RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPROVING SCHOOLS BY IMPROVING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: EVALUATION OF CHAMINADE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  *Corresponding author: *MEWEZINO Esso-Mondjonna*	For too long parents were not involved in the collaborative experience, therefore their concerns were not voiced. Today, then, it is not surprising that collaboration between teachers and parents has become even more important because of the relevance in achieving new school reform requirements that promote equitable practices for every student. The aim of this study, carried out during a research residency in the United States, was to evaluate teachers and students' perceptions of parental involvement in school activities. Survey questionnaires were administered to both teachers and students in a high school setting. Finding revealed that while most teachers agree that parental involvement improve school achievement, only one third of students agree that their grades improve when they get help from home. Furthermore, while teachers would like to see greater parental involvement, only a small minority of students would like their parents to visit the school. This illustrates a difference in perception between these two groups. The results' discussion illustrates that parental involvement at all grade levels can contribute to the academic and behavioral performance of students. When parents work collaboratively with schools, they assist in ensuring that effective practices are employed. Doing that helps solve problems and improving education.

INTRODUCTION

A strong school-parent partnership is an important ingredient in any successful school program. Parents have been instrumental in the change process for the education of children, especially children with special needs. Enlisting the support of parents is essential, as parents provide key information regarding their children. When parents are involved in the partnering relationship, all stakeholders benefit. It is essential that parents feel that they are an important part of the school community. Turnbull A., Turnbull R., Erwin E. & Soodak L. (2006) suggest that there are many ways to enhance families' participation and sense of community in their child's school. First, it is vital that teachers make every effort to welcome families and ensure that they connect with other families at school. Secondly, it is wise for teachers to provide meaningful opportunities for parents to attend and volunteer in school activities. This contributes to the development of partnerships with parents and enhances their sense of community within the school. In addition, some parents may lack the economic resources to participate (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Although some parents have innate communication skills and the ability to easily build strong relationships with teachers, others may need to be coaxed (Tucker C., Bachman L., Klahr J., Meza N. & Walters M., 2008). It is possible that parents may feel devalued and may need explicit encouragement to communicate with teachers. There may be feelings of uncertainty due to parents own negative experiences with schools,

feelings of embarrassment about clothing or their own learning inadequacies. However, there are still many parents who are willing to participate. Teachers must recognize that active participation by one group is viewed passively by another. For example, for some parents following the teachers' suggestions and making no demands is considered active participation; for others, involvement means being present in the classroom on a set schedule of days assisting with instruction. The key issue is that teachers must communicate with parents to determine how much they want to be involved. It is important that teachers make the effort to include parents, as much as possible. In light of the above findings, this study was devised to evaluate and shed the light on how teachers and students perceive parental involvement in school activities. Collaboration cannot be effective if parents are not included. There must be a connection between parents and schools. Schools must be willing to collaborate with parents. It is becoming increasingly evident that schools cannot effectively educate children without the support and involvement of parents. The challenge becomes that of ensuring an effective work between the school and home and meeting the needs of every student. Schools must have a plan of action that identifies specific strategies for including parents in the learning process.

Related Research on Parental Involvement: There are benefits for all stakeholders when parents are actively involved in the learning experience. While great value was placed on improved parent-teacher-relationships, Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., Bassler, O.C. &

Brissie, J.S. (1987) suggested that parental involvement remained a challenging goal to meet in schools. A study by Fletcher R. & Silberberg S. (2006) investigating the importance of fathers' involvement in their children's school activities confirms evidence of positive effects of parents' involvement in their children's schooling. The finding is that a father's participation in school activities had a stronger influence on students' grades and contribute to the reduction of misbehavior of some male students than a mother's involvement. Based on this, the researchers have recommended that schools target fathers more consistently for participating in activities related to academic achievement. If parents can assist teachers in the classroom, then it is important that schools strive to attract parents as key stakeholders in the learning process. Partnering with parents is valuable as everyone benefits (Sanders M. G., 2008). Martin D. & Martin M. (2007) describe the experience of implementing a family/school partnership in an urban elementary school. In the study, four hundred fourth grade students were participants in the five-year longitudinal study. Thematic subjects such as maths, language arts, science, and social studies were investigated. Yearly, students took state standardized tests and the researchers evaluated their academic performance to determine the impact of parental involvement. The results were compared to previous outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the program on academic achievement. Data was also collected on the behavioral aspects of students in classroom settings. Data was assessed across the areas of attendance, discipline, suspensions, and expulsions. The research showed that academic achievement in reading and maths was above the 75% percentile for the state requirement. There was also a 30% improvement in the number of students who were proficient in maths in the 2000-2004 academic year.

The research also showed that attendance improved from 90% in 2000 to almost 97% in 2004. Inappropriate behaviors such as expulsions and suspensions decreased. These included behaviors such as yelling, using profane language, and lack of cooperation. The authors note that parents were instrumental to the collaborative process and the establishment of positive partnering relationships. A study by Somers C. L., Owens, D. & Piliawsky M. (2009) found that there were important factors that contribute to school dropouts and identified an intervention in the prevention of dropouts. The authors collected data on the effects of mentoring, personal development, and parental involvement on students' achievement with 140 ninth graders attending an urban public high school. The participants responded to a Likert style survey and open-ended questions were also given to collect information regarding their career goals and role models.

The study showed that having qualified teachers, giving more attention to individual students, increasing teachers' support, reducing class sizes, and making instruction meaningful to students, as well as connecting teaching with real-world experiences were likely to help students but the most important factor contributing to keeping students in school to complete their education was partnering with parents and strengthening the school/home relationship. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that parental mentoring be implemented, which allows parents to play an active role as stakeholders in education. That influences students' motivation to perform better when they perceive their parents actively involved in school in times of adversity and difficulties. Another study that addresses the benefits of parental involvement was investigated by Hornby (2011). According to this, positive academic outcomes stem from parental involvement ranging from benefits in early childhood to adolescence and beyond. The impact can be seen in improved attendance, behavior, grades and efforts in completing homework. It extended beyond elementary school and included the special needs population. From the above, parental involvement is highlighted as critical for children to make progress in schools. That seems also to be appoved in Africans' vision. They believe that raising children is a community activity, therefore they believe in the saying that "it takes a village to raise a child." For the benefit of the children, it is a necessity that all community members are engaged and involved in education and preparing the younger generation for the future. In the past for example, society was organized in such a way that every

ethnic group was responsible for its own education system (Pare-Kabore, 2003). The people of Africa want education to include: economic activities (farming, cattle breeding, weaving, etc.), the valuing of participation and responsibility of children, and the development of a sense of community (Desalmand P., 1983). There must be an interconnection between knowledge transmitted and community needs. Oral method was predominant and participation of parents and relatives was highly encouraged at all levels. Therefore, the practice of this traditional education differs from one culture to another one. In the light of the fore mentioned, the importance of parental involvement at various levels of children's school career, seems of high importance. Two-thirds of teachers surveyed in the U.S.A. believed that their students would perform better in school if their parents were more involved in their child's education, while 72% of parents say children of uninvolved parents sometimes fall through the cracks in schools. Studies in the U.S.A. have shown that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades, pass their class and be promoted, are more likely to attend school regularly and graduate and go on to post-secondary education.

According to Makgopa M. & Mokhele M. (2013), teachers agree that parental involvement is a valuable component of any student's education. Parent-child discussions about school help to both improve academic achievement and reduce problematic behavior. They expect parents to help when the learners get the answers wrong, and help the children correct them. In line with this, Erdener M. A., & Knoeppel R. C. (2018) point parent as the main responsible in children's education. Moreover, a parent who is involved remains a great support that makes learners become more successful (Kalaycı G. & Ergül H., 2020). The data from Nunez J.C. et al. (2019) find out when children perceive that parents provide support, their interest grows due to increased competence and autonomy through their engagement in homework. Teachers survey responses were unanimous that parents must play their role in helping and urging their children to do their schoolwork while teachers play their role in teaching the children. Ultimately, as the learners realize that their parents (at home) are behind them as far as their schoolwork is concerned, while teachers are also behind them, they will definitely work harder. Doing this encourages the learner to work even harder on his school task. The research of Tomchuk M. (2021) on teacher perceptions of parent-teacher communications and practice underlines that students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support student learning. Given that it becomes important to better understand the relationship between teacher attitudinal beliefs and teacher behavior when it comes to communicating with parents.

Munir N., Watto R.M. & Latif M. (2021) have found out a long-term link between parental involvement and student achievement in the classroom. According to this finding parental involvement has a decisive impact on a child's academic achievement because it undoubtedly promotes his behavior and lead to improved performance when parents have a sensitive and enthusiastic potential for their child. Williams KE, Berthelsen D & Laurens KR (2022) have identified parent engagement in school as essential in determining academic outcomes. It has a strong effect on children's academic achievement and is also involved in important mediated pathways. In this study, teachers reported children's positive school experiences and their ability to manage emotions and focus attention and academic competence are linked with parent engagement in children schooling.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methods that were used to conduct this study. The topics discussed are the participants, setting, and data collection procedures.

Participants and Setting: Participants in the study were 64 students between the ages of 14 and 18. The participants were in grades nine and twelve and were a diverse group across religions, races, and

experiences. They were 714 students enrolled in grades nine through 12. Sixty-six percent were Catholic, 57% Caucasian, 32% African American, 5% biracial, 2% African, 2% Hispanic and 1% others. All the students were required to take the Ohio Graduation Test in reading, maths, writing, and social studies and were required to pass them before graduating. The majority of the students came from a two-parent household.

In addition, 52 teachers were also participants in the study. Thirty-four of them had master's degrees and 18 had bachelor degrees. Teachers were at different levels of teaching experience, including two teachers for whom this was their first year of teaching. Teachers were well qualified in their content areas and taught courses such as foreign language, English, history, mathematics, religion, health, and science. The setting was Chaminade Julienne, a Catholic high school in a Midwestern city.

The school was owned and operated by two religious orders, the Society of Mary (Marianists) and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, in conjunction with laypersons. The school was over 120 years old and had an impressive reputation and had earned national recognition for excellence. The school was committed to educating the whole person, working for justice, and developing family spirit.

Data Collection: During the academic year, the researchers met four times with the principal of the Catholic high school. The initial meeting was to discuss the purpose of the study and the possibility of obtaining permission to conduct the study during the second semester of the academic year. The purpose of the second meeting was to discuss preliminary information regarding specific procedures that were employed in establishing partnerships with parents. During the last two meetings, the researchers and the principal identified who should be surveyed and when the surveys could be distributed.

After permission was granted, the researchers designed surveys, one for teachers and one for the students in grades nine and 12 to determine teachers and students' perceptions of parental involvement and the effectiveness of parent-school partnerships. The survey had prompt statements regarding specific questions about parental involvement. A Likert-style format was used with responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This question was asked, "How would you rate parents' involvement in your school? The question was asked as a way to generate the thoughts of teachers relevant to the collaborative process. The second survey for the students had eight prompts with a Likert style also. A question that was asked of students to determine their perception of parental involvement was, "How would you rate parents' involvement in your school?" Once the surveys were designed, the researchers met with the principal to identify convenient days for distributing surveys. The principal sent an email to teachers to inform them about surveys and to ask for their cooperation. Students and teachers were surveyed within a two-month time frame during the months of February and March. The return rate of surveys by students and teachers was slow because the school was closed for a few days due to bad weather and there were conflicts within the daily schedule (e.g., makeup work; examinations). Students were surveyed under their teachers' supervision four days after the teachers had completed the surveys. The researchers prepared the teachers by having them write the researcher's name on the board and then showed the students on the Internet which country the researchers were from. The researchers also provided the teachers with an explanation for the study and the importance of the research in identifying the difference between parental involvement in America versus parental involvement in Africa. There were 52 teachers employed at the school, however, only 16 teachers were willing to complete the survey. Lack of participation by the teachers might have been due to the time of the year and the pending breaks (e.g., spring). The data was analyzed to determine teachers and parents' perceptions of parental involvement. It would have been beneficial if the researchers had surveyed parents also. However, time restrictions made this impossible. The view of parents is important as teachers and administrators struggle to identify best practices for ensuring student success.

RESULTS

This chapter provides the results of the survey. There were 64 students and 16 teachers involved in the survey. Tables and graphs presented below show that there were a lot of disagreements.

Teachers' Perceptions on Parental Involvement: Teachers in different cultures hold different perceptions regarding home-school cooperation. This section carries out Chaminade high school teachers' views on parental involvement.
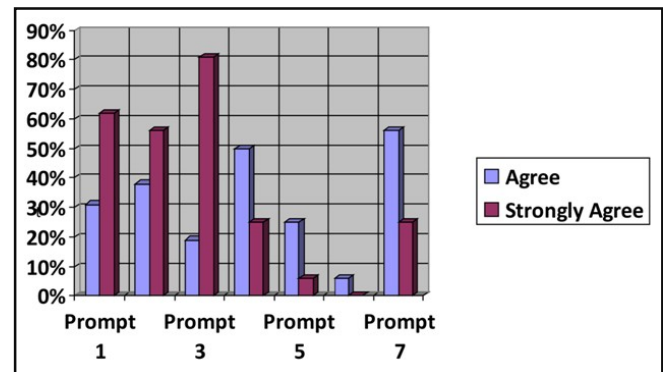
Figure 1. Teachers' Total Percentage of Agreement

Figure 1 illustrates a strong agreement that parents' involvement is important for school improvement and for students' success. For instance, the data in the teachers' survey for prompt 1 show that teachers agreed (93%) that parents' involvement can help them become more effective in their classrooms. They also felt on prompt 2 that parental involvement is important for school improvements (94%) and 100% responded on prompt 3 that parental involvement can improve students' achievements. This is not surprising because teachers consider educating a child as a collaborative mission between family and school. Students' success doesn't only rely on the effort and support provided by schools, but also on what parents do with their children at home. Teachers believed that "Every family has some strength that could be used to optimize student's success" (81%). Teachers agreed with the impact of parental involvement and on students' success. There was a great agreement in sharing responsibilities and discussing with parents regarding their children's class work, "I often discuss with parents regarding their children's class work" (75%). The prompt, "I often receive parents' visit at school" received the lowest score (31%) as well as "I feel comfortable visiting parents at home to learn more about my student" (6%). The reason for this could be that parents were not provided with different opportunities to allow them to meet teachers. Besides, in rating parents' involvement in school, the option "Sometimes" received the highest score. 7 out of 16 teachers found collaboration with parents in their school will fit well that option "Sometimes". This brings to infer that teachers-parents collaboration is not consistent and that there should be consequently a lack of involvement.
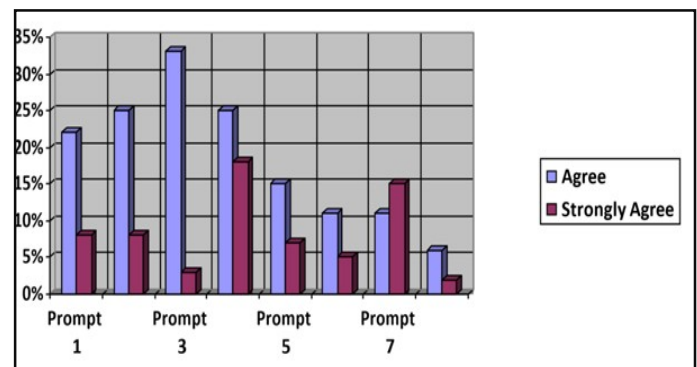
Figure 2. Students' Total Percentage of Agreement

Students' Perceptions of Parental Involvement: In this passage we explore how students perceive and experience parental involvement in Chaminade high school. Students had different viewpoints on parental involvement. Students' responses to the prompt 1, "My grades improve when I get help at home" (33%) illustrates that parents' involvement does improve performance achievement at school. However, these students don't get much help from parents as they would like to. They expressed that by disagreeing with prompt 1, "My parents help me with my class assignment" (31%). 36% of students had discussions with parents regarding the benefit of doing well at school. Those who disagreed with this principle are 35%. The difference is not significant and that seems to demonstrate that parents did not consider this activity as a priority. The prompt 4, "My parents have met all my teachers" has parity in the responses. 43% responded yes and 43% said no. This parity could not be applauded because it says that there is an extreme lack of communication between parents and teachers and collaboration between home and school is not working well. This is well illustrated in the graph by prompt 5, "My parents know all teachers by their names" (59%) as well as by prompt 7, "My parents haven't visited me yet at school' (57%). That could explain why parents did not make helping children a priority because teachers are not communicating with them about why it's essential to be involved.

The most interesting finding for us was that the prompt, "I'll be happy if my parents visit me frequently at school" did not receive a good response from the students. Only 8% agreed. Same thing happened to the prompt, "I'm happy when my parents visit me at school" (16%). These two prompts received the lowest scores on this table. But children rated their parents' involvement at the level of satisfaction. This shouldn't surprise anybody given the fact that children at the age of adolescence want their freedom and thereby do not want to allow their parents to interfere with their lives. That could explain why on prompt 3, parents were not enthusiastic in spending time every day to discuss with their children why they should do well at school. The random nature of the response illustrates that students may have been distracted or unconcerned about completing the survey. Also, some of the students failed to respond to statements or provided more than one response to the prompt. It is possible that the students did not take completing the survey seriously. Figure 2 illustrates the variability across the students' responses.

DISCUSSION

Of all the complex challenges facing education today, none is as demanding or as critical as creating a culture of collaboration (Friend M. & Cook L, 2010). This is not surprising since the need for school-based collaboration has increased over the past decade. Another consideration is the impact of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 which has set high standards for student achievement and created clear accountability systems for all students (Kochhar-Bryant, C.A, 2008). To illustrate the importance of parental involvement almost every set of new standards for the preparation of teachers and administrators now addresses collaboration as a key topic. The reality is if parents are not involved in collaborative endeavors, then school improvement will be limited (Friend M. & Cook L., 2010). This study sought to determine teachers and students' perceptions of parental involvement in a Catholic high school. To direct the focus of this research the following research questions were asked: a) What are teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in a Catholic high school? b) What are students' perceptions of parental involvement in a Catholic high school? Clearly, the data supported that teachers, as well as students believe that parental involvement can be important. Basically, teachers believe that parental involvement is very important and that parental involvement improves student achievement. The following quote highlights this point: ''Parents must always be associated with their children's schooling. Their approach to language learning affects students approach automatically'' (interview, Chaminade English teacher). Another teacher states, ''Parents are the key. When they know how to help their kids, it facilitates teachers to progress students' learning.''

Secondly, it is wise for teachers to provide meaningful opportunities for parents to attend and volunteer in school activities. However, they did not have strong feelings regarding the prompt, "I often discuss with parents regarding their children's class work. Those findings disagree with Turnbull A., Turnbull R., Erwin E. & Soodak L. (2006) who suggest that teachers welcome families and ensure they connect with school for the good of the children. This illustrates that even though teachers believe that collaborative endeavors are essential, they may be reluctant to discuss with parents regarding their child's performance. Teachers agreed with previous research regarding the active participation of parents and its impact on student achievement. It is apparent that teachers recognize the relevance of identifying strategies that can be employed to maintain and increase parental involvement in the school. Whereas, the viewpoints of students were most interesting in that students varied in their opinion of parental involvement, there was the highest agreement with the prompt, 'My parents have met all my teachers' (43%) while prompt 2 shows that students improve their grade when they get help from home. Regarding this one, the interviewed student relates, ''My bench mate this year moved to a public school. When I asked why did he make that decision his best friend who was studying at the same school said his father is on retirement.

He won't be able to pay his vehicle fare while he comes far from school''. The prompt, 'I'll be happy if my parents visit me frequently at school' (8%) received the lowest score. This is not surprising considering that high school students typically do not want their parents coming to school to discuss their performance with their teachers. They would probably view this as embarrassing. It is apparent that students do not view parental involvement as essential based on the variability of the responses. It is evident that at the high school level students do not think that parents have to be as involved, as in the earlier years of schooling. The school is in the process of implementing a strategy, Net Classroom, as a way to improve collaborative opportunities for professionals and families. The research supports that effective partnerships honor and encourage families' contributions to their child's learning and development and at the same time respect families' preferences for participation in their child's education (Turnbull A., Turnbull R., Erwin E., & Soodak L., 2006). Three decades of research on parental participation in education tell us why effective parent-professional partnerships are essential. When parents engage with students in learning activities at home and in the community, children do better. Parental involvement in their child's learning contributes to increases in the following: reading achievement; maths achievement; positive attitudes toward school; attendance and retention; homework completion; and positive behavior at home and at school.

Ultimately, children from all races, ethnicities, religions, languages, and socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from family-school partnerships. Additionally, it is likely that the benefits of parental involvement will endure over time. It is important to note that collaboration is the common thread in many current initiatives for school reform. Collaboration is crucial as school personnel work with families and parents of their increasing diverse student groups (Friend, M. & Cook L, 2010). Additionally, collaborative teams may work on decision-making, curricula reform, development of new programs or restructuring. More importantly, teams are able to generate energy and interest in new strategies or ideas. Therefore, the merit of collaboration is noteworthy as everyone truly benefits by establishing partnering relationships. This study was relevant because it illustrated that teachers do indeed want to promote partnering relationships with parents. It also showed that high school students do not believe that collaboration is as important at the high school level, even though many of the parents were actively involved in the learning experience. Future research should focus on identifying specific strategies that promote partnering relationships with key stakeholders to improve the academic performance of students. Sanders, M. G (2008) notes that schools can achieve success and excellence when teachers, families, and students work collaboratively. Williams K. et al. (2022) reveal that parents' engagement in school and children's school liking have also been identified as essential in

determining academic outcomes. Parents' engagement in school has a strong effect on children's academic achievement and is also involved in important mediated pathways. For example, in a longitudinal Australian study, the relation between school-based-parent involvement and children's Grade 3 reading achievement was fully mediated by children's classroom self-regulation behaviors as reported by teachers.

CONCLUSION

The main goal of the current study was to evaluate teachers and students' perceptions about parental involvement in teaching-learning process. The results show that teachers and students are aware of the parents' influence on academic achievements. Most of them accept the significance of parental involvement. Moreover, they believe that school and parents need to establish an efficient partnership in order to foster students' outcomes. That imply to think creatively about how to involve families more in educational work with their children. At a time when new technologies occupy an important place in our lives, new teaching methods are being put forward to improve the training of new generations of students. It should be noted, however, that whatever the method, parental involvement remains essential. With this in mind, it would be worthwhile to carry out evaluations of how digital tools are used today to better involve parents.

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