known.<sup>48</sup>

The final mediating factor is children's aspirations; Seginer's model suggests that parents' expectations first affect student aspirations, which in turn affect student achievement. Because so much previous space was dedicated to the relationship between parental expectations and student aspirations, no further discussion is required here.

Seginer's work has been examined in some detail because it clearly emphasizes the relationship of parental expectations to student achievement while many other studies fail to clarify this connection and because by offering a model for examining the antecedents of parental expectations and the mediating factors of those expectations to student achievement it helps bring together the findings of several other studies cited in this review.

A synthesis of the research on the nature of parental influence on the academic aspirations, motivation, and performance of children now seems appropriate.

---

48

Ibid, pg. 17.

1. Parental encouragement is more influential on children's academic aspirations, motivation, and performance than sex, IQ, socioeconomic status, or past performance of children.
2. Parental influence is stronger than peer influence on the development of children's academic aspirations, motivation, and performance, and parent and peer agreement on academic and occupational goals produces an even stronger influence on children. Furthermore, through the expression of their aspirations for their children, parents seem to affect the children's choice of peers. In other words, children frequently choose peers who are in agreement with their parents about academic and occupational goals.
3. Parents influence their children as both expectancy conveyors and as role models. When the parents' expectations are made clear to their children, they will have more influence as expectancy conveyors than as role models; however, when the children are unclear about their parents' expectations, the parents have more influence as role models.
4. The greater the frequency, consistency, clarity, and persuasiveness of parental encouragement over time the greater the likelihood children will agree with their parents' aspirations for them.
5. Children tend to agree with the goals of their parents as they perceive these goals; however, the strength of agreement between parents and children seems to be positively related to the

accuracy of the children's understanding of their parents' real goals.

6. As children become older and better informed about their parents' goals, they tend to adopt these goals.
7. Mothers and fathers may differ in the way in which they influence their children; however, parents of both sexes have a significant impact on their children's academic orientation.
8. The quality of the parent-child relationship is not a significant factor in determining the extent to which the child accepts the parents academic goals.
9. The antecedents of parental expectations are school feedback, parents' own aspirations, and parental knowledge. Not much scientific information is available to parents on which to base standards for children's academic development, and as a result parents rely on natural indicators and folk wisdom to establish such standards. Perhaps because they are not knowledgeable about scientific standards for child development, parents adjust their expectations for their children on the basis of early school feedback; when children's grades are low, parents are likely to lower their expectations for their children's academic performance. Parents who have unfulfilled educational and occupational aspirations for themselves and/or parents whose children receive low grades are likely to broaden the range of their values in order to compensate for their own failure and that of their children to excell at academic pursuits. This increased range of values may impede the frequent, consistent, clear, and

persuasive communication of goals by parents to children which is related to the likelihood that children will accept their parents goals.

10. Parental expectations are mediated to student academic performance by achievement supporting behavior, differential reinforcement, and children's aspirations. Parents who encourage their children to earn high marks, pay attention to their children's school related matters, stress the connection between good school performance and higher occupational status, and discuss various occupational opportunities with their children produce children who have more specific educational and occupational goals, work harder in school, think more about their futures, and are more confident about overcoming obstacles which may block their goal attainment than children whose parents fail to exhibit these attitudes and behaviors.

Two important, although obvious, conclusions as well as two important implications for educators can be drawn from this research synthesis. The first and most obvious conclusion is that parents exert a tremendous influence on their children's academic aspirations, motivation, and performance whether or not they intend to exert such an influence and regardless of the quality of their relationship with their children. A great deal of legislation has been aimed at equalizing educational opportunities, of overcoming disadvantages that are often associated with race, sex, or socioeconomic status. Yet research indicates that the influence parents have on children's academic

outcomes is even greater than that exerted by these other factors. As

Robert E. Herriott explains:

I would suggest that rather than being determinants of educational plans, such variables as sex, family income, and other status characteristics of adolescents most frequently reported in the educational research literature are simply predictors which gain their predictive power through their association with other variables. In other words, it is reasonable to assume the existence of variables which intervene between the social, economic, and intellectual characteristics of an adolescent and his educational plans.<sup>49</sup>

Some twenty years after Herriott's work led him to this suggestion,

Seginer offers a similar conclusion:

The reason for not including structural variables (like social status, race, sex, or child's ethnic background) is that status variables are merely descriptive. Thus, it is not SES differences as such but rather the extent to which parents of different socio-economic background respond to school feedback, agree with school suggested criteria of academic achievement, or fulfill their own aspirations that explain parents' expectations.<sup>50</sup>

An implication for educators that grows out of this first conclusion is that spending greater effort in establishing a partnership between parents and schools could be a wise investment. Given the influence parents have on their children, it would certainly be to a school's advantage to have the parent working with the school instead of against it.

A second conclusion is that, thanks to over 30 years of research on the topic, a good deal of information about the way in which parents influence their children is now known. The implication which arises is that what is known should be taught -- to both educators and parents --

---

49

Herriott, pg. 159.

50

Seginer, pg. 6.

so that educators will be more sensitive to student motivational problems which might have roots in the home and parents are encouraged to give their children frequent, consistent, clear and persuasive encouragement to do well in school. As Sewell and Shah concluded about factors which influence student performance:

Because parental encouragement is a social-psychological variable, it is presumably subject to modification by means of programs of counseling directed at parents or parents and children, whereas the child's intelligence and family socioeconomic status are likely to be more difficult to influence at this point in a (high school student's) development.<sup>51</sup>

It is possible, in other words, for parents to learn which set of their attitudes and behaviors will promote good school performance by their children and which will have an adverse effect on their schooling.

---

51

Sewell, pg. 571.



Characteristics of the Relationship  
Between Parents and Schools

A considerable body of literature examines the behaviors and attitudes of teachers and administrators on one side and parents on the other as the two relate to one another in matters concerning children's schooling. The great majority of these investigations have focused on the pre-school and early elementary grades; less parent involvement programs as well as less research of parent-school relationships have occurred in upper elementary grades and secondary school settings.

Collins, Moles and Cross in their recent study of parent-school partnership programs in upper elementary and secondary levels entitled The Home School Connection/Selected Partnership Programs in Large  
52  
Cities speculate why a tradition of home-school collaboration at the upper levels has not developed. First, the lower grades have been favored in funding for both the establishment of programs and research. Several federally funded programs, like Headstart, for example, required parent involvement, so studying the effects of this involvement seemed a logical and necessary step. Second, parents of secondary school children face a difficulty establishing a single comprehensive link with the school since their children are likely to deal with a number of teachers as well as counselors and specialists; parents of younger children, on the other hand, can more easily establish this link since their children usually have only one teacher per year. Third, as

adolescents become increasingly independent and self-directed, they may resist when parents try to get involved in their schooling. In a study of attitudes of secondary principals, teachers, parents, and students toward parent involvement in the schools, Thornburg found that students preferred less parental involvement than did any of the other groups.<sup>53</sup> Fourth, parents may conclude that when their children reach junior high school they are capable of getting along in school without their parents' help. A fifth and final issue not mentioned by Collins, Moles, and Cross but which would seem to discourage parent involvement is the advanced nature of secondary school subject matter. Parents who felt comfortable helping their children with reading, writing, and arithmetic might hesitate when confronted with poetry, rhetoric, and calculus.

Because of the relative scarcity of parent involvement programs in upper elementary and secondary levels and because of the resulting absence of research studies examining the dynamics of parent-school relationships at these levels, it is necessary to examine studies which have investigated parent-school relationships on the elementary school level but which also have relevance for the upper elementary and secondary levels. As Lightfoot explains:

It is important to explore the special nature of the interactions between families and schools during the early years of the child's

schooling because these beginning stages shape the course of action, the quality of relationships, and the perspectives of the various participants during the years that follow.<sup>54</sup>

Lightfoot's conclusions about the dynamics of the relationship between parents and schools will be examined in detail in this section of the literature review since her areas of concern are shared by many other investigators. Further, this section of the review will focus primarily on the causes of difficulty in establishing successful and productive relationships between parents and schools while the third and final section of the review will focus on actual parent involvement practices, many of which hope to overcome these difficulties in order to develop a partnership between parents and schools.

Lightfoot sees the relationship between families and schools to be marked with conflict even though they are engaged in a "complimentary sociocultural task."

One would expect that parents and teachers would be natural allies, but social scientists and our own experience recognize their adversarial relationship -- one that emerges out of their roles as they are defined by the social structure of society, not necessarily or primarily the dynamics of interpersonal behaviors.<sup>55</sup>

Smith and London agree with Lightfoot's assessment.

Even though there is general agreement that educators and parents need each other, and that schools must move vigorously to seek out alliances with community groups, there are obstacles and barriers which inhibit or interfere with their organization and smooth running.<sup>56</sup>

---

54

Lightfoot, Sara Lawrence. Worlds Apart/Relationships Between Families and Schools, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1978, pg. 21.

55

Ibid, pg. 20.

56

Smith, Elsie J., and Clement B. G. London. "Overview: A Union of School, Community, and Family," Urban Education, Vol. 16, No. 3, October 1981, pg. 250.

Epstein and Becker identified a number of concerns about parent-school relationships which became apparent in the survey responses of 3,700 teachers in 600 schools in Maryland. These concerns indicate that parent involvement in schools is no simple matter.

1. Teachers' time: Teachers seem concerned about the amount of time required to develop effective parent-school relationships. As one teacher commented, "I believe parents and students can benefit from parent involvement. However I also know that it takes a great deal of training and explaining and coordinating to have a good program. We are not provided with time to do this type of training. It's all our own time. I no longer feel like giving my time without compensation."<sup>58</sup>
2. Parents' time: Teachers were concerned about the amount of time parents could legitimately be asked to spend on practices designed to improve their children's school performance. In fact one teacher commented, "I don't even help my own children very much (with school work) because I am too tired when I get home."<sup>59</sup>
3. Parents' ability: Three distinct attitudes of teachers toward parents were detected: (a) parents care but cannot do much to

---

57

Epstein, Joyce L., and Henry Jay Becker. "Teachers' Reported Practices of Parent Involvement: Problems and Possibilities," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1982, pg. 103-113.

58

Ibid, pg. 104.

59

Ibid, pg. 106.

help their children with actual learning; (b) parents care but should not help with learning; and (c) parents care and can be of great help if they are shown how to help.<sup>60</sup>

4. Administrative support: Many teachers thought that school climate and the principal's support were important factors in effective parent involvement programs. One teacher commented, "Most of my teaching career, my principals have been very much against the teacher working with parents other than when discipline was involved, and have been unwilling for the teacher to have contact with parents outside of regular classroom hours."<sup>61</sup>

The first area of conflict Lightfoot examines goes beyond the logistical concerns examined by Becker and Epstein to a more fundamental issue: the differences in ways adults in families and adults in schools relate to children.

In families, the interactions are functionally diffuse in the sense that the participants are intimately and deeply connected and their rights and duties are all-encompassing and taken for granted. In schools, the interactions are functionally specific because the relationships are more circumscribed and defined by the technical competence and individual status of the participants.

There are contrasts between the primary relationships of parents and children and the secondary relationships of teachers and children. Children in the family are treated as special persons, but pupils in school are necessarily treated as members of categories. From these different perspectives develop the particularistic expectations that parents have for their children and the universalistic expectations of teachers.<sup>62</sup>

---

60

Ibid, pg. 111.

61

Ibid, pg. 107.

62

Lightfoot, pgs. 21-22.

Because of their intimate relationship with their children, parents want schools to give their children special consideration, while teachers by the very nature of their job must strive to hold all children to the same rules, procedures, and standards. Seginer makes a similar point when she notes, "School is regimental, competitive, and academically-oriented. The child's home may be competitive, but it is seldom regimental and is set for a much wider variety of activities than is tolerated by schools."<sup>63</sup>

The second area of conflict between schools and parents which Lightfoot examines concerns the boundaries of responsibility and authority each has with respect to the development of children. Conflict arises because these boundaries are not clearly defined so parents and teachers may disagree who has the right to govern a certain area of a child's life. When teachers assign homework, for example, can they insist that it be completed in after-school hours in out-of-school locations? Can parents decide that other family activities take precedence over homework? Are parents responsible for ensuring their children's completion of homework? According to Lightfoot, these ambiguous boundaries of responsibility and authority may lead to an explanation for teachers' reluctance to actively encourage parent involvement in schools.

The only sphere of influence in which the teacher feels that her authority is ultimate and uncompromising seems to be with what happens inside the classroom. Behind the classroom door, teachers experience some measure of autonomy and relief from parental

---

<sup>63</sup>

Seginer, pg. 14.

scrutiny, and parents often feel, with shocking recognition, the exclusion and separation from their child's world.<sup>64</sup>

Smith and Thompson address this same issue.

Some parents have been unhappy with the inaccessibility of schools and their general lack of responsiveness to the communities they serve. There is often distrust, dissatisfaction, and frustration on all sides. There is also some degree of ambivalence about the role of parents in the schools. Many teachers consider the place of parents to be in the home; that their role is that of being good parents. Although unsure of their roles and responsibilities in the schools, parents want their children to receive a quality education, to be happy with competent teachers who can provide their children with an education that eventually will enable them to succeed.

Some teachers, on the other hand, have viewed the schools as their turf, not to be invaded by active groups of parents who they feel might seize control.<sup>65</sup>

Another reason that teachers may not welcome the involvement of parents in the schooling of their children is that they feel that they can get by without it. As Becker and Epstein explain:

Actions (of parent involvement) that are requested rather than required and carried out with little or unknown frequency, meetings attended by small groups of parents rather than all parents, and selected use of parent-involvement techniques with only certain parents are all indications that, for the average teacher, parent involvement at home is not indispensable to satisfactory teaching.<sup>66</sup>

Thornburg, referring to a study by Davies, discusses a similar reluctance on the part of school administrators to exuberantly encourage parent participation.

---

64

Lightfoot, pg. 26.

65

Smith, pg. 251.

66

Becker, Henry Jay, and Joyce L. Epstein. "Parent Involvement: A Survey of Teacher Practices," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1982, pg. 96.

Davies concluded that some administrators were reluctant to work with parents because they feared that parents might see problems and thereby demand changes. In response to this fear, many schools put up "window dressing activities," designed to provide the appearance of an open, responsive school or school system with a lot of citizen involvement, but without much reality.<sup>67</sup>

Lightfoot argues that boundaries between parents and schools might be appropriate for educational purposes and that it is the ambiguity of these areas of authority and responsibility rather than the boundaries themselves that cause conflicts between parents and school staff members. The ambiguity "exacerbates the distrust between (teachers and parents). The distrust is further complicated by the fact that it is rarely articulated, but usually remains smoldering and silent."<sup>68</sup>

Rather than eliminate boundaries, the author suggests that tensions between parents and teachers could be greatly relieved if areas of responsibility and authority were clarified in meaningful communication; however, Lightfoot finds traditional modes of communication inadequate.

Schools organize public, ritualistic occasions that do not allow for real contact, negotiation, or criticism between parents and teachers. Rather, they are institutionalized ways of establishing boundaries between insiders (teachers) and interlopers (parents) under the guise of polite conversation and mature cooperation. Parent-Teacher Association meetings and open house rituals at the beginning of the school year are contrived occasions that symbolically reaffirm the idealized parent-school relationship but rarely provide the chance for authentic interaction. Parents and teachers who are frustrated and dissatisfied with their daily transactions do not dare risk public exposure in these large school meetings by raising their

---

67

Thornburg, pg. 150.

68

Lightfoot, pg. 27.



private problems. Teachers fear the scrutiny of their colleagues and principal, who expect them to conform to the collective image of smooth control and decorum that they want to project to parents.<sup>69</sup>

Lightfoot's indictment of traditional parent-school contacts is echoed by others. Colton, for example, finds several styles of parent-teacher conferences to waste time and afford little privacy, confidentiality, or real insight into the student's performance.<sup>70</sup>

Epstein and Becker offer the following comment in their study of teacher attitudes toward parent involvement:

One of the reasons so many teachers and principals conduct and support visit-school nights and parents' conferences is that these activities have become formal, accepted strategies for parent-teacher exchanges. They are school-level activities that recur in similar, predictable form in most schools. In contrast, the techniques of parent involvement in learning activities at home are classroom-level projects that are developed by individual teachers. The patterns for exchange for these activities have not been standardized and so there are no clear expectations.

It is questionable whether the familiar rituals of visit-school night and parent conferences accomplish more than a polite exchange between parents and teachers.<sup>71</sup>

Besides ritualistic parent-teacher contacts which fail to promote good communication, the only other contact between parents and teachers or school administrators is frequently that prompted by problems school authorities or parents encounter with the student learning and development. As Lightfoot explains, these contacts are "rarely neutral and rarely productive."

---

69

Ibid, pg. 28.

70

Colton, Brad. "Open Forum: Big Success for Small Districts," NASSP Bulletin, Vol. 65, No. 446, September 1981, pg. 121.

71

Epstein, pgs. 112-113.

Usually when parents are summoned to the school, the teacher is reporting on some trouble their child is having adjusting to the social milieu and/or learning. Most often, criticism by teachers brings defensiveness on the part of parents, who blame the problems on inadequate teaching. Parents ask for a conference when they sense that their child is unhappy with the school environment or isn't learning to read. The teacher often interprets the parents' concern as an attack on her teaching skills, and she becomes defensive.<sup>72</sup>

Findings of Mager in his study of the conditions which influence teacher-parent contacts confirm Lightfoot's hypothesis. Mager divided his teacher-subjects into high and low frequency groups on the basis of the number of contacts they made with parents. For both groups, informing parents about their children's lack of academic progress, their lack of social and emotional adjustment, and their behavioral problems were among the primary reasons teachers initiated contacts with parents. Low on the list of reasons for contact were seeking general information, sharing general information, and explaining curriculum. Mager also suggests that the principal's support may be a necessary condition for teacher initiated contact of parents, a conclusion that gains added relevance in light of the suggestion in Thornburg's article that administrator's may actually prefer little or no meaningful parent-school contact.<sup>73</sup>

Mager also raises another issue which seems to affect the relationship of parents and teachers.

Among conditions influencing the parent-teacher relationship, the socioeconomic status of the teacher and the students' parents was

---

72

Lightfoot, pgs. 28-29.

73

Mager, Gerald M. "The Conditions Which Influence a Teacher in Initiating Contacts with Parents," The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 73, No. 5, May/June 1980, pgs. 276-282.

widely cited. Differences in status are generally believed to work against good relationships because of value differences, cultural differences or personal discomfort.<sup>74</sup>

Although Mager's study did not include a wide enough range of parents' socioeconomic status to measure this influence, it was noted that "teachers who reported a high frequency of teacher-initiated contact often classified themselves as upper-middle class. This was at least one level above the status at which they placed the students' parents."<sup>75</sup> Lightfoot also indicates that differences in teacher and parent socioeconomic status further complicate an already difficult relationship.

The teachers felt particularly anxious and threatened by the upper-middle-class and upper-class parents because they experienced no institutional protection and because they felt humiliated and demeaned by these parents' attitudes of superiority.<sup>76</sup>

And again in a different context:

There is, therefore, an illusion of mobility and assimilation through schooling that creates distance and hostility between middle-class-oriented teachers and lower-class parents, while in reality the educational system serves less to change the results of primary socialization in the home than to reinforce (and denigrate) and render them in adult form. In other words, poor and minority parents expect that schools will support their child's entry into middle-class life; parents are made to feel inadequate in preparing children for an uncharted future; and families relinquish the final remnants of their cultural patterning and familiar social structures.<sup>77</sup>

---

74

Ibid, pg. 281.

75

Ibid, pg. 281.

76

Lightfoot, pg. 31.

77

Ibid, pg. 31.

And finally:

Teachers identified with the average people in town, felt vulnerable and powerless in relation to the upper-middle class, and considered only the lower class as really inferior to them.<sup>78</sup>

In an article about forming partnerships between parents and schools, David Seeley looks beyond specific causes of conflict to focus on a broader view about the separation between parents and schools. According to Seeley, the difficulties between parents and schools is caused by the perception that schools are governmental "service-delivery systems" rather than partnerships.

Genuine partnership is driven out of education as schools, parents, and students come to think of their relationships in terms of service delivery -- of "provider" and "client," of "professionals" and "target population."

The chief characteristic of partnership is common effort toward common goals. Partners may help one another in general or specific ways, but none is ever a client, because the relationship is mutual. Providers and clients can deal with one another at arm's length; partners share an enterprise, though their mutuality does not imply or require equality or similarity. Participants in effective partnerships may be strikingly different, each contributing to the common enterprise, particular talents, experiences, and perspectives and sometimes having different status within the relationship and control over aspects of the work to be done.

The concept of service delivery, unlike that of partnership, leads to conflict producing ambiguities about whether provider or client wields more power in the relationship.

An immediate advantage of the partnership concept for education is the assistance it provides in escaping the dilemma of whom to blame for educational failure. The service-delivery concept of education makes families either victims or villains. When learning does not take place, the client can blame the provider, and the provider can blame the client.<sup>79</sup>

---

78

Ibid, pg. 32.

79

Seeley, David S. "Education Through Partnership," Educational Leadership, Vol. 40, No. 2, November 1982, pg. 42.

Vernberg and Medway illustrate how blame for school problems becomes an issue in parent-school relationships. In a study to determine teacher and parent causal perceptions of school problems, the researchers found that teachers assigned causation in order of increasing frequency to school characteristics (i.e., teacher characteristics and behaviors, task difficulty, influences of other children, and school administrative policies and procedures), child characteristics (i.e., effort, attention, ability factors, mental states, physical problems, delayed development, etc.), and home characteristics (i.e., parental nurturance and encouragement, child-management practices, neighborhood variables, job demands, family relations, etc.). Parents made just the opposite causal assessment. Although similar studies have led to different conclusions and the need for further research in this area is indicated, the Vernberg and Medway study links Lightfoot's belief that communication between parents and schools is unsuccessful to Seeley's belief that the "service delivery system" is "unproductive." According to Seeley, "A stalemate caused by mutual recrimination is unnecessary. The partnership concept provides a more productive framework."

A synthesis of the literature on the relationship between parents and schools, then, seems to indicate that this relationship is marked by conflict.

---

80

Vernberg, Eric M., and Frederic J. Medway. "Teacher and Parent Causal Perceptions of School Problems," American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1981, pg. 35.

81

Ibid, pg. 36.

1. Parents and teachers and families and schools relate to children in different ways, and this difference in perspective is likely to produce disagreements about how a child should be treated at home and at school.
2. The ambiguity of the boundaries between parents' and schools' areas of authority and responsibility concerning children's development leads to distrust, defensiveness, and a lack of meaningful cooperation. Furthermore, because these boundaries are not clearly identified, teachers and administrators tend to protect their "turf" by shutting parents out of schools.
3. Traditional methods of parent-school communication are ritualistic and unhelpful in promoting good relationships between parents and schools.
4. The only other contact between parents and schools is frequently that prompted by problems with students' schooling. Since good communication does not exist at other times, these contacts are rarely productive.
5. Differences in the social status between school staff members and parents further frustrates an already difficult relationship.
6. The conflicts in the relationship between parents and schools prevents the successful formation of home-school partnerships and leads instead to the unproductive hurling of blame from one to the other.

From this review of the literature on the relationship between parents and schools the impression might be given that productive home-school relationships do not presently exist. This, however, is not the

case. It has been the purpose of this section of the literature review to examine the home-school relationship in light of the difficulties which exist in that relationship. It remains for the final section of this review to examine present parent involvement practices, many of which attempt to overcome the difficulties and conflicts indicated above.

Parent Involvement Practices

In a parent involvement survey given to approximately 3,700 public elementary school teachers, about three quarters of the teachers agreed that the general idea of parent involvement is a good one, but about half of the teachers had serious doubts about the success of practical efforts to involve parents in learning activities at home. According to the authors of the survey:

This should not come as a surprise. Teachers have not been educated in the management of parent involvement, the teachers' and parents' time is finite, teachers and parents have different skills and often diverse goals for the children, and teachers and parents may have many children (and other family obligations) that require a share of their time and interest. <sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, as was seen in the last section of this literature review, a number of complex problems call for resolution before effective home-school relationships can exist.

It is difficult to find anyone to dispute the value of parents and schools forming partnerships to promote the academic achievement of children. The National Commission on Excellence in Education in their now famous publication admonishes parents to bear the "responsibility to participate actively in (their) child's education," <sup>83</sup> while the National PTA insists that a "working partnership between the principal and the PTA, dedicated to the welfare of children and youth, can strengthen

---

82

Becker, pg. 89-90.

83

The National Commission on Excellence in Education. A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform, U. S. Department of Education, Washington, 1983.



family life and improve the schools." Although it would seem almost un-American to suggest that parents and schools not form such a partnership, a more realistic appraisal of the proposed coalition between families and educators is characterized by the teachers whose survey responses seem to say, "It's a nice idea, but..."

A number of suggestions for involving parents in the education of their children can be found in the literature. Unfortunately, for reasons mentioned in section two, very little about specific practices and even less about comprehensive programs have been directed at the upper elementary and secondary school levels. Only the work of Collins, Moles, and Cross offers a comprehensive examination of parent involvement programs designed to improve the academic achievement of students at these levels. It is the plan of this section to first review studies aimed at elementary school levels which have relevance to this work along with studies aimed at particular aspects of parent involvement at upper elementary and secondary levels before carefully examining the more comprehensive work by Collins, Moles and Cross.

Parent education as a means of improving student achievement involves workshops, counseling sessions, or classes in which parents are given instruction on how to help their children become more productive students. In one study, Cox and Matthews evaluated the children of parents who had participated in the Downing program, a program designed to promote significant attitudinal changes in (a) the use of controlling

techniques with children, (b) the awareness of the emotional needs of children, (c) the expression of trust and respect for children, and (d) the confidence of parents in child rearing practices. The researchers summarize their results as follows:

Keeping in mind that the students in this study have a history of one or more significant educational failures, the results would seem to suggest that both teachers and observers reported marked or significant difference between treatment students (those whose parents had participated in the Downing program) and control students (those whose parents had not participated), with the strength of these differences increasing over the 8 week follow-up period. The direction of behavior for treatment students was toward both a reduction in frequency of inappropriate behaviors and an increase in appropriate behavior. <sup>85</sup>

Although the Cox and Matthews study examines student behavior rather than student academic achievement, its findings are significant to the purposes of this study for two reasons:

1. Student behaviors are frequently related to academic performance. In recent school effectiveness literature, for example, one of the elements common to schools with high academic achievement by students is good discipline. <sup>86</sup>
2. The study indicates that parent training affects student performance; it can be safely assumed that parent training could be designed to help parents positively affect their childrens' academic performance.

---

85

Cox, William D., and Charles O. Matthews. "Parent Group Education: What Does It Do for the Children," Journal of School Psychology, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1977, pg. 360.

86

Purkey, Stewart C., and Marshall S. Smith. "Too Soon To Cheer? Synthesis of Research on Effective Schools," Educational Leadership, December 1982, pg. 67.

In another study, Therrien found that parents who participated in Parent Effectiveness Training (PET is a systematically designed training course in which parents learn and practice interpersonal and problem-solving skills to improve their relationships with their children) were able to function at facilitative levels of empathy and that these skills were maintained over time.<sup>87</sup> The Therrien study, like the Cox study, indicates that parents can learn to change their own behaviors and attitudes as well as those of their children by participation in training programs.

Many training programs for parents designed to improve their children's school behavior rely on teaching parents the techniques of behavior modification. In a review of studies which examined the results of training parents in behavior modification, O'Dell lists the advantages authors cite for teaching parents these techniques.

Collectively, these advantages include: (a) the ability for persons unskilled in sophisticated therapy techniques to learn the principles of behavior modification and carry out treatment programs; (b) the fact that behavior modification is based on empirically derived theory; (c) many persons can be taught at one time; (d) only a short training period is usually required; (e) a minimum of professional staff can have more treatment impact than in one-to-one treatment models; (f) many parents like a treatment model that does not assume "sick" behavior based on the medical model; (g) many childhood problems consist of rather well defined behaviors that are conducive to behavioral treatment; and (h) the applicability of behavior modification in dealing with problems in the natural environment.<sup>88</sup>

---

87

Therrien, Mark E. "Evaluating Empathy Skill Training for Parents," Social Work, Vol. 24, No. 5, September 1979, pg. 418.

88

O'Dell, Stan. "Training Parents in Behavior Modification: A Review," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 81, No. 7, 1974, pg. 419.

Behavior modification techniques are used by parents in home-based reinforcement programs, and although many home-based reinforcement or behavior modification programs seem to be designed to improve student behavior rather than academic achievement, Atkenson and Forehand note, "Psychologists have successfully applied the same home-based reinforcement program that is used with disruptive behaviors to improve academic behaviors in the classroom."<sup>89</sup>

According to a review of home-based reinforcement programs by Barth, these programs operate as follows:

Programs that utilize home-based reinforcement of school behavior are based on the premise that the feedback from report cards can be of more assistance to children, teachers, and parents than it now is. In such programs, notes are sent home frequently, usually daily at first, and they report on the child's performance on certain pre-specified, or target behaviors. The frequent feedback helps the parents and child to monitor how the child is doing and provides the parents with information that they use to systematically reward performances that meet the criteria. In some programs, performances that do not meet the criteria are systematically sanctioned. Many of these programs have now been implemented and have been shown to be remarkably successful. Although the basic systems are quite similar, the relevant parameters of the system have been varied.<sup>90</sup>

Barth's review also brings attention to the issue of teacher cooperation in the successful implementation of new school programs.

The acceptance of new programs by teachers often seems to be determined by the short term response costs, which have become associated with the notions of additional study, extra training, data collection, and

---

89

Atkenson, Beverly M., and Rex Forehand. "Home-Based Reinforcement Programs Designed to Modify Classroom Behavior: A Review and Methodological Evaluation," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 86, No. 6, pg. 1300.

90

Barth, Richard. "Home-Based Reinforcement of School Behavior: A Review and Analysis," Review of Educational Research, Vol. 49, No. 3, Summer, 1979, pg. 437.

classroom restructuring, rather than the greater long term gains for the students and the teacher of a positive, well managed classroom. New techniques that do not require great behavioral changes from the teacher, but which provide significant changes for children, need to be implemented to provide additional aid for teachers and children.<sup>91</sup>

After examining a number of home-based reinforcement programs, Barth makes the following conclusion:

It is apparent that parents can learn to administer home-based reinforcement with a modicum of instruction. Home visits and time-consuming parent educational programs are not necessary for successful behavioral change when this system is used.<sup>92</sup>

Barth warns that before schools can hope to implement successful home-based reinforcement programs school staff members must examine their attitudes about parents. Barth's concern about what he calls "false assumptions" about parents harkens back to the earlier discussion about the relationship between parents and teachers and bears repeating here.

One assumption may be something like: If we, as trained educators and counselors, cannot structure the school situation in order to get the children to perform at school, then we cannot expect their untrained parents to structure the home environment in order to help change their children's school behavior. The fallacy here is that school behavior and home behavior can have very distinct properties, and that behavior observed in one setting is not necessarily predictive of behavior in a second setting. It is very possible, in fact, that parents have already found a way of structuring the child's home environment that is quite effective in promoting appropriate behavior.

A second assumption centers around the expectation that the parents of unmotivated, low-performing children are likely to be unmotivated, low performers as well, and to be unable to follow instructions without careful monitoring. It should now be apparent that very brief and simple instructions can be sufficient prompts for parents and that they can implement highly structured, as well as

---

91

Ibid, pg. 436-437.

92

Ibid, pg. 444.

unstructured, programs and effect significant changes in school behavior.<sup>93</sup>

In summary, the studies cited above indicate (a) parent education programs are effective in improving student behaviors, and these improvements remain over time; (b) researchers familiar with training parents list a number of advantages in teaching parents behavior modification techniques; (c) behavior modification used in home-based reinforcement programs has been proven to be effective with improving both academic and disruptive student behaviors; (d) home-based reinforcement programs can be implemented in schools without imposing hardships on faculty members.

Home-based reinforcement programs also seem promising for upper elementary and secondary levels. Both Barth and Atkenson and Forehand indicate that these programs have been successful for a wide range of grade levels, classroom situations, and student behaviors. Furthermore, home-based reinforcement offers resolutions to some of the obstacles to effective parent-school relationships in the upper elementary and secondary levels mentioned in the second section of the present review. First, the required frequency and consistency of communication between parents and teachers might help establish and maintain the link between home and school that is often lost when parents have to deal with more than one teacher. Second, parents are not required to master advanced subject matter in order to help their children improve their academic performance since their role in home-based reinforcement programs is simply to reward or sanction behavior according to the teachers' reports.

---

<sup>93</sup>Ibid, pg. 452.

One concern among those who suggest the importance of effective home-school relationships is the necessity of simply establishing good lines of communication between school staff members and parents. In the reviews of home-based reinforcement programs, for example, both authors emphasize the importance of teachers' communicating on a frequent and regular basis with parents. Swick notes that the "family-school relationship usually is based upon the teacher-child relationship," and in a sense this puts the cart before the horse:

How the child performs, his standing in the class and behavior towards the teacher are, unfortunately, used by many teachers to judge the family. Yet a knowledge of the total family setting could provide teachers with a wealth of information to use in making school a positive experience for the child and other family members.<sup>94</sup>

The importance of teachers and parents' getting to know one another is also emphasized by Warren Starr, the superintendent of schools in Yakima, Washington, who as principal of Yakima's Davis Senior High School launched a parent involvement program that eventually became a district-wide project. The first objective of the Davis program was "to effect regular home contacts by teachers and not administrators."<sup>95</sup>

At first teachers at Davis were required to phone parents about excessive absences and tardies and were expected to report occasions of excellent student achievement as well; teachers were also required to make weekly

---

94

Swick, Kevin J. "Toward A Meaningful Family-School Relationship," The Clearing House, Vol. 53, No. 2, October 1979, pg. 97.

95

Starr, Warren D. "High School Partnership at the Secondary Level," The High School Journal, Vol. LXI, No. 7, April 1978, pg. 328.

reports to the administration about their progress on the phone. The value of the phone contact, according to Starr, was its impact on negative teacher attitudes.

We quickly found that initial questioning and negativism were quickly dispelled by the positive communication results which took place between parents and teachers during the phone conversations. Teachers found out early that most parents gave more strokes to the teachers than they had complaints.<sup>96</sup>

Starr refers to this first stage of his home-school partnership program as the "awareness stage," and its main benefit seems to be that it breaks down some of the barriers between parents and teachers that Lightfoot and others describe. It is interesting to recall that Lightfoot criticized traditional forms of parent-teacher contact because they did not provide opportunity for meaningful communication; Yakima's use of telephone contact between parents and teachers would seem to allow for the one-on-one communication Lightfoot predicted would be more valuable to both parents and teachers. Stage two of Starr's program involved what he calls summer "training" programs, which included some lecture and discussion sessions, but 70% to 80% of the time was spent on home visits.

The teachers initially over-estimated the number of home visits they could make in a given period of time and most of them under estimated the time expended at each home as well as the values received during these visits. Home visits were found to be incremental, i.e., the gains appeared small at first but grew gigantic as the project progressed.<sup>97</sup>

---

96

Ibid, pg. 328.

97

Ibid, pg. 329.



Phase two of the Davis program, then, seems to be a more intensive phase one. In other words, phase two seems designed to get the teachers away from the phones and into the homes of the children's parents, and its main benefit seems to be communication itself, rather than something derived from a special activity performed by teachers, parents, and children. The notion that contact alone is significant is not a foreign one to educational researchers. Iverson, Brownlee, and Walberg, for example, studied the effects of teacher-parent contacts on elementary school children's reading improvement. A contact was defined as a conference, a telephone call, a note or other written communication between a teacher and one or both parents. None of these activities require any more than passive acceptance of information by the parents.

98

Starr's article raises an interesting, albeit obvious, question: What specifically do researchers and practitioners mean when they refer to parent involvement or home-school partnerships? Those who advocate home-based reinforcement are clear on this topic: they define parent involvement as parents' administering rewards and/or sanctions to their children for their behavior as that behavior is described by frequent reports provided by the children's teachers. Starr, on the other hand, is much less clear on just what it is parents are supposed to do after their communications with teachers have occurred.

---

98

Iverson, Barbara K., Geraldine D. Brownlee, and Herbert J. Walberg. "Parent-Teacher Contacts and Student Learning," Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 74, No. 6, July/August 1981, pg. 394.

Cervone and O'Leary have grappled with the meaning of parent involvement and have outlined the "Parent Involvement Continuum," a helpful tool in the study of parent involvement practices. According to the authors:

We see parent involvement as falling along a continuum that stretches from activities in which the parent is the passive recipient of information to activities in which the parent is an active partner in the educational process.

The passive-active continuum flows both vertically and horizontally. This means that in any individual category, the activities range from those in which parents play a relatively passive role to those in which parents take an active part.<sup>99</sup>

The four horizontal categories of the continuum are (a) Reporting Progress, (b) Special Events, (c) Parent Education, and (d) Parents Teaching. An example from the article best illustrates the vertical design to the continuum:

The category "Reporting Progress" begins with Good News Notes (occasional messages from the teacher that parents need not answer) and ends with Home-School Notebooks (weekly or even daily exchanges of information between parents and teachers). The latter clearly requires a time commitment from the parents that the former does not.<sup>100</sup>

Although the specific items the authors list in each category are not important here (and unfortunately are not explained in the article), a few examples from each category will perhaps make the distinctions among categories clearer.

---

99

Cervone, Barbara Tucker, and Kathleen O'Leary. "A Conceptual Framework for Parent Involvement," Educational Leadership, Vol. 40, No. 2, November 1982, pg. 48.

100

Ibid, pg. 48.

1. Reporting Progress includes parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, and newsletters.
2. Special Events includes end-of-the-year picnics, gym shows, and open houses.
3. Parent education includes workshops, classroom observations, courses for parents, and parent-to-parent meetings.
4. Parents teaching includes home worksheets, parents teaching in the classroom, and parent objectives in the IEP.

Although Cervone and O'Leary do not offer an exhaustive list of parent involvement practices, they do provide an interesting and helpful framework for analyzing parent involvement practices. It can be seen, for example, that Starr's program would fall into the first category, Reporting Progress, since its main goal seems to be communication between parents and teachers without much active involvement on the part of the parents. The home-based reinforcement program, on the other hand, would fall into two categories: Parent Education -- for that part of the program that suggests parents attend a workshop or training session to learn the techniques of behavior modification -- and Parents Teaching -- for that part of the program that suggests parents teach their children appropriate behaviors through a system of rewards and sanctions. The continuum makes clear, then, that Starr's program places less emphasis on parent activity than does home-based reinforcement.

Another analysis of the types of parent involvement practices is provided by Lombana and Lombana, who suggest that counselors can more fully understand the needs of parents and more wisely use their time with

parents if they use their model for parent involvement. The authors use a triangle divided into four horizontal sections to represent types of parent involvement.

The bottom section of the triangle represents the largest number of parents, who principally desire to have a feeling of belonging to the school, to have information about their children's cognitive and affective environment, and to have an avenue of communication among school staff members.

The next section of the triangle, representing a slightly smaller yet still significant number of parents, depicts the need for productive conferences with counselors, teachers, and other school personnel.

The third level of the triangle depicts parent education programs. Parent education as used here refers to programs that teach parents more effective ways to discipline and communicate with their children. It is estimated that approximately one of five parents of school-aged children would acknowledge the need for professional assistance.

At the top of the triangle are the needs of the smallest number of parents: counseling. As differentiated from parent education, parent counseling is a less cognitive approach and focuses more directly on particular parental concerns or emotional difficulties that would be reflected in the parenting role. Probably fewer than one of twenty parents of school-aged children would respond to counseling.<sup>101</sup>

In the authors' model, the amount of time and expertise required to deal with the various needs of parents forms an inverse relationship to the amount of parents in each need area. In other words, a great deal more time and expertise is required in parent counseling than is required in simple forms of parent communication or parent conferences. Because of the time and expertise requirements, the authors suggest that the first two levels of parent involvement form the backbone of the home-school

---

101

Lombana, Judy H., and Al E. Lombana. "The Home-School Partnership: A Model for Counselors," Personnel and Guidance Journal, Vol. 73, No. 5, May/June 1980, pgs. 36-37.

partnership since by working in these areas teachers and counselors will influence virtually all parents of children in school. Parent education and parent counseling, on the other hand, "are best left to counselors who possess the necessary expertise and who have additional time to donate."<sup>102</sup>

If the Lombana and Lombana model is used to again compare the Davis program to home-based reinforcement programs, it can be seen that the Davis program falls into the first and second areas of the Lombana triangle, those areas which rely primarily on communication between teachers and parents and which will respond to the needs of nearly all parents. The home-based reinforcement program, on the other hand, would fall into the third area of the triangle, parent education, and would hope through teaching parents techniques of behavior modification to reach those parents who need more effective ways to discipline and communicate with their children. The Lombana and Lombana model would seem to agree with Starr's belief that communication alone is sufficient "parent involvement" for the vast majority of parents and to suggest that a home-based reinforcement program would be an inappropriate means of parent involvement for all parents but should instead be reserved for approximately one of every five parents.

Both the Parent Involvement Continuum and the Lombana and Lombana triangle are useful for analyzing parent involvement practices in terms of the amounts and types of activity required by both parents and teachers and for determining what target population of parents is most likely to be affected.

A number of suggestions for parent involvement which are discovered in the literature are offered below. These suggestions are not given closer examination here because they may have been mentioned previously in this study, because they may have been given light treatment by the original author, or because they will be considered in more detail under the discussion of the Collins, Moles, and Cross work. In order to be included in the list, the parent involvement suggestion had to appear in one of the items from the bibliography printed at the end of this study. The list is presented here mainly in an attempt to show the vast number and variety of parent involvement practices available to schools:

Notes to parents (on general topics and to provide continuous feedback on programs); home school notebooks; homework sheets; class newsletters; class letters on curriculum projects; parent handbooks; good behavior or academic success awards ("happy grams"); telephone calls; in-person conferences; open house; tours of the school; classroom observations; parents' room; lending library; make and take workshop; parent bulletin board; new parent orientation; back to school nights; career days; home visits; workshops; training sessions; classes; lectures for parents; audiovisual presentations; group counseling; volunteer programs; parents teaching in the classroom; welcoming committees; contact through other parents; PTA meetings; gym shows; coffees; spaghetti dinners; potluck suppers; end-of-the-year picnics.

The Home-School Connection by Collins, Moles, and Cross bears careful examination since it is one of the only lengthy and thorough reports on existing parent-involvement practices in upper elementary and secondary levels (grades four through twelve). The report contains a discussion and synthesis of findings across twenty-eight home-school collaboration programs identified as being in operation during the 1980-81 school year in twenty-four of the most populous cities in the United States, site visit reports on seven of these programs, and profiles of all twenty-eight.

Large cities were selected for the study because large cities commonly have great numbers of students not achieving well in addition to low-income students and highly diversified populations; furthermore, it was assumed that large cities would have the resources to develop the innovative programs necessary to reach their populations. The criteria for selecting programs for study are as follows:

1. The program had been in operation for at least one year.
2. The program encouraged the utilization of parents as educators of their children, in contrast to parent involvement as classroom aides or on advisory committees.
3. The program included any of the grades four through twelve.
4. The program operated in at least two or more non-special schools.

Special attention was also given to programs which served a significant number of economically disadvantaged students or a significant number of students who were culturally and/or linguistically different from the mainstream population.

The authors describe the criteria used to select the seven programs for site visits as follows.

Three principal criteria guided the selection of these programs for site visits. The first was diversity of location, methods of working with parents, types of student behavior addressed, and conceptual orientation. The second criterion centered on the degree of promise the program held for the future. We looked for programs which have sustained themselves over a period of time, had reported some solid achievements, and appeared sufficiently viable to continue for some time. The third criterion was comprehensiveness. All things being equal, programs containing several activities or innovations rather than a single thrust were chosen.<sup>103</sup>

Of the twenty-eight programs studied, twenty-four have as a major goal academic achievement in reading and mathematics, while seventeen are seriously concerned about attendance, and fourteen with social development, including conduct, human relations, and self-concept. To involve parents, seventeen use workshops or classes, fifteen use individual conferences, and fifteen use home visits and telephone contact. Twenty-one programs seek to use parents in socializing roles, nineteen encourage parents to help plan their children's home and community educational experience, and eighteen expect parents to tutor their children at home. Obviously, some programs have multiple purposes and parent involvement methods.

Twelve of the twenty-eight programs involve parents of high school students and another ten reach to grades seven or eight, while only six are restricted to grades six and lower. Fourteen of the programs were targeted on low-income families, four on minorities, and ten on a broad range of families. Six received funding from only local sources, two received only state funding, and thirteen relied almost entirely on federal funds. Eighteen of the programs cost over \$100,000 per year.

The authors recognize a number of elements which seem to be characteristic of the successful programs studied. These common elements include the following:

1. Leadership at the district and school level seems to be actively committed to strengthening home-school relations. 104

Several authors refer to the importance of administrative support (Becker and Epstein, 1982; Mager, 1980; Lightfoot, 1978; Gordon and Breivogel, 1976), which is important to note since the survey and



2. Widespread support for the program exists among parents, teachers, businesses and other segments of the community. The utilization of a wide variety of resources found among these groups contributes to the development of a positive climate.
3. Appropriate training and orientation are given to staff members. Areas of special importance are human relations, cross-cultural relations, conferencing techniques, and career counseling.
4. Teachers and their representative organizations are included in the planning for the program.
5. Computers can be helpful in producing individual test scores, study prescriptions, educational requirements for jobs of interest, and other information for parents to use in counseling and instructing their children.
6. Participation by parents is voluntary. (The authors found no mandatory programs in their study.)
7. Accommodations are made for the diverse interests and circumstances of parents (i.e., evening and Saturday conferences, bilingual assistance, social services information, etc.).

---

interviews used in gathering the data for this present study concentrate on the views of secondary school principals concerning parent involvement practices. Starr offers this comment about administrators.

The beginning of an effective and efficient home-school partnership is to make sure that the administrator of the school is creating or has created an effective environment for a home-school partnership. This also means that all of the administration of the school must believe in the value and equality of parents and teachers working together. They must believe in the value of open communications concerning school curriculum and instruction taking place in the home. If this necessary environment setting is not available at the secondary school, it is my belief that the chances of a home-school partnership at this level are just about non-existent.

8. Students are not stigmatized as having academic or behavioral problems since the parents of all children are invited to participate.
9. The parents are respected as co-partners in the collaborative effort to improve student learning.

The authors suggest that the nine elements listed above should be kept in mind when schools attempt to establish effective parent involvement programs. The authors also promote the development of a comprehensive or "multi-stranded approach combining the features" of several programs since that combination may be "the most useful in meeting different parent, student and school needs. In such programs, parents can choose the level and nature of their involvement as it suits their needs and their children's needs." <sup>105</sup> The development of a comprehensive program, according to the authors, involves the following five strategies.

1. Needs Assessment: "Programs can focus on various concerns -- student achievement, behavior, attendance, career planning and others. Which to choose may depend on the availability of reliable indicators." <sup>106</sup> Examining achievement test results, grade distributions, absentee rates, and other significant areas of concern will help school officials determine which areas of student development a parent involvement program may best serve.

---

105

Collins, pg. 20.

106

Ibid, pg. 23.

2. Sources of Funding: Schools should consider investigating the possibility of receiving grants from businesses and foundations or developing creative strategies to accumulate the necessary funds.
3. Other Local Resources: The community involvement mentioned earlier as one of the elements of successful programs may be mobilized to provide the school with important resources without large costs. For example, using computers from local businesses during the evenings or weekends is a good example of a valuable community donation to parent involvement programs.
4. Program Implementation: "There are advantages to having a full-time program director...This creative, energetic and enthusiastic person -- inventor, seller and administrator in one -- would be ideal." <sup>107</sup> Parents and teachers should also be involved from the earliest stages of program development in order to win their support for program implementation.
5. Evaluation: "Studies of the processes of service delivery between school personnel and parents, and then between parents and their children, would be most informative...Studies of the effects on students are also needed to complete the picture and determine how well program goals are being attained." <sup>108</sup>

The authors list five objectives of comprehensive programs, each followed by a number of "activities" which are designed to achieve the objective. Three of these objectives emphasize the importance of

---

107

Ibid, pg. 25.

108

Ibid, pg. 25.

communication among teachers, parents, and students: (a) to establish channels for communication between schools and parents; (b) to exchange information and suggestions regularly to promote the progress of individuals (emphasis added); and (c) to maintain regular communication between parents and their children. The remaining two objectives focus on schools' giving help to parents or offering them advice on how to help their children be successful at school: (a) to make available educational resources and strategies for parents to use with their children; and (b) to provide auxiliary services for parents to support student learning.

Activities suggested to achieve the first three "communication" objectives include parent-teacher conferences, school-community coordinators to contact inactive parents, parent hotlines, open house, parents and students' working together on materials provided by the school, parents' providing a quiet place for study, parents' checking student homework, etc. Activities designed to achieve the last two objectives include parent workshops, offering tips for home activities to strengthen weak areas, supplying parents with career development profiles on their children, providing parents with their children's standardized tests scores, etc. The authors are not clear in this section of the report why areas of concern so similar to one another are divided to produce five objectives when two would have been sufficient; furthermore, dividing the activities of parent involvement programs among the five categories as the authors have done causes more confusion than clarification of objectives. For example, the use of parent workshops is an activity designed to achieve objective one -- to establish

channels for communication between schools and parents -- as well as objective five -- to provide auxiliary services for parents to support student learning. Does this mean that workshops should be used frequently since they are important in achieving communication or less frequently because they are only needed when more serious parent-child-school problems are encountered? Although the work of Collins, Moles, and Cross is tremendously helpful in providing the elements of successful programs and in offering an organized and intelligent set of strategies for developing comprehensive programs, the Parent Involvement Continuum of Cervone and O'Leary and the Lombana and Lombana Triangle are both more useful for examining parent-involvement practices and the targeted goals and audiences of those practices.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of Collins, Moles, and Cross is the detailed reports from the seven site visits and the profile reports of all studied programs since these reports offer a wealth of ideas for school staff members considering increasing their schools' parent involvement. Considering each of the twenty-eight programs in this study is surely inappropriate; however, examining one site visit report from a parent involvement program which addresses secondary school students and their parents will not only shed light on the types of programs being used on this level, but will also demonstrate the organizational structure for studying parent involvement programs which inspired the format for reporting data gathered in the interviews of this investigation.

The authors divide their reports into the following twelve sections.

1. Program Definition
2. Rationale
3. Focus
4. Objectives
5. Program Implementation
6. Facilities Required
7. Personnel and Training Required
8. Costs
9. Organizational Support
10. Findings To Date
11. Supports And Barriers To Program Implementation
12. Transferability

Three of the seven site visits have relevance to secondary schools: The Home Study Program of New Orleans, The Parent Partnership Program of Philadelphia, and Operation Fail-Safe of Houston. For purposes of demonstrating the Collins, Moles, and Cross approach, the Houston site visit report has been reprinted in its entirety with permission of the authors in Appendix B; it should be noted, however, that these other two site visits along with several profile visits merit close attention by anyone considering parent involvement programs appropriate for a secondary level.

A synthesis of the literature on the current state of parent involvement practices follows.

1. Educators agree that involving parents in children's education is a good idea, but not many schools have established comprehensive parent involvement programs. Furthermore, even

less has been accomplished in involving parents of secondary students.

2. Evidence indicates that parent education programs can help to change parent behaviors and attitudes, that these changes in parents positively affect children, and that these changes remain over time.
3. Behavior modification and home-based reinforcement programs have been proven to be effective at improving academic performance and disruptive school behaviors for a wide range of grade levels, classroom situations, and student behaviors.
4. Developers of parent involvement programs frequently stress the importance of simply establishing good communication between school personnel and parents. In fact, for some programs involvement is synonymous with communication.
5. Models like the "Parent Involvement Continuum" and the Lombana Triangle are useful tools for examining parent involvement practices to determine (a) the amount of involvement required of the parents, (b) the population of parents and students practices are likely to affect, and (c) the amount of time and expertise that is required of school personnel.
6. According to an extensive study by Collins, Moles, and Cross, characteristics of successful parent involvement programs in upper elementary and secondary levels include committed leadership, widespread support, appropriate training of staff, teacher input, computer assistance, voluntary parent participation, accommodations for diversity of parents,

invitations for universal participation, and respect for parents as co-partners.

Researchers who have examined the effect of parents on children's motivation and performance in school inform educators that parents exert a tremendous influence on their children, whether or not they intend to exert such an influence and regardless of the quality of their relationship with their children. Researchers who have examined the relationship between parents and schools depict a complex relationship that is more often than not adversarial and unproductive. And researchers who have studied the current state of parent involvement practices designed to bridge the chasm had until recently held out only a few promising examples of effective parent-school cooperation on an elementary level and offered even less hope to secondary school educators.

Collins, Moles, and Cross end the introductory portion of their work with an encouragement to conduct further investigation of parent involvement programs:

Home-school collaboration in the upper grades is a relatively new phenomenon on the scale uncovered in this survey, but judging by the account of inquiries and actual adoptions of techniques and strategies by other school systems the area is definitely expanding. This is an exciting area with a rich variety of new, creative programmatic approaches. Now is the time to learn as much as possible about them so as to help others who are thinking and planning along similar lines.<sup>109</sup>

It is hoped that the present analysis of parent involvement practices used in Catholic secondary schools will make a contribution to that learning.

---

109

Ibid, pg. 28.



## CHAPTER III

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study is to analyze the parent involvement programs used in Catholic secondary schools which are designed to produce successful academic performance by students. With the review of related literature in Chapter II as a backdrop, the data collected for this purpose can now take center stage. First, however, it is helpful to review the major questions which guide this study.

1. Which areas of parent responsibility do principals of Catholic secondary schools consider significant to student academic performance?
2. What is the frequency in Catholic secondary schools of programs to encourage parent responsibility in these areas?
3. What are the principals' assessments of their programs for encouraging parent involvement?
4. What means of measurement do the principals use when rating the effectiveness of parent involvement programs?
5. What characteristics of parent involvement programs do principals consider most significant for achieving parent involvement?
6. According to these principals, what areas of parent involvement need further development?

The data presented and analyzed below were collected through a survey of the principals of the Catholic secondary schools in the

Chicago Archdiocese and through interviews of seven of these principals. The presentation and analysis of data are offered in two sections, one of which concerns the results of the survey and the other the results of the interviews.

Survey of Principals of Catholic  
Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago

A survey entitled "Parent Involvement Questionnaire" was sent to all the principals of the fifty-nine Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the nation's largest Catholic diocese. Forty-nine principals, 83% of the total, responded to the survey. Some characteristics of these principals and their schools are provided below.

1. Nineteen (39%) of the principals are male members of religious orders, and twenty-six (53%) are female members of religious orders; of the four principals who are not members of religious orders, three (6%) are males, and one (2%) a female.
2. Twenty-one (43%) of the forty-nine schools have student populations which are all-female, nineteen (39%) have all-male student bodies, and nine (18%) are coeducational. Two of the all-male schools are preparatory seminaries.
3. The average student population of the forty-nine schools is 876. Thirteen (26%) of the schools have student populations under 500 students, twenty (41%) have populations which range from 500 to 1,000, and sixteen (33%) have populations over 1,000.
4. The all-female schools have student populations which range from 108 (the smallest school in the sample) to 2,070 and average 833 students; the all-male schools have student populations which range from 259 to 2,648 (the largest school in the sample) and average 1,011; and the coeducational schools have populations which range from 300 to 1,467 and average 695.

5. The schools whose principals responded to the survey are primarily located in the Chicago metropolitan area. These schools serve students from a wide range of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Because these schools charge tuitions of \$1,000 or more, the assumption might be made that they service only families who can afford this expense; however, both the schools themselves and the Archdiocese offer financial assistance to needy families.

The "Parent Involvement Questionnaire" was created for the purpose of this study. Drafts of the instrument were presented to four Catholic secondary school administrators (two principals and two assistant principals) and three professors of educational administration; their suggestions for improvement were incorporated into the survey sent to the fifty-nine principals.

The survey is divided into four parts. In Part One, the principals are asked to rate the significance of twelve factors in determining the academic success of students by circling "S" for SIGNIFICANT, "N" for NOT SIGNIFICANT, or "?" for NO OPINION. In Part Two, they are asked to indicate if their schools provide formal programs for accomplishing twelve tasks which directly correspond to the twelve factors listed in Part One by circling "YES" or "NO." In Part Three, the principals are asked to rate their schools' parent involvement programs in terms of their effectiveness in fostering successful academic performance by students; the principals were provided a five point scale for this purpose. Those principals who indicate that they do not have a program in an area under consideration are asked to indicate whether or not

they desire the development and implementation of a program by circling "NN" for NO NEED or "D" for DESIRED. Part Four of the survey allows principals to offer comments or make suggestions about parent involvement in secondary schools.

The twelve areas of parent responsibility and involvement examined in the survey are suggested by the review of related literature. Although other areas could have been included, an attempt was made to keep the survey brief as well as thorough. Furthermore, data collected in the interviews are not restricted to these twelve areas, so it is hoped that any meaningful area of parent involvement not examined in the survey is discussed in the presentation and analysis of the interview data.

#### Presentation of Survey Data

##### PART ONE: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARENT'S ROLE IN THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS

Please rate the significance of the following factors in determining the academic success of students. Circle "S" for SIGNIFICANT, "N" for NOT SIGNIFICANT, "?" for NO OPINION.

1. Parents' possessing an understanding of the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	90%	6%	2%	2%
#	44	3	1	1

2. Parents' possessing an understanding of their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	86%	10%	0%	4%
#	42	5	0	2

3. Parents' possessing an understanding of occupational and post-secondary educational opportunities and requirements.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	74%	22%	2%	2%
#	36	11	1	1

4. Parents' setting high academic achievement levels for their children.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	80%	12%	4%	4%
#	39	6	2	2

5. Parents' setting high educational and occupational aspiration levels for their children.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	76%	18%	2%	4%
#	37	9	1	2

6. Parents' regularly communicating with school staff members to monitor their children's progress.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	82%	8%	4%	6%
#	40	4	2	3

7. Parents' initiating communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect academic performance.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	80%	8%	8%	4%
#	39	4	4	2

8. Parents' supporting school staff members in child-school conflicts.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	80%	8%	8%	4%
#	39	4	4	2

9. Parents' providing a proper study atmosphere in the home.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	86%	8%	4%	2%
#	42	4	2	1

10. Parents' supervising their children's homework performance.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	74%	14%	10%	2%
#	36	7	5	1

11. Parents' assisting with their children's homework.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	22%	45%	25%	8%
#	11	22	12	4

12. Parents' seeking educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school.

	S	N	?	NO RESPONSE
%	61%	25%	12%	2%
#	30	12	6	1

PART TWO: EXISTENCE OF YOUR SCHOOL'S PROGRAMS  
TO PROMOTE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Indicate if your school provides a formal program for accomplishing the following.

DOES YOUR SCHOOL PROVIDE A FORMAL PROGRAM:

1. For informing all parents about the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	86%	6%	8%
#	42	3	4

2. For informing all parents about their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	78%	14%	8%
#	38	7	4

3. For informing all parents about occupational and post-secondary educational requirements and opportunities?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	55%	37%	8%
#	27	18	4

4. For encouraging all parents to set high academic achievement levels for their children?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	47%	45%	8%
#	23	22	4



5. For encouraging all parents to set high educational and occupational levels for their children?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	39%	53%	8%
#	19	26	4

6. For encouraging all parents to regularly communicate with school staff members to monitor their children's progress?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	80%	12%	8%
#	39	6	4

7. For encouraging all parents to initiate communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect their children's academic performance?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	70%	22%	8%
#	34	11	4

8. For encouraging all parents to support school staff members in child-school conflicts?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	55%	35%	10%
#	27	17	5

9. For encouraging all parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	43%	49%	8%
#	21	24	4

10. For encouraging all parents to supervise their children's homework?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	37%	55%	8%
#	18	27	4

11. For encouraging all parents to assist with their children's homework?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	10%	82%	8%
#	5	40	4

12. For encouraging all parents to seek educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school?

	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
%	27%	65%	8%
#	13	32	4

PART THREE: YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS  
OF YOUR SCHOOL'S INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

For the following items, rate your school's parent involvement programs in terms of their effectiveness in fostering the successful academic performance of students. In the scale, 5 indicates "very effective" and 1 indicates "not effective." If your school does not have a program in the area specified, answer "NN" if you believe there is "no need" for such a program or "D" if you believe a program in the area would be "desirable." (Answers were considered invalid if the respondent indicated "NO" for a program area in Part II but gave a rating for this same area in Part III. It should be noted that percentage totals for some items are less than 100% because percentage points were sometimes lost when percentages were rounded off to the nearest whole number.)

1. Your formal program for informing all parents about the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	14%	53%	16%	0%	0%	2%	4%	4%	6%
#	7	26	8	0	0	1	2	2	3

2. Your formal program for informing all parents about their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	16%	43%	14%	2%	0%	0%	12%	4%	8%
#	8	21	7	1	0	0	6	2	4

3. Your formal program for informing all parents about occupational and post-secondary educational requirements and opportunities.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	12%	27%	12%	2%	0%	14%	12%	4%	16%
#	6	13	6	1	0	7	6	2	8

4. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to set high academic achievement levels for their children.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	8%	20%	18%	0%	0%	12%	24%	4%	12%
#	4	10	9	0	0	6	12	2	6

5. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to set high educational and occupational aspiration levels for their children.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	8%	10%	16%	0%	0%	12%	29%	4%	20%
#	4	5	8	0	0	6	14	2	10

6. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to regularly communicate with school staff members to monitor their children's academic progress.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	6%	47%	22%	2%	0%	4%	6%	4%	8%
#	3	23	11	1	0	2	3	2	4

7. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to initiate communication with school staff members to inform them about home or personal problems which might affect their children's academic performance.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	8%	22%	27%	8%	0%	6%	12%	6%	10%
#	4	11	13	4	0	3	6	3	5

8. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to support school staff members in child-school conflicts.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	6%	29%	14%	6%	0%	16%	12%	8%	8%
#	3	14	7	3	0	8	6	4	4

9. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	8%	14%	12%	4%	0%	12%	29%	8%	12%
#	4	7	6	2	0	6	14	4	6

10. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to supervise their children's homework.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	4%	12%	18%	2%	0%	22%	22%	6%	12%
#	2	6	9	1	0	11	11	3	6

11. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to assist their children with homework.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	0%	4%	6%	0%	0%	53%	16%	6%	14%
#	0	2	3	0	0	26	8	3	7

12. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to seek educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school.

	5	4	3	2	1	NN	D	NO RESP	INVALID
%	2%	4%	16%	2%	0%	29%	29%	6%	12%
#	1	2	8	1	0	14	14	3	6

#### PART FOUR: YOUR COMMENTS

This section of the survey is optional and is provided so that you may offer information about your feelings about the significance of the role of parents, the possibilities of school programs to encourage a school-parent partnership, specific information about your school's programs, or any other information you think may be helpful in a discussion of the relationship among schools, parents, and the successful academic performance of secondary school students. (Each principal's comments are set off by ">" and may have been abridged.)

> Was confused by what you meant by "formal program."

> Most of the items in Part Two and Part Three are handled informally.  
Parental interest is minimal.

> Our parent "programs" are not really formalized programs on paper. They flow from our recognition of the importance and significance of parent involvement. The primary means of communication with parents is the literature we send via the administrative office (regular parent newsletter -- 6 per year; student parent handbook; College Night/Career Night Brochure; Parent Night In School). The staff persons who implement our programs with parents are the Department of Student Services staff, our Dean of Students, Mothers Club Moderator, Fathers Club Moderator, and administrative and office staffs. The teacher role is a participative role and is required to be so via the faculty handbook.

> At this point we have no formal programs for parents. Once a year we have parents come to school to go through their daughter's schedule -- they meet teachers, learn about requirements for a particular course, homework expectations, etc.

Standardized test scores are sent home to parents with an explanation of scores.

Teachers are encouraged to contact parents concerning student progress -- both academic and behavioral. Many teachers hold parent conferences as the need arises.

Parents receive student handbooks and are asked to sign a letter indicating that they have read over the policies and procedures.

Monthly parent letters are sent out. Information in these includes

calendar updates, requirements for NHS, new policies or procedural changes, etc.

In the past we have held parent meetings at which school finances were explained, programs in which speakers discussed the curriculum and self-scheduling, adolescent behavior, teens and alcohol. After these meetings parents received their daughters' report cards.

We are looking for some kind of program(s) to help parents understand the adolescent years and to give them skills in dealing with behaviors that arise during these years of high school.

> Our programs are not entirely separate entities but are addressed in regularly scheduled meetings with parents at various levels. There are presently individual conferences with teachers as well as group gatherings which deal with all the areas you are investigating. Complete presentations of all that is expected academically are made to all parents. Written material is also presented with the oral. We find a significant advantage is gained when our expectations are clearly presented.

> Those programs marked "NN" were so marked because of the parents' failures to respond to those lines of communication which had been offered to them.

> Our school puts a copy of its handbook into the hands of each student and each parent at the beginning of the school year. We hope the perusal of the book will give each parent and student a real understanding of the "school's curriculum, rules, and procedures." Then we promote the educational advantages our school has to offer by means of bulletins and letters which call special attention to the cultural

activities and extra-curricular programs provided to enrich the academic program.

In response to a survey much like yours some time ago, we arrived at the following observations:

1. In trying to reach the parents of our students, our greatest handicap is the language barrier. Communication efforts through translators, counselors, and bilingual tutors have all failed to secure the cooperation of parents whose children do not respond to our efforts.
  2. Many of our parents are employed and because of their work do not communicate with their children for days at a time. Our appeals to older brothers and sisters who graduated from our school have not been successful in establishing an approach to parents.
  3. Since the students of our school come from 115 parishes in the city, distance is also a major factor in our failure to successfully communicate with parents.
- > We have no school-parent partnership because
1. Parents do not speak English;
  2. Parents live quite a distance from the school;
  3. Fathers work nights, and mothers are not permitted to go out freely;
  4. Parents have great confidence in the school;
  5. Most parents, especially the mothers, have had very little schooling in Mexico.
- > Our parent involvement at present consists of
1. Registration for incoming freshmen;



2. Letter to parent in summer -- informational;
3. Letter to parents with student handbook requesting that they read and sign it;
4. Required conference with homeroom teacher to get first quarter report card;
5. "Good News" letter to parents during the year;
6. Letter to parents about service of school social worker;
7. Mothers/Fathers Club activities;
8. Parent education evenings offered several times a year on topics of interest.

Often parents most in need of communication are least willing to "get involved."

> There is a great need for providing school programs to inform and interest parents in the work and academic progress of their children. Unfortunately this takes time and finances. Principals are so overloaded that even though they realize this type of program would greatly enhance the rapport between school and home, their hands are tied. I hope to develop a much more effective parent program for the coming year.

> It has been our consistent experience that when students are having significant difficulty in studies and/or discipline, particularly when they have to be expelled for those reasons, there is usually only one parent and limited or no parental supervision. The parent is usually a non-participant in school sponsored activities for parents.

> I consider parents' cooperation extremely important. I feel their interest and concern really makes the difference in whether a student is

properly motivated.

> Students who have interested parents seem to have more chance for success, more motivation, and more support when faltering.

> Since our school is a seminary high school where young men are encouraged to look at the question of priesthood, I see parent involvement as absolutely crucial. In our three-to-five year plan to increase the number of students going on to the college seminary, we identify parents as a major group of people to be involved with.

We have begun a number of programs to help parents understand their role in encouraging and fostering vocations. We make an effort to meet with each of the families of our students to explore their part in this responsibility.

Academically we are involved primarily with parents whose sons are having academic difficulty in the school. Any boy who is on academic probation must come in with his parents to develop an agreement which would set down guidelines for the boy's improvement. The student, his parents, the student's counselor, and I meet to discuss what is causing his poor performance and to plan how that poor performance might be improved. As part of this conference, many times the parents offer insights and decide on things that they too must change in order to help their son's improvement.

I am convinced the area you are exploring is crucially important. We need to pin down more specifically the variables that do affect students' performance. Certainly parents somehow affect this.

> We have a Parent-Faculty Newsletter that is published by our parents four times a year, and the material presented is written by the

administration and faculty only. It keeps the parents up on what is going on in academics, discipline, sports, and activities.

We send out deficiency forms during the fifth week of every quarter to inform parents about their child's progress. We have parents come in for their first report card, and we write to them to tell them when the others should be expected (report cards after the first quarter are given to students).

We have staffings when students are failing. We also ask teachers to have phone interviews with parents. This isn't perfection, but we do notice an improvement in student attitudes.

We plan to have all parents and students sign a contract next year which will say that they understand the student must study at least one hour a day.

I really think we need to be able to get to the parents more, but most of our parents are not educated themselves and are afraid.

> Faculty members share in the responsibility for helping students plan course sequences. As of now these same "advisors" meet with parents to discuss the academic progress of students.

> Printed in the school handbook is the statement, "Our school assists the parents in the education of their daughters." I believe without parental cooperation successful high school experiences cannot be achieved.

#### Analysis of Survey Data

The responses of the principals to Part One of the survey offer an answer to the question, "Which areas of parent responsibility do principals of Catholic secondary schools consider significant to student

academic performance?" The twelve areas of parent responsibility can be ranked according to the percentage of principals who indicate the area of parent responsibility is significant. These percentages are presented behind each item.

Rank	Area of Responsibility
1	Parents' possessing an understanding of the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures. (90%)
2	Parents' possessing an understanding of their children's academic ability and achievement levels. (86%)
2	Parents' providing a proper home study atmosphere. (86%)
4	Parents' regularly communicating with school to monitor their children's progress. (82%)
5	Parents' setting high academic achievement levels for their children. (80%)
5	Parents' initiating communication about problems which might affect performance. (80%)
5	Parents' supporting school staff members in conflicts. (80%)
8	Parents' setting high educational and occupational aspiration levels. (76%)
9	Parents' possessing an understanding of occupational and post-secondary opportunities and requirements. (74%)
9	Parents' supervising homework. (74%)
11	Parents' seeking educational experiences beyond those provided by the school. (61%)
12	Parents' assisting their children with homework. (22%)

The first and most obvious conclusion which can be drawn from the responses on Part One of the survey is that a substantial percentage (74 to 90%) of the respondents believe that ten of the twelve considered areas of parent responsibility are significant to student academic performance. Furthermore, these ten areas are not restricted to a single type of parent responsibility. For example, areas ranked one through five and considered significant by 80% or more of the respondents call for parental knowledge, a proper home environment, the establishment of high aspirations, and communication with and support of school staff members. The vast majority of these principals seem to believe, then, that the parent's role is significant in the determination of the academic success of students and that parents manifest their effect on children's school work through a number of channels.

As a group, these principals want parents to possess understanding of the schools (90%), their children's ability and achievement (86%), and the possibilities for their children's future (74%). They want parents to set high standards for their children, both in high school (80%) and beyond (76%). They want parents to communicate with their staffs to monitor their children's progress (82%) and to explain problems which might affect their children's performance (80%). They want parents to support their staffs when conflicts arise (80)%. They want parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home (86%) and to supervise homework (74%), but do not believe it is necessary for parents to actually help their children with homework (22%). Finally, a lesser majority (61%) want parents to seek educational experiences beyond those

provided by the school.

Part Two of the survey responds to the question, "What is the frequency in Catholic secondary schools of programs to encourage parent responsibility in these areas?" The frequency of parent involvement programs can be examined by ranking these program areas according to the percentage of principals who respond that such programs exist in their schools. These percentages are presented behind each item.

Rank	Existing Programs
1	Programs for informing all parents about the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures. (86%)
2	Programs for encouraging all parents to regularly communicate with school staff members to monitor their children's progress. (80%)
3	Programs for informing all parents about their children's academic ability and achievement as measured by standardized tests. (78%)
4	Programs for encouraging all parents to initiate communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect their children's academic performance. (70%)
5	Programs for informing all parents about occupational and post-secondary educational requirements and opportunities. (55%)
6	Programs for encouraging all parents to support school staff members in child-school conflicts. (55%)

- 7 Programs for encouraging all parents to set high academic achievement levels for their children. (47%)
- 8 Programs for encouraging all parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home. (43%)
- 9 Programs for encouraging all parents to set high educational and occupational levels for their children. (39%)
- 10 Programs for encouraging all parents to supervise their children's homework. (37%)
- 11 Programs for encouraging all parents to seek educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school. (27%)
- 12 Programs for encouraging all parents to assist with their children's homework. (10%)

In each of the twelve areas considered, the percentage of principals who indicate their schools have parent involvement programs is less than the percentage of principals who consider parent responsibility in corresponding areas to be significant. This difference ranges from a low of 2% (82% of the principals rate parent communication to monitor progress significant, and 80% of the principals indicate their schools have programs to foster this communication) to a high of 43% (86% rate parents' providing a proper home study atmosphere as significant, but only 43% indicate the existence of school programs to encourage this behavior). Since each area considered in the survey will be examined in some detail later, it is unnecessary to make a lengthy comparison of Part One to Part Two at this time. It is appropriate, however, to conclude that there is a disparity between the

number of principals who believe parent responsibility is significant and the number of programs in their schools to encourage such responsibility.

Part Three of the survey addresses the question, "What are the principals' assessments of their programs for encouraging parent involvement?" Very few principals rate their existing parent involvement programs with 1 or 2, the low end of the effectiveness scale. In fact, by comparing the percentage of principals who indicate the existence of parent involvement programs to the percentage who rate their program 3, 4, or 5, it can be seen that most principals find their existing parent involvement programs to be at least moderately effective, assuming that the middle of the effectiveness scale indicates moderate effectiveness.

Program Area	% Which Indicate Existing Program	% Which Rank Program 3, 4, or 5
1. Informing parents about school's curriculum, etc.	86%	83%
2. Informing parents about children's academic ability, etc.	78%	73%
3. Informing parents about post-secondary opportunities.	55%	51%
4. Encouraging parents to set high academic achievement levels.	47%	46%
5. Encouraging parents to set high aspiration levels.	39%	34%
6. Encouraging parents to communicate about student progress.	80%	75%



Program Area	% Which Indicate Existing Program	% Which Rank Program 3, 4, or 5
7. Encouraging parents to communicate about home problems.	70%	57%
8. Encouraging parents to support school in conflicts.	55%	49%
9. Encouraging parents to provide a proper home study atmosphere.	43%	34%
10. Encouraging parents to supervise homework.	37%	34%
11. Encouraging parents to assist with homework.	10%	10%
12. Encouraging parents to seek education beyond school.	27%	22%

Assuming that principals who rate programs as either 4 or 5 (the high end of the effectiveness scale) believe their programs are highly effective, it is possible to rank the parent involvement programs on the basis of the percentage of principals who assess their programs as highly effective (i.e., 4 or 5). It should be noted that specific programs are not being ranked here; instead, the ranking indicates the frequency with which areas of parent involvement are being addressed through programs rated highly effective.

Rank	Parent Involvement Programs
1	Informing parents about the school's curriculum, etc. (67%)
2	Informing parents about children's ability, etc. (59%)
3	Encouraging parents to communicate about progress. (53%)

Rank	Parent Involvement Program
4	Informing parents about post-secondary opportunities, etc. (39%)
5	Encouraging parents to support school in conflicts. (35%)
6	Encouraging parents to communicate about problems. (30%)
7	Encouraging parents to set high achievement levels. (28%)
8	Encouraging parents to provide home study atmosphere. (22%)
9	Encouraging parents to set high aspirations. (18%)
10	Encouraging parents to supervise homework. (16%)
11	Encouraging parents to seek education beyond school. (6%)
12	Encouraging parents to assist with homework. (4%)

The contrast between the number of principals who believe parent involvement is significant to student academic performance and the number of programs which exist to promote that involvement is made even more dramatic when only programs rated highly effective are considered. Before examining each of the twelve areas in detail, it will be beneficial to first look at other data provided by Part Three of the survey.

By considering the responses to the categories "Desired" and "No Need," at least a partial answer can be provided to the question, "According to principals of Catholic secondary schools, what areas of parent involvement need further development?" The parent involvement programs below are ranked according to the percentage of principals who indicate a desire for the development and implementation of such programs.

Rank	Programs Desired
1	Program for encouraging parents to set high aspiration levels. (29%)
1	Programs for encouraging parents to provide a proper home study atmosphere. (29%)
1	Programs for encouraging parents to seek education beyond the school. (29%)
4	Programs for encouraging parents to set high achievement levels. (24%)
5	Programs for encouraging parents to supervise homework. (22%)
6	Programs for encouraging parents to assist with homework. (16%)
7	Programs for informing parents about their children's academic ability and achievement. (12%)
7	Programs for informing parents about post-secondary opportunities. (12%)
7	Programs for encouraging parents to communicate about problems. (12%)
7	Programs for encouraging parents to support school in conflicts. (12%)
11	Programs for encouraging parents to communicate to monitor progress. (6%)
12	Programs for informing parents about the school's curriculum, etc. (4%)

The programs listed below are ranked according to the percentage of principals who feel there is no need for the development of a parent involvement program in these areas.

Rank	Programs Not Needed
1	Programs for encouraging parents to assist with homework. (53%)
2	Programs for encouraging parents to seek education beyond school. (29%)
3	Programs for encouraging parents to supervise homework. (22%)
4	Programs for encouraging parents to support school in conflicts. (16%)
5	Programs for informing parents about post-secondary opportunities. (14%)
6	Programs for encouraging parents to set high achievement levels. (12%)
6	Programs for encouraging parents to set high aspiration levels. (12%)
6	Programs for encouraging parents to provide a proper home study atmosphere. (12%)
9	Programs for encouraging parents to communicate about problems. (6%)
10	Programs for encouraging parents to communicate about progress. (4%)
11	Programs for informing parents about the school's curriculum, etc. (2%)
12	Programs for informing parents about children's ability. (0%)

Each area of parent responsibility and involvement can now be reviewed by comparing information gleaned from Parts One, Two, and Three of the survey.

1. 90% of the principals believe that parents' possessing an understanding of the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures is a significant factor in determining the academic success of students. 86% have programs to promote this understanding, and 67% rate their programs highly effective for this purpose. 4% indicate a desire for such programs, and 2% believe such programs are not needed.
2. 86% believe that parents' possessing an understanding of their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests is significant; 78% have programs to promote this understanding, and 59% rate their programs highly effective. 12% desire while none see no need for such programs.
3. 74% believe that parents' possessing an understanding of occupational and post-secondary educational opportunities and requirements is significant; 55% have programs to promote this understanding, and 39% rate their programs highly effective. 12% desire while 14% see no need for such programs.
4. 80% believe that parents setting high academic achievement levels for their children is significant; 47% have programs to encourage this parental behavior, and 28% rate their programs highly effective. 24% desire while 12% see no need for such programs.

5. 76% believe that parents' setting high educational and occupational aspiration levels for their children is significant; 39% have programs to encourage this behavior, and 18% rate their programs highly effective. 29% desire while 12% see no need for such programs.
6. 82% believe that parents' regularly communicating with school staff members to monitor their children's progress is significant; 80% have programs to encourage this behavior, and 53% rate their programs highly effective. 6% desire while 4% see no need for such programs.
7. 80% believe that parents' initiating communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect academic performance is significant 70% have programs to encourage this behavior; 30% rate their programs highly effective. 12% desire while 6% see no need for such programs.
8. 80% believe parents' supporting school staff members in child-school conflicts is significant; 55% have programs to encourage this behavior; 35% rate their programs highly effective. 12% desire while 16% see no need for such programs.
9. 86% believe that parents' providing a proper study atmosphere in the home is significant; 43% have programs to encourage this behavior; 22% rate their programs highly effective. 29% desire while 12% see no need for such programs.
10. 74% believe parents' supervising their children's homework performance is significant; 37% have programs to encourage this

behavior, and 16% rate their programs highly effective. 22% desire while 22% see no need for such programs.

11. 22% believe that parents assisting with their children's homework is significant; 10% have programs which encourage this behavior, and 4% rate their programs highly effective. 16% desire while 53% see no need for such programs.
12. 61% believe that parents' seeking educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school is significant; 27% have programs to encourage this behavior, and 6% rate their programs highly effective. 29% desire while 29% see no need for such programs.

From the review of each area presented above, the following summary statements can be made.

1. A substantial percentage of principals (81% average) believe that parent involvement in the first ten areas listed is a significant factor in the determination of the academic success of children.
2. Although parent involvement programs exist in the schools in all twelve areas, the number of programs in each area is in every case less than the number of principals who believe the area is significant, and in some cases the disparity is quite large. In nine of the twelve areas, the difference is ten or more percentage points, and in six the difference is greater than twenty percentage points.
3. Few principals rate their parent involvement programs highly effective. In only three areas do over 50% of the principals

rate their programs either 4 or 5. In fact, even with the elimination of the two areas judged least significant -- areas 11 and 12 -- the average percentage of principals who rate their programs highly effective is 38%, which can be compared to the 59% who indicate their schools have programs and 81% who believe these areas are significant.

4. Principals indicate that their schools are more effective at communicating with parents than they are at manipulating parent behaviors. The three most highly rated program areas are (a) informing parents about curriculum, rules, and procedures (67%); (b) informing parents about their children's academic ability and achievement levels (59%); and (c) encouraging parents to regularly communicate with school staff members to monitor their children's progress (53%). This last area is different than the other two in that it assumes that parents will initiate the contact, yet it is similar to the others in that it concerns information possessed by schools and disseminated to parents. On the other hand, of the top ten areas, the areas which have the smallest percentages of highly effective programs are (a) encouraging parents to supervise their children's homework (16%); (b) encouraging parents to set high educational and occupational aspiration levels (18%); and (c) encouraging parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home (22%). What these three areas have in common is that they call on the school to convince the parent to behave in a certain way, and it would seem from the ratings offered by the principals that



programs designed to affect behavior fall short of their intended goals.

5. Principals agree with Kahl and other social scientists that parents affect their children's academic performance by setting high academic achievement levels and high educational and occupational aspiration levels. However, for the most part these principals have been unable to create highly effective programs for encouraging parents to accomplish this task. Furthermore, programs in these two areas are among those desired by the largest number of principals whose schools currently have no programs for these purposes.
6. Principals want parents to establish a proper home environment for study and to supervise their children's homework; however, most have been unable to establish highly effective programs to accomplish this learning in the home. Programs in these areas are also among those most frequently desired by principals whose schools do not have such programs.

What emerges from the analysis of the survey data is an image of principals who want to involve parents in the education of their children because they are convinced that this involvement is a significant factor in achieving student success, but who find that developing and implementing programs which effectively accomplish that involvement is not an easy task. Through their comments in Part Four of the survey, the principals themselves describe a number of barriers to involving parents. Presented below is a list of such obstacles gleaned from the principals' comments; it should not be assumed, however, that

these items offer an exhaustive presentation of parent involvement barriers. Difficulty in achieving parent involvement will also be carefully considered in the presentation and analysis of interview data.

1. Parents are indifferent to school communications.
2. Parents work so many hours that they have little time or are too exhausted to be involved with schools.
3. Parents' native language is not English and few staff members are bilingual.
4. Parents live in areas which are not safe so they are unwilling to leave their homes at night to travel to schools.
5. Parents live distances from schools which make travelling to schools too difficult.
6. Parents are not well educated themselves and do not feel comfortable in school settings or competent to be involved in their children's schooling.
7. Parents trust the school to educate their children and feel that their involvement is unnecessary.
8. Those parents who could most benefit from involvement with schools are least willing to be involved because they do not value education for themselves or their children.
9. Home and personal problems, like divorce, for example, place hardships on parents which make their involvement with schools more difficult and perhaps less of a priority in their lives.
10. Principals are too overworked to give the time and energy necessary to develop and implement parent involvement programs.

Given the number of obstacles perceived by the principals along with information provided in Chapter II which indicates the existence of serious rifts between schools and homes, it is to the principals' credit that so many have established programs and that so many of these programs can be rated at least moderately successful. The greatest difficulty in establishing a comprehensive parent program which ministers to all the areas of parent involvement principals believe are significant seems to be making programs highly effective rather than moderately effective. This increase in program effectiveness might mean (a) reaching those parents who are most frequently and seriously blocked from involvement by obstacles like those listed above, and (b) designing programs which modify parent behavior rather than ones which simply communicate with parents.

Interviews of Administrators of Seven Catholic  
Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago

The purposes of the interview portion of this study are to (a) expand on information provided by the survey; (b) gather more specific and detailed information about parent involvement programs used in Catholic secondary schools; (c) examine the means of assessment principals use when evaluating their parent involvement programs; (d) study the common characteristics of parent involvement programs which principals consider most significant for achieving effective parent involvement; and (e) consider school characteristics which might have an impact on the development, implementation, or effectiveness of parent involvement programs.

In determining both the amount of schools and the specific schools to be examined by the interview process, the following criteria were used:

1. The selected schools should have parent involvement programs with high assessments from their principals relative to other surveyed schools.
2. The selected schools should provide a sufficient diversity of size, type (i.e., all-male, all-female, and coeducational), location, and racial and ethnic composition of students to adequately represent the Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago.
3. The principals of the selected schools must be willing and available to discuss at length their schools' parent involvement programs.

The first two criteria are considered of equal importance, and it has been necessary in the final selection of schools to compromise by foregoing an examination of all the most highly rated schools in order to achieve appropriate diversity.

By adding the points principals awarded their schools' parent involvement programs in Part Three of the survey, it is possible to produce an "effectiveness score" by which schools can be compared. There is obviously no statistical merit to such a score; it serves only the purpose of screening schools for the selection of interview subjects. If a principal had awarded the maximum rating of 5 to programs in all twelve areas considered on the survey, the school would receive an effectiveness score of 60 points. No school received this maximum however, the highest total of 54 points is not far off this mark.

The school with the highest total is an all-black, all-female school of 750 students, located within the Chicago city limits. The school with the second highest total at 52 is an all-male school of 1,000 students, 60% of whom are from suburban homes. In an attempt to match these schools with similar schools but with student populations of the opposite sex, an all-black, all-male school of 743 students, located in the city was selected along with an all-female school of 2,000 students 60% of whom are from suburban homes. The all-black, all-male school has an effectiveness score of 20, and the all-female suburban school has an effectiveness score of 37. Although the all-black, all-male institution has an effectiveness score below the 24 point average for the forty-nine surveyed schools, the school has been selected

because it so closely matches the number one school on the scale and because something can be learned from the comparison of schools of such similar circumstances and such different scores. Because the Archdiocese contains a number of coeducational schools, it seems appropriate to select one of these schools for further study. Unfortunately, among the coeducational schools no school has an above average effectiveness score; in fact, the average for coeducational schools is 15 compared to the forty-nine school average of 24. Among the highest totals of the coeducational schools is the score of 25, from an institution of 600 students in the northern section of the city. For many years, this school had been considered a "parish" high school (i.e., students are drawn from the school's immediate area). Although the student population once consisted almost entirely of children of German descent, the current student body is approximately 20% Hispanic and 80% mixed European. To match this selected school, a coeducational school was selected from the southern section of the city. This school has a population of 305 students, 55% of whom are Hispanic. This second coeducational institution has an effectiveness score of 16, one above the coeducational school average. Finally, since the Archdiocese contains two preparatory seminaries, the one with the highest effectiveness score, 33, was selected. This school is located in the city's center and has an all-male student body of 270 students.

The seven selected schools, then, represent a wide range of school size (270 to 2,000), type (two all-male, two all-female, two coeducational, and one all-male preparatory seminary), location (three southern city, one northern city, one city center, two suburban), as

well as racial and ethnic student composition (two all-black, two nearly 100% Caucasian, one 20% Hispanic-80% European, one 55% Hispanic, one 15% Black-26% Hispanic-59% Caucasian). Finally, these schools represent effectiveness scores of 54, 52, 37, 33, 25, 20, and 16.

The presentation of the interview data follows a format inspired by the work of Collins, Moles, and Cross, a sample of which is presented in Appendix B. It has been necessary to modify their original format, however, to accommodate the nature of this study: The Collins team examined single programs while this work considers all the efforts a school makes to affect the twelve specified areas of parent responsibility. The modified format, then, allows for multiple parent involvement practices which may not fall under the heading of a single program. The interview data are presented in the following categories:

1. Rationale, Focus, And Objectives Of Parent Involvement Programs;
2. Implementation: Practices Used To Achieve Parent Involvement;
3. Personnel And Training;
4. Total Costs of Parent Involvement;
5. Supports for and Barriers to Parent Involvement;
6. Methods of Assessment;
7. Findings;
8. Transferability.

The data from each interview are presented through narrative description and direct quotations. Analysis and interpretation of the data follow the presentation of data from all seven interviews.

## INSTITUTION A

Institution A is located in the southern area of Chicago and has an all-black female enrollment of 755 students. In 1979, four south side girls schools were merged to form two schools, and in 1983 these two were merged to form one -- Institution A. The students are drawn from 125 grammar schools and fall into a socioeconomic bracket described as containing "a lot of poor kids, many of them on welfare. We also have some well-to-do, but mainly we have a lot of parents who are really scraping to get by."

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Programs

The principal believes that parents are "the primary educators of their children" and that the school is responsible for "assisting parents. We're taking care of a part of their daughters' total education, a part the parents aren't equipped to take care of or don't have the time to care of. The child is with the parents longer than she will ever be with us, and we feel an obligation to involve the parents in the services we're offering to their daughter." "Total education" for Institution A means educating the "whole child -- spiritually, psychologically, academically, socially -- we try to provide services in all these areas and then to communicate what we do to the parents." This emphasis on the whole child sometimes causes the school's staff to become involved in the personal and family life of the child. For example, the principal described an experience she had recently in which it was necessary for her to be present when a mother informed her daughter in the principal's office that her father had just been



murdered. "We see a lot of tragedies in our kids' lives and there is a need for us to minister to the kids and their families."

The principal also insists on parent involvement because she wants to protect her school from possible legal action by parents of suspended or expelled students. If the parents have been kept informed about their daughter's performance, it is unlikely they will attempt a lawsuit, or, if they do make such an attempt, it will be more difficult for them to win.

The school administrators at Institution A focus on four areas which they feel require parent involvement: (1) tuition payment, (2) tardiness and absence, (3) behavior, and (4) academics.

According to the principal's general impressions gathered from several years of experience at Institution A, about 75% of the students in the school have parents whose need for involvement is fulfilled by receiving general information disseminated to all parents. In other words, 75% of the parents are motivated enough and skillful enough to be successful with their children if they are simply kept informed. Twenty five percent of the students and their parents, however, need more intensive levels of involvement, according to this principal. The principal also identified 2% of the students as requiring services provided by outside-the-school agencies whose purpose is to work with serious family or personal problems.

The principal agreed that her parent involvement efforts would best be described as a number of practices rather than parts of a comprehensive program.

Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

Institution A relies heavily on requiring parent involvement.

"There is a lot of manipulation of students in order to get the parents to comply with our regulations. We insist that parents are responsible, and we insist that they take an active interest. If the parents say they cannot attend we try to set up another appointment. But if they are not cooperative, we say, 'Your daughter is also important.' We are willing to meet with parents from early in the morning -- I get here at 6:30 -- until 4:30 or 5:00 in the afternoon. Generally, we have to put the screws on parents to get them to come in. From our point of view, there is a lot of forcing parents to get them to be responsible and to take an interest." If parents do not attend a mandatory meeting or in other ways fail to comply with the school's requirements for parent involvement, their daughters are suspended until the parents cooperate. In some cases, parents who disagree with the school are told "they have the option of taking their daughters out of the school." In the list of parent involvement practices which follow, then, it should be kept in mind that in most cases parents have been told that they must agree to the level of involvement indicated.

#### Admissions Procedures

The admissions process used by Institution A is a "careful and painstaking" one which involves testing, contacting elementary schools for background information, and one-on-one interviewing of students by admissions board members. During the interview, students are asked about their previous performance in school, their conduct in and out of school, their relationships with family members, and their aspirations.

Parents are also interviewed and asked the same set of questions about their daughters so that the interviewer achieves some insight into family interaction.

#### Program for Low Achievers

The school participates in a program for low achieving high school students funded by the State of Illinois. The program services thirty low achievers in two groups of fifteen students from the freshman and sophomore years. Students who qualify for the program have reading levels of 4.0 to 6.0; the program hopes to build general skill levels so that these students can be successfully mainstreamed by their third year of high school. Parent involvement required by the program includes the following:

1. A parent meeting is held in the spring while the girls are in eighth grade in order to explain the details of the program and to obtain the parents' written agreement to fulfill all requirements of the program.
2. Parents must come to the school to receive all their daughters' report cards and must meet with teachers at these times, as well as other times such meetings are deemed necessary.
3. Parents must attend workshops and "inservices" organized by a psychologist and designed to help them cope with behaviors frequently exhibited by low achieving teenagers.

If parents fail to participate in these required activities, their daughters are removed from the program.

#### Deficiency Notices

The school sends notices to parents in the fifth week of each

quarter to inform them about courses in which their daughters' performance is likely to lead to failure. Teachers may not fail students if they have not submitted deficiency notices for them or contacted the parents in some other manner.

#### Report Cards

All parents must come to the school to receive their daughters' first quarter report cards and may meet with their daughters' teachers at this time. Although parents are not required to visit the teachers, most parents take advantage of the opportunity. Parents who fail to pick up their daughters' report cards at the end of the first quarter are required to visit the school at the end of the first semester to receive first quarter report cards and the results of the school's October testing. Approximately 16% (parents of 120 students) failed to pick up report cards on the assigned day; most of these, however, eventually came to the school, prompted by "gentle reminders" given to their daughters. At the conclusion of the first semester, "ten to fifteen parents had to be forced to come to the school."

#### Academic Probation

If students receive three failures at a marking period, they are put on academic probation, and they and their parents are required to meet with two members of the four member academic board. At the meeting, information supplied by all of the girls' teachers is shared with the parents, and discussion takes place about what parents can do to help improve their daughters' academic performance.

One result of the meeting is a contract between parents and the school which specifies the conditions for the students to remain at the

school.

#### Phone Contact

The school contacts parents when the students are absent if the parents have not called the school or if it is suspected that phone calls to the school have come from other than parents.

The principal encourages teachers to call parents frequently; in fact, teachers are not allowed to fail students unless parents have first been notified that their children are in danger of failing.

#### Parent Newsletter

Several times each year, the school publishes a parent newsletter and distributes it to the students to bring to their parents. When parents visit the school to receive report cards, they are informed about the newsletter and told to expect it from their daughters.

#### Home Visits

Home visits are usually performed only by the school's counselors and only under very special circumstances. A home visit might occur, for example, if a girl asks a counselor to help her inform her parents that she is pregnant.

#### Personnel and Training

The principal of Institution A has never sponsored a workshop or inservice for her staff which was completely dedicated to training staff members for their work with parents. However, "the topic has been included in broader inservice sessions and in faculty meetings. Our main thrust on these occasions is to convince the teachers to always deal with parents on an unemotional, factual basis."

Although no one in the school is designated the parent involvement

coordinator, the counselors, youth minister, dean of students, academic dean, and the three administrators -- those most likely to be working with parents -- meet at least once each week to coordinate their activities.

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement

The principal reported that parent involvement at Institution A costs "almost nothing. The only money we spend is on the newsletter, and this cost is minimal." It should be noted, however, that costs are incurred in salaries for personnel, the printing of report cards, the expense of holding meetings, and other items which directly and indirectly affect parents and their involvement in the schooling of their daughters. However, these costs are hidden in the day-to-day operation of the school and are thus overlooked by this principal.

#### Supports and Barriers

Parents themselves, according to the principal, are the biggest barrier to effective parent involvement programs. "Parents don't want to come in. They only come in on their own for two reasons: deficiency notices or behavioral notices. And then when they come, they assume that everybody should drop everything in order to work with them. Some parents are hostile because they feel that when we correct their daughters we are correcting them. Other parents have an 'I don't care' attitude -- like the ones who won't pick up report cards. These usually have kids who run into academic and disciplinary troubles. Some of these kids don't have strong support groups at home."

Another barrier to effective parent involvement, according to the principal is the adversarial relationship which exists between society

and schools. "There is a general breakdown in society itself. We are seeing an increasing trend towards the lack of family structure and an erosion of values. I see kids saying "Give me, give me, give me" to their parents, which is exactly opposite to the values we try to teach in the school. Our standards and values -- share, love one another, don't steal -- are not acceptable to society."

A third barrier to parent involvement is "perpetual burnout. We have so many things going on and only so many people to go around. Teachers have six periods, and we offer so many services, so many co-curricular activities. I can't ask the faculty to do much more than they're already doing."

Once parents have been brought into the school whether by force or their own interest, the principal sees them as one of the major supports for effective parent involvement. "Once they're here, 90% are supportive, appreciative. In a way, every time you have parents come in it's an inservicing for them and they have learned something, how schools operate, how their daughters' education should be managed."

Another area cited as a support for effective parent involvement is the assistance provided by "hospitals and social agencies which supply help for kids who are faced with drug problems, psychological problems, family problems, pregnancies, physical or sexual abuse. If we think kids must be counseled, we make it a condition for the kids to stay here that the parents must agree to have their daughters counseled. The agencies use a sliding scale for payment so that families pay what they can afford." Most agencies used by Institution A require parents to be involved in the programs for their children.

### Methods of Assessment

Although data are collected concerning students who see counselors, students who are placed on academic probation, and the attrition rate of each of the classes, the principal did not give any indication that she uses this material to measure the success of her school's programs. One of the problems this principal faces in accumulating statistics about enrollment patterns and academic success rates is the confusion produced by the school mergers. The principal agreed, for example, that the attrition rate can be one measurement of the success of involving parents to help students, yet the attrition statistics have been muddied by the radical changes in enrollment produced by the mergers. It will be some time, then, before patterns of enrollment or even patterns in academic success rate are stabilized enough to allow the principal to evaluate programs through the use of such statistics.

The principal indicated that she also measures the success of her parent involvement programs by her own experiences which lead her to believe that students have a greater chance for success when their parents take an active interest.

### Findings

The principal is convinced that parent involvement is significant in determining the academic success of students and feels that the amount of involvement presently occurring in her school is sufficient.

### Transferability

"Our kids are a microcosm of society -- they are just the same as the kids in public schools. The mandatory parent involvement programs we use should be used in the public schools as well."



## INSTITUTION B

Institution B is located in the southern area of the city and has an all-male, all-black student population of 743 students. According to the principal, a "small percentage come from families that are genuinely wealthy, and some are genuinely poor. But the biggest percentage are from middle income homes."

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Programs

One of the major goals for the parent involvement programs at Institution B is to "convince parents that there is a correlation between their activities and their home environment and their children's academic success."

This principal feels that 50% of his students' parents "have what they need" to make their sons successful, so that the school's responsibility to these parents is simply to keep them informed about their sons' progress. Ten percent, on the other hand, "really need intensive work with school personnel, with a counselor. This is the 10% whose names keep coming up over and over." The remaining 40% are "marginal. I'm not sure if they are really getting what they need from the school." About 1% of the students and their parents are recommended to outside-the-school agencies for assistance with serious problems; however, the principal feels that "another 10% could really use this outside help and 20% could get at least some benefit from it."

According to the principal, Institution B has a number of parent involvement practices instead of an integrated or comprehensive program.

Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

Unlike the principal of Institution A, the principal of Institution B believes that parent involvement programs should be voluntary.

"Opportunities are provided for parents if they want to come to school and inquire about them. How can you force people to be involved? What do you do if they don't attend? What is the sanction? I would rather not set myself up by demanding that they cooperate."

Open House Day for Eighth Graders

Parents who send their sons to Institution B can receive their first exposure to the school and its programs by attending open house days scheduled in the fall and winter of the boys' eighth grade year.

Freshman Registration

Parents meet with members of the school's staff in the spring of their sons' eighth grade year in order to receive an explanation of their sons' test scores and to register for the first year of classes. Approximately 85% of Institution B's incoming freshman parents attend this registration meeting; the remaining 15% have packets of registration information sent to their homes.

September "Mini-Schedule" Night

Parents of all Institution B's students are invited to the school to familiarize themselves with their sons' schedules and teachers. "Classes" consist of ten minute explanations from teachers about academic expectations and homework requirements. "I am very pleased with attendance on this evening; we usually have 60% to 65% of our parents attend."

### Parent-Teacher Night

Parent-teacher conferences are held three times each year at the ends of all but the last quarter. Individual appointments for teachers and parents are not scheduled, and parents decide which teachers they would like to visit. Attendance dwindles from "40% at the first night to about 10% on the last night."

### Other Parent-Teacher Meetings

Meetings can be held before or after any school day. Each teacher is required to be present in the classroom fifteen minutes before the school day starts and a half hour after classes end. This arrangement provides an opportunity that is "good for parents who drop off and pick up their kids every day." Appointments are not required in these cases.

During the school day, parents can make an appointment to meet with a teacher during the teacher's free period. "A good number of parents seem to take advantage of these school-day appointments. It is a low key program that works nicely for parents who are interested in their children."

### Deficiency Notices and Progress Reports

Deficiency notices are distinguished from progress reports in that deficiency notices inform parents about areas of their sons' performance which require improvement while progress reports allow teachers to show the positive dimensions of student performance. Both types of reports are sent to parents at the same time, the mid point of each quarter; however, teachers are not required to send either type of report.

### Report Cards

Report cards are mailed to parents each quarter.

### Academic Probation

When students fail more subjects than they can take in summer school, they are placed on academic probation. Although parents are notified about the probation and are required to sign a letter of acknowledgement, they are not required to attend a meeting at school.

### Phone Calls

Phone calls are frequently made to parents by "our better teachers" but are not required by the principal.

### Parent Education

Through the use of regular parent club meetings, the school tried to offer lessons on becoming successful parents. "Our usual attendance at these sessions included the forty parents who always attend parent meetings, and these are not the ones we were trying to reach."

### Parent Newsletter

The monthly parent newsletter sometimes offers practical suggestions for parents who are interested in helping their sons with homework and is compiled by the parents club.

### Personnel and Training

According to the principal, "teachers could use basic training in interpersonal relationships, on understanding human nature, on how to be professional and maintain their cool in tough situations" in order to enable them to be more effective in their exchanges with parents. Although inservice occurs at Institution B at least once every three years, the principal did not indicate that topics like those listed above were included in previous sessions.

Personnel that have frequent contact with parents include the disciplinarian, the director of studies, and, in particular, the counselors, "who are very much in touch with parents."

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement Programs

The principal indicated that the school spends almost nothing on parent involvement practices at present but that he would be willing to pay for effective programs if those "programs could save kids. We would more than make up any expense by the kids we would save."

#### Supports and Barriers

Because Institution B has relatively few parent involvement practices and because the principal felt that many of those practices it does have are less than successful, a good portion of the interview was dedicated to discussing barriers to effective parent involvement. The only items which might be listed under "Supports" are (a) parents' wanting their children to attend Institution B, and (b) a sufficient number of outside-the-school agencies to service the students and their parents.

Among the barriers, the principal listed the following:

1. The financial and personal issues confronting the parents of Institution B make the principal reluctant to insist on their involvement in school. Parents are not willing or available to "really get into their children's schooling -- people are working many hours just to make ends meet. And then there is so much brokenness at home, in the structures of the family -- extended families, parents divorce, remarry, kids live with

grandparents, changing of names. Basic identity becomes a problem."

2. The complex nature of the relationship between parents and schools makes this principal hesitate in adding more parent involvement practices. "I have learned that the more structures you set up the more you see the same thing repeating itself. The same parents coming, the ones you are trying to get don't come. I think parent involvement is a deeper thing than just providing more opportunities. Something within a person causes him to stay away. I don't know if they're not interested or don't know enough to ask the right questions or are intimidated. No matter what you do it doesn't seem to be the right thing. We are reluctant to set up more structures because we just exhaust our energies and resources and we still don't get the response we want."
3. A third barrier is that the interaction between parents and students which produces an effect on student academic performance is very complex and may not really be addressed by parent involvement programs sponsored by schools. "Kids that are really troubled and confused we see over and over again come from parents who don't get involved in school. These parents just don't have it together. They don't have the values, the ideals, the discipline, the very basic understanding of the learning process. They don't even know enough to be attentive to their son and his needs for a quiet place with no distractions and no television. They don't understand what has

to be done in order to create the environment for him to learn. "The key element is the degree of authority the parent exercises -- not how rich or poor they are. If the parent gives the kid an environment of discipline, the kid will develop the mental discipline he needs in school. It also isn't important how much education a parent has -- some very educated people don't exercise authority, don't give their kids discipline. Parents must give kids a vision of what they might become; also they must teach kids that they must work and suffer for their accomplishments. I saw an athlete warming up recently to the phrase 'No pain, no gain -- no pain, no gain,' and I thought to myself if parents could teach their kids that about academics and about life, the kids would be successful.

"It would take such a great deal of time to change the parents, to teach them what they need to know. By the time a parent could be taught in a parent workshop, the kid would have already failed out."

4. A fourth barrier is the parental attitude that the school is solely responsible for student academic performance. "Some parents think the school will do all the work. They pay \$1200 and the kid will be prepared for college -- some miracle will occur."
5. Finally, the principal discussed research that suggests black parents sometimes hold unrealistic expectations for their children. "Some parents don't understand the cost -- in terms of effort for success. In order to sustain the motivation of

their kids they hold out an ideal that is far beyond what the kids can do and are not clear themselves on the cost of that success. As a result, the kids miss achieving the impossible goal and become discouraged and give up."

#### Methods of Assessment

The principal listed the following methods for assessing the success of his parent involvement practices: (a) feedback from teachers, (b) improvement of grades, (c) watching students change, (d) the school's attrition rate, and (e) the percentage of parents in attendance at events.

#### Findings

Although the principal has seen a number of students grow in "mental discipline" in his years as principal, the school's high attrition rate (nearly 50%) makes him "discouraged about the success of our programs."

#### Transferability

All of Institution B's parent involvement practices will transfer since none seem bound to the uniqueness of the institution.



## INSTITUTION C

Institution C has an all-male population of 1,000 and is located in a western suburb of Chicago. Approximately 60% of the students are from suburban homes, and the remainder come from homes within the Chicago city limits. The school accepts students with composite scores above the national percentile of ten; approximately 93% of the graduates attend college, but for about 30% the choice is a junior college. The school contains very few minorities -- five black students and "very few Hispanics." According to the principal, a member of a religious order and the previous guidance director of the school, the socioeconomic bracket of the students is "middle-middle."

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Programs

"What we try here is a force-feed motivational thing. We are very insistent about parent involvement, but we don't actually go so far as to make the programs mandatory.

"We try to counsel parents so that they can set the right tone for study in their homes. They don't know algebra, they don't know about the Byzantine Empire, and they don't know beans about the Incas and the Mayas. So you hope that if they set time aside and make the kid sit there, something has been accomplished."

The principal feels that about 10% of the school's students and their parents are "in great shape, self-starter types who don't need much from the school." Another 10% need to be "force-fed" by having intensive contact with the school's counselors. The remaining 80% are "in an area that needs some reinforcement -- parent conferences and

things like that." About 1% have very serious motivational or family problems and need the assistance of outside-the-school agencies.

The principal hopes that his school's parent involvement practices save students from being expelled for poor behavior or academic performance.

#### Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

Like Institutions A and B, Institution C has an open house day in the fall for eighth grade students and their parents, an entrance test in January, and a registration for incoming freshmen in spring. Parents do not get very involved in the registration process, however, since "they don't know a whole lot about it." Only signatures indicating approval of their sons' programs are required. Institution C also sponsors a "Back-To-School Night" for parents of new students in the fall of each year similar to the "Mini-Schedule Night" sponsored by Institution B. Those programs sponsored by Institution C which deserve greater attention are described below.

#### Parent-Club Activities

The principal recently combined the mothers and fathers clubs to form a single "coed" club, and now insists that the once-a-month meetings of the parents club be used to familiarize the parents with the school and school related issues. Recent meetings have included presentations by guidance counselors, the religion department, coaches, and college financial assistance officers. Attendance at meetings ranges from 75 to 100 parents, and "has increased since we began our new focus on school related topics."

### Once-a-Month Principal Letter

For eleven months of the year, the principal sends letters to parents on a variety of topics, including academics. These letters are the primary vehicle for informing parents about special events at school like parent club meetings and parent-teacher conferences.

### Deficiency Notices

Deficiency notices are sent to parents at the mid-point of the first and third quarters. Unlike many schools which wait until the end of the quarter to begin parent-teacher meetings and special programs for struggling students, Institution C uses the deficiency notices to begin intensive work with parents and students. The parents of students who receive three or more deficiency notices in a quarter are required to attend a special meeting with the students' counselor, held on the same evening as the school's parent-teacher conference. The meetings are scheduled by appointment and are designed to produce a contract between the school and the parents which specifies the parents' responsibilities in the improvement of student academic performance. According to the principal, "Parents rarely miss their appointments. I don't want to say that it doesn't happen, but it has never been brought to my attention.

"The important ingredient in this system is looking the parents straight in the eye and saying your kid is failing three courses. What are you going to do about it? This is much better than mailing a notice home and having parents sign it without ever looking at it.

"It would be ideal if parents and counselors kept in touch with each other after this initial contact, but they probably don't. It is pretty much a one-shot deal."

The principal stated that the counselor for each of the four years meets with the parents of approximately thirty parents at these conferences. Although the school has relied on deficiency notices as a tool to keep parents informed for many years, this is only the second year that they have combined the notices with parent meetings and contracts. After the parents have met with the counselor, they have the option of meeting with their sons' teachers.

The principal attributes a 50% reduction in report card failures to the school's new program and, specifically, the increased parent involvement it has produced. "The only changes we made are we insisted on the parents' meeting with the counselor and we moved our parent conferences from the end of the quarter to the mid-point in the quarter. It seems to be tremendously successful."

#### Personnel and Training

Institution C recently sponsored a one hour inservice to increase the sensitivity and empathy of teachers for students who come from broken homes. According to the principal, "A lack of study enthusiasm can be attributed to broken homes. Depression and hurt that comes from a broken home festers inside of a kid and can eventually make itself felt at school." Although inservice hours are held at least three times each year at Institution C, this was one of the only occasions that the principal could remember when the topic was directly related to parents.

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement Programs

The only cost the principal mentioned was that incurred by the printing and mailing of the once-a-month letter. A parent raffle connected to the letter helps to defray some of these costs.

### Supports and Barriers

Among the barriers to parent involvement, the principal cited the increase he has witnessed in "broken homes, separated and divorced parents."

Among the supports for parent involvement, he mentioned a staff that is generous with its time and willing to contact parents, and parents who seem to take a great interest in their children's schooling. "About 70% to 75% of our parents really take a great interest in their kids. Not many of them have the idea that they can just drop the kids on the door step and we will take care of their education. If we said we had 1% like that it would be an exaggeration."

### Methods of Assessment

The primary method the principal uses to assess his parent programs is the failure rate of his students. He also referred to a number of personal experiences which he felt were appropriate in a discussion concerning parent involvement.

### Findings

The 50% reduction in failures which the principal attributes to parent involvement early in the school year makes this principal very encouraged about the success of his program. Since the program is only in its second year, the principal was not sure whether it would dramatically affect the school's 25% attrition rate.

When discussing the attrition rate, the principal commented, "Parents who don't care are most likely to have kids we can't save, kids that will be expelled. And we have to keep in mind that even Jesus

himself lost Judas -- and Peter was wavering. Human nature suggests it's impossible to reach all kids and their parents."

#### Transferability

The principal attributes so much of the success of his parent involvement practices to "parents who care" that he does not think his programs would be useful where parental concern is not as high. He feels that the programs would not be successful in public schools, for example, where he believes, many parents are less committed to the education of their children than the parents at Institution C.

## INSTITUTION D

Institution D is the largest all-female Catholic high school in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Although the school is located just within the southern limits of the city, it draws at least 60% of its 2060 students from the nearby suburbs. In a typical year, nearly 700 eighth grade girls apply for approximately 525 positions in the Freshman Class. After initial screening by standardized testing, the first 525 students to return registration forms are accepted. Each Freshman Class has a "wide range of academic ability," with about one third of the group assigned to developmental classes for those behind grade level. Approximately 93% of the graduates attend college.

Institution D has a unique administrative organization. The chief administrator of the school is called the "executive director," and immediately beneath her in the school's hierarchy is the "curriculum director," who is followed by four "consultants," one for each of the school's four classes. These six make up the school's administrative team, or "executive council." The data presented below was provided by the sophomore consultant, who explained that each consultant is considered the "principal" for her level and as such is responsible for the academic and behavioral performance of that level's students. On the other hand, these "principals" have no responsibility for teacher supervision and evaluation.

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Programs

The sophomore consultant believes that the staff of Institution D gives greater attention to the slower and average students because they believe these students need more assistance to be successful. Likewise,

it is the parents of these students who are the subjects of more intensive parent involvement practices. In the present Sophomore Class of 542 students, the consultant believes that about 80% of the students perform well with parent contact that is routine and generally addressed to all parents. Twenty percent of the students need more personal and specific contact like phone calls and failure notices. Five percent of the sophomores need even more help, perhaps several counseling sessions with qualified school personnel. During the current school year, 6 girls, or 1%, needed to be referred to outside-the-school agencies. Parents of freshmen and sophomores are the focus of more parent involvement programs than parents of juniors and seniors.

The consultant also believes that the school has a number of parent involvement practices, often initiated in distinct program areas for distinct purposes, rather than a comprehensive parent involvement program. "We have such a large school, I don't know how one person could coordinate all parent contact."

#### Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

Like the other schools examined, Institution D sponsors an open house in the fall for eighth graders and involves the parents in their children's first registration. However, contact at registration is restricted to communication by mail: packets of information are sent to parents and they must return them quickly in order for their daughters to be admitted.

#### Freshman Open House Night

Like Institution B's Mini-Schedule Night and Institution C's Back-To-School Night, Institution D's Freshman Open House Night is designed



to inform visiting parents about the expectations and requirements of their daughters' classes. According to the consultant, attendance on this first parent visit is "very good."

#### Deficiency Notices

Again like other schools, Institution D informs parents if their daughters are not performing well about five weeks into the school year. Unlike some other schools, however, Institution D requires the parents to return a form agreeing to help their daughters improve.

#### Report Cards and Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parents must come to school to receive their daughters' first quarter report card. Beginning at 2:00 in the afternoon, the grades are handed directly to the parents by the consultants, and teachers are available so that the parents may visit with them if they choose. If a teacher wants a parent to visit, a note is attached to the report card. Most parents visit in the evening hours at times assigned alphabetically by parents' last name. At the conclusion of this distribution in 1983, the sophomore consultant found that of her 542 parents "twenty-eight had failed to meet their obligation." However, of this group, perhaps as many as "sixteen had called to explain why they could not attend."

Parents who fail to attend or who attend but fail to meet with a teacher who requested a visit constitute a "very, very small percentage of the total. However, when it does happen, I contact the parents. I find some indifference, but usually there is a good reason for their behavior."

#### Phone Contact

The consultant relies heavily on phone contact with parents to

correct difficulties with students. If a teacher asks for assistance with a student, "and I can't handle the problem with the student I go directly to the parents."

Teachers are encouraged to contact parents as well. Although the consultant keeps no formal records of parent-teacher phone contact, she feels she is orally informed by the teachers to a degree that makes her believe that such contact is occurring frequently.

#### Academic Probation

If a student fails two credits during one school year, the student is accepted back for the following year on academic probation.

Probation contracts are signed by the parents; however, the contract does not specify expected parent behavior but simply serves as a formal notice to parents.

#### Parent Newsletter

All parents receive the parent newsletter which is published once a month by the school's public relations department. The consultants and counselors are free to submit any information they think might be helpful. In the February 1984 issue, for example, the counseling department offered the following "Study Tips for Parents."

1. Help your daughter by providing a quiet place for study, away from distraction.
2. Help her to establish a regular routine for studying.
3. Periodically ask to see her work.
4. Ask leading questions about the material she is learning in her classes.

5. If she is having difficulty, suggest sources of help, i.e., the library, reference books, teacher, resource centers at school.
6. Help her to keep in good shape by getting enough rest and exercise, and by eating the right food.
7. Help her to budget her time; for freshmen we expect at least two hours of studying each evening.
8. Help her to learn that studying begins on the first day of class.
9. Help her by being interested in what she is learning and how it will help her achieve her goals.
10. Help her by encouraging and supporting her efforts.

#### Parent Survey

In early 1984, Institution D's development office conducted a parent survey which asked parents their opinions about the school's religious environment and instruction, academic program, athletic programs, student aid and scholarship opportunities, student life, faculty, physical facilities, and finances. Although the survey was not directly connected with the efforts of the sophomore consultant and did not focus only on academic issues, it is an indication of the two-way communication between home and school which seems important to the administrators of Institution D.

#### Parent-Teacher Appointments

"We have parents coming up all the time. They call me for appointments mainly when their daughters are having some difficulty."

#### Personnel and Training

The personnel arrangement which is important to effective parent

involvement at Institution D is that which allows for a full-time administrator and a full-time counselor for each of the four levels. No special training for working with parents has been given to this group.

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement Programs

The most significant cost cited by the consultant is that produced by what might be considered an abundance of administrative personnel. However, she also pointed out that five of the six administrators are members of the religious order which owns and manages the school and that their salary reductions lighten the burden of this expensive arrangement.

#### Supports and Barriers

The consultant was very pleased with the parent involvement at Institution D and cited no barriers to that involvement. Below are listed the supports she indicated.

1. Parents who send their children to Institution D are educated themselves and can actually assist their children with their home study. "Occasionally, you might run across one who can't help the kids with homework, primarily in foreign language study. A large percentage of our parents are college educated. Many of our parents seem to be teachers or nurses."
2. Teachers are very cooperative about contacting parents.
3. Parents are very good about contacting teachers: "Even dads take time off from work to visit."
4. The unique administrative organization allows the consultant and the counselor on each level to give students and parents a

good deal of individual attention. The consultant feels that each year she works closely with seventy or eighty sets of parents. "I think almost everything I do is indirectly connected to parents. I go to parents for most of the problems I confront, especially ones that recur. About 30% of my day is given over to directly working with parents. I can afford this time because of our administrative organization. This morning our freshman consultant plans to work with parents from the start of her day until 10:30. My day started at 7:30 with a phone call from a parent. We have the time. We can't have success without parents, and if parents aren't making sure that the kids are doing homework ... We absolutely need their help. It's even more essential to involve parents with high school people. You can steer elementary school people, but when they get to high school level, there are so many outside forces that they are interested in and that are drawing them. Unless the parents really know what the kids are studying or that they have certain things to do, the kids won't get the help they need. It's so important for those lines of communication to be open so that parents know what's going on in the classrooms."

5. Finally, another support for parent involvement cited by the consultant is the school's good reputation. Because the school is respected for its high standards, parents who send their daughters know that they will have to cooperate and that their daughters will have to perform well. This expectation,

then, fosters parent involvement.

### Methods of Assessment

The consultant pointed to the number of students who were removed from Institution D for poor academic or behavioral performance: from the present sophomore class, only twelve students had been removed when they were freshmen and only seven had been removed during the course of this year.

### Findings

The consultant is very pleased with the level of parent involvement at Institution D and with what she sees as the results of that involvement. "Parents are very responsive, and we have all the avenues we need to work with them. Since I've been here (four years), I've had maybe one or two parents who were not cooperative."

### Transferability

The consultant felt that Institution D was unique only because parents paid a large sum of money to send their daughters to the school. This added "investment" prompted parents to be more supportive and involved. However, it should be noted that Institution D's tuition is not significantly higher than other Catholic secondary schools in the area, so the expense parents face makes Institution D different only from free public high schools.

## INSTITUTION E

Institution E is a coeducational secondary school of 600 students. Approximately 20% of the students are Hispanic, the remainder a mixture of European ancestry. Founded in 1950, Institution E was originally designed to be a "parish school," one that primarily serves families from the immediate area. The neighborhood and the school itself once had an almost 100% German population. Approximately 60% of the students are girls. The students come from "primarily blue collar, lower-middle class families, and many from single parent homes," according to the principal, a nun who has been assigned to the school for a number of years but who is currently in only her second year as principal. Fifteen percent of the student population is non-Catholic.

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Programs

The principal expressed her desire for extensive parent involvement, even in curriculum development, since the parents "know what's going on in the real world and can tell us what kids need to compete out there." Furthermore, she wanted to encourage parents to help their children the way her parents had helped her. "When I was a kid, my father would say, 'Don't you have homework to do?' They didn't look to see if you did it, but you had to spend that time. And they weren't as educated as our parents are. They only had eighth grade educations. But woe betide you if you didn't spend time studying."

The major focus of the school's parent involvement programs is "the whole matter of caring. If you care about kids you do something about their problems. If you care you call in the parents." The principal believes that parent involvement depends heavily on a school staff,

teachers in particular, who care enough about students to involve parents in whatever ways are appropriate to achieve student success. The school has a limited number of formal practices and no formally organized and comprehensive program for parent involvement.

"Fifty percent of our students need to have their parents involved more, need to have their parents watch over them more." The principal also thinks that 20% of the students could use the help provided by outside-the-school agencies, since even though drug abuse was declining, drinking was increasing, and students with problems are often successful at hiding them: "They're not telling us everything."

#### Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

A number of practices similar to those used by the first four institutions examined are used in Institution E: parents first become involved with the school through their children's registration, held in the spring of the children's last year of elementary school; a "Pot Luck Dinner" is held for the parents of all new students in September; deficiency notices are mailed during the fifth week of every quarter; a faculty-parent newsletter is sent out four times each year; parents visit school to pick up first quarter report cards (about 95% attend); teachers are asked to contact parents; and parents sometimes contact teachers to make appointments.

#### Staffings

The most unique parent involvement practice offered by Institution E is a "staffing" which is held for students who are performing very poorly. At staffings, parents and their children meet with the students' counselors and all their teachers. It has been the principal's



experience that no parent has ever failed to attend a staffing and that most parents are very appreciative of the amount of information which the school personnel shares with them. Contracts between the parents and the school are developed as a result of staffings or as a result of smaller meetings involving the parent and only one or two staff members. The contracts usually demand only general agreement from the parent to support the school.

#### Outside-the-School Agencies

Occasionally the school will insist that the parents obtain professional help for their children; if the parents hesitate, the school threatens to remove the student. These professional counseling sessions usually demand considerable parent involvement.

#### Personnel and Training

The principal feels that most of her teachers know how to deal with parents since most of them "really care" about the students; furthermore, "common sense is all you need" to interact successfully with parents.

No staff member is responsible for coordinating the school's parent involvement practices.

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement Programs

None other than those incurred by the newsletter.

#### Supports and Barriers

Among the barriers to effective parent involvement, the principal lists the following.

1. "Parents work all day, and they're tired when they get home from work. They would much rather watch television and drink

beer than get involved in their children's schooling."

2. "Parents are not really interested in academics. They don't want to take the initiative (in curriculum development, for example); they would much rather have the school tell them what to do."
3. "Parents don't have the strength to enforce rules at home."
4. "We're living in a different world now -- there's a lot of selfishness in people. Television has spoiled a lot of people. They don't seem to want to give the time. Being a parent is a full-time job, and people don't treat it that way. The United States is a degraded country. Just look at some of the things our senators and representatives have done, and they are supposed to be our models."

Supports for parent involvement cited by this principal include teachers who are willing to work with parents and parents who are "quietly supportive" of the school. Another advantage for Institution E is that approximately 30% of the students come from families who live in the parish, so the principal is afforded a number of opportunities to communicate with the parents of these students. Finally, the principal believes that the students themselves appreciate the involvement of adults because they "need and want direction."

#### Methods of Assessment

No clear methods of assessment are used. The principal seems to rely on personal experience for assessment.

#### Findings

The principal summarized her findings about the effectiveness of

parent involvement programs with the following: "I think it's important to have parent involvement, but I'd like to know how you do it. If we (educators in general) could work as hard at our academic programs as we do at our athletic programs, we would have a lot more success."

#### Transferability

All of Institution E's parent involvement programs will transfer to other institutions.

## INSTITUTION F

Institution F is a coeducational school of 305 students, 60% of whom are female. Located in the southern area of Chicago, the school has a population which is 55% Hispanic, 15% Polish, 11% black, and 19% mixed European. In a survey of families recently compiled by the school's staff, it was discovered that 32% of the students come from families whose incomes fall below the federal poverty level, and 26% of the students come from single parent families. The principal believes that very few parents have better than a high school education and many of the families are very large.

This report combines the comments of the principal and assistant principal, who both took part in a single interview.

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Practices

The administrators want parents (a) to "have knowledge about what is going on in the school; and (b) to "pay more attention, show more concern, as 'Are you doing your homework?', call us up, call teachers, don't wait for deficiency notices. We hope our parent contact puts more pressure on parents to help students. They are not equipped to assist students with school subjects, but they should be encouraging."

The administrators established parent education programs because they "recognized a need on the part of our parents to be better parents, to know what they should be doing, how they should work with their children. We didn't feel parents were coping well with kids' behavior. We learned this through our experiences on the discipline board when we found ourselves giving parents instructions about how to be better parents."

Another goal sought by the staff of Institution F is to achieve the "self-motivation of the students, to get them to the point where they recognize what they want to do with their futures and they see that work in high school is connected to that future."

Special tutoring programs as well as parent involvement practices are used to "avoid the situation which prevents kids from coming back," namely failing more credits than can be made up in summer school.

At Institution D, the administrators believe that 25% of the students come from supportive families who need only those communications which go out to all families; 50% of the students need to have their parents more involved in their schooling through phone contact and meetings at the school; and another 20% to 25% need the help of an outside-the-school professional. Institution F is unique among the schools studied in that a member of the religious order that owns and operates the school is a trained psychologist who visits the school for at least two full-days each week. The school sometimes relies on hospitals or social agencies, but these occurrences are so rare that the administrators were hard pressed to give examples.

Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

Like other schools studied, Institution F sponsors an open house in the fall for eighth graders and their parents, a registration session in the spring, and a "Parent Night" in September. The 1983 Parent Night was attended by about two thirds of the students' parents, and those who were not in attendance were mainly parents of third and fourth year students. Deficiency notices are sent each quarter, and parents come to the school for the first report card. In February, twelve first quarter

report cards remained in the principal's office, and approximately twenty reports were picked up after the assigned date. Ninety percent of the parents, then, did report to school on the appropriate evening to pick up their children's grades. A parent newsletter is sent four times a year, and the mothers club (no fathers club exists) conducts "poorly attended" monthly meetings.

The principal and her assistant at first suggested that Institution F had very little parent involvement, but after further discussion they felt that they make many attempts to involve parents but that these attempts do not fall under the organization of one comprehensive program.

#### Parent Education

Institution F experimented with a parent education program in the 1982-83 school year when a visiting psychologist conducted four sessions on parenting. According to the principal, the psychologist offered the parents very practical information, and the availability of the program was well promoted through written and oral communications to parents. Although the principal considered offering parents incentives like tuition rebates, she eventually decided to offer no special enticements. Although parents seemed genuinely enthusiastic after the first session and although each session covered new topics, attendance dwindled with each meeting. Attendance at the first meeting neared seventy-five, dropped to thirty two months later for meeting two, dropped again to twenty for meeting three, and hit a low of seven at the final meeting.

#### Principal/Counselor-Parent Meeting

The principal and the school's full-time counselor met recently

with all the parents whose children will be required to attend summer school to make up semester failures. During these two days of continuous face-to-face meetings, parents were informed about special tutoring programs available for their children. Only two parents did not attend the meetings, and the principal indicated that no action was taken against them for their lack of cooperation.

#### Tutoring Program

Members of the National Honor Society as well as teachers tutor students during the school day and after school. The principal sends a letter to all parents informing them about the tutoring program, reminds them about the program in their meetings about summer school, and sends another notice to all parents whose children fail to take advantage of the program. Fifty-four students were invited into the program, twenty signed a form indicating they would attend, but only twelve have reported for the tutoring. No parents have responded to the principal's notice that their children have not taken advantage of the program.

#### Phone Calls

The school both receives and initiates many parent phone calls. Teachers, members of the discipline board, the counselor, the assistant principal, and the principal all make contact with parents frequently. Although the school has a large number of Hispanic students, only one staff member, the foreign language teacher, can communicate in Spanish. This teacher produces a Spanish language edition of the parent newsletter and is sometimes called out of class to make or answer a parent phone call.

The principal related a number of experiences with parents which indicate that all attempts to increase parent involvement at Institution F are designed to meet the needs of individual students. In other words, although formal parent involvement programs exist in the school, parents are contacted more frequently by phone calls, letters, meetings at school, and even home visits as the need arises.

#### Personnel and Training

All school personnel are expected to involve parents, but the principal and her assistant did not see a serious need for training their staff. "Most of our teachers are pretty good at working with parents. There are some parents no one can deal with because they have so many personal problems they will be hostile with everyone. For the most part, I don't worry when teachers and parents make contact."

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement Programs

The school incurs only postage expenses, and these are minimal.

#### Supports and Barriers

In discussing the barriers to effective parent involvement programs, the administrators offered the following.

1. Parents do not offer consistent cooperation. When deficiency notices are sent or when report cards are received, parents offer their support; however, the support soon fades as the parents fail to check their children's study habits on a day-by-day basis. Both administrators thought "indifference" was a word too strong to describe the causes of this inconsistency. Instead both agreed it was a question of the parents' "priorities."



"Education is on the list of priorities, but it is not number one or two. It's there somewhere and it's pretty high on the list, but it's not on the top. They would rather hand the responsibility over to us. Parents don't have time because they need to work two jobs, and then they have so many kids to deal with.

"The parents do care about their kids so when the school initiates the contact, they will respond. Consistent follow-up is what we need, but parent interest dwindles because parents can't give that help on a regular basis.

"Sometimes simple survival issues take over. We went to the home of one boy to find out why he wasn't going to school. He was asleep on the couch in the living room when we arrived, and his mother said, 'If you can wake him up and get him to school that's fine, I've got to get to work.' Two alcoholic brothers were living in the same house. The father had been dead for a long time.

"The boy struggled and managed. This past October when he was a senior, he had gotten a job during the summer and finally had a taste of what it was like to earn some money, have money around. There were times when his mother would call and say that she didn't have car fare to get him to school and other times when he said he didn't have shoes to go to school or that he didn't have a jacket to wear in the cold. We tried to give the family economic assistance; we even found a man who would pay half of his senior tuition if he would pay the other half.

He had earned enough money in the summer to pay but he decided to drop out. He said, 'We have money for food now, to do a few things.' When we said, 'Look at after graduation,' he said, 'No.'

"What had saved him from first to fourth year had been the school's interest and a brother-in-law who was willing to do anything he could to help the kid through school. The mother eventually got jealous of the son-in-law and said he could no longer help."

2. Because many parents speak only Spanish and because only one staff member at Institution F is bilingual, communicating, especially spontaneously, with these parents is very difficult.
3. Because the staff is small, faculty members and administrators are forced to "wear many hats." In fact, the assistant principal speculated that the lower average of parent involvement practices in coeducational schools indicated by the survey results might be related to the fact that these schools are smaller than the all-male or all-female schools. In other words, the greater number of responsibilities given to members of a small staff prevents them from having time to develop more effective parent involvement programs. The assistant principal's point is illustrated by the Spanish teacher who is called from class in order to translate phone messages.

Among the supports for effective parent involvement at Institution F, the administrators list the school's small size, which allows teachers and administrators to know students well and to become

personally involved in their home lives. The administrators also think that they recognize "a lot of concern from parents. They want Catholic education for their kids."

#### Methods of Assessment

The principal and her assistant seem to rely on their personal experiences with students and families to help them assess the effectiveness of their programs. They also think the school's attrition rate might be a good measure of how helpful parent involvement practices are at keeping students in school.

#### Findings

Both administrators guess that the school's attrition rate is approximately 40%.

Both administrators agree that their experience with parent education programs was discouraging, and they have no plans to develop a similar project.

They both plan to continue striving for parent involvement even though they have met with many disappointments.

The assistant principal commented, "Any dealing with parents to get them from where they are to where we would like them to be is beyond our strength. I would rather deal with the kids. We have them here, we have time. Sometimes when we contact parents it feels like a ritual, and I wonder if anything meaningful is happening."

Both administrators also indicated that many of their students seem to become successful despite rather than because of their home environment. "Three of our five student council officers are seeing the family counselor because of problems at home." The experiences of the

principal and her assistant have led them to believe that school personnel can make a difference in students' lives if they show the students they care about them. In other words, the school staff members can in some cases become surrogate parents who help students from difficult home environments achieve success.

### Transferability

Since the major focus of the school's parent involvement programs is communication with parents on an individual basis as the need arises, Institution F's parent involvement efforts can be transferred to other school settings.

## INSTITUTION G

Institution G is one of two all-male preparatory seminaries in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Of the school's 270 students, 26% are Hispanic and 5% are black; however, the principal sees a gradual increase occurring in the proportion of minorities attending the school. The present Freshman Class, for example, has a population which is 31% Hispanic, 9% black and 8% Oriental. The school is located in Chicago's downtown area but draws students from as far away as the Wisconsin border. According to the principal, "We are a middle class school. We don't get the very rich kids and have only a few very poor ones."

Rationale, Focus, and Objectives of Parent Involvement Programs

Institution G has academic, behavioral, and formational goals, and because of the formational goals "we ask kids to do extra things they might not have to do in other schools. Our uniqueness is something we need to communicate to parents." The uniqueness of the school, according to the principal, is that it is a preparatory seminary.

The principal indicates that the school's small size and the special nature of its purpose, along with his own style of interaction which he describes as "catching more flies with honey than with vinegar," lead him to concentrate on reaching each student and his parent through personal contact.

The principal believes parents have a significant influence on their children's academic success so "we need them to show an active interest. We only have the kids a few hours a week compared to the time the parents have them."

Of the students at Institution G, "there is not much middle ground. Either the kid is on the honor roll or we need to contact parents to get them more involved. Probably about 20% to 24% of our students need fairly intensive parent involvement in order to be successful." Approximately five students each year, 1% to 2%, need to be referred to outside-the-school professional assistance.

Implementation: Practices Used to Achieve Parent Involvement

Institution G sponsors an open house for eighth grade students and their parents, involves parents in their children's registration, and sends parents a letter during the summer which encourages their participation, explains the school's philosophy, and informs them that the staff expects their sons to at least be open to the possibility of the priesthood.

Freshman Parent Night

Freshman Parent Night in September achieves three purposes. First, it allows the principal, the academic dean, and the dean of discipline to explain the school's procedures and to make clear their expectations for both parents and students. "We try to make our presentations very practical -- the need to study without distractions, without the t.v. or the Walkman, the use of public libraries for study, the importance of checking homework or asking kids what they've done or to see what they've done." Second, the evening functions as a social activity so that parents can meet teachers and other parents in an informal atmosphere. Finally, it allows parents and teachers to have conferences about problems which may have already surfaced. According to the principal, "By this date we might have noticed kids who are

experiencing some adjustment troubles. Parents and teachers are asked to let me know if they want to make a point of seeing one another on this night, and I set up appointments for them." Institution G's Freshman Parent Night is somewhat different than other September parent meetings, then, in that one of its purposes is to foster parent-teacher conferences about student problems very early in the school year.

If parents fail to attend the Freshman Parent Night, the principal writes to them in order to "stress the interest we have in them becoming a part of the process. We ask them to come to our next meeting which occurs about one and a half to two months later when grades are ready for distribution."

#### Demerit Cards

All students are required to carry demerit cards, and these cards are used by the school as a means of communication with parents. Students who fail to complete a homework assignment or who turn in an assignment of unacceptable quality have an "H" marked on their cards; parents are informed that they can check the daily effort of their sons by simply asking to see their cards. Students who receive ten H's must attend a mandatory after-school study for the remainder of that quarter. If, after being released from the study at the end of the quarter, the students accumulate five more H's in the next quarter, they must return to the study. The principal has found that parents frequently check their sons' cards and are supportive of the after-school program.

#### Parent-Teacher Conferences

In each year of students' attendance, the students' parents are expected to attend a parent-teacher conference. In the freshman year,

these conferences are held primarily for the purpose of discussing problems, and teachers only schedule appointments with parents of students who are experiencing difficulties. "Teachers call the parents to schedule appointments. One teacher usually doesn't have to see more than four parents during the course of the evening. At the conclusion of the individual conferences, the families meet in assembly, and the dean of academics and I reinforce the message of the teachers in a very gentle way."

The purpose of each year's parent-teacher conferences is distinct from the others. The parents of third year students, for example, meet with a teacher of their sons' choice for half hour appointments scheduled in March. The teacher is previously given all the school's information about the students and is asked to prepare summary reports for the students and their parents. The goals of the teacher are to review the boys' progress over their three years at Institution G and to discuss with them and their parents student behavioral patterns, attitudes towards work, aspirations for the future, and so on.

#### Other Contact

Letters are sent to parents whose sons are having serious grade difficulty. Occasionally these letters request a parent phone call or a meeting between parents and school personnel. Sometimes meetings with parents are conducted by one teacher or an administrator, and sometimes a staffing approach is used. The principal believes that the school staff contacts parents very often, believes that this contact is significant in the academic success of the students, but also believes



that the best parent involvement approach is that which meets the individual needs of the students and parents.

#### Personnel and Training

According to the principal, all his instructional and administrative staff members bear the responsibility for parent involvement. No special training for the staff was indicated.

#### Total Costs of Parent Involvement Programs

The costs of the parent involvement programs at Institution G are minimal.

#### Supports and Barriers

The principal indicates two major barriers to effective parent involvement: poverty and "parents who think they know everything." "Some parents have had such a poor background themselves that the environment of their home will never be conducive to learning. Learning has never been encouraged. Some poor people never had the luxury perhaps of taking the kids to a museum or an art institute or on a trip somewhere to get the kids interested in learning or reading or investigating. These kids come to school with no built-in curiosity.

"Another problem for schools is the group of parents who think they know everything -- especially those that are educators themselves. One parent was convinced that his son was not having a drug problem although several people here tried to talk to him about it. He was sure that everything his little character told him was the truth and since he was an educator he knew how to get the truth out of kids. Eventually, we caught the kid holding drugs on a school outing."

The principal feels that he has learned "that there will always be people that are hard to reach" and that the only hope in cases like these comes from working consistently and patiently with the family.

Among the supports for parent involvement, the principal cites the school's small enrollment which allows the personnel to become personally involved with students and parents; faculty members who generously give parents their time; parents who are very cooperative; and outside-the-school agencies for students with severe problems.

#### Methods of Assessment

"We've seen parent involvement work by watching kids change."

#### Findings

The principal related his own experiences with a student who at first had serious difficulties and "who people didn't think would make it here" but who became successful through the "interest of his mom and dad, just hard working, blue collar people, who really cared about their son. Our impression is that if we stay on a kid in a supportive, loving, and challenging way we can help him."

#### Transferability

The principal attributes the success of his programs to the uniqueness of his situation. In particular, he cites (a) the school's small size, (b) the parents' financial investment, and (c) the special nature of the school which all but guarantees that students who attend are probably well motivated in the first place.

### Analysis of Interview Data

The format used to present the interview data will also prove convenient for the analysis of this material.

#### Rationale, Focus, And Objectives Of Parent Involvement Programs

Although all of the interviewed administrators believe that parent involvement has a significant effect on the academic performance of students and although each school has developed and implemented a number of practices to encourage parent involvement, none of the interviewed administrators describe their efforts at parent involvement as a "comprehensive program." No school has a staff member assigned to coordinate all the school's parent involvement practices, and no administrator was prepared to present a written document explaining the policies and procedures of parent involvement practices. Analyzing the rationale, focus, and objectives of each school's program, then, is complicated by the fact that (a) the use of the word "program" seems inappropriate and (b) the principals are not accustomed to applying these three concepts to their parent involvement efforts.

Furthermore, the purposes of this study and the nature of the interviews limit the types of parent involvement practices under discussion to those that promote successful academic performance. Therefore, the rationale, focus, and objectives of the parent involvement practices have been somewhat determined by the study since only those practices whose rationale is founded on the belief that parents have a significant effect on the performance of their children, whose focus is academic, and whose objective is to promote successful academic performance through parent involvement are considered.

Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to summarize the comments of the principals under the three topics of this category.

#### Rationale

The interviewed administrators believe that parents have a significant effect on the academic performance of their children and hope through their parent involvement practices to encourage parent support for school goals. This rationale for parent involvement was expressed frequently and forcefully by all interviewed administrators and is by far their chief reason for seeking parent involvement. The administrators did offer other rationales, however, and these are presented below. The letters behind items indicate the institutions whose administrator offered the items as rationales for parent involvement.

1. Since schools provide a service to parents, the "primary educators of children," administrators have a professional obligation to inform their clients/parents about the state of that service. (A)
2. An emphasis on educating the "whole child" blurs the boundaries between home and school as school personnel try to "minister" to all the needs of the child. (A)
3. Administrators have a responsibility to protect their organizations from legal jeopardy, and keeping parents well informed is one method of protection. (A)
4. Parents are more intune with the "real world" than educators, so administrators should encourage them to contribute their knowledge to the school's curriculum development efforts. (E)

5. Administrators recognize a need for parents to learn more about successful parenting techniques, and schools seem an appropriate source for such instruction. (F)
6. Administrators need to communicate their schools' unique mission to parents so that parents will understand the demands the school places on students. (G)

#### Focus

Difficulty in identifying the focus of a school's parent involvement efforts is caused by the absence of formally organized programs and the resulting lack of cohesiveness and integration of practices such organization accomplishes. In order to compensate for this absence, each administrator was asked to estimate the percentage of students they hope to affect by various levels or types of parent involvement. Their responses are listed below.

#### Institution A

75% of the students are served by routine communications given to all parents; 25% require more intensive parent involvement which addresses the specific needs of the individual student; and 2% of this latter group have problems so severe that they need the professional assistance of outside-the-school agencies.

#### Institution B

50% of the students are served by routine communications to parents while 10% require more intensive parent involvement. It is difficult to judge whether or not the remaining 40% are receiving the level of parent involvement they require for academic success. Although 1% of the students and their parents

are recommended to outside-the-school professionals, 10% need and 20% could benefit from such assistance but are not receiving it because they have not been identified by the school staff.

#### Institution C

10% of the students and their parents need little encouragement from the school in order for the students to be successful; another 10% require intensive parent involvement with the school; the remaining 80% need some parent involvement in the form of routine communications and more personal attention. 1% need the assistance of outside professionals.

#### Institution D

Slower and average students as well as first and second year students require more parent involvement in order to be successful. Of these students, 80% are serviced by routine communications to parents, and 20% need more individualized parent contact. Of this latter group, 5% need the assistance of fairly consistent counseling, and 1% need the assistance of outside professionals.

#### Institution E

"Caring" is the focus of all school programs; if teachers are concerned about their students, they will elicit the appropriate level of parent involvement for each student. 30% of the students are serviced by routine communications; 50% need more intensive and personalized parent involvement; the remaining 20% need but are not receiving outside-the-school professional assistance.

#### Institution F

30% are serviced by routine communications; 50% need more intensive parent contact and involvement; and 20% need and are receiving assistance from outside professionals.

#### Institution G

Personal interaction between staff members and students produces appropriate levels of parent involvement. 75% to 80% are serviced by routine communications to parents; 20% to 25% need more intensive levels of parent involvement; and 1% to 2% need outside professionals.

#### Objectives

Because the nature of this study limits the types of parent involvement practices under discussion, it can be safely assumed that the overarching objective of the parent involvement practices discussed with the principals can be stated as follows: "To promote the successful academic performance of students." Other objectives were mentioned, however, and are summarized below.

1. To minister to the needs of children and their families. (A)
2. To fulfill legal obligations to parents. (A)
3. To teach parents that a correlation between home and academic performance exists. (B)
4. To help parents develop the proper home atmosphere for learning and especially the completion of homework. (C and E)
5. To prevent students from being expelled. (C and F)
6. To develop a curriculum useful for students in today's marketplace. (E)

7. To encourage parents to show more concern for their children's academic performance. (F)
8. To teach parents the skills of parenting. (F)

Implementation: Practices Used To Achieve Parent Involvement

It is hoped that the following summary of practices used in the seven schools accomplishes one of the purposes of the interview portion of this study, namely, to gather more specific and detailed information about parent involvement practices used in Catholic secondary schools.

Admission, Orientation, and Registration of Freshmen

All seven schools involve parents in some stage of the admission, orientation, and registration process of freshman students. Open houses are popular fall events for eighth grade students and their parents and are designed to present information about the schools' programs as well as attract prospective students. All Archdiocesan schools sponsor an admissions and/or placement test held on the same day in January except for the preparatory seminaries, which test in November or December. For sharing test results with parents, completing information required for admission, and registering students for their first year of classes, schools use procedures which range from the personal and time consuming effort of conducting one-on-one interviews first between staff members and students and then between staff members and parents, to the more time-efficient yet still personal meeting between one counselor and approximately fifteen students and their families, to the least personal but highly efficient use of written communication passed through the mails.



### Parent Night In September

Known as Mini-Schedule Night, Back-To-School Night, Open House Night, or Freshman Parent Night, an orientation session sponsored early in the school year for parents of new students seems customary. In some cases, parents hear presentations from school officials in large assemblies; in others, parents are introduced to some or all of their children's teachers in either private conferences or group meetings; in most cases, the evening concludes with time set aside for socializing. The purposes of parent orientation can vary among schools but usually include (a) establishing a link between home and school by providing school staff members and parents their first face-to-face contact; (b) explaining the rationale behind the school's rules and procedures; (c) communicating faculty and administration expectations for student performance and parent involvement; (d) informing parents about the difficulties in adjustment that often accompany a student's transition from elementary to secondary school; (e) allowing staff members to meet with parents of those children already identified as exhibiting problem behaviors; and (f) providing an opportunity for parents to meet one another. Most principals agree that parent nights are attended by 60% to 85% of the parents of freshmen.

### Deficiency Notices, Demerit Cards, Report Cards, and Parent Conferences

All seven schools communicate with parents through deficiency notices or progress reports at mid-quarter and through report cards at the conclusion of each quarter. Some administrators insist that teachers communicate to parents before giving students failing grades on their report cards; other administrators strongly support teacher

communication with parents without insisting on it. Demerit cards used in one school provide a sort of ongoing deficiency notice to parents since students are expected to carry the cards at all times and teachers mark the cards whenever students fail to complete their work. Parent-teacher conferences are held in most schools usually at the conclusion of some academic quarters; one school, however, holds its conferences after parents receive deficiency notices at the midpoints of the first and third quarters. Three schools invite parents to school to pick up their children's first quarter report cards, and one of these now uses this same procedure at the conclusion of the second marking period. All three schools sponsor parent-teacher conferences on report card pickup day. Some schools sponsor parent-teacher conferences by appointments scheduled by the teacher or the school office, while other schools allow parents to choose which teachers, if any, they will visit. Some schools insist on parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences and have devised various means of enforcing this policy, ranging from gentle persuasion to student suspension until parents comply.

#### Academic Probation And Parent Contracts

Administrators of five schools cite procedures for academic probation among their parent involvement practices. Although probation procedures vary among schools, the common characteristics include the following: (a) probation is prompted by the student failing a more than acceptable number of classes; (b) parents are informed that their child has been placed on probation and are asked to sign a document acknowledging the probation; (c) at the conclusion of the probationary period, the student is retained if academic performance has improved or

expelled if improvement has not occurred. Only one school informs parents about their child's probation by letter alone; all other schools demand a meeting between parents and school officials. As a result of these meetings, most schools also insist that parents sign a contract which specifies their role in the improvement of student performance.

#### Phone Contact

All interviewed administrators indicate that phone contact is a common and important method of parent involvement. Most schools encourage parents to call the school office when their children are staying home from school, the children's counselor when their children are exhibiting unusual behavior, or the children's teachers when they want to monitor their children's progress. Administrators also encourage teachers to contact parents to keep the parents informed about student performance and to elicit parent support.

#### Parent Newsletters

Six administrators indicate their schools publish parent newsletters from four to eleven times each year and that space is sometimes allotted to information concerning academic performance. Several newsletters, for example, have been used to offer parents tips for helping their children attain good grades.

#### Staffings

Administrators of three schools use "staffings" for involving parents in the academic performance of their children. A staffing is a meeting of the parents, a school administrator, the child's counselor, and usually all the child's teachers held to address a problem in the child's school performance. The primary goals of staffings are (a) to

share information from a number of sources in order to achieve a greater understanding of the nature of the child's school difficulty, and (b) to establish corrective measures.

#### Other Parent-Teacher Contact

All of the administrators indicate that they make provisions for parents and teachers to have face-to-face contact by granting teachers free periods for this purpose, demanding by contract that teachers make themselves available before or after classes, or making arrangements during the school day to free teachers from duties to allow them to meet with parents. Furthermore, administrators explain that many teachers devise their own methods for keeping parents informed about their children's academic progress: teachers' insisting that parents sign graded tests or quizzes was offered as an example.

#### Home Visits

Home visits are rarely used and only at those times when most other alternatives have been exhausted. Administrators of two schools claim that home visits had been used by them or their staffs in the past, in one case to inform parents about a student pregnancy and in another to bring a truant student to school.

#### Parent Involvement as a Requirement of Special Student Programs

Only in the case of a state funded program for low achieving students is parent involvement a requirement for student participation.

#### Parent Workshops And Other Parent Education Efforts

Parent education has been tried in three of the seven schools and has usually focused on giving parents alternatives for dealing with

adolescent behavior. In two of these programs, attendance was voluntary for parents and disappointing to the administrators; in the third, parent workshops were required as part of the government funded low achievers program.

#### Outside-The-School Assistance

Administrators of all seven schools claim their schools use assistance from outside-the-school professionals for students and parents with problems too severe to be handled by school staff members. All the administrators agreed that these professionals demand parent involvement in their work with students. Most of these outside-the-school services are provided to parents on a sliding payment scale which allows parents to pay only what they can afford.

#### Personnel And Training

None of the seven schools has a parent involvement coordinator, or a person officially designated to develop and implement parent involvement practices to promote successful student academic performance. In only one school, Institution D, does an administrator feel that a special personnel arrangement had been made -- in the form of administrative organization -- which accommodates the goal of involving parents in their children's schooling. However, this administrative organization has been designed primarily to provide a sufficient number of administrators for a large student population, and the fact that this administrator has the time to work more extensively with parents is a convenient feature rather than an intended outcome of the administrative organization. All seven schools have parents clubs and parents club moderators, but all administrators agreed that these clubs have little

if any relationship to academic programs. In all schools, encouraging parent involvement is thought to be the responsibility of administrators, counselors, and teachers, with one group or another sometimes given chief responsibility depending on the nature of the involvement and the school personnel available.

Although some administrators feel that their staffs could benefit from inservice training on how to effectively work with parents, only one school has actually conducted a recent inservice dedicated to a parent-related topic -- the effects of broken homes on children's performance -- and this session occupied only one hour.

#### Total Costs Of Parent Involvement

Only in Institution D does the administrator cite special costs associated with the school's parent involvement programs, and these costs are related to what the administrator sees as an unusually large expense for administrative salaries. It is impossible, however, to determine what portion of this expense is directly related to the goal of encouraging parent involvement as opposed to the broader goal of efficient and effective school administration.

In all other schools, the administrators claim their schools' only expense which can be directly related to parent involvement is the cost of publishing and mailing their newsletters. It is interesting to note that no administrator mentioned the cost of mailing deficiency notices or report cards although both have the singular purpose of communicating with parents. Perhaps administrators take for granted many of their customary parent involvement practices and therefore fail to consider the costs incurred by these practices.

### Supports And Barriers

In each of the interviews, administrators spent a considerable amount of time discussing the supports for and barriers to their parent involvement practices. Examining their comments in extensive detail would not further the purposes of this study. Listed below in summary form, then, are first the supports for and then the barriers to parent involvement programs cited by these administrators.

#### Supports For Parent Involvement

1. Among the major supports for parent involvement, administrators list the parents themselves, who in most cases want their children to attend the selected private school because of its Catholic atmosphere and good reputation, who take a great interest in their children, who want their children to attain academic and occupational success, and who, because of all these attributes, will cooperate with the school to ensure student success. In only one school, Institution D, does the administrator feel that parents are also helpful in assisting their children with homework since most of them are educated enough themselves to know the material.
2. The second most frequently mentioned support for effective parent involvement is staff members who care about their students, who are generous with their time and energy, and who willingly and frequently contact parents.
3. Several administrators mention as a support for parent involvement the fact that they or other appropriate personnel are able to get close to students and their families because

they are responsible for a relatively small number of students. In fact, the administrator of Institution D, the largest school considered in the interview portion of this study, praises her school's administrative organization because it allows her and a full-time counselor to work with only 542 students; in effect, the administrative organization of Institution D has created four small schools, each with its own "principal" and counselor, within the larger institution. The administrator of Institution E touts the fact that she knows a considerable number of her parents as fellow parishoners and wins their support through personal contact, while the administrators of both Institutions F and G feel the smallness of their schools allows them to become involved in the personal lives of their students and to work with parents on a more individual basis.

4. One administrator, the principal of Institution E, thinks students themselves support parent involvement because they feel the need for direction from the adults in their lives.
5. When these administrators have encountered students and parents with serious emotional or psychological problems, they feel they have received considerable support from hospitals and other social service agencies which provide professional assistance to parents and children for fees the parents can afford. In all seven schools, administrators had at some time referred parents to these agencies.



### Barriers To Parent Involvement

1. Although every administrator cites parents as a major support for involvement programs, many administrators also list them among the biggest obstacles. Among the ways in which parents block the development and/or implementation of effective programs, these administrators cite the following: (a) Parents are indifferent to their children's schooling and do not want to become involved in the process; instead, they prefer to leave the education of their children completely in the hands of the educators. (b) Parents can be hostile to school personnel when their children are corrected because they feel that the correction is aimed at them. (c) The financial and personal issues confronting especially those families in lower socioeconomic brackets causes parents to place other priorities ahead of the education of their children. In other words, so much of the energy of these parents is given over to basic survival issues that not much remains for their children's schooling. (d) The increasing number of single parent homes, divorced and remarried parents, natural parents who abandon their children or hand them over to other relatives to raise confuses the issue of who is responsible for and should be actively involved in children's education. (e) Parents do not possess sufficient parenting knowledge and/or skills to create a disciplined atmosphere conducive to learning in their homes. (f) Because of their other responsibilities or their lack of knowledge and skills, parents do not provide the consistent

encouragement and discipline that is required to inspire student success. (g) Parents who have recently migrated to the United States and/or who have not become part of the mainstream culture often fail to cooperate with schools because a language barrier diminishes their understanding or because a cultural barrier prohibits their agreement with and support of American middle class standards so important in schools.

2. Although these administrators praise their teachers' concern for their students and dedication to their work, they believe that teacher burnout is another barrier to parent involvement programs. Furthermore, these administrators hesitate to implement new programs which demand more of their staff members because they feel their personnel now give more of themselves than is required by contract or perhaps is even appropriate for good health.
3. Administrators of small schools feel that the need for a single staff member to fill many roles inhibits school personnel from giving as much of their time and energy to parent involvement programs as these programs require to be effective.
4. A fourth barrier to effective involvement is the general erosion of American "society's values" and "family structures" which are requirements for parental involvement in children's education. Gone are the strong family ties and the attitudes of selflessness which inspired parents of the past to sacrifice their personal preferences for the well-being of their children.

5. The nature of the relationship between schools and homes is so complex that it defies the development and implementation of programs to bridge the gap. In other words, because educators do not fully understand the dynamics of the relationship they are unable to create effective parent-school partnerships. Furthermore, the relationship between parents and their children and its effect on academic performance is another one which is not fully understood, so again programs based on best-guess approaches fall short of their goal. Finally, it is likely that parental behavior which negatively affects student academic performance is so engrained in the parents that it would take more time to change that behavior than the schools have available.

#### Methods Of Assessment

One of the major questions that guide this study and one of the major purposes of the interview portion of the investigation concern the means of measurement principals use when rating the effectiveness of their parent involvement programs. All interviewed administrators have strong opinions about whether or not their schools' programs are effective, about which forces are supports for and which are barriers to effectiveness, and about the final causes for their programs' success or failure. Yet no administrator save one has a clearly defined means of quantitatively measuring the effectiveness of parent involvement programs.

Several administrators believe that their schools' attrition rate might provide a useful measurement for determining the effectiveness of parent involvement programs designed to save students from expulsion or

from dropping out because of academic failure; however, no administrator seems to be in possession of his or her school's exact attrition rate or attrition patterns, and no administrator gave evidence of having used this statistic to measure program effectiveness in the past. Although some schools maintain records of failures at each semester, number of students placed on academic probation, number of students regularly visiting counselors, and even number and type of parent contact, no evidence was found that any of this information is organized in a manner useful for measuring program effectiveness.

Only the principal of Institution C uses a quantitative measurement for determining program effectiveness: by examining the failure rates of his students before and after program implementation, he is prepared to claim that a specific parent involvement program produced a 50% reduction in student failures. It is important to note that this principal does not claim to have conducted a controlled experiment or one which meets the rigid requirements of social science research; instead, he is satisfied to have reached his own goal of finding a quantitative means of measurement convenient and meaningful to a practitioner.

All administrators rely on the qualitative research technique of personal observation to rate the effectiveness of parent involvement programs. Some discussed the feedback they received from teachers, or the changes they witnessed in students' characters, behaviors, and/or grades, and all offered approximations of the percentage of parents they had seen participating in various parent activities. To refer to these observations as qualitative research, however, would be a gross

exaggeration since the administrators are not trained qualitative researchers and because the reports of their findings lack the thoroughness and careful analysis of such research.

In short, the principals rate the effectiveness of their parent involvement practices by first observing an occasion in which a parent involvement practice plays some part, by making judgements about the effectiveness of this parent involvement practice in achieving the desired effect on this occasion, by categorizing this occasion, the accompanying practice and its effectiveness rating with others similar to it already committed to memory, and by eventually drawing on the accumulation of these categorized remembrances in order to make a judgement about the overall effectiveness of parent involvement practices.

### Findings

Because the primary means of determining the effectiveness of parent involvement practices used by these administrators is personal observation and reflection, the findings they report are expressed in a personal manner. From their experiences, all administrators find that parents exert a significant influence on the academic performance of students. Some speak of their frustration with trying to improve academic performance while others talk about being content with their schools' efforts and the level of parent involvement they observe. Administrators from Institutions B and F believe that their parent involvement practices are not highly effective in promoting successful academic performance, while those from Institutions A, C, D, and G are satisfied with the effectiveness of their programs. The opinions of the principal of Institution E are more ambivalent than the others: she

finds her present practices somewhat satisfactory but would welcome additions which would more effectively involve parents.

The administrators from Institutions B and F both indicate that parents of their students have other priorities besides their children's education which absorb much of their time and energies and that establishing successful parent involvement programs is difficult if not impossible because of these competing interests. Administrators from C, D, and G, on the other hand, find parents to be very supportive and willing to involve themselves in the schooling of their children. The principal of Institution A shares with administrators of Institutions B and F the belief that many parents are uncooperative and reluctant to be involved but has arrived at mandatory programs which produce a level of parent involvement she finds effective.

There is some indication that the socioeconomic status of the students' families is a factor in the determination of the type of parent involvement programs principals consider effective for their schools. The administrator of Institution D finds that only 5% of the report cards are not picked up by parents on the assigned day, that parents are generally educated enough to help their daughters with homework, and that parents are very cooperative about meeting with school personnel -- "Even dads take time off from work to visit." The administrators of Institution A and F, on the other hand, find that 16% and 10% of the parents, respectively, fail to report for grade cards on the assigned day, that parents are not well educated and therefore cannot help their children with homework, and that parents have other priorities which often place ahead of their children's schooling.

Institution D draws 60% of its students from the suburbs, and the administrator places the students' families in the "middle-middle" socioeconomic bracket; the families from Institution A, on the other hand, are "really scraping to get by," while 32% of the families of Institution F fall below the federal poverty line. The administrator of Institution C, a school which also draws 60% of its students from suburban families, has opinions about his parent involvement programs which closely parallel those of Institution D's administrator, while the administrator from Institution B, a school located only 3 miles from Institution A and which draws its students from much of the same area, is frustrated by the level of parent involvement in his school. The administrator of Institution A feels that she has achieved an appropriate level of parent involvement by making involvement mandatory, while the administrators of Institution B and F are for the most part dissatisfied with their voluntary parent involvement programs. On the other hand, the administrators of both Institution C and D use programs which call for voluntary parent involvement and are satisfied with the levels of involvement they receive.

It would seem, then, that one factor which might have an impact on the effectiveness of parent involvement programs is the socioeconomic status of the parents, and perhaps one explanation for how socioeconomic conditions of families interact with parent involvement programs is that offered by the administrators of Institution F in their discussion of parents' priorities. They believe that parents of lower socioeconomic status are concerned with their children's schooling, respond when schools inform them of problems, and support schools in

their work of educating their children, but that these parents cannot give the consistent attention to their children's schooling that is so often required for success because other "survival issues" absorb their time and energies. A voluntary parent program aimed at families in lower socioeconomic brackets would be poorly received, then, because parents faced with several and competing responsibilities will choose to fulfill those responsibilities which appear most urgent and pressing.

It has not been the purpose of this study to make determinations about the effects of parents' socioeconomic status on parent involvement programs; therefore, sufficient data has not been gathered nor have appropriate controls been exercised to allow further comments on this topic. It is hoped, however, that this discussion has provided some direction for future research.

#### Transferability

All of the voluntary parent involvement programs used by these seven schools could be used in other Catholic schools, in private schools, and in public schools. The mandatory involvement practices used in Institution A could, according to the school's principal, be used in all schools; however, several of the other administrators did not think mandatory involvement practices would be appropriate in their institutions or in public schools. Several of the administrators believe parents' paying tuition or the parents' making an investment in schooling is an advantage in developing parent involvement programs that their schools have over public schools. In other words, these administrators believe that parents who make a financial investment in their children's education are likely to be the type of parents who



(a) hold schooling as a priority and (b) are willing to actively support the schools' efforts in order to protect their investment. Parents of this type, then, are more easily motivated to participate in parent involvement programs. Administrators of small schools mention the difficulty of transferring their parent involvement programs which rely on personal contact and individual attention to larger institutions. None of the administrators mentioned their schools' uniqueness as Catholic or religious institutions as a barrier to the transfer of their parent involvement programs.

From the analysis of interview data, the following summary statements can be made.

1. Principals believe that parents' have a significant effect on the academic performance of their children and have devised a number of parent involvement practices to promote the successful academic performance of their students.
2. None of the principals have developed a comprehensive parent involvement program, have appointed school personnel to coordinate parent involvement, or have on hand a written document explaining the policies and procedures of parent involvement.
3. Principals feel that all members of their educational staffs share the responsibility to encourage parents' involvement in their children's schooling; however, these principals have provided little if any special training for their staffs on parent involvement techniques. Some principals feel that special training is unnecessary since relating to parents takes

only "common sense"; other principals believe that their staffs could use training to increase their sensitivity to home problems and to improve their ability to interact with parents.

4. All principals categorize their students by the type of parent involvement they require in order to achieve academic success. The three categories used are as follows. (a) Students who are served by routine communications given to the parents of all students: These students have parents who are either self-motivated or motivated by the general communications from schools to give their children the encouragement and discipline they need to perform well in school. Principals believe that if these parents are kept informed their children will be academically successful in school. (b) Students who require more intensive parent involvement which addresses the specific needs of the individual: Principals identify this group as students who do not receive sufficient encouragement and discipline from parents when the parents receive only routine school communications, and as a result these students perform poorly academically or act out in school. In order to improve the performance and/or behavior of these students, the principals rely on more specific communications to parents designed to focus on the individual student's school problems and the parents' part in the correction of these problems. (c) Students who need the services of outside-the-school professionals because they have emotional, psychological, or other personal problems too severe for school personnel to

treat: Parents of these students become involved in the treatment of their children at the insistence of the professionals conducting the treatment.

5. The parent involvement practices used in schools can be categorized to correspond to students' needs for parent involvement. Parent involvement practices designed for all parents include eighth grade open houses, registration and orientation procedures, parent nights at the start of the school year, parent newsletters, and report cards. Parent involvement practices designed for parents whose children need more intensive parent involvement include deficiency notices, phone calls from teachers, counselors, or administrators, parent-teacher conferences, staffings, probation contracts, and parent education programs.
6. In order to correct poor student performance, schools use a series of practices which require progressively more parent commitment and involvement as each step in the series is taken. Although the sequence or specific practices may vary, a parent whose child was performing poorly might encounter the following:
  - (a) Phone contact from one or more teachers informing the parent of early indications of poor performance.
  - (b) Deficiency notices from one or more teachers giving written warning that the student is failing at mid-point in the quarter. Deficiency notices are to be signed by parents and returned to school officials.

(c) Parent-teacher conferences with one or more teachers or the student's counselor to discuss deficiency notices or grades. These conferences are held on an evening common for all parents whose children have performed poorly.

(d) Staffing with all of the child's teachers and his or her counselor as well as a school administrator to discuss the child's continued poor performance. This meeting is arranged for one child and his or her parent and is conducted during the school day.

(e) Academic probation. The parents are required to sign a contract specifying both the parents' and the child's responsibilities which must be fulfilled if the child is allowed to remain in school.

(f) Parents required to seek outside-the-school professional counseling for family problems.

7. Although schools do not have comprehensive parent involvement programs, it is clear from the progression of involvement practices discussed above that parent involvement practices in most schools form "quasi-programs" to the extent that they have been categorized to correspond to students' needs. A number of characteristics are common among the programs found in Catholic secondary schools, so it can be assumed that administrators consider these characteristics to be important for achieving parent involvement. First and foremost among these characteristics is the central importance of communication. Almost all parent involvement practices rely on communication

between school personnel and parents; in fact, in some instances communication is synonymous with involvement. For example, administrators believe that they have involved parents in the academic performance of their children when they inform them through the use of deficiency notices that their children are performing poorly. It would seem that when administrators use practices which simply communicate information about children's progress, they make assumptions that (a) parents know what do to help their children, and (b) parents have the skills to perform whatever tasks are necessary to help their children. A second common characteristic of these programs is that face-to-face and one-to-one communications are considered to be more effective at achieving parent cooperation than most other forms of communication. As a result, this more personal contact is used by many schools for working with the parents of children who are least successful and least receptive to the schools' assistance. Another common characteristic is that most programs hope to establish contact with parents as early as possible in their children's enrollment in order to establish the channels of communication which will be required throughout the students' attendance. A final common characteristic of parent involvement programs is the importance placed on projecting a caring attitude towards students and their parents. Although the concern for students is genuine, administrators hope that parents and students who perceive this concern will cooperate

with school programs because they assume these programs are in their best interests.

8. Although some principals are frustrated by barriers that have hampered the effectiveness of some parent involvement programs, all principals are committed to involving parents in their children's schooling, and most are open to suggestions for the further development of such programs.
9. Principals rely on personal experience and reflection rather than on quantitative measures to assess the effectiveness of their programs. Programs are judged to be effective especially when they produce a noticeable and positive change in a student's attitude, behavior, or grades.
10. There is some indication that school characteristics such as school size and the socioeconomic status of student families have an impact on (a) the type of parent involvement practices used in schools and (b) the effectiveness of certain types of practices. However, further investigation of these areas is required before any conclusions can be drawn.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study is to analyze the parent involvement practices of Catholic secondary schools which are designed to produce successful academic performance by students. The following questions have guided this effort:

1. Which areas of parent responsibility do principals of Catholic secondary schools consider significant to student academic performance?
2. What is the frequency in Catholic secondary schools of programs to encourage parent responsibility in these areas?
3. What are the principals' assessments of their programs for encouraging parent involvement?
4. What means of measurement do these principals use when rating the effectiveness of parent involvement programs?
5. What characteristics of parent involvement programs do principals consider most significant for achieving parent involvement?
6. According to these principals, what areas of parent involvement need further development?

This study is divided into three major sections: a review of related literature, a survey of principals of Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago and interviews of administrators from seven of these schools.

The review of related literature presented in Chapter II examined (a) the effects of parental attitudes and behavior on student motivation and performance, (b) the characteristics of the current relationship between parents and schools, and (c) parent involvement practices in upper elementary grades and secondary schools.

The survey of principals focused on twelve areas of parent responsibility suggested by the review of related literature and examined (a) the opinions of principals about the significance of each of the twelve areas in determining the academic success of students, (b) the frequencies of formal programs in these secondary schools for encouraging parent responsibility and involvement in the twelve areas, and (c) the principals' assessments of their parent involvement programs.

The interview portion of the study attempted to (a) expand on information provided by the survey; (b) gather more specific and detailed information about parent involvement programs used in Catholic secondary schools; (c) examine the means of assessment principals use when evaluating their parent involvement programs; (d) study the common characteristics of parent involvement programs which principals consider most significant for achieving effective parent involvement; and (e) consider school characteristics which might have an impact on the development, implementation, and effectiveness of parent involvement programs. The interview subjects were selected from the survey respondents and represented schools which (a) have parent involvement programs with high assessments from their principals relative to other surveyed schools and (b) provide a sufficient diversity to represent the population of all Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago.



### Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from information provided by the review of related literature and the analysis of data gathered from the survey and interviews, and correspond directly to the major questions of the study.

1. Which areas of parent responsibility do principals of Catholic secondary schools consider significant to student academic performance?

Principals of Catholic secondary schools are in strong agreement that several areas of parent responsibility are significant to the academic performance of children. Specifically, principals believe it is important for parents to understand the curriculum, rules and procedures of the school, their children's ability and achievement levels, and the possibilities for their children's future; to set high standards for their children, both in school and beyond; to communicate with school personnel to monitor their children's progress and to inform them about problems which might prevent their children from performing well; to support school staff members in child-school conflicts; to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home; and to even supervise their children's homework. Principals believe it is important for parents to give their children encouragement, a sense of mental discipline, an understanding that there are costs to be paid for academic accomplishment, and a sense of vision. Principals agree with researchers who have found that the frequency and consistency of parental encouragement and

interest are significant in determining the success of student academic performance.

2. What is the frequency in Catholic secondary schools of programs to encourage parent responsibility in these areas?

Because principals of Catholic secondary schools believe parents have a significant effect on the academic performance of children, they have supported the development and implementation of a number of practices to encourage parent involvement. These Catholic secondary schools do not have comprehensive parent involvement programs, yet the practices are usually organized to the extent that (a) practices are targeted to the specific needs of students, and (b) a series of practices is usually in place which requires progressively more parent involvement for those students who continue to perform poorly after routine levels of parent involvement. Although many parent involvement practices can be found in Catholic secondary schools in all considered areas of parent responsibility, the number of programs in each area is in every case less than the number of principals who believe the area is significant, and in some cases the disparity is quite large. This finding supports studies cited in Chapter II that indicate educators agree that the general idea of parent involvement is a good one but have serious doubts about the success of practical efforts to involve parents.

3. What are the principals' assessments of their programs for encouraging parent involvement?

Few principals rate their parent involvement practices highly effective, although principals do indicate that their schools are more effective at communicating with parents than they are at changing or manipulating parent behavior. For the most part, these principals believe their schools are effective at informing parents about curriculum, rules, procedures, and their children's academic ability, achievement levels, and progress in school, but much less effective at getting parents to provide a proper home study atmosphere, supervise homework, or set high aspiration levels for their children. When examining the assessments principals award their parent involvement practices it is important to consider the evidence that school characteristics may have an impact on the effectiveness of parent involvement practices. For example, both small and large schools with a sufficient number of qualified personnel have implemented and rated as highly effective parent programs which rely on extensive personal contact between staff members and parents, a technique either not used or not rated as highly effective in schools with more limited staff sizes. Family socioeconomic status may also be a factor in determining the effectiveness of practices since parents struggling for financial survival are likely to place a number of priorities ahead of their children's education and are, therefore, less likely to participate in voluntary parent involvement activities. Further evidence that the characteristics of a school's population may have an impact on the effectiveness of parent involvement practices is offered

by the finding cited in Chapter II that differences in social status between school staff members and parents further exacerbates an already difficult relationship.

4. What means of measurement do these principals use when rating the effectiveness of parent involvement programs?

Principals rate their parent involvement practices as effective when they believe these practices have produced a noticeable and positive change in a student's attitude, behavior, or grades, and they rely heavily on personal observation and reflection to determine if (a) a change has occurred, and (b) the parent involvement practice is related to that change. Although several principals seem aware that quantitative measures such as attrition rates and patterns, grade distributions, and number of students on probation might be useful tools for measuring the effectiveness of parent involvement practices, few of these measures are actually used for this purpose.

5. What characteristics of parent involvement programs do principals consider most significant for achieving parent involvement?

Although schools do not have comprehensive parent involvement programs, they have established quasi-programs by categorizing practices to correspond to the students' needs for parent involvement. There are a number of characteristics these parent involvement programs have in common, so it can be assumed that principals consider these characteristics most significant for achieving parent involvement. First and foremost among these

characteristics is an emphasis on communication. Almost all parent involvement practices rely on effective communication between parents and schools; in fact, in many instances involvement is synonymous with communication. Second, face-to-face and one-to-one communications between parents and school personnel are considered more effective at achieving parent cooperation and are used, therefore, for those students and parents who have shown reluctance to cooperate. Third, these programs usually promote parent involvement early in a student's enrollment in order to establish a tone of cooperation for the years ahead. Finally, these programs are designed to show students and their parents that school personnel care about their well-being.

6. According to these principals, what areas of parent involvement need further development?

Administrators of Catholic secondary schools desire the development of programs which would effectively convince parents to set high achievement and aspiration levels for their children, to establish a proper home environment for study, and to supervise their children's homework. Although schools now have programs designed to accomplish these ends, it is these programs which are most often judged to be least effective. As mentioned earlier, these are programs which are designed to affect parent behavior and are more difficult to achieve than programs which promote communication between parents and school personnel.

Recommendations for Developing  
Effective Parent Involvement Programs

The following recommendations are made to secondary school administrators who would involve parents to promote successful academic performance by students.

1. Comprehensive programs for parent involvement designed to improve student academic performance should be developed. The rationale, focus, objectives, policies, and procedures of these programs should be carefully spelled out in written documents which will be used to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of specific parent involvement practices.
2. These comprehensive parent involvement programs should consist of a variety of parent involvement practices. The designers of these practices should be sensitive to family characteristics such as parents' education level and socioeconomic status so that the involvement practices are effective at involving parents and at meeting the specific needs of the students and their parents.
3. Besides information about schools' curricula, rules, and procedures, and student ability levels, achievement levels, and progress, schools should give a prominent place to parent involvement practices which communicate to parents research findings that indicate the significant role parents play in the academic performance of students. In other words, one of the major objectives of parent involvement programs should be "to convince parents that they are at least equal partners with schools in their children's education."

4. Research suggests that parents' communicating high academic and occupational aspirations in a clear and persuasive manner is important to successful student performance, so parent involvement programs should include practices which inform parents about (a) the academic ability level of their children and the differences between ability level and their children's past academic achievement; (b) post-secondary educational opportunities and requirements; and (c) occupational opportunities and requirements. It is assumed that the more knowledgeable parents are about these topics the more clear and persuasive they will be when setting standards for their children.
5. Since research also suggests that frequency and consistency of parental encouragement is important to student performance, parent involvement programs should contain practices which provide daily or at least very frequent communications between parents and teachers much like those used in home-based reinforcement models. These practices would be targeted at those students whose performance indicates a need for improvement and more parent involvement, and would supply parents with the information they require to give frequent and consistent reinforcement.
6. Parent involvement programs should not be founded on the assumption that parents know what to do or have the necessary skills to help their children perform successfully. Schools should offer frequent and practical suggestions to parents about

developing a proper home study atmosphere, supervising homework, and motivating their children.

7. Although most parent involvement practices should rely on voluntary parent involvement, all programs should include provisions for mandatory participation for use when circumstances warrant such participation. If, for example, students are about to be expelled or are refusing to respond to school assistance, mandatory involvement of parents might be deemed appropriate. The provisions for mandatory parent involvement should be clearly specified in the written documents which guide the parent involvement programs. Although mandatory involvement may not be used frequently, it should at least be among the options found in a comprehensive program.
8. Parent education should be given a prominent part in parent involvement programs. The literature on behavior modification and home-based reinforcement programs hold too much promise for schools to ignore. Schools should work to overcome parental reluctance for participation in education programs by creating attractive programs, holding these programs at days and times convenient for parents, promoting these programs throughout the community, and offering parents incentives for participation. As a final resort, schools should consider mandatory attendance for parents in special need of parent education.
9. Parent involvement specialists and/or coordinators should be appointed to direct parent involvement programs. These staff members could well be full-time members of guidance



departments who have been provided with the training required to develop, implement, and direct comprehensive parent involvement programs. This training should focus on human relations, cross-cultural relations, conferencing techniques, career counseling, and should provide exposure to research concerning (a) the ways in which parents affect their children's performance; (b) the nature of the relationship between parents and schools; and (c) the latest approaches to encouraging parent involvement. The specialist/coordinator should conduct staff inservice training programs as well as work individually with staff members to help them become more effective at achieving parent support for school goals.

#### Recommendations For Future Research

The following areas related to this study require further investigation.

1. Quantitative as well as qualitative measurements should be developed to assess the effectiveness of present parent involvement practices.
2. Investigations should be conducted to determine the nature of the effect school characteristics have on the effectiveness of parent involvement practices. Of special interest is the effect of parents' socioeconomic status on the effectiveness of parent involvement practices.
3. Parent involvement in secondary schools should be examined from the perspective of parents and students.

4. Since schools have not developed comprehensive parent involvement programs to improve academic performance, such programs should be developed and implemented in secondary school settings and the effects of these programs on student academic performance should be examined.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Scarvia B. "Parents and Standardized Tests," Peabody Journal of Education, Vol. 58, No. 2, January 1981, pgs. 96-107.
- Atkenson, Beverly M., and Rex Forehand. "Home-Based Reinforcement Programs Designed to Modify Classroom Behavior: A Review and Methodological Evaluation," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 86, No. 6, 1979, pgs. 1298-1308.
- Bar-Tal, D., and J. Guttman. "A Comparison of Teachers', Pupils' and Parents' Attributions Regarding Pupils' Academic Achievements," British Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 51, 1981, pgs. 301-311.
- Barth, Richard. "Home-Based Reinforcement of School Behavior: A Review and Analysis," Review of Educational Research, Vol. 49, No. 3, Summer, 1979, pgs. 436-458.
- Becker, Henry Jay, and Joyce L. Epstein. "Parent Involvement: A Survey of Teacher Practices," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1982, pgs. 85-102.
- Bedley, Gene. "The Law of Return: Working With Parents," Thrust, Vol. 9, No. 1, October 1979, pgs. 15-16.
- Boyer, Ernest L. "High Schools: A Report on Secondary Education in America," an address to the Public/Nonpublic School Administrators Conference, February 1, 1984.
- Byrne, David R., Susan A. Hines, and Lloyd E. McCleary. The Senior High School Principalship Volume I: The National Survey, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia, 1978.
- Castricone, Anna M., Wendy Wright Finan, and Stanley K. Gumble. "Focus on Career Search: A Program for High School Students and Their Parents," The School Counselor, Vol. 29, No. 5, May 1982, pgs. 411-414.
- Cervone, Barbara Tucker, and Kathleen O'Leary. "A Conceptual Framework for Parent Involvement," Educational Leadership, Vol. 40, No. 2, November 1982, pgs. 48-49.
- Coleman, James S., Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore. High School Achievement/Public, Catholic, and Private Schools Compared, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1982.
- Collins, Carter H., Oliver C. Moles, and Mary Cross. The Home-School Connection/Selected Partnership Programs in Large Cities, The Institute For Responsive Education, Boston, Massachusetts, 1982.

- Colton, Brad. "Open Forum: Big Success for Small Districts," NASSP Bulletin, Vol. 65, No. 446, September 1981, pgs. 121-122.
- Conklin, Mary E., and Ann Ricks Dailey. "Does Consistency of Parental Educational Encouragement Matter for Secondary School Students?" Sociology of Education, Vol. 54, October 1981, pgs. 254-262.
- Cox, William D., and Charles O. Matthews. "Parent Group Education: What Does It Do for the Children," Journal of School Psychology, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1977, pgs. 358-361.
- Denzin, Norman K. The Research Act/A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1978.
- Duncan, L. Wendell, and Paul W. Fitzgerald. "Increasing the Parent-Child Communication Through Counselor-Parent Conferences," Personnel and Guidance Journal, Vol. 47, No. 6, February 1969, pgs. 514-517.
- Elam, Stanley M. "The Gallup Education Surveys: Impressions of a Poll Watcher," Phi Delta Kappan, September 1983, pgs. 26-32.
- Epstein, Joyce L., and Henry Jay Becker. "Teachers' Reported Practices of Parent Involvement: Problems and Possibilities," The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1982, pgs. 103-113.
- Finn, Chester E., Jr. "Obstacles to Achieving Excellence in American Education," an address to the Public/Nonpublic School Administrators Conference, February 1, 1984.
- Gallup, George H. "The 15th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, September 1983, pgs. 33-47.
- Gallup, George H. "Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 63, No. 1, September 1981, pgs. 33-47.
- Gordon, Ira J., and William F. Breivogel, eds. Building Effective Home-School Relationships. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., Boston, 1976.
- Gorton, Richard A. and Kenneth E. McIntyre. The Senior High School Principalship Volume II: The Effective Principal, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia, 1978.
- Henderson, Anne, ed. Parent Participation--Student Achievement/The Evidence Grows. National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1981.
- Herriott, Robert E. "Some Social Determinants of Educational Aspiration," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 33, No. 2, Spring 1963, pgs. 157-177.

- Iverson, Barbara K., Geraldine D. Brownlee, and Herbert J. Walberg. "Parent-Teacher Contacts and Student Learning," Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 74, No. 6, July/August 1981, pgs. 394-396.
- Kahl, Joseph A. "Educational and Occupational Aspirations of "Common Man" Boys," Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1953, pgs. 186-203.
- Kandel, Denise B., and Gerald S. Lesser. "Parental and Peer Influences on Educational Plans of Adolescents," American Sociological Review, Vol. 34, No. 2, April 1969, pgs. 213-223.
- Kerckhoff, Alan C., and Judith L. Huff. "Parental Influence on Educational Goals," Sociometry, Vol. 37, No. 3, 1974, pgs. 307-327.
- Lightfoot, Sara Lawrence. Worlds Apart/Relationships Between Families and Schools, Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1978.
- Lombana, Judy H., and Al E. Lombana. "The Home-School Partnership: A Model for Counselors," Personnel and Guidance Journal, Vol. 61, No. 1, September 1982, pgs. 35-39.
- Mager, Gerald M. "The Conditions Which Influence a Teacher in Initiating Contacts with Parents," The Journal of Educational Research, Vol. 73, No. 5, May/June 1980, pgs. 276-282.
- McDaniel, Thomas R. "Bridging the Home-School Gap: New Directions for the Secondary School," NASSP Bulletin, Vol. 66, No. 455, September 1982, pgs. 99-106.
- McGeeney, Patrick. Parents Are Welcome. London, 1969.
- McCleary, Lloyd E. and Scott D. Thomson. The Senior High School Principalship Volume III: The Summary Report, National Association of Secondary School Principals, Reston, Virginia, 1979.
- Moles, Oliver C. "Synthesis of Recent Research on Parent Participation in Children's Education," Educational Leadership, Vol. 40, No. 2, November 1982, pgs. 44-47.
- The National Commission on Excellence in Education. A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform, U. S. Department of Education, Washington, 1983.
- The National PTA. "The Principal and the PTA, Partners in Education," Chicago.
- O'Dell, Stan. "Training Parents in Behavior Modification: A Review," Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 81, No. 7, 1974, pgs. 418-433.

- Parsons, Jacquelynne Eccles, Terry F. Adler, and Caroline M. Kaczala. "Socialization of Achievement Attitudes and Beliefs: Parental Influences," Child Development, Vol. 53, 1982, pgs. 310-321.
- "People Are Your Most Valuable Resources," Instructor, Vol. 92, No. 1, August 1982, pgs. 42-47.
- Picou, J. Steven, and T. Michael Carter. "Significant-Other Influence and Aspirations," Sociology of Education, Vol. 49, January 1976, pgs. 12-22.
- Purkey, Stewart C., and Marshall S. Smith. "Too Soon To Cheer? Synthesis of Research on Effective Schools," Educational Leadership, December 1982, pg 67.
- Rehberg, Richard A., and David L. Westby. "Parental Encouragement, Occupation, Education and Family Size: Artifactual or Independent Determinants of Adolescent Educational Expectations?", Social Forces, Vol. 45, 1967, pgs. 362-374.
- Seeley, David S. "Education Through Partnership," Educational Leadership, Vol. 40, No. 2, November 1982, pgs. 42-43.
- Seginer, Rachel. "Parents' Educational Expectations and Children's Academic Achievements: A Literature Review," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 1983, pgs. 1-23.
- Sewell, William H., and Vimal P. Shah. "Social Class, Parental Encouragement, and Educational Aspirations," American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 73, 1968, pgs. 559-572.
- Smith, Elsie J., and Clement B. G. London. "OVERVIEW A Union of School, Community, and Family," Urban Education, Vol. 16, No. 3, October 1981, pgs. 247-260.
- Smith, Thomas Ewin. "The Case for Parental Transmission of Educational Goals: The Importance of Accurate Offspring Perceptions," Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 44, No. 3, August 1982, pgs. 661-674.
- Starr, Warren D. "High School Partnership at the Secondary Level," The High School Journal, Vol. LXI, No. 7, April 1978, pgs. 327-330.
- Swick, Kevin J. "Toward a Meaningful Family-School Relationship," The Clearing House, Vol. 53, No. 2, October 1979, pgs. 97-100.
- Therrien, Mark E. "Evaluating Empathy Skill Training for Parents," Social Work, Vol. 24, No. 5, September 1979, pgs. 417-419.
- Thomas, William B. "Parental and Community Involvement: Rx for Better School Discipline," Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 62, No. 3, November 1980, pgs. 203-204.

- Thornburg, Kathy R. "Attitudes of Secondary Principals, Teachers, Parents and Students Toward Parent Involvement in the Schools," The High School Journal, Vol. 64, No. 4, January 1981, pgs. 150-153.
- Twentyman, Craig T., and Ron C. Plotkin. "Unrealistic Expectations of Parents Who Maltreat Their Children: An Educational Deficit That Pertains to Child Development," Clinical Psychology, Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1982, pgs. 497-503.
- Unity Catholic High School Handbook, Unity Catholic High School, 1983-84, pg
- Vernberg, Eric M., and Frederic J. Medway. "Teacher and Parent Causal Perceptions of School Problems," American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1981, pgs. 29-37.
- Who's Who Among American High School Students, "14 Annual Survey of High Achievers," 1983.
- Williams, Trevor H. "Educational Aspirations: Longitudinal Evidence on Their Development in Canadian Youth," Sociology of Education, Vol. 45, Spring 1972, pgs. 107-133.

**APPENDIX A**

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**



PARENT INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

PART I: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARENT'S ROLE  
IN THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS

Please rate the significance of the following factors in determining the academic success of students. Circle "S" for SIGNIFICANT, "N" for NOT SIGNIFICANT, "?" for NO OPINION.

- |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|----|---|
| 1. Parents' possessing an understanding of the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures.  | S | NS | ? |
| 2. Parents' possessing an understanding of their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests.                  | S | NS | ? |
| 3. Parents' possessing an understanding of occupational and post-secondary educational opportunities and requirements.                                  | S | NS | ? |
| 4. Parents' setting high academic achievement levels for their children.  | S | NS | ? |
| 5. Parents' setting high educational and occupational aspiration levels for their children.   | S | NS | ? |
| 6. Parents' regularly communicating with school staff members to monitor their children's progress.   | S | NS | ? |
| 7. Parents' initiating communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect academic performance. | S | NS | ? |
| 8. Parents' supporting school staff members in child-school conflicts.  | S | NS | ? |
| 9. Parents' providing a proper study atmosphere in the home.  | S | NS | ? |
| 10. Parents' supervising their children's homework performance.   | S | NS | ? |
| 11. Parents' assisting with their children's homework.  | S | NS | ? |
| 12. Parents' seeking educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school.   | S | NS | ? |

PART II: EXISTENCE OF YOUR SCHOOL'S PROGRAMS  
TO PROMOTE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Please indicate if your school provides a formal program for accomplishing the following.

DOES YOUR SCHOOL PROVIDE A FORMAL PROGRAM:

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. For informing all parents about the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures?  | YES | NO |
| 2. For informing all parents about their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests?  | YES | NO |
| 3. For informing all parents about occupational and post-secondary educational requirements and opportunities?  | YES | NO |
| 4. For encouraging all parents to set high academic achievement levels for their children?  | YES | NO |
| 5. For encouraging all parents to set high educational and occupational levels for their children?  | YES | NO |
| 6. To encourage all parents to regularly communicate with school staff members to monitor their children's progress?  | YES | NO |
| 7. To encourage all parents to initiate communication with school staff members to inform them about home and personal problems which might affect their children's academic performance? | YES | NO |
| 8. To encourage all parents to support school staff members in child-school conflicts?  | YES | NO |
| 9. To encourage all parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home?   | YES | NO |
| 10. To encourage all parents to supervise their children's homework?  | YES | NO |
| 11. To encourage all parents to assist with their children's homework?  | YES | NO |
| 12. To encourage all parents to seek educational experiences for their children beyond those formally offered by the school?  | YES | NO |

PART III: YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
YOUR SCHOOL'S PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

For the following items, rate your school's parent involvement programs in terms of their effectiveness in fostering the successful academic performance of your students. In the scale, 5 indicates "very effective" and 1 indicates "not effective." If your school does not have a program in the area specified, answer NN if you believe there is "no need" for such a program or D if you believe a program in the area would be "desirable."

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|
| 1. Your formal program for informing all parents about the school's curriculum, rules, and procedures.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 2. Your formal program for informing all parents about their children's academic ability and achievement levels as measured by standardized tests.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 3. Your formal program for informing all parents about occupational and post secondary educational requirements and opportunities.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 4. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to set high academic achievement levels for their children.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 5. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to set high educational and occupational aspiration levels for their children.   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 6. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to regularly communicate with school staff members to monitor their children's academic progress.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 7. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to initiate communication with school staff members to inform them about home or personal problems which might affect their children's academic performance. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 8. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to support school staff members in school-child conflicts.   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 9. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to provide a proper study atmosphere in the home.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 10. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to supervise their children's homework.   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 11. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to assist their children with homework.   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |
| 12. Your formal program for encouraging all parents to seek educational experiences for their children beyond those formally provided by the school.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NN | D |

#### PART IV: YOUR COMMENTS

This section of the survey is optional and is provided so that you may offer information about your feelings about the significance of the role of the parents, the possibilities of school programs to encourage a school-parent partnership, specific information about your school's programs, or any other information you think may be helpful in a discussion of the relationship among schools, parents, and the successful academic performance of secondary school students. Any information you can send me about the specifics of your parent programs would be greatly appreciated. If, for example, you have printed parent bulletins, handbooks, letters, etc., I might be able to learn a great deal about your programs if you send this information to me. If a member of your staff is responsible for your parent programs, it would be helpful if you sent me his or her name so that I might contact him/her for further information. Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX B

AN EXCERPT FROM

THE HOME SCHOOL CONNECTION/SELECTED PARTNERSHIP

PROGRAMS IN LARGE CITIES,

BY CARTER H. COLLINS, OLIVER C. MOLES AND MARY CROSS

OPERATION FAIL-SAFE: HOUSTON, TEXAS

Site Visit Conducted By: Carter Collins

## PROGRAM DEFINITION

Operation Fail-Safe is a school system initiated program designed to foster home-school cooperation in the education and career guidance of students.

## RATIONALE

Operation Fail-Sale is more than just a program, it is a concept which pervades and touches all aspects of the Houston educational system. The concept, and the program in which it is embodied, grew out of three major considerations. First, Houston is a growing, thriving metropolis -- a good educational system was recognized as being essential to continued growth and development of the city.\* Second, the public school administrators, business and community leaders all perceived that the educational system could be greatly strengthened and improved if parents were encouraged to play a more active, responsible role in the education of their children. Third, there was the presence of a very pragmatic superintendent who believed parents had a lot to offer and who was determined to create the conditions necessary to encourage a high level of parent participation.

Moving from the global notion of parent involvement down to the local classroom level, it was reasoned that if parents were more informed about the strengths, weaknesses and academic progress (or lack of it) of their children, they would be in a much better position to work with the child at home, thus reinforcing and supplementing the efforts of the classroom teacher. One systematic way of sharing the critical body of academic knowledge about the student has been the program's utilization of the academic achievement profile, which serves as the main basis for the parent-teacher discussion at the fall Fail-Sale conference.

## FOCUS

Operation Fail-Sale is an Houston Independent School District program designed to stimulate: (i) public awareness of the role of parents in the education of their children; (ii) the direct involvement of parents in the learning process; (iii) increased parent effectiveness

---

\*This reasoning is manifested in the slogan found on many of the district's publications -- "Houston Independent School District -- A Partner in the Progress of Houston."

in developing academic achievement and good study habits at home; and (iv) parental involvement in the career guidance of secondary school youth.

The program, which is a system-wide effort, works to open channels of free communication among the home, the school and the community. The administration and staff hope that the development of a strong home-school partnership will lead to improved student attendance, higher achievement scores and better department.

The principal feature of the program is the parent-teacher conferences held in the spring and fall of each year. Prior to the conferences, there is a flurry of planning, orientation and organizational activities which set the stage for the big event. Notwithstanding the centralized structure of the program, the individual school is the major arena of program activity. Needless to say, the friendly rivalry and competition between schools has been a positive asset to the program. Preparation for the conferences also involves a multi-media, mutli-dimensional public interest campaign at the district, area, and school level. These activities help to build community support for the idea of increased parental involvement and to urge parents to attend the conferences. In the first year of the program, the school administration was able to garner over a million and a half dollars of free publicity for the program from the local business community.

The central point of parent-teacher interaction at the conference on the elementary level is the computer generated student achievement profile (math and reading) which is prepared for each student prior to the meeting. At the secondary level, there is greater stress on career and occupational guidance and the printout from the Career Occupational Preference System (COPSII) becomes the main focus. The student, parent, and teacher together discuss the student's academic achievement progress to determine how that supports, or fails to support, the career direction in which the student wishes to go. On both the elementary and secondary levels, the teacher, student and parents work together to find solutions for the various problems of weaknesses which the conference has highlighted. To assist the parent in working with the students at home, the program provides a series of reading and math materials (K-6) entitled Points for Parents, along with other publications for home use.

#### OBJECTIVES

There are eight specific overall objectives which define and guide the Fail-Safe model. These are:

- \* To increase awareness and gain the support of the community for the idea of shared parent-school responsibility for the educational development and progress of the students.

- \* To provide training, orientation, program support, incentives and leadership to the staff necessary for the development of effective parent programs in each of the schools.
- \* To design and develop a dissemination system for communication with parents about select aspects of a child's progress in the areas of academic development and social adjustment at school.
- \* To devise a means of communication between the community-at-large and the school system by bringing in community representatives to share ideas concerning parent-community involvement in local education.
- \* To provide opportunities for direct parent-teacher interaction with respect to the academic, and social development progress of the students.
- \* To design, develop and disseminate teaching strategies for parents to use in tutoring, socializing and the child's growth and development.
- \* To provide parents with the kinds of information and motivation needed to make them active participants in the career counseling of their children.
- \* To improve student learning and increase career planning awareness through parent and teacher collaboration.

Needless to say, the superordinate goal under which these eight objectives fall is the improved educational achievement of all the students attending the Houston public schools. The fact that there has been a steady rise in achievement scores, notwithstanding changes in the school population, indicates that progress is being made in the fulfillment of this goal.

#### PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Although program implementation is an evolutionary process (with rather indistinct beginnings and endings), there are, for the purpose of this presentation, at least seven implementational steps connected with Operation Fail-Safe which can be isolated and addressed. These are: (i) public awareness; (ii) community involvement; (iii) staff training; (iv) educational conferencing; (v) procedures and materials; (vi) dissemination; and (vii) evaluation assessment.

#### Public Awareness

A local advertising agency designed a total public awareness campaign to launch Operation Fail-Safe in the 1978-79 school year. The Fail-Safe logo and theme, "Don't Fail Me - Help Me", appeared on one hundred billboards throughout the city. Award-winning public service announcement spots were shown on television for two months prior to



Fail-Safe days. Approximately \$1,700,000 in public service space advertising was donated by radio, television, and outdoor media to promote teacher/parent conference days.

### Community Involvement

Community members, parents, teacher organization representatives, and administrators composed a city-wide task force on parent involvement. Goals were formulated and strategies were developed to meet objectives. Task force recommendations made to the administration became the basis for the parent involvement effort.

### Staff Training

Professional Houston Independent School District staff members were initially in-serviced over closed circuit television. Further staff development was provided by the Guidance Department to building counselors and building Fail-Safe coordinators. A training manual detailed organizational procedures for principals and teachers. Area coordination was provided by the Area Guidance Specialists.

### Educational Conferencing

In the spring and fall of each school year, the entire system gears up for parent-teacher conferences. The planning, which begins well in advance, is quite elaborate and varies considerably from school to school. At most schools there is an intensive campaign to alert the public to the event and to urge all parents to attend. The program has a great deal of flexibility, which allows individual schools to accommodate the time requirements of a majority of the parents. Conferences can be held during school hours, in the evening, or even on Saturday. Another indication of the program's willingness to facilitate parent attendance is the sending of a letter, from the superintendent, to the parent's employer requesting release time so the parent can attend the conference.

The conference itself has served as a unique opportunity for the parent, teacher and student to get together and discuss the student's progress and any problems which are hindering student achievement. The achievement profile is a documented record of how the student is doing as indicated by the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The profile provides a solid basis for determining progress from conference period to conference period and allows the teacher, the parent and the student to agree upon strategies for improvement.

Aside from the conference, the occasion is an opportunity for parents to attend special cultural programs, mini-workshops on school related topics, coffee klatches and other offerings. As mentioned earlier, each school comes up with its own menu; these kinds of activities, however, are representative of what can be found from school to school.

Given the large Hispanic population in Houston, finding enough bilingual personnel to facilitate parent-teacher conferences has been something of a problem. The problem has been greatly alleviated, however, by calling on bilingual teachers, students, and community volunteers to act as interpreters for those parents who require assistance.

### Procedures and Materials

The procedural framework for Operation Fail-Safe was established in 1979 by a committee representing teachers, administrators and community interests. The procedures for holding the twice-yearly parent-teacher conferences operate at three levels; the office of the Deputy Superintendent for Special Services; area offices; and the school building level.

At the school building level, the operation is managed and directed by the principal, a Fail-Safe Committee and a coordinator. Within the parameters set by higher authorities, the principal and the committee establish the calendar of events and activities leading up to the conferences, the holding of the conferences, and any follow-up work necessary. The calendar includes such items as details of the pre-conference public awareness campaign; the invitation and call to parents; in-service training for teachers (conducted by the coordinator); the ordering and distribution of conference forms and materials for the parents; provision for activities which will take place during the conferences; and any post-conference follow-up that is to be performed. There is a great deal of flexibility built into the process and each school is expected to tailor its program to fit the needs of its parents and the community it serves.

The six area offices provide general supervision and coordination for all of the schools within their areas. The Area Guidance Specialist provides training and backup for the school level coordinators, including the career counseling aspect of the parent-teacher conferences. The area offices serve as a link between the central administration and the neighborhood schools. Through that link, directives, information, and requests pass up and down through the system.

The Deputy Superintendent for Special Services gives overall supervision and direction to the program at the district level. The Office of Guidance and Parent/Community Support serves as the staff arm to the Deputy Superintendent, and renders such services as training for the area coordinators, materials development (usually in conjunction with the Curriculum Department), public relations services and represents the program's interests in budgeting and funding.

In addition to the external relations work done by the superintendent's office, the Institute for Parent Involvement, Springfield, Illinois, sells technical assistance and help to school systems wishing to set up programs like Fail-Safe.

## Dissemination

The dissemination of Fail-Safe materials takes place at two levels -- internal and external. Within the system, the parent-teacher conferences are the first line of distribution. At the conferences, parents (elementary level) receive materials such as the achievement profiles, Points for Parents booklets (English and Spanish versions available), reading prescriptions, and a reading list of library books and other materials. At the secondary level, materials on student achievement, career choice information, program options, testing, and other materials are given to the parents.

External channels of distribution consist of a commercial outlet located in Illinois, plus the efforts of school districts through the meetings, conventions and other professional contacts they have around the nation.

## Evaluation/Assessment

Assessment and evaluation has been built into the implementation of Operation Fail-Safe, and critical measurements and analysis have been made at several important junctures. As is true with many large school systems, Houston has a rather large, professional, well established Research and Evaluation Division which is headed by a Deputy Superintendent. Having the Research Division situated in the upper level of administration facilitates the use of research as a tool for analysis, evaluation, feedback and refinement.

In addition to its distinct set of objectives and operational characteristics, there are four overarching features which describe the tone and spirit of the Operation Fail-Safe. These are:

District-wide system. Fail-Safe embraces all of the public school students and their parents within the district. Although directed and managed from the central office, each school has the opportunity and responsibility for shaping and modifying the details of the program to fit local needs.

Goal-oriented. The objectives of the program are clearly promulgated and stem from the belief that when teachers, parents and students all work for the same goals, there is a greater possibility of achieving such goals.

Positive catalyst. Fail-Safe has been the catalyst which served to bring into focus several pre-existing district programs (Title I Parent Involvement, Secondary Guidance Program, Competency Testing, Basic Skills, and Volunteers in Public Schools). All of these components now complement one another instead of existing as independent, unrelated programs.

Variety of strategies. The program uses a variety of strategies to involve teachers, parents and students. Parents and children at a sample of 39 schools use computerized reading prescriptions which list activities in which parents K-6 receive the Points for Parents series and a Reading and Math Progress Form at the Fail-Safe conferences. The form is a list of specific strengths and weaknesses prepared for each child. At the secondary level, parents and their children receive an individualized computer-generated career planning profile. This profile includes objective considerations of career goals, expectations, and attitudes in relation to identified interests and abilities.

#### FACILITIES REQUIRED

In Houston, Fail-Safe operation was superimposed upon an existing system, therefore requiring no additional space of facilities. The administration and management was done out of existing office facilities. The conferences were held in the classrooms. The computer requirements, although something of a strain on the system, were done with existing facilities.

#### PERSONNEL AND TRAINING REQUIRED

At the central district level, the administration and coordination of the Fail-Safe program is located in the Office of Guidance and Parent/Community Support which is headed by Mrs. Letitia Plummer. The Guidance Department is situated under the Special Services Division headed by Mrs. Patricia Shell, who is a Deputy Superintendent. These personnel are an integral part of the system with other duties in addition to Operation Fail-Safe. Out in the field, the district is divided into six sub-superintendencies -- these are area coordinators for the program. At the local school level, the operation is administered and coordinated by the principal and the school coordinator.

All in-service training associated with the program is arranged and provided by the Guidance Division.

#### COSTS

Operation Fail-Safe is completely funded out of local funds. The first year's cost of the program was \$616,600 -- high due to heavy start-up costs. By school year 80-81 the costs had dropped to \$347,000 or \$1.43 per conference. Program costs are offset slightly through the sale of the program's copyrighted materials.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Operation Fail-Safe enjoys widespread support both within and outside of the school system. The General Superintendent is more than an ardent supporter, he is the main driving force behind the program. Although not a representative sample, all of the administrators interviewed during the site visit praised and endorsed the program.

According to surveys conducted by the Evaluation and Research Division, the majority of the teachers considered the program valuable and a help to the educational process. Those same surveys indicate that parents by and large endorse and support the program.

There is ample evidence that the community at large believes that Fail-Safe is a worthwhile program. This is demonstrated by the fact that the elected school board has consistently appropriated funds to support the program. Civic groups throughout the community have given support to the program by helping to publicize the program among their members, offering space for posters, notices and other information about the conferences. The response from the business community has been positive. The donation of over a million dollars worth of media service to help launch the program is indicative of that positive response.

#### FINDINGS TO DATE

In October of 1979, the Houston Independent School District's Research Department presented to the school board a report entitled, "Update on Operation Fail-Safe". The purpose of the report was to record some of the major achievements of Fail-Safe after its first year of operation. The report covered major findings relating to:

- \* improved student attendance (time on task);
- \* increased student achievement;
- \* increased parent participation in the schools;
- \* positive parent participation in the schools;
- \* positive feedback on use of Fail-Safe materials; and
- \* cost effectiveness.

#### Student Attendance

In comparing student attendance for the school year 1977-78 with that of 1978-79, an increase from 90.2 percent to 91.41 percent (an increase of 243,400 days) was shown. When translated into instructional hours, this amounted to 1,460 hours or an average increase of 7.5 hours per student.

#### Student Achievement

An analysis of standardized achievement composite test scores showed continued improvement of basic skills performance of the students in the Houston Independent School District. For the second consecutive year, the average academic achievement of students in grades one through six meets or exceeds the national norm. At the secondary level, a significant improvement in achievement occurred at all grade levels. In the area of student achievement, the cause and effect relationship is clouded by the fact that the school district declared an end to social

promotions in 1978. This no doubt had a tremendous impact on some students' motivation to learn.

### Parent Participation

Prior to the introduction of Fail-Safe, the main vehicle for parent participation was through parent organization meetings. A "Survey of Parent Involvement in the Houston Independent School District" showed a dramatic increase (47 percent) with the advent of Fail-Safe. The increase among low-income parents, minority parents, and parents of secondary school students was the most encouraging of all.

### Parent-Teacher Evaluations

Both parents and teachers were surveyed to determine their reactions to the Fail-Safe conferences. The responses were very positive. For example:

- \* 96.7 percent of the parents felt "more positively about their child's education."
- \* 97.1 percent of the parents felt "that the conference was a positive experience."
- \* 97.1 percent of the parents "received a plan from the teacher of things they can do to maintain or improve their child's education."
- \* 85.4 percent of the teachers felt "positively about their relationship with the parents of their students."
- \* 71.6 percent of the teachers "believed that the parent-teacher conference day was a success."
- \* 93.3 percent of the teachers indicated "parents were receptive to suggestions."

### Feedback on Fail-Safe Materials

Parents were asked to evaluate the usefulness of the Points for Parents booklet. Of the parents returning the survey:

- \* 83 percent tried the activities in the booklet with their child.
- \* 74 percent thought the activities were "just right" in level of difficulty.
- \* 95 percent indicated the directions for most of the activities are "easy to understand."
- \* 95 percent thought their child liked the activities "very much" or "somewhat."

In addition, parents evaluated the computerized reading prescriptions. Of the parents returning the survey:

- \* 80 percent felt the computer prescription gave them an understanding of their child's reading skills.
- \* 73 percent tried the activities in the prescription with their child.
- \* 67 percent felt the difficulty level of the activities were "just right."
- \* 94 percent thought the directions for the activities were "easy to understand."
- \* 93 percent said their child liked the activities in the prescription "very much" or "somewhat."

### Cost Effectiveness

An important factor in implementing any program is the cost. When the cost for production and development of materials (\$616,588.83) is pro-rated by the number of conferences (242,000), the cost per conference is only \$2.55 for the first year of Operation Fail-Safe. Although the value of the parent-teacher-student relationship established at the conference and the numerous positive after-effects cannot be measured in dollar amounts, the costs incurred seem small in terms of the benefits received. If Fail-Safe materials had been simply mailed to parents, the costs would have been similar but without the desirable effects of personal interaction.

In addition to the surveys upon which "Update on Operation Fail-Safe" was based, the Research Department conducted two studies during the 1977-78 school year to determine the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. The first study involved the comparison of the parent involvement in each school, as determined by the school principal, to the composite score of either the sixth, eighth or eleventh grade students on standardized achievement tests. Within elementary, junior and senior high schools, levels of parent involvement were statistically compared with achievement tests scores using a correlation procedure. The analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between parent involvement and student achievement at every level. From these analyses, it can be inferred that schools with high levels of parent involvement also tend to have high achievement test scores.

### SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS TO PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND PERMANENCE

In the early stages of the program, the administration was faced with the usual kinds of latent parent and teacher fears and anxieties precipitated by the appearance of a major new program. As time went on, however, and teachers and parents began to feel good about the

conferencing experience, the fears and anxieties disappeared. There is little doubt that the language barrier still remains a handicap in some places.

Another problem which seems to have caused some initial concern was the amount of paper work teachers had to execute in connection with the program. For the most part, this problem has been resolved by the streamlining of the procedures and the reduction of the paper work required.

In terms of support, Fail-Safe has apparently been very fortunate. The school leadership has given constant support to the program. The same, according to documented information, has been true of the teachers and the parents. Although the program cost per pupil is low, the total cost is considerable. The willingness of the community to approve such expenditures, through their representatives, is indicative of strong community support. There is also ample evidence that the business community of Houston is behind the program and gives its active support.

Although parent attendance at the parent-teacher conferences has declined slightly in recent times, the overall level still remains quite high (an average of about 75 percent at the elementary level and about 40 percent at the secondary level). This relatively high level of parent involvement over a three and a half year period indicated continued parent support and interest in the program. Furthermore, questionnaires filled out by parents during the conferences indicate that the parents find the conferences useful and wish the program to continue. There is also evidence that the community, the school teachers, and administrators continue to give strong support to the program. Another factor which adds to the possibility of permanence is the fact that the program is funded locally and currently, at least, local funds seem more secure than Federal funds. Consequently, there is a strong possibility that Operation Fail-Safe will be institutionalized, with modifications perhaps, and become a permanent feature of the Houston school system.

There appears to be no immediate threat to the continuance of the Operation Fail-Safe. It would be pure speculation but unforeseen events like the departure of the present general superintendent (who has been a main force behind the program), a change in school board composition, or a drastic reduction of local funds could have a significant, negative impact on the direction and level of the program.

At this point, the question of tempo and program dimensions seems to be a much more pertinent question than permanence. From all reports, the initiation of Fail-Safe in the fall of 1978 involved a tremendous output of energies by the community, school and parents. To try to maintain that level of momentum twice a year and over a period of years would be extremely costly. If the conferences were held once per year, that in itself would cut the emotional, physical and financial cost substantially. Aside from the cost factor, it is likely that the attendance pattern of the parents will add to the gravitational pull toward the once a year conference schedule. It may be that the more



contact some parents have with the school, the more they will come to believe that all is well and that there is no need for conferencing with the teacher more than once per year. The feeling of security on the parents' part may be further extended by the continuous rise in achievement scores and the steady increase in student school attendance.

In regard to parents' concerns about their children, it is interesting to note that, in the beginning, many parents were reported as believing that Fail-Safe meant that their children could not fail a grade. It was necessary therefore to educate parents to the fact that Fail-Safe was a military term referring to a series of back-up safeguards which greatly decreased the chances of an operating failing to achieve its mission. It does not mean that there is a total guarantee against failure.

#### TRANSFERABILITY

Operation Fail-Safe has already been successfully adapted by the Indianapolis school system, so there is no question that under the right circumstances the program is transferrable. In addition to the original transfer mechanisms created by Houston, Indianapolis has produced a manual which is a sort of do-it-yourself piece for others to follow. In addition to the experiences of Houston and Indianapolis, which can be utilized by newcomers to the field, there is the possibility of calling upon the Parent Involvement Institute, P. O. Box 2377, Springfield, Illinois 72705, for assistance.

There are about five major areas of consideration which seem to impact upon the transferability of Fail-Safe. These are: (i) leadership; (ii) program initiation; (iii) teacher organization issues; (iv) cost; and (v) ability to maintain a certain momentum.

Leadership. Fail-Safe is a systemwide, pervasive program which requires the cooperation and support of several, sometimes diverse, factions; i.e., teachers, administrative units, parents, and the community. It takes a strong, determined, dynamic personality to pull these forces together into a harmonious, mutually supportive collection. Without such leadership, a district may have little success in launching and maintaining a Fail-Safe type program.

Program initiation. Since Fail-Safe permeates the entire district, its initiation may require disturbing elements which have not been stirred for years. This can be extremely disruptive for some people. Consequently, it may require several months, or even years, of preparatory work before the program can be launched. Even then, it may be necessary to have a phase-in, in some districts.

Teacher organization. The introduction of a Fail-Safe type program can have considerable impact on the lives of the teachers. For example, if the system is to be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of the parents -- like having parent-teacher conferences at night -- it means that teachers must be willing to make certain adjustments. In some

places we may find a strong teachers' union which has a standing contract forbidding teachers to work other than the regular school day. Consequently, the successful introduction of the program may hinge upon the presence of a teacher organization which is flexible and open to cooperating with the district in new innovative programs.

Cost. Although Houston has managed to get the cost down to less than \$2.00 per student at each parent-teacher conference, the initial costs were quite high. Since many of the costs are fixed, systems which have a very low teacher-student ratio could expect the costs to be even higher (Houston has about 200,000 students over which the fixed costs are spread). At the same time, if the system receives funds from the state under a student attendance formula, the increased attendance which the program seems to engender may make the venture a self-supporting one. For example, at one point the increase in student attendance which took place in Houston made the district eligible for an additional 1.7 million dollars under the state aid formula. Here again, phasing-in could be the best strategy. If the initial phase is successful and cost effective, it may induce the funding source to provide the additional funds necessary for launching the next phase.

Maintaining momentum. A certain level of momentum is required for a program like Fail-Safe to put down roots and become institutionalized. If the momentum drops too sharply or too early, the initial positive impressions of the program held by the community and the school officials could evaporate, leaving the program in jeopardy. To maintain such momentum, however, may be more difficult than the original launching. The novelty wears off and the system has to draw upon resources which tend to decline, rather than increase as time goes on. As in any transplant, it is critical to make sure that the soil, climate, moisture and ecology are supportive of the new plan. Fail-Safe has already been successfully transplanted once. There is no doubt that, if the conditions are right, it can be transplanted many times again. The important point is that we make sure the conditions are supportive before the transplant is attempted.

For the name and address of the person to contact for additional information, please refer to the profile in Section Four.

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Michael N. Riley has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Melvin Heller, Director  
Professor, Administration and Supervision, Loyola

Dr. Max Bailey  
Associate Professor, Administration and Supervision,  
Loyola

Dr. Karen Gallagher  
Assistant Professor, Administration and Supervision,  
Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4/17/89  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director's Signature