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Why Do Parents Become Involved in Their Children's Education? Implications for School Counselors

This article discusses a theoretical model of the parental involvement process that addresses (a) why parents become involved in their children's education, (b) the forms their involvement takes, and (c) how their involvement influences both proximal (e.g., motivation) and distal (e.g., achievement) student outcomes. The authors describe how school counselors can use this model to enhance schools' and parents' capacities to engage parents effectively in children's education. Specifically, they articulate how school counselors can educate teachers and parents about the importance of teacher and school invitations to involvement, productive forms of involvement, and students' active role in shaping their own educational outcomes. The authors briefly discuss future directions for research on parental involvement in the school counseling context.

Schools often dedicate precious resources toward the goal of increasing the incidence and effectiveness of family involvement in children's education. Their efforts, however, are not always informed by systematic investigations of *why* parents become involved or *how* their involvement influences children's academic engagement and achievement. Our research addresses this disconnect between school practice and educational research in three ways. First, we examine parents' motivations for participating in a range of involvement activities. Second, we also consider what is happening psychologically when parents and children interact in one activity commonly targeted by school intervention programs: homework. Finally, we argue that parental involvement is such a vital resource to children's academic success because it contributes to the development and enactment of cognitive and motivational resources within the child rather than to the more distal outcome of standardized achievement test scores.

The framework that guides our inquiries is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) model of the parental involvement process (Figure 1). Structured in several sequential levels, the model addresses three questions: Why do parents become involved? What forms does their involvement take? And, how does their involvement influence student outcomes? The model is unique in the educational research literature because it focuses on understanding the *process* of parent involvement rather than identifying associations between parent involvement practices and student academic achievement. In previous work, we used the model to generate a fairly comprehensive set of recommendations for school practice (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In this article, we revisit those recommendations, updating our thinking in light of recent empirical tests of the model's hypotheses across grade levels and ethnic groups. We also focus on articulating how school counselors can leverage the model to enhance the incidence and effectiveness of family involvement within their local school context.

Our recommendations recognize that school counselors play a pivotal but often misunderstood role in bridging home and school. They also recognize that as a bridge, school counselors must be able to adapt their knowledge of the model as a tool for enhancing parent involvement across the constituencies they serve. For example, recommending and supporting the enactment of strategies that school leadership and staff may take requires a set of skills that differ from those needed when recommending and supporting actions that families may take to support children's educational success. Thus, our recommendations are organized in two major sections: working with colleagues and working with families. Before presenting our recommendations we give a brief description of the model and related research. We conclude by identifying potentially fruitful avenues for future research on family involvement in children's education.

THE MODEL AND RELATED EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Consistent with the larger theoretical perspective of social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), Hoover-

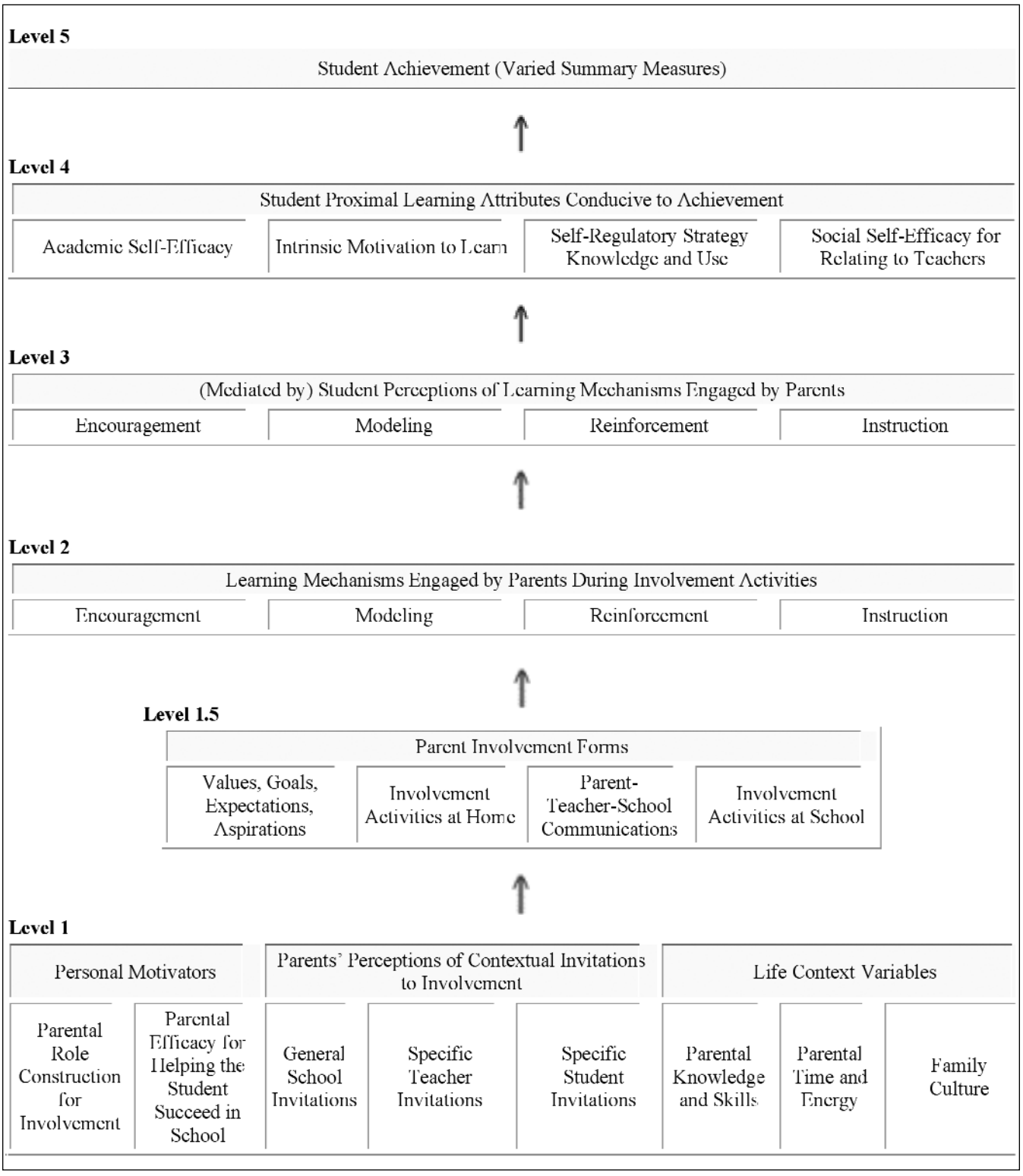

Figure 1. Model of the parental involvement process (adapted from Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997, 2005).

Dempsey and Sandler's model views human behavior as part of a reciprocal system that also includes personal factors (e.g., beliefs) and environmental factors (e.g., social interactions, physical surroundings). For example, Level 1 of the model argues that an array of personal beliefs and contextual factors influence parents' choice of involvement forms, which are represented in Levels 1.5 and 2. The upper levels of the model (Levels 3–5) offer an explanation for how parents' involvement behaviors

are transformed into enhanced student outcomes.

Seeking to explain the process of parental involvement, the model contributes to the literature in three specific ways:

1. Attention to parents' motivations for involvement (not just describing what they do but why they do or do not become involved)
2. Portrayal of parents' involvement behaviors as psychological phenomena that support student learning (identifying the "active ingredients" within various involvement forms)
3. Emphasis on students' active role in their own learning (including examinations of students' perceptions of family-based learning resources and students' own attributes as resources that enhance learning).

Parents' Motivations to Become Involved (Level 1)

Level 1, the foundation of the model, articulates a range of parents' motivations for becoming involved and includes four variables: motivational beliefs (role and self-efficacy); perceptions of invitations to involvement (from school, teacher, and child); perceived life context (time and energy, skills and knowledge); and family culture. Research suggests that among these four factors, parents' perceptions of invitations from children and teachers are the most robust and consistent predictors of parents' home-based and school-based involvement behaviors across grade levels and across ethnic groups (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; Walker, Green, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2006). Parents' motivational beliefs (construal of their role and abilities) and perceived life context appear to play a secondary role in shaping parents' involvement forms, as do family resources (including socioeconomic variables such as family income and level of education; Green et al.; Walker et al.). Taken as a whole, this work underscores that interpersonal relationships, between parents and children and between schools and families, are essential to the success of schools' family involvement initiatives.

Parent Involvement Forms (Levels 1.5 and 2)

Levels 1.5 and 2 offer two definitions of parental involvement. Summarizing trends in the literature, Level 1.5 operationalizes involvement as the frequency and quality of four forms of involvement associated with positive student outcomes. These forms include parental values, goals, expectations, and aspirations; home-based activities (e.g., homework); parent-teacher-school communications; and school-based involvement ranging from rather passive activities (e.g., volunteering) to rather active ones (e.g., governance). Among these factors, parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's learning appear to have more influence on student achievement than other forms such as home-based involvement (e.g., parent-child communication about homework and school learning, parental supervision of student homework; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007). Moreover, parental expectations predict student outcomes other than achievement, such as attitudes and behaviors that support educational success (Jeynes). For example, students' perceptions of their parents' goals predict children's goal selection and goal-oriented behavior (Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2007).

The second definition portrays parents' involvement forms as traditional learning mechanisms including encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction (see Level 2). Mechanisms were identified in accordance with major theories of how people learn. For example, the inclusion of encouragement stems from increasing recognition that the emotional quality of parent-child interactions influences the effectiveness of specific parenting practices and children's openness to parents' socialization efforts (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Modeling was included given Bandura's (1986) concept of observational learning. Reinforcement reflects behavioral theory's emphasis on contingency (Skinner, 1989). Instruction reflects the importance of didactic models of teaching and learning, especially in fostering the internalization of culturally appropriate norms and values (Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

Fundamentally, this level of the model assumes that the forms of involvement identified in Level 1.5 are important to children's learning and development because they contain specific "active ingredients" that enact a variety of learning processes. For example, applied to common home-based activities such as helping with homework, the model assumes that parents contribute to enhanced student outcomes when they *encourage* and *model* important learning skills such as persistence in the face of difficulty; *reinforce* behaviors and attitudes related to learning such as managing time wisely; and *instruct* their children about ways to enhance learning such as breaking down a problem into smaller, manageable pieces.

Student Perceptions of Parental Involvement (Level 3)

Level 3 of the model reminds us that children are active architects of their own development. It represents the model's mediation hypothesis, which asserts that parental involvement influences student outcomes via students' perceptions of their parents' actions. Its inclusion in the model stems directly from theories suggesting that learning is an interac-

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tive process that includes the offering of knowledge or information by a social resource (e.g., parent or teacher) and the learner's perceptions of and engagement with that resource. For example, Piaget's (1952) constructivism emphasizes that individual learning is grounded in making meaning from activity. Similarly, social learning theories argue that learning depends on the learner's attention to, retention of, and later reproduction of modeled behavior (Bandura, 1986; Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).

Grounded in these perspectives, some researchers have argued that using parents' and teachers' self-reported practices to predict student outcomes—a substantial trend in the research literature—offers only partial information about how caregivers' actions influence child outcomes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Pomerantz et al., 2007; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornsbusch, & Darling, 1992; Walker, 2009). To obtain a more complete understanding, research also must attend to children's perceptions of an adult's practices and the larger interpersonal climate in which those practices are used. This idea is supported by evidence that our ability to predict student outcomes varies depending on whether parent self-reports or student reports of parents' behaviors are used as the independent variable (Desimone, 1999; Walker et al., 2006) and by the often modest correspondence between parent and child reports of the parent's involvement behaviors (Pelegrina, Cruz Garcia-Linares & Casanova, 2003; Trautwein & Kropf, 2004).

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Student Outcomes Influenced by Parental Involvement (Levels 4 and 5)

The final two levels of the model articulate the range of student outcomes influenced by parental involvement and by students' perceptions of their parents' involvement. Level 5 represents the current tendency in the research literature to regard student achievement (as measured by standardized summative assessments) as a significant outcome of parental involvement. Constructs at Level 4 reflect our assertion that although student achievement is an important effect, the primary outcomes of parental involvement are the development of children's own attributes and behaviors or "inner resources" (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991) that lead to achievement. Thus, Level 4 identifies four student outcomes that have been perennially related to both student school success and parent involvement: academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), or students' belief in their ability to master academic material; social self-efficacy for relating to teachers (Ryan & Patrick, 2001), or students' belief in their ability to approach teachers for help and support; intrinsic motivation to learn (Covington & Mueller, 2001), a construct with a long association with significant learning; and self-regulatory strategy use (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986, 1988), which involves important metacognitive behaviors that support learning such as goal setting and self-monitoring.

Demonstrating the link between these proximal outcomes and student achievement, discriminant function analyses have revealed that students' use of self-regulated learning strategies predicts their achievement track with 93% accuracy (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986). Logically, what parents do in the context of their involvement seems less directly related to students' academic success than what children are prepared and willing to do, particularly as they press for increasing independence during adolescence. Empirically, our assertion that parents can best support student achievement by contributing to the proximal outcomes identified at Level 4 is supported by larger associations between parent involvement activities and student attitudes and behaviors than between parent involvement activities and achievement test scores or grade point averages (Jeynes, 2003).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELOR PRACTICE

Using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of the parental involvement process, school counselors, working with their teaching and administrative colleagues, can increase effective parent participation in children's education. Ideally positioned to serve as a bridge between the school and the home, school counselors can take a leadership role in the process whereby schools invite parents into an increasingly effective role in their children's educational, career, and socio-emotional development. Both the ASCA National Model® (American School Counselor Association, 2005) and the new School Counseling Competencies (ASCA, 2008) call for school counselor leadership in the establishment of family-school collaboration. Further, the Education Trust's National Center for Transforming School Counseling has been working with school districts and counselor education programs nationwide to increase school counselor impact on student achievement (www.edtrust.org).

Because school counselors have an ongoing, multiyear responsibility for their students, they are an obvious choice to take the lead in family-school partnerships. While teachers work with most students for just one academic year, school counselors are usually responsible for students for the duration of their attendance at a school. Hence, elementary school counselors work with a student from kindergarten through Grade 5 or 6, middle school counselors have students for 2 to 3 years, and high school

counselors have students for 4 years. Because students are often assigned to school counselors alphabetically, siblings tend to have the same counselor. This allows a school counselor to become familiar with a student's home situation and provides continuity for the family in terms of the contact person it has at the school.

School counselors are professionally trained in all the areas identified by Gareau and Sawatzky (1995) as most important for family-school collaboration: personnel connections, positive and caring attitudes, honesty, openness, trust, being treated as equal partners, communication, and a commitment by all school personnel. Professional educators with a mental health perspective, school counselors are responsible for the implementation of comprehensive, developmentally appropriate K-12 curricula and are trained to work with the "whole student" (ASCA, 2005). Students' academic development, career development, and personal/social development all fall under the purview of the school counselor (ASCA). Because a student's performance in all of these areas can be enhanced with appropriate parental support, parents and school counselors are natural partners in efforts to benefit the students. School counselors are trained in both individual and group counseling approaches. They have learned strategies for working with parents, guardians, families, and communities to address problems affecting student success (Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs, 2009). These skills, coupled with their knowledge of school dynamics, make school counselors particularly well suited to effectively link parents and schools and to take the lead in efforts to maximize parental involvement (Bemak & Cornely, 2002).

In the following passages we link the roles and responsibilities of school counselors to components of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model as means to offering recommendations for school counselor practice. One set of recommendations targets actions that school counselors may take to increase schools' capacities to engage parents effectively (for a summary, see Appendix A). The second set describes actions that school counselors may take to increase families' capacities to be effectively engaged in children's education (for a summary, see Appendix B).

STEPS THAT SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN TAKE TO INCREASE SCHOOLS' CAPACITIES FOR ENGAGING FAMILIES

Grounded in empirical tests of the model and related research, it seems particularly important that school counselors target teacher (and school) invitations (a component at Level 1) as a means to enacting more frequent and effective forms of involvement (Levels 1.5 and 2). Below we offer seven specific suggestions (see Appendix A).

Address Attitudes of School Personnel Toward Parents and Parent Involvement

Teachers' behaviors are influenced by their beliefs and expectations about families (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002). Thus, prior to reaching out to parents, school counselors must collaborate with school colleagues to identify barriers to family involvement including differences in values and culture between parents and school personnel (Hill & Taylor, 2004) and teachers' (mis)perceptions regarding parents' lack of involvement (Konzal, 2001). As a first step, school counselors can do an assessment of the attitudes of teachers and staff regarding parent involvement. School counselors then can develop training programs for teachers, administrators, and staff to review research on the importance of caregiver involvement in the school and the barriers to it. Of critical importance is a commitment by the principal to ongoing, schoolwide efforts to establish and maintain trusting, respectful, responsive communication between school personnel and parents. With input from all stakeholders, clear role expectations for both parents and school personnel need to be developed and publicized.

Develop a Welcoming Staff

School counselors can advocate for the hiring of school personnel who reflect the student population. Bilingual personnel contribute to clearer communication with students and parents with limited English proficiency (Thorn & Contreras, 2005). Parent liaisons (volunteer or paid) who are representative of the parent population can serve as greeters, interpreters, and parent advocates. School counselors also can provide training in interpersonal communication skills to teachers, administrators, and staff (e.g., *Keys to Communication: A Handbook for School Success*). Educators can be taught how to ask open-ended questions that encourage parents and students to answer more fully than with a "yes" or "no." They also can be taught a variety of attentive listening skills that are designed to establish rapport with the parent. Techniques such as maintaining a comfortable degree of eye contact, nodding the head, and responding with encouragers such as "I see," "Go on," and "Tell me more about that" can express a teacher's genuine interest in what a parent has to say. Additional skills, such as reflecting content and/or feeling ("I hear you saying you want your child to feel safe in school" or "It sounds like you are upset that your child is being bullied"), contribute to a parent's sense of being truly heard and increased trust in the teacher or administrator.

Increase Personnel's Socio-Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

In schools where teachers and administrators are of a different cultural or racial background than students or their parents, school counselors can serve as cultural interpreters to both groups. Ongoing sociocultural training for school personnel is necessary to raise awareness and offer appropriate approaches (Comer, 1990; Sue & Sue, 2003). Topics might include the special needs of recent immigrant families (Orozco, 2007), cultural differences, individualism vs. collectivism as cultural norms (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003), and the power of nonverbal communication (Sue & Sue). Teachers need to know that in addition to psychological issues faced by schoolchildren, those from minority and immigrant families are often dealing with external causes of distress such as discrimination, poverty, and immigration status (Sue & Sue). Members of marginalized groups may view school personnel with caution in light of their perceptions of differences in power and conscious or unconscious bias. School counselors can emphasize with the school staff the need for *consistent* expressions of authenticity, sincerity, and openness in an effort to overcome the fear, powerlessness, and mistrust that minority families may have when addressing authority figures (i.e., teachers and school personnel) and representatives of the majority culture.

Because school counselors have an ongoing, multiyear responsibility for their students, they are an obvious choice to take the lead in family-school partnerships.

Foster Sensitivity to Nontraditional Caregivers

The definition of *family* or *parent* is complex. Single parents, noncustodial parents, stepparents, same-sex parents, foster parents, live-in partners, grandparents, extended families that include aunts, uncles, and cousins, and "fictive kin" (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007)—plus families that blend step-siblings, half-siblings, and adopted as well as biological siblings (sometimes of different races)—are all examples of family constellations that differ from the tradition of two married parents who live together with their biological children. School counselors can develop in-service training programs to increase teacher and staff sensitivity to the composition of the contemporary family and its needs and expectations of the school (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Training programs can include presentations by nontraditional parents themselves.

Help Teachers Learn About Their Students Through Contact with Families

Effective teachers create learner-centered classroom environments (Walker, 2009). Parents are important to creating such environments given their "expert" knowledge of their child's social, emotional, career, and educational aspirations, strengths, challenges, and learning style (Amatea, Smith-Adcock, & Villares, 2006; Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2006). Thus, school counselors can explain to teachers the importance of affirming parental contributions to the teacher's understanding of the child (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002) and suggest that teachers solicit from parents (by phone, in writing, or in person) information that would assist the teacher in supporting the child's learning. For example, the first homework assignment of a new school year can be a letter from the parent to the teacher describing the child. Such teacher invitations set a child-centered tone and signal the teacher's respect for the parent as a partner in the educational process and may in turn influence parents' role construction.

Additional information from parents about students can be obtained in the context of routine parent-teacher conferences or conferences called to address learning or behavioral difficulties that arise. Having a school counselor serve as a moderator at such meetings may help to set a tone of cooperation. The school counselor can convey that the goal is not to assign blame for any difficulties, but rather to work collaboratively on an assessment and intervention plan to meet the educational needs of the student. In any conference contexts, parents should be asked for their expertise first, thus validating their importance as equal partners in the process. In cases where school counselors and teachers are trying to quickly identify family and classroom interactional patterns that may affect student behavior and learning, they can use a family consultation model described by Nicoll (1992). For example, by asking the parents nonthreatening questions such as "To help me get a better picture of your son, tell me about him" or "Tell me about the other members of your family," the school counselor and teacher can often obtain a sense of the labels attached to each family member (e.g., introverted-extroverted, bright-slow, easy-difficult) and how the child in question is uniquely positioned in the family constellation.

Assign Interactive Homework

Because parents want to know how to support their child's learning, specific homework assignments from the teacher are viewed as helpful, assuming that they respect the time, energy, and cultural context of the parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2 001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). School counselors can suggest that teachers develop homework assignments requiring the participation of the entire family (e.g., Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Such projects can give parents, even those who do not come to the school, the opportunity to become actively involved in their child's education. For example, when children are given an assignment

to develop a family tree or to interview a relative about his or her career path, parents become active participants in the homework process. Teachers also can incorporate the rich resources of the students' family culture (called "funds of knowledge" by Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) into the curriculum, thereby drawing in parents as capable, active participants in the child's learning process. As positive reinforcement, teachers can communicate their appreciation for parents' contributions, ask them to share in the student's success, and even invite them to the school to see the final product of the class's work. This participation can contribute to parents' role construction, sense of self-efficacy, and enhanced understanding of what students are learning in school.

Use Homework to Increase Effective Forms of Parent Involvement and Classroom Instruction

Homework is a frequently used learning strategy and gives school counselors an opportunity to develop collaboration among teachers, parents, and students. However, homework is also often a significant source of stress for families and students (Cooper, 2001). One way school counselors might address this issue is by helping to develop an individual profile for each student using the Homework Motivation and Preference Questionnaire (HMPQ; Hong & Milgram, 1998–2001), available for students from 5th through 12th grade. The profile describes the source of a student's motivation (self, parent, or teacher) and his or her preferences regarding how, where, when, and with whom to do homework. Rowell and Hong (2002) further suggested that school counselors conduct parent workshops in which parents complete the HMPQ answering the questions as they believe their child would. After comparing their answers with those of their child, parents can be shown that their preferred method of learning may be different from that of their child. Using information on their children's motivation and preference profile, parents can meet with school counselors and in groups to share how they have modified the homework environment in response to the child's preferences for lighting (dim vs. bright), noise (sound/music vs. quiet), temperature, and seating (chair vs. couch, bed, or floor). Those parents who learn their child prefers studying with peers rather than alone or with authority figures can facilitate study groups.

For students who tend to procrastinate or have difficulty persisting in the completion of homework assignments, parental rule setting about when and where homework should be done has a strong positive relationship with achievement (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Parents can communicate clear expectations, provide guidelines, and reinforce behavior when rules are followed. Working together, school counselors, parents, and teachers can develop positive reinforcements ranging from formal rewards (snacks, free time, television, computer time) to smiles, encouragement, and expressions of parental approval. School counselors can share research with parents that shows that directly assisting with homework can have a negative outcome on the student's performance and that parents can be more effective by supporting independence and autonomy in doing homework, especially as the student progresses through the grades (Cooper, Nye, & Lindsay, 2000). For students who require it, school counselors can arrange for additional homework support at the school, in small groups or individually (Hong, Milgram, & Rowell, 2004).

STEPS THAT SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN TAKE TO INCREASE FAMILIES' CAPACITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT

Our recommendations in this section focus on Level 1 of the model and target parents' motivations to become involved, especially their role construction and self-efficacy and their skills and knowledge for involvement. Once parents understand that it is their responsibility to be involved (role construction) and that their involvement can have a positive outcome on their children (efficacy), the stage is set for teachers to invite their involvement. We also target Levels 1.5 and 2, suggesting several ways that school counselors can increase the range and quality of parents' involvement forms and how they can remove barriers to involvement. The full set of recommendations is summarized in Appendix B.

School counselors should support and encourage school personnel to immediately engage with parents and students in an open, authentic, genuine, and affirming manner, treating them as equal partners in the education enterprise.

Communicate the Importance of Parent Involvement

As a first step, school counselors can conduct an assessment of the attitudes of families and students regarding parent involvement. If some families in the community hold the perception that parental involvement in the school is inappropriate, parent liaisons (representative of the various parent populations and speaking their languages) can be trained to establish and maintain contact with families and to explain the benefits their participation can have for their children. Parents also can be reminded that, even if they lack specific academic skills and knowledge, they are uniquely positioned to support their child's education through their emotional support and aspirations and through their advocacy for the child (i.e., the enactment of mechanisms and forms at Levels 1.5 and 2). For example, parents can model for their children a commitment to learning and, through encouragement and positive reinforcement, they can communicate that they value educa-

tion and that the children's efforts can have a positive effect on performance. School counselors are also important resources because they can teach parents advocacy skills and strategies.

Prepare Parents to Perceive and Respond Appropriately to Teacher Invitations to Involvement

Parents' responsiveness to teacher invitations for involvement depends upon their role construction, their sense of efficacy, and how they perceive the invitation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). School counselors can assist parents in responding appropriately to both formal and informal teacher invitations to involvement. An example of a formal invitation is an invitation to a parent-teacher conference. With such a formal invitation, school counselors can give parents fact sheets to prepare for parent-teacher conferences (for an example, see Rochford, 2005) describing specific steps to take before (talk with the child about school, prepare questions), during (ask questions, share information about the child, ask what parent can do to help, ask to be kept informed about the child's progress), and after the meeting (share information from the conference with the child, keep in touch with the teacher). Prior to the conference, parents also can be provided with the learning goals for their child in this grade or course. In order to increase parents' understanding of these goals, workshops can be offered. All materials should be available in appropriate languages.

Parent volunteers need meaningful acknowledgment from the principal as well as teachers and students in order to feel appreciated.

An example of an informal invitation is a request from the teacher to the parent to attend an event at school. Generic invitations via flyer or parent newsletter are less effective than a personalized invitation by phone or in a note addressed specifically to the parent. Having the child "second" the invitation by writing a letter explaining the event and requesting the parent to RSVP in writing helps establish the importance of the parent's participation. Parents are more likely to attend events in which their child is an active participant, for example, a performer or presenter. School counselors can encourage parents to initiate communication with teachers and administrators and can provide them with addresses, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers. The contact hierarchy in the school (whom to contact first regarding a specific issue) should be in writing.

Facilitate Parent-Teacher-Administrator Dialogues

School counselors can facilitate dialogue between both individual families and school personnel and between groups of parents and school personnel. Trained in group process, school counselors can guide open conversations among these stakeholders that can clarify misperceptions, increase trust and understanding, enhance relationships, and increase interaction. Acting as an intermediary, school counselors are trained to assist those in conflict to "hear" other points of view and begin to find common ground (Edwards & Foster, 1995). High-quality parent-teachers relationships are perceived by parents, students, and teachers as essential to parent involvement (Barge & Loges, 2003). School counselors can serve as moderators helping parents and school personnel to communicate their concerns and develop appropriate, cooperative responses. As parents become more equal partners in the education of their children, they will become more empowered in the school. This change in the balance of power requires administrator and teacher willingness to share power with parents. School counselors can advocate for the inclusion of parents in decision-making roles in the school and can facilitate this process (Bemak & Cornely, 2002).

Make Parents Feel Important and Comfortable in the School

Parents can be given special identification cards to wear while in the school. These cards, often issued for security purposes, emphasize their special status and allow parents to be warmly acknowledged by school personnel when on school property. Students can help decorate the school with posters, photos, and artwork that reflect the culture of all of the families in the school. The goal is to create an environment that says, "We all belong here." Space can be allocated for a parent resource room with materials of interest to parents on display and available for distribution. Multiple "comfortable spaces" for parents can be created in the school to encourage parent–school counselor conversations and parent-to-parent networking (Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, & Meza, 2008). Schools can offer parents the use of the gym, library, computer lab, parent resource room, and other facilities (Bemak & Cornely, 2002).

Use Parents as Educators in the School

Parents can be invited to share their skills and interests with students and with school personnel at career fairs, in classroom presentations, in special interest assemblies, and in staff meetings (Bemak & Cornely, 2002). In this way parents are seen by students and school personnel as valuable partners in the educational process. Inviting parents to serve as guest educators in the school can have a positive impact upon parents' role construction and self-efficacy.

By demonstrating a love of learning and positive connections to the school, parents are teaching their children the importance of education through modeling. Parents prefer substantive (e.g., sharing one's professional expertise at a career fair) to token roles in their child's school. Once parents make an offer

to volunteer, it is important that the school allow them to do so and acknowledge their contribution. Volunteers need meaningful acknowledgment from the principal as well as teachers and students in order to feel appreciated. Setting aside space for a volunteer room where volunteers can interact with one another and with school staff gives volunteers a home within the school and a way to satisfy a desire to be close to their children and keep an eye on them (*al pendiente* in Spanish; Quintanar & Warren, 2008). Parent liaisons can coordinate the recruitment and participation of parent volunteers. School counselors can coordinate volunteer recognition activities and volunteer interaction with school personnel. Satisfied parent volunteers are excellent recruiters of additional parent participants.

Offer Parents Resources and Ideas to Enhance Their Parenting Skills

All parents can benefit from opportunities to learn more about child development and effective parenting. Using a strengths-based model rather than a deficit model, school counselors can organize parent education programs and parent groups on subjects identified in a needs assessment (e.g., parenting skills, communication, boundaries, limit setting, anger management, stress reduction, child and adolescent development, time management, computer literacy, and understanding schools, child abuse laws, and discipline alternatives; Bemak & Cornely, 2002) that *parents* perceive as beneficial for themselves as well as their children. Acute family needs can be addressed through the resources of outside agencies (e.g., bereavement counselors, marriage and family counselors), and offering these programs in school facilities attracts parents (Benson & Martin, 2003; Ponec, Poggi, & Dickel, 1998). Training may be provided by parents and by school personnel or outside experts.

Invite New Parents to Visit the School

First impressions are lasting ones. Keeping this in mind, school counselors should support and encourage school personnel to immediately engage with parents and students in an open, authentic, genuine, and affirming manner, treating them as equal partners in the education enterprise. For example, school counselors can support initial positive family-school interactions by organizing visits for the families of students entering their schools. Preschoolers entering kindergarten, elementary students transitioning to middle school, students entering high school, and students transferring from another district all can be welcomed by school counselors and, where appropriate, a parent liaison volunteer from their community. School counselors could present parents with written materials (in the appropriate language) explaining ways in which they can contribute at home and at school to their child's motivation, learning, and achievement. It should be emphasized that the goal of such initial meetings is to establish rapport among the student, parents, and school.

Organize Student-Family Activities

Varsity sports engage parents as observers rather than participants with their children (Bemak & Cornely, 2002). Parents from other cultures may not understand the rules of the games in which their children are engaged. School counselors can distribute information to parents regarding existing extracurricular programs and can organize more family-centric activities to bring parents to the school. Such activities might include family fun nights, swim nights, family gym events, parent-child chess lessons, competitions, and other activities to involve parents. In addition, community groups led by parents (e.g., Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts) can be invited to use school facilities for their meetings. Attendance at these events by teachers, staff, and especially the principal conveys an interest in the whole student.

Address Barriers to Parent Attendance

School counselors can develop flexible schedules for parents who are unable to attend meetings during the traditional school day. Making child care and elder care available, allowing students to attend with parents, providing transportation, and making home visits can assist parents in participating in their children's schooling. By holding meetings at centers of community activities where parents already feel comfortable, schools can reach parents who might not attend meetings at the school.

Create School-Family-Community Linkages

School counselors can assist school personnel in learning about the school's local community and encourage principals to establish relationships with community leaders (e.g., parent leaders, spiritual leaders, elected officials, youth organization workers, and community organizing; Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004). School counselors can extend personal invitations to community leaders to visit the school and address teachers and staff about their mission and services. School counselors can work with community businesses, tutoring programs, mentoring organizations, literacy projects, community health services, libraries, and recreational programs to build school-family-community partnerships (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). With school social workers and school psychologists, school counselors can develop a list of community resources and make appropriate referrals of families

as needed. Among the nine school-family-community partnerships most frequently noted in the literature, Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy (2004) cited six that directly involve parents: parent centers, family/community members serving as teacher's aides, parent and community volunteer programs, home visit programs, parent education programs, and parents in site-based management.

CONCLUSION

School counselors are concerned with the "whole child," responsible for his or her academic, career, and personal/social development (ASCA, 2005). As a team, school counselors are responsible for the needs of all students in the school for all of their years of attendance at a school. They have been trained in leadership, advocacy, and collaboration skills. They are uniquely positioned in the school to work with students, parents, teachers, and administrators promoting teamwork and effecting school change. This role is consistent with the standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (2009). But school counselors alone cannot accomplish a comprehensive parent involvement program that positively impacts student motivation and achievement. Principals must lead a schoolwide effort, and teachers, parents, and community stakeholders all must commit to create an environment that supports and values parents' involvement in and contributions to their children's learning both in school and at home.

CONTINUING RESEARCH ON THE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The work and applications reviewed above suggest several productive lines of inquiry into the process of family involvement and the roles that school counselors might play in supporting this essential process. Such work has the potential to enhance schools' parental involvement efforts while also contributing to continuing efforts to validate the model and its assumptions.

First, the model and related research suggest that parents' motivations for involvement include personal psychological variables (role construction and efficacy for helping the child learn), contextual motivators (school, teacher, and student invitations to involvement), and school responsiveness to family life context variables. Research to date has affirmed that contextual motivators—active, welcoming, and supportive invitations from schools, teachers, and children themselves—generally offer the most powerful support for involvement. This finding suggests several lines of continued research.

First, the motivators have been examined most often with reference to the power to predict home-based and school-based involvement; continued work should focus attention also on the motivators' ability to predict two other major forms of involvement: parents' expressed family values, goals, aspirations, and expectations for children's academic accomplishments, and families' engagement in home-school communications. At the school level, school counselors may be especially helpful in developing more specific school knowledge of families' home-based involvement practices. For example, school counselors' expertise in group dynamics and effective communications may then be especially helpful in replacing an all too common assumption in many schools (i.e., "parents who don't show up at school aren't involved") with schoolwide understanding that many parents work consistently to support student learning at home, even if they "don't show up at school." Grounded in this enhanced understanding, school counselors may then work with teachers and staff to increase invitations to involvement (e.g., through specific suggestions for manageable helping activities at home, or interactive parent-teacher communications about student learning accomplishments and goals; see, for example, Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

Second, notable programs working with high-needs families have emphasized the benefits of strong schoolwide efforts to help parents feel welcome in the school and comfortable in seeking advice about effective supports for student learning from other parents, teachers, and school staff (e.g., Comer, 1990; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Mapp et al., 2008). School counselors might take the lead on systematic efforts, such as action research projects, to track schools' program development and parent participation; this would be quite useful for schools' continued planning of enhanced involvement options for the families and communities they serve. Parental involvement is not a "one size fits all" proposition, so knowing more about interactions among family and school characteristics, psychological motivators, and involvement forms is an important research avenue. Because contextual motivators are linked theoretically to the other sets of motivators through a process of social construction, action research examining interactions among the three may offer fuller understanding of *how* the motivating variables function in supporting parents' involvement decisions. For example, consistent with Bandura's (1986) argument that persuasion is a socially based resource that contributes to more positive self-efficacy beliefs and, in turn, more engaged action, it is possible that invitations from teachers, students, and the school act as a moderator in the face of weak personal motivational beliefs and

contextual resources. This is an idea that can be empirically tested using the model and its associated measures.

Third, schools and teachers also may benefit from research on the learning mechanisms engaged by families during involvement. At the school level, a multistage process may be useful. For example, school counselors might be instrumental in (a) gathering information on the learning mechanisms that parents currently use, with what levels of perceived success; (b) sharing information with parents about the range of mechanisms that offer important support for student learning (e.g., helping families understand that encouragement—which may be used independent of specific knowledge about homework content or language status—can offer important support for student effort during learning as well as learning accomplishments); and (c) seeking and answering parents' questions about alternative mechanisms that may be helpful as children mature developmentally. Research that documents the influence of interventions targeting parents' understanding and use of learning mechanisms, and the influence of interactions among the mechanisms themselves on student outcomes, is essential to enhancing our understanding of *how* children learn from social interaction.

Research that examines the causal mechanisms of the effect that parental involvement has on student learning will profit from two specific understandings of parents' influence on students' school outcomes. It must first acknowledge that the effectiveness of involvement depends in part on students' perceptions of that involvement; that is, students' perceptions of interactions with parents in the course of involvement mediate involvement's influence on their learning. Several studies have linked parents' positive, affectively supportive interactions with their children to important student outcomes such as attentiveness during involvement with their parents, students' internalization of parental contributions to their learning, and academic learning (e.g., Grolnick et al., 1991; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Research that examines *how* the nature of the parent-child relationship impacts student openness to parental influence and in turn student outcomes will make a tremendous contribution to the field.

Research on parental involvement also will benefit from acknowledging that parents' primary influence on student learning is to be found in students' development of the learning attributes they use, with increasing independence, across the course of school years. Thus, while it is useful to examine how varied forms of involvement are linked to student academic achievement, researchers also must consider how involvement forms contribute to students' desire to learn, beliefs about their learning abilities, and use of learning strategies. In sum, research and practice must regard parental involvement's influence on student learning as a complex, socially mediated process. ▮

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APPENDIX A

Steps That School Counselors Can Take to Increase Schools' Capacities for Engaging Families

Address attitudes of school personnel toward parents and parent involvement

- Attend to the critical role of central factors in the creation of positive school climate: principal leadership; long-term commitment to improving and maintaining positive school climate; and the creation of trust through mutually respectful, responsive, and communicative school counselor–parent relationships.
- Conduct training programs with teachers, staff, and administrators explaining research on the importance of caregiver involvement in the school and describing barriers to this participation; eliminate negative attitudes regarding amount or manner of parental participation.

Develop a welcoming staff

- Provide in-service interpersonal communication skills training to school personnel; develop strong positive office staff skills with a "consumer" orientation; create habitual attitudes of respect toward parents, students, and visitors.
- Train paid or volunteer parent liaisons who represent the cultural background and speak the languages of the school population to establish and maintain contact with incoming families.

Increase personnel's socio-cultural awareness and sensitivity

- Organize ongoing training programs for school counselors, faculty, administrators, and staff to increase multicultural competence.

Foster sensitivity to nontraditional caregivers

- Increase school personnel's awareness of and sensitivity to nontraditional caregivers; invite caregiver presentations to staff.

Help teachers learn about their students through contact with families

- Suggest that teachers solicit from parents information about their children that would help in school; serve as a moderator at parent-teacher conferences.

Assign interactive homework

- Suggest that teachers engage family members through student homework assignments that require interaction with a caregiver (e.g., family trees, career interviews, activities calling upon the parents' "funds of knowledge").
- Encourage teachers to give positive reinforcement for parents' participation by expressing appreciation, inviting them to share in the children's success, and extending invitations to go to the school to see the final product of the class's work.

Use homework to increase effective forms of parent involvement and classroom instruction

- Emphasize the importance of student outcomes other than achievement (e.g., motivation, persistence); provide in-classroom guidance sessions with students and workshops with teachers and parents to explain students' individual profiles with regard to the source of their motivation, and their preferences for how, when, where, and with whom to do homework.
- Offer parent workshops regarding more effective and less effective ways of supporting student learning.

APPENDIX B

Steps That School Counselors Can Take to Increase Families' Capacities for Involvement

Communicate the importance of parent involvement

- Conduct an assessment of the attitudes of families and students regarding parent involvement; train parent liaisons to explain to families the benefits their participation can have for their children.
- Teach parents the value of conveying emotional support and aspirations to their children; explain the value of modeling for their children a commitment to learning and the importance of working hard; provide examples of positive reinforcement; tell parents how important it is for them to express to their children the value they place on education.

Prepare parents to perceive and respond appropriately to teacher invitations to involvement

- Prior to parent-teacher conferences, prepare fact sheets for parents explaining parent-teacher conferences (how to prepare, what to do during, how to follow up); give parents learning goals for their children's classes; offer workshops explaining learning goals and their relationship to assignments.
- Help teachers and students make invitations to parents personal and meaningful by explaining the importance of the parents' participation.
- Create clear materials explaining the appropriate school staff to contact and how to reach them.

Facilitate parent-teacher-administrator dialogues

- Serve as mediators in discussions between groups of parents and administrators; assist all participants to feel "heard"; guide groups to increased trust and the discovery of common ground.
- Advocate for the inclusion of parents in decision-making roles in the school.

Make parents feel important and comfortable in the school

- Create special identification cards for parents to wear at the school; have school personnel recognize and warmly acknowledge parents.
- Design a welcoming environment with posters, photos, and artwork that represent all of the families in the school; express the feeling "we all belong here."
- Create a parent resource room with materials of interest to parents on display; create multiple "comfortable spaces" for parents in the schools, supportive of parent–school counselor conversations and parent networking.
- Offer parents the use of the gym, library, computer lab, and other facilities.

Use parents as educators in the school

- Invite parents to share their expertise at career fairs, classroom presentations, assemblies, and staff meetings.
- Explain to parents how they can model for their children a love of learning and a positive connection to the school.

Offer parents resources and ideas to enhance their parenting skills

- Organize and lead parent education programs and parent mutual support groups on topics that parents have identified (e.g., parenting skills, computer literacy, bullying, dealing with children with special needs).
- Invite community experts and parent liaisons to present on subjects such as bereavement, divorce, community health, mental health, and social services.

Invite new parents to visit the school

- Organize visits to the schools, especially when children are transitioning into kindergarten, from elementary to middle school, and from middle school to high school.
- Give parents written materials (in the appropriate language) explaining the ways they can contribute to their children and participate in the school.

Organize student-family activities

- Organize family-centric activities to bring parents and students to the school to play together (e.g., family fun nights, swim nights, parent-child chess lessons).
- Develop information sheets in appropriate languages explaining the rules of various varsity sports in which the students are engaged.

Address barriers to parent attendance

- Provide translators at meetings and have written materials in all necessary languages.
- Develop flexible schedules (including evening and weekend hours) for parent meetings; offer child care and elder care during meetings.
- Provide transportation where necessary or arrange for school counselor to make a home visit.

Create school-family-community linkages

- Involve teachers in learning about the local community.
- Invite community leaders to visit the school and address staff about their organization's mission and services; invite parent-led community groups (e.g., Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4H) to utilize school facilities.
- Develop a list of community resources for distribution to parents and to make appropriate referrals.