

important link between families and schools due to teachers' practices, reported in Column 3. There are two important patterns of results in Table 2:

- Single parents, regardless of their educational level, report more requests from teachers than do married parents to be involved in learning activities at home.
- According to parents, teachers who are confirmed *leaders* in parent involvement make more equal requests of all parents, regardless of education and marital status, whereas other, *nonleader* teachers ask more of single and low-educated parents.

It is not enough, then, to measure only marital status or parent education to explain parents' behavior concerning their children. Research on single parents and the schools must also take into account teachers' practices concerning parents.

Table 3 extends the inquiry by introducing other variables that may explain the simple patterns in Table 2. The first line of Table 3 reports the independent effects of the three variables—marital status, mothers' education, and teachers' practices of parent involvement—that were introduced earlier. With the other two variables statistically controlled, single parents, less-educated parents, and parents whose children are in the classrooms of teachers who were *leaders* report receiving more requests from teachers for their involvement with their children in learning activities at home.

The second line of the table introduces other characteristics of the family, student, and teacher that previous research suggests may also affect parents', teachers', and students' interactions and evaluations of each other. *Race* clearly helps to explain the effect of single-parent status on parents' reports of teachers practices. More black parents head one-parent homes in this sample (as in the nation), and black parents report receiving more requests for parent involvement than do white parents, regardless of marital status. These results reflect the practices of the urban district in which most of the black parents in this sample reside. Teachers in the urban district reported that they used more parent involvement practices (Becker & Epstein, 1982b), and the parents' responses verify the teachers' reports. Teachers tend to reach out to parents when children need extra help. The results also may indicate a continuing trend for black parents to let teachers know that they want to be involved in their children's education (Lightfoot, 1978).

The regression coefficients in line 2 of Table 3 show that six variables in addition to race have significant independent effects on parents' reports of their experiences with teachers' practice of parent involvement. Parents report significantly more frequent requests for involvement from teachers if they have less education (PARED), have younger children (GRADE), have children whose teachers are *leaders* in parent involvement (TCHLDR), or whose teachers use specific strategies to build close family-school relation-

TABLE 3. Effects of Measures of Family, Student, and Teacher Characteristics on Parents' Reports of Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement

	FAMSTR ^a	PARED	TCHLDR	PARWORK	RACE	SEX	ACH	DISC	GRADE	YEARST	TQDAL	PARCOMF	TKNOCH	TALKHLP	R ²
Initial model	-.116*	-.108*	.126*												.048
Full model	-.006	-.102*	.071*	.046	-.238*	-.029	-.055	.003	-.114*	.053	.072*	.071*	.238*	.211*	.286
	(-.138) ^c	(-.133)	(.141)	(.047)	(-.306)	(-.039)	(-.134)	(.020)	(-.195)	(-.029)	(.130)	(.114)	(.328)	(.296)	

^aVariables are FAMSTR = one- or two-parent homes; PARED = schooling from less than high school (0) to graduate school (5); TCHLDR = teacher's leadership or lack of parent involvement confirmed by principal (0-4); PARWORK = no work (0) or work (1) outside home by parent; RACE = black (0) or white (1); SEX = male (0) or female (1); ACH = reading and math skills ranked by teacher (0-6); DISC = low (-1) or high (+1) discipline problems; GRADE = students' grade in school management (0-4); PARCOMF = parent feeling comfortable and welcome at school (1-4); TKNOCH = parent report that teacher knows child's individual learning needs (1-4); TALKHLP = teacher talked to parent about how to help child at home (0/1). The outcome "parents' reports" refers to the number and frequency of teacher requests for up to 12 techniques to involve parents in learning activities at home.

^bStandardized regression coefficients are reported. N = 1135.

^cZero-order correlations are in parentheses.

*Indicates coefficient is significant at or beyond the .01 level.

ships. These interpersonal practices are: parent feels comfortable and welcomed at school (PARCOMF); parent reports that teacher knows child's individual learning needs (TKNOCH); and teacher talks to parent about how to help the child at home (TALKHLP). Separate analyses show that these variables are about equally important for black and white parents.

The percentage of variance explained in parents' reports of teachers' requests for their involvement improved markedly—from 5% to 30%—when we added detailed information on the actual practices that bring schools and families together. It is important, too, that even with teacher-parent interpersonal practices accounted for, *teacher leadership* in the use of specific practices continues to significantly affect parents' reports of their experiences with learning activities at home.

In previous research, the limited focus on marital status has veiled the importance of other variables that influence parents' interactions with their children and their children's schools. Single and married parents' reports about their experiences with parent involvement are influenced by many family and school factors, not simply by the categorical label of marital status.

Single and married parents' reports about what teachers ask them to do at home is one indicator of their treatment by the schools. The next two sections explore teachers' evaluations of single and married parents' abilities to conduct the requested activities and the quality of the home work that their children do.

TEACHERS' REPORTS OF SINGLE AND MARRIED PARENTS' HELPFULNESS AND FOLLOWTHROUGH

Parents' marital status is believed to influence teachers' opinions of parents and their children. Teachers were asked to rate the helpfulness and followthrough on home-learning activities of the parents of each student and the quality of homework completed by each student. In contrast to the laboratory study of Santrock and Tracy (1978) that asked teachers to rate hypothetical children from one- and two-parent homes, our questions were designed *not* to call teachers' attention to the students' living arrangements when the teachers rated parents and students. We were interested in whether, in a natural environment, teachers' evaluations were affected by parent marital status (identified by the parent) or other family characteristics and practices. It is likely that elementary-school teachers are aware of family living arrangements from information provided by parents on emergency cards each year, from informal exchanges with parents or children about their families, or from discussions with other teachers. However, our method for collecting information did not ask teachers to base their evaluations on the explicit criteria of the children's living arrangements.

Table 4 presents teachers' evaluations of the quality of involvement of single and married parents. The ratings of parent helpfulness and followthrough on learning activities at home ranged from +1 to -1, with a mean of .18 and a standard deviation of .70, indicating that, on average, parents were perceived as neither particularly helpful nor inept but more were helpful (35%) than not (17%). The comparisons in the first column of Table 4 show that teachers rated married parents significantly higher than single parents on helpfulness and followthrough on home-learning activities. The second column shows that better educated single and married parents received higher ratings from teachers on helpfulness. The difference in ratings was significant between low- versus high-educated married parents (.267 vs. .437) and single versus married high-educated parents (.302 vs. .437).

The third column offers important information about how teachers' practices affected their evaluations of parents' helpfulness. Teachers who were *leaders* in the use of parent involvement practices rated single, less-educated parents significantly higher in helpfulness and followthrough at home than did teachers who were *not leaders* in parent involvement (.366 vs. .102). The same pattern appeared for teachers' ratings of single, high-educated parents (.483 vs. .234). Less-educated married parents were considered less responsible assistants than more-educated married parents, regardless of the teachers' leadership in the use of parent involvement.

If we had not included teachers' practices in our comparisons, we would conclude that, regardless of education, teachers rate single parents as less cooperative and less reliable than married parents in assisting their children at home. What we see instead is that teachers' own practices of parent involvement influence their ratings of the quality of parental assistance. Teachers' frequent use of parent involvement practices reduces or eliminates the teachers' differential evaluations of single and married parents.

Table 5 presents the results of the initial and the better specified models. The regression analyses summarized in Table 5 show, as did the previous tables of simple mean scores, that there are significant independent effects of marital status, parents' education, and teacher leadership in parent involvement on teachers' ratings of their students' parents on helpfulness and followthrough at home. Although each variable has significant, independent effects, the three-variable model explains only 4% of the variance in teachers' reports of parent helpfulness.

On the second line of the table, other measures of family, student, and teacher characteristics that have been found important in other research on family-school connections are added to the basic model. These variables increase the explained variance to 23%. Most dramatically, student achievement levels and behavior *in school* affects how teachers evaluate the students' parents. Teachers rate parents more positively if their children

TABLE 4. Teachers' Estimates of the Quality of Parents' Responses to Requests for Involvement (Means, Standard Deviations, and Test Statistics from Multiple Comparisons of Mean Scores of Single vs. Married, Low vs. High-Educated Parents and Parents of Children in Classrooms of Confirmed Leader vs. Nonleader Teacher in Parent Involvement)

Teachers' estimates of parents' helpfulness	Family structure		Parent education ^a		Teacher leadership in parent involvement		Other significant comparisons of means
	\bar{X}	s.d.	\bar{X}	s.d.	Confirmed leader	Nonleader	
Single parent	.227	.174	.366*	.733	Confirmed leader	Nonleader	Single vs. married, low education ($\bar{X} = .302$ vs. $.437^*$)
	.712	.733	(41)	(149)			Single vs. married, low education, in nonleader classroom ($\bar{X} = .102$ vs. $.260^*$)
	(255)	(149)	(108)	(106)			Single vs. married, high education in nonleader classroom ($\bar{X} = .234$ vs. $.436^*$)
					Confirmed leader	Nonleader	Low vs. high education, married, in nonleader classroom ($\bar{X} = .260$ vs. $.436^*$)
Married parent	.346*	.267*	.291	.736	Confirmed leader	Nonleader	
	.660	.693	(103)	(335)			
	(813)	(438)	(260)	(680)			
					Confirmed leader	Nonleader	
High							
Low							

^aParent education is high if the respondent attended or graduated from postsecondary school; low if parent attended or graduated from high school only.
^{*}T-test significant at or beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 5. Effects of Family, Student, and Teacher Characteristics on Teacher Reports of Parent Helpfulness and Followthrough on Learning Activities at Home

	FAMSTR*	PARED	TCHLDR	PARWORK	RACE	SEX	ACH	DISC	GRADE	YEARST	TQUAL	PARCOMF	TKNOCH	TALKHLP	R ²
Initial model	.077*	.131*	.135*												.039
Full model	.042 (.081) [†]	.049 (.131)	.136* (.121)	.014 (.027)	-.034 (.039)	-.044 (.025)	.343* (.365)	-.205* (-.256)	-.099* (-.079)	.104* (.079)	-.009 (.051)	.041 (.092)	.029 (.069)	.056 (.050)	.226

*Variables are described in the footnote to Table 3. The outcome "teacher reports" in this table refers to the ratings by teachers of the parent of each student on the quality of parent help at home (scored -100/+1).
[†]Standardized regression coefficients are reported. N = 1135.
[‡]Zero-order correlations are in parentheses.
[§]Indicates coefficient is significant at or beyond the .01 level.

are high achievers or well behaved in school. Children may be successful in school because their parents help them at home, or parents may give more help to children who are good students and easy to assist, or good students may be assumed by teachers to have good parents as part of a school/home "halo" effect.

Teachers of younger children and more experienced teachers tend to rate parents higher in helpfulness and followthrough than other teachers. Teachers of the lower elementary grades tend to use more parent involvement techniques, and more experienced teachers may be more aware and appreciative of how the efforts of parents supplement the efforts of teachers (Becker & Epstein, 1982a, b). Although race was not an important variable overall for explaining teachers' ratings of parent helpfulness, separate analyses of black and white parents revealed that marital status remained a modest but significant influence on the teachers' ratings of white parents but not of black parents. White, single parents were rated lower in helpfulness and followthrough than white, married parents, with all other variables in the model statistically controlled. White, single parents may be the most distinct group in terms of their marital status because proportionately more white than black parents are married.

These analyses show that it is mainly the characteristics and needs of students—not the simple category of parental marital status—that best explain teachers' evaluations of parents. But, teachers' leadership remained an important influence on their ratings of parents, even after all other variables were statistically taken into account. Teachers who frequently use parent involvement techniques in their regular teaching practice acknowledge the help they receive and view single and married parents in a more positive light than do other teachers. When teachers involve parents in their children's schoolwork on a regular basis, creating more family and school "overlap," they tend to report that the amount and quality of help from single parents is comparable to that of married parents. When teachers use frequent activities as part of their teaching practice, they help parents build better skills to assist their children at home. At the same time, these activities may help teachers develop more positive expectations and appreciation of parents. Teachers who keep schools and families more separate and do not make parents part of their regular teaching practice tend to promote the stereotype of single parents. They rate single parents' assistance and followthrough on learning activities at home lower in quality and quantity than that provided by married parents.

TEACHERS' REPORTS OF THE QUALITY OF HOMEWORK BY CHILDREN FROM ONE- AND TWO-PARENT HOMES

Teachers were asked to rate the quality of homework completed by each of their students. Researchers identified the children from one- and

two-parent homes from data provided by parents. Teachers identified the students who were homework "stars" and homework "problems." Scores on the quality of homework ranged from +1 to -1, with a mean of -.01 and a standard deviation of .64, indicating that, on average, students were neither particularly outstanding nor inferior, with about equal numbers of homework stars (20%) and homework problems (21%). Teachers' ratings of children's homework are shown in Table 6 according to children's living arrangements in one- or two-parent homes, parents' education, and their teachers' leadership in the use of parent involvement.

The first column of Table 6 shows that students from two-parent homes were more often rated as "homework stars" and were less often viewed as "homework problems" than were students from one-parent homes. The measures in the second column show that these ratings were linked to parent education. Children whose mothers had little formal education were rated lower in the quality of their homework than other children in one-parent homes (.057 vs. -.101 for more- vs. less-educated mothers) and in two-parent homes (.157 vs. .050). Family socioeconomic status in Column 2 of Table 6 helps to explain teachers' evaluations of children in one- and two-parent homes, as has been reported before (Barton, 1981; Laosa & Siegel, 1982; Scott-Jones, 1983).

Teachers' practices of parent involvement are taken into account in Column 3 of the table. Teachers who were *not leaders* in parent involvement held significantly lower opinions of the quality of homework of children from single-parent homes than from married-parent homes, at both levels of parent education. The results suggest that children from less-educated, single-parent families face disadvantages in school that may be exacerbated by teachers' lack of leadership in organizing parent involvement in learning activities at home.

If estimates of homework quality reflect student achievement in general, children from one- and two-parent homes in teacher *leader* classrooms should have more similar grades and achievement test scores, after other important characteristics are taken into account. In classrooms of teachers who are *not leaders* in parent involvement, children from one-parent homes may do less well than children from two-parent homes in their report card grades and other school achievements.

The regression analyses in Table 7 show how teachers' ratings of the quality of students' homework are influenced by other parent, teacher, and student characteristics. On the first line of the table, the familiar three-variable model shows that marital status and parent education have significant independent effects on teacher ratings of student homework. Students from one-parent homes or whose parents have less education are given lower ratings on homework quality. Teacher leadership in parent involvement is not a significant independent influence on teachers' ratings of students, after the other variables are accounted for. The basic model,

TABLE 6. Teachers' Estimates of the Quality of Children's Homework Completion (Means, Standard Deviations, and Test Statistics from Multiple Comparisons of Mean Scores by Family Structure, Family Education, and Teacher Leadership in Parent Involvement)

Teachers' estimates of students' homework completion	Family structure		Parent education ^a		Teacher leadership in parent involvement		Other significant comparisons of means
	\bar{X} s.d. N	\bar{X} s.d. N	\bar{X} s.d. N	\bar{X} s.d. N	\bar{X} s.d. N	\bar{X} s.d. N	
Single parent	.035 .604 (255)	Low	-.101 .601 (149)	Confirmed leader	.073* .648 (41)	Single vs. married, low education ($X = -.101$ vs. .050*)	
				Nonleader	-.167 .572 (108)		
	.057* .599 (106)	High		Confirmed leader	.207* .620 (29)	Single vs. married, low education, in nonleader classroom ($X = -.167$ vs. .045*)	
				Nonleader	.001 .585 (77)		
	Married parent	.100* .619 (813)	Low		Confirmed leader	.068 .630 (103)	
					Nonleader	.045 .644 (335)	
		.157* .589 (375)	High		Confirmed leader	.254 .595 (63)	
					Nonleader	.138 .587 (312)	

^aParent education is high if the respondent attended or graduated from postsecondary school; low if parent attended or graduated from high school only.
*T-test significant at or beyond the .05 level.

TABLE 7. Effects of Family, Student, and Teacher Characteristics on Teachers' Ratings of Children on Their Homework Completion

	FAMSTR*	PARED	TCHLDR	PARWORK	RACE	SEX	ACH	DISC	GRADE	YEARST	TQUAL	PARCOMF	TKNOCH	TALKHLP	R ²
Initial model	.085 ^b	.106 ^a	.039												.021
Full model	.068 ^a (.097) ^c	.022 (.114)	.042 (.026)	-.024 (-.005)	-.107 ^a (-.007)	.058 (.132)	.392 ^a (.412)	-.183 ^a (-.259)	-.007 (.001)	.050 (.035)	-.038 (.021)	-.024 (-.005)	.058 (.105)	.055 (.018)	.236

*Variables are described in the footnote to Table 3. The outcome "teacher ratings" in this table refers to the evaluations by teachers of each student's homework (scored -1/0/+1).

^bStandardized regression coefficients are reported. N = 1135.

^cZero-order correlations are in parentheses.

^aIndicates coefficient is significant at or beyond the .01 level.

however, explains only 2% of the variance in teacher ratings of student homework.

The second line of Table 7 shows that 24% of the variance in teacher ratings of student homework is explained by other measures. The most important variables are the work students do in class and their classroom behavior. Brighter students—whatever their behavior or other characteristics—were rated higher on the quality of their homework, and well-behaved students—whatever their ability or other characteristics—were given higher ratings on homework quality. Black students were rated significantly higher in homework quality, after achievement level and behavior were taken into account. Even with these highly influential variables taken into account, the quality of homework of students from two-parent homes was still rated slightly higher by some teachers than that of students from one-parent homes.

Several researchers have questioned whether teachers base children's grades and other ratings on criteria other than performance and whether their ratings reflect bias against children from single parent homes (Barton, 1981; Boyd & Parrish, 1985; Hammond, 1979; Lightfoot, 1978). Our data show that teachers base their judgments about the quality of children's homework mainly on the performance of the children, rather than on other unrelated criteria. There is little bias evident against children in one-parent homes. When they do occur, biased reports are more likely by teachers who have less contact with parents. If teachers do not ask for and guide parent involvement, single parents and their children are assumed to be less qualified than married parents and their children.

The simple lines of inquiry in Tables 2, 4, and 6 suggest that there may be important statistical interactions of marital status, parent education, and teachers' leadership in parent involvement in their effects of school and family communications. For example, when we graph the mean scores in Tables 2, 4, and 6 (not shown here), we see that *teacher leadership* matters more in determining teachers' ratings of single parents' helpfulness and followthrough on learning activities with their children at home, and on their ratings of the homework quality of children in one-parent homes. *Parent education* matters more for married parents on how teachers rate parents' helpfulness and children's homework. New research is needed on the consequences for student learning of these potentially important interactions.

The full models in Tables 3, 5, and 7 reveal other important patterns. *Parents' reports* of teachers' practices of parent involvement are influenced by several characteristics of students, teachers, parents, and family-school communications. *Teachers' reports* of parents are influenced especially by the teachers' interactions with the child in school. It often is said that children are reflections of their parents, but it also seems to work the other way. Parents are evaluated, in part, on the basis of their children's success

and behavior in school. *Teachers' reports* of children are mainly determined by the children's school work. However, even after achievement level is taken into account, some teachers report that children from one-parent homes have more trouble completing homework than do children from two-parent homes. The analyses show clearly that the ratings that parents and teachers give each other are significantly affected by teachers' philosophies and practices of parent involvement.

On a related theme, in the full model we also found that whether or not mothers worked outside the home had no important effect on parents' reports about teachers, teachers' reports about parents, or teachers' reports about the quality of children's homework.

PARENTS' AWARENESS, KNOWLEDGE, AND EVALUATIONS OF TEACHERS

Are single and married parents equally aware of their children's instructional program? Is marital status an important variable for explaining parental receptivity to teachers' requests to help their children? Epstein (1986) showed that teachers' practices influenced parental reactions to their children's teachers and schools. For this chapter, we examined whether single and married parents react differently to teachers' efforts to involve and inform parents. The exploration of previous analyses showed that marital status had no significant effect on whether parents think the child's teacher works hard to get parents "interested and excited about helping at home." Rather, frequent experience with teachers' requests to become involved in learning activities at home had a strong effect on parent awareness of the teacher's efforts. Other variables—less education of parents, parents' belief that teachers know the individual needs of their children, and teachers' direct conversations with parents about helping their own child at home—also had significant, independent effects on parents' awareness of teachers' efforts to involve parents.

Similarly, teachers' frequent requests for parent involvement in learning activities at home—not marital status—had strong effects on single and married parents' reports that they get *many ideas* from teachers about how to help at home; that the teacher thinks parents *should help* at home; that they *know more* about the child's instructional program than they did in previous years; and that the teacher has positive *interpersonal skills* and high *teaching quality*.

OTHER REPORTS ABOUT SCHOOL FROM SINGLE AND MARRIED PARENTS

Other data collected from parents also help explain some of the results reported in the previous tables.

Single parents reported significantly more often than married parents that they spent more time assisting their children with homework but still did not have the "time and energy" to do what they believed the teacher expected. Single parents felt more pressure from teachers to become involved in their children's learning activities. It may be that their children required or demanded more attention or needed more help to stay on grade level. Or it may be that parents who were separated, divorced, or never married felt keenly their responsibility for their children and the demands on their time. Single parents divide their time among many responsibilities for family, work, and leisure that are shared in many two-parent homes (Glasser & Navarre, 1965; Shinn, 1978).

Requests from teachers for parents to help on home-learning activities may make more of an impression and may be more stressful for single parents (McAdoo, 1981). Our data show, however, that single parents respond successfully to teachers who involve all parents as part of their regular teaching practice. Like other parents, single parents who were frequently involved by the teacher felt that they increased their knowledge about the child's instructional program. Indeed, teachers who organize and guide home-learning activities may especially help single parents make efficient and effective use of often limited time. When teachers convey uniform expectations and guidance for involvement by all parents, single parents receive an important message about their continuing responsibility in their children's education.

Married parents spent significantly more days in the school as volunteers, as classroom helpers, and at PTA meetings than did single parents. Teachers may be more positive toward parents whom they meet and work with in the school building and classroom. These positive feelings may influence some teachers' ratings of the quality of parental assistance at home. An important fact is, however, that the teacher leaders—whose philosophy and practices emphasized parent involvement at home—*did not* give significantly lower ratings to single parents or less-educated parents on their helpfulness or followthrough on home-learning activities, despite those parents' lower involvement at the school building. Because many single parents work full- or part-time during the schoolday or have other demands on their time that keep them away from school, it is important for teachers to emphasize practices that involve all parents with their children's education at home. If all involvement occurs during school hours, single parents and working parents are excluded from school activities.

There were several measures on which there were no significant differences in the reports of single and married parents. Some common beliefs about single and married parents were not supported statistically. For example, single and married parents gave similar evaluations of the overall quality of their children's teachers, the extent to which the teacher shares the parent's goals

for their child, their child's eagerness to talk about school, their child's level of tenseness about homework activities, the appropriateness of the amount and kinds of homework that their children's teachers assigned, and the frequency of most communications (e.g., notes, phone calls, and memos) from the school to the home. These findings support Snow's 1982 conclusion that single and married parents had similar contacts with teachers, similar evaluations of teachers, and that socioeconomic status was more predictive than marital status of parents' contacts with teachers. We show, however, the SES is not the most important variable. Rather, school and family communications of several types reduce or eliminate the importance of marital status and SES.

Marital status is not significantly related to the severity of discipline problems in class. The belief that children from one-parent homes tend to be disruptive in school may be one of the "myths" that has perpetuated from earlier studies based on "special problem" populations and from studies that did not include measures of student, family, and teacher characteristics and practices—all of which are more important influences than marital status on children's classroom behavior. In our study, children's disciplinary problems in the classroom are significantly correlated negatively with gender ($r = -.262$), academic achievement ($r = -.147$), and whether the child likes to talk about school at home ($r = -.124$), as might be expected. Male students, low-achieving students, and those who do not like to talk about school or homework with their parents are more likely than other students to be disciplinary problems in class. But parents' marital status is not significantly associated with behavior problems in class ($r = -.056$).

Marital status is not correlated with parents' willingness to help at home, feeling welcome at the school, or with reports that someone at home reads regularly with the child. Indeed, single and married parents are remarkably positive about the general quality of their children's elementary schools and teachers (Epstein, 1986). As in earlier reports by Eiduson (1982), Keniston (1977), and Sarick and Maudlin (1986), our survey shows that, like married parents, single parents are concerned about their children's education, work with their children, and are generally positive about their children's elementary schools and teachers.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Researchers have contributed three types of information on single parents. First, *descriptive reports* offer statistics about single parents and their children. Many reports have focused on the dramatic increase over the years in the prevalence of single parents, the number of children in

single-parent homes, racial differences in marital patterns, and the economic disparities of single versus two-parent homes, especially single-mother homes versus other family arrangements (Bane, 1976; Cherlin, 1981; Newberger & Associates, 1986; Weitzman, 1985). It is important to continue to document and monitor the trends in separation, divorce, the numbers of children affected, and the emergence and increase of special cases such as teenage single parents (Mott Foundation, 1981) and never-married parents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1982).

Second, *analytic studies* of the effects of family structure on children or parents go beyond descriptive statistics to consider *family conditions and processes* that affect family members. Research of this type has measured a range of family-life variables—such as socioeconomic status, family history, family practices, and attitudes such as parental commitment to their children (Adams, 1982; Bane, 1976; Epstein, 1983; Furstenburg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Marjoribanks, 1979; Svanum, Bringle, & McLaughlin, 1982; Zill, 1983). These studies increase our understanding of the dynamics of family life under different social and economic conditions.

Third, *integrative, ecological studies* of the effects of family structure on children and parents go beyond the boundaries of family conditions to include *other institutions* that affect family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 1987; Leichter, 1974; Litwak & Meyer, 1974; Santrock & Tracy, 1978). These studies show that effects of family structure are, in large part, explained by other variables, including teachers' practices of parent involvement and other measures of family and school interaction.

The present study contributes new knowledge based on data from parents and teachers about single parents and their children's schools:

1. *Single parents are not a single group.* Single parents are highly diverse in their education, family size, family resources, occupational status, confidence in their ability to help their children, and other family practices that concern their children. The diversity in single-parent homes means that we cannot fully understand families by measuring only the simple category of marital status.

2. *There is diversity in teachers' practices that concern families.* Some teachers' philosophies and practices lead them toward more positive attitudes about single parents and about how all parents can assist the teacher as knowledgeable partners in their children's education. Some teachers' practices exemplify the theory that families and schools are overlapping spheres of influence for children, and other teachers' practices exemplify the belief that families and schools are better off when teachers and parents conduct separate and different activities.

Some teachers involve all or most parents successfully. Other teachers demand more but expect less of single parents and their children. Single parents' abilities to help their children may be affected by the teachers' abilities to inform and direct the parent about productive activities for parent involvement at home.

Santrock and Tracy (1978) found that teachers rated hypothetical children from two-parent homes higher on positive traits and lower on negative traits than children from one-parent homes. Levine (1982) reported that teachers had lower expectations for children from one-parent homes. In actual school settings, we found that teachers differed in their evaluations of children from one- and two-parent homes. Teachers tend to rate children from one-parent homes lower on the quality of their homework, and teachers who were *not leaders* made even greater distinctions between children from one- and two-parent homes.

3. *Teacher leadership, not parent marital status, influenced parents' knowledge about the school program and the teachers' efforts.* Single and married parents whose children were in the classrooms of teachers who were *leaders* in parent involvement were more aware of teachers' efforts in parent involvement, improved their understanding of their children's school programs, and rated teachers' interpersonal and teaching skills higher than did parents of children in other teachers' classrooms.

Evidence has been accumulating in many studies that daily practices are more important than static measures of family structure for understanding children's experiences. This has often been interpreted to refer to practices that parents might conduct on their own. But parent involvement in school is not the parents' responsibility alone. Contexts influence practice. Kriesberg (1967) found a neighborhood effect on parents' practices. He noted that disadvantaged single mothers in middle-class neighborhoods gave more educational support to their children than similar mothers in poor neighborhoods. Our study reports a school effect on parents' practices. Teachers' practices that support and guide parents boost the involvement of all parents, including single parents—the same parents that other teachers believe cannot or will not help their children.

4. *Research on single parents and their children must include measures of family and school structure and processes that affect the interactions of parents, teachers, and students.* Marital status will look more important than it is unless studies include measures of the teachers' practices. In this study, teachers' approaches to parent involvement, other teacher, parent, and student characteristics, and specific family-school communications were more important and more manipulable variables than marital status or mother's education for explaining parents' and teachers' evaluations of each other. Studies of school and family connections must go beyond simple structural labels such as marital status and education and include measures of the practices and attitudes of parents, teachers, and students. During the school years, it is necessary to measure the characteristics of all overlapping institutions that influence student behavior and particularly the family and the school. This is especially true for particular outcomes such as student learning and development or parental understanding and practices concerning their children as students.

5. *Schools' interactions with families need to change because families are changing.* Teachers must consider how they perceive and interact with single parents in order to minimize bias and maximize the support that all parents give their children.

Family members may recover relatively rapidly from the disruption caused by divorce or separation (Bane, 1976; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978; Zill, 1983). But teachers who favor traditional families may have difficulty dealing with families who differ from their "ideal." Some administrators and teachers still consider the primary, two-parent family as the model by which other families should be judged (Bernard, 1984). The primary family—two natural parents and their children—may be an ideal type but it is no longer the "typical" family for all school-aged children. In 1980, 63% of white children and 27% of black children lived in primary families; 14% of all white children and 43% of all black children lived in one-parent homes with their mothers. Most of the others lived in "blended" families in which at least one parent had remarried (Hernandez & Meyers, 1986). Demographic trends indicate that the one-parent home will be "the new norm" as over half of all children will live in a one-parent home for some of their school years. During that time, teachers' practices to assist and involve all parents can help reduce single parents' stress about their children's well-being and help children's learning and attitudes about school and homework.

Schools need to change their understanding of single parents in order to better meet the parents' concerns and children's needs. Most suggestions about how the school should assist single parents and their children focus on providing psychological services, family therapy, discussion groups, or individual counseling for children who experience divorce in their families (Brown, 1980). Although discussion or therapy sessions may help children adjust to family disruptions, this study suggests that a more important general direction is to assist all parents in how to help their children at home in ways that will improve their children's success in school. This includes helping parents make productive use of small amounts of time at home on school-related skills, activities, and decisions.

School policies and practices can minimize or exaggerate the importance of family structure. Although school practices cannot solve the serious social and economic problems that single parents often face, our data show that teachers play a pivotal role in the lives of children from one-parent homes and in their parents' lives as well.

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Parents' Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement

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Teachers have strong opinions about parent involvement. Some believe that they can be effective only if they obtain parental assistance on learning activities at home. Others believe that their professional status is in jeopardy if parents are involved in activities that are typically the teachers' responsibilities. The different philosophies and beliefs of teachers reflect the two main, opposing theories of school and family relations.

One perspective emphasizes the inherent incompatibility, competition, and conflict between families and schools and supports the separation of the two institutions (Parsons, 1959; Waller, 1932; Weber, 1947). It assumes that school bureaucracies and family organizations are directed, respectively, by educators and parents, who can best fulfill their different goals, roles, and responsibilities independently. Thus, these distinct goals are achieved most efficiently and effectively when teachers maintain their professional, general standards and judgments about the children in their classrooms and when parents maintain their personal, particularistic standards and judgments about their children at home.

The opposing perspective emphasizes the coordination, cooperation, and complementarity of schools and families and encourages communication and collaboration between the two institutions. It assumes that schools and families share responsibilities for the socialization and the education of the child. Teachers and parents are believed to share common goals for children that are achieved most effectively when teachers and parents work to-

gether. These assumptions are based on models of interinstitutional interactions and ecological designs that emphasize the natural, nested, necessary connections between individuals, groups, and organizations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Leichter, 1974; Litwak & Meyer, 1974).

Although teachers may combine these perspectives, they tend to emphasize the precepts of one theory or the other in organizing their teaching practice. In an earlier survey of teachers, we found that in some classrooms interinstitutional cooperation was low. These teachers made few overtures to parents, rarely requesting their help on learning activities at home. In other classrooms cooperation was high. These teachers made frequent requests for parental assistance in reinforcing or improving students' skills (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Teachers' reports tell only one part of the story. Parents' reports are needed to verify and to clarify their experiences with teachers' different practices of parent involvement. Among the most frequently mentioned expected benefits of parent involvement are the increased or sustained interest and support of parents in the school programs and in their child's progress (Gordon, 1979; Keesling & Melaragno, 1983; Mager, 1980; Morrison, 1978; Rich & Jones, 1977; Robinson, 1979; Sowers, Lang, & Gowett, 1980). Little research has been done, however, to link specific teachers' practices with the parents who experience them or to measure differences in attitudes and reactions of parents whose children are in classrooms of teachers with different philosophies and practices of parent involvement. The data collected for this study connect the teachers with the parents of their students. I examine parents' awareness of teachers' efforts, knowledge about the school program, and evaluations of teachers. The results should provide an understanding of parents' perspectives on teachers' practices that em-

phasize the cooperation or separation of schools and families.

Method

Parents of 1,269 students in 82 first-, third-, and fifth-grade classrooms in Maryland completed and returned by mail questionnaires on the parent involvement practices of their children's teachers—a response rate of 59%. The questionnaire, administered in the spring of 1981, contained items assessing parents' attitudes toward the schools and teachers, their experiences with different kinds of involvement and communications with the schools, and their reactions to the teachers' programs and practices. The teachers of these parents' children included 36 "case" teachers who were identified in an earlier survey as strong supporters and users of parent involvement in learning activities at home and 46 "control" teachers who, by their own report, did not emphasize parent involvement but who matched the "case" teachers in their teaching assignment by grade level, school district, years of teaching experience, estimated achievement level of the students in their classes, and average education of their students' parents. Among the "case" teachers, 17 were recognized by their principals as especially strong leaders in the use of parent involvement. In this report, "parent involvement" refers to the frequency of participation by parents in 12 types of learning activities that teachers request parents to conduct or monitor at home that support the child's instructional program at school. Overall, the 82 teachers ranged along a continuum from low to high use of parent involvement. This continuum is one measure of teachers' emphasis on the separation or cooperation of schools and families on learning activities.

Table 1 describes the characteristics of parents who returned questionnaires. Families were instructed that the parent most familiar with the child's school and teacher should complete the survey. Over

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Parents (N = 1,269)

Parent Characteristics	%
Grade level of children:	
K, 1, 2	45
3, 4	27
5, 6	28
Sex:	
Female	92
Male	8
Race:	
White	62
Black	36
Other	2
Highest education completed:	
Some high school (or less)	25
High school diploma	28
Some college	20
Bachelor's degree	10
Some graduate school (or advanced degree)	17
Family structure:	
Two-parent home	76
One-parent home	24
Employment:	
Not working	39
Part-time work	18
Full-time work	43

90% of the "most knowledgeable" parents were female. Other background and family characteristics showed a representative mix of the families served by Maryland's schools. About one-fourth of the parents had some high school education but no diploma, almost one-third graduated from high school, about one-fifth attended some college, and about one-fourth graduated from college or attended graduate school. About one-fourth of the sample comprised single parents. Two-fifths of the respondents did not work outside the home; one-fifth worked part-time; and two-fifths had full-time jobs outside the home. About one-third of the respondents were black.

There were some differences between the parents who responded to the survey and those who did not. More parents whose children were above average in math and reading skills in school returned the survey than did parents of children doing average or below average work in these subjects. Regardless of how children fared academ-

ically, the response was greater from parents whose children were in the classrooms of teachers who were leaders in parent involvement. Mailing back the questionnaire may be an indicator of parental cooperation on important requests from the teacher (Becker, 1982).

The differences in return rates from parents had offsetting effects. Parents whose children were in classrooms of teachers who emphasized parent involvement tended to be more positive about school than other parents, but parents of high-achieving students tended to be more critical of school and teachers than other parents. The small differences in return rates from some parents did not seriously affect the usefulness of data from the sizable, diverse sample of parents.

Statistical methods were used to take into account the multiple characteristics of parents, teachers, and students in order to isolate effects on parents of teacher practices of parent involvement. The cross-

tional nature of these data prevents us from drawing conclusions about causal relationships between teacher practices and parents' reactions and evaluations. Regression techniques, however, yield information that permits informed guesses about potentially important, independent effects that should prompt new longitudinal studies.

In this article, I briefly examine parents' attitudes toward public elementary schools and their experiences with some common forms of parent involvement and then focus on parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement in learning activities at home. I examine the responses of parents who have different educational backgrounds and whose children are in classrooms of teachers who differ in their leadership in the use of parent-involvement practices.

Results

Parents' attitudes toward public elementary schools and teachers

Parents' attitudes toward the public elementary schools and teachers were remarkably positive. About 90% of the parents agreed that their elementary schools were *well run*. Almost as many felt *comfortable* at their child's school and believed that they and the teachers had the *same goals* for the child.

The parents' clearly positive attitudes seem to contradict recent national reports that have criticized the curricula, teachers, and standards in the public schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, 1983). The reactions of parents in Maryland are more like the findings of a recent Gallup poll (1983), in which only 9% of respondents with children in public schools said that getting good teachers was a problem, only 9% cited parents' lack of interest, and only 1% reported problems with administrators. Although there are some problems in all schools, most parents were not con-

cerned about the basic administration of the schools or with the quality of teachers. They found fewer problems with elementary than with secondary schools, and they were more positive about the public schools if they sent their children there (Gallup, 1982, 1983; Goodlad, 1983). Other recent studies also report generally positive attitudes of parents of public school children toward the curriculum (Klein, Tye, & Wright, 1979), parent involvement, and homework (Olmsted, Wetherby, Leler, & Rubin, 1982; Williams, 1983; Zill & Peterson, 1982).

Teachers could do more to involve parents. Despite positive attitudes about schools and teachers in general, parents reported that teachers could do more to involve parents in learning activities at home. About 58% of the parents rarely or never received requests from the teacher to become involved in learning activities at home. Fewer than 30% of the parents reported that teachers gave them many ideas of how to help their child in reading and math. They overwhelmingly agreed that teachers should *involve parents* in learning activities at home and that *homework* was useful for their children. Over 80% of the parents said they could spend more time helping their children at home if they were shown how to do specific learning activities.

Experiences with parent involvement

We look now at several types of parent involvement that the parents experienced. These include involvement in basic obligations at home, communication from the school to the home, assistance at the school, and assistance in learning activities at home.

Involvement in basic obligations. The most pervasive form of parent involvement is the parents' provision of school supplies needed by their children and general support and supervision at home. Over 97% of the parents in this Maryland survey said that their children had the supplies

needed for school, and over 90% reported that their children had a regular place to do homework. These management chores are expected by the schools and are accepted as basic responsibilities by almost all parents.

Involvement in school-to-home communications. Communication from the school to the home is sometimes considered "parent involvement" but is usually "parent information." All schools send information home to the family about schedules, report card grades, the family about schedules, report card grades, special events, and emergency procedures. Most of these activities flow one way, from the school to the home, often with no encouragement for communications from parents. Some schools organize and require teacher-parent conferences with all parents; others hold conferences with some parents, only on request. A few schools support home visits by teachers or by aides who serve as liaisons between teachers and parents to inform parents about school procedures.

Despite the typical profusion of notices from school to home, some parents receive few communications from teachers. In the Maryland sample, about 16% of the parents said they received no memos from their child's teacher, over 35% had no parent-teacher conference, and about 60% never spoke to the teacher on the phone, as shown in Table 2. It is not surprising that the more time required for an exchange, the less often that type of communication occurs, but it is revealing that large numbers of parents are excluded

from many of the traditional forms of communication that link the school to the home.

Involvement at school. One prevalent form of involvement is parental assistance at the school—in the classroom as an aide to teachers; in other school locations such as the cafeteria, library, or playground; or at special events, such as class parties, trips, or fund raisers. Although some parents participate, most parents are not active at school:

About 70% *never* helped the teacher in the classroom or on class trips.

About 70% *never* participated in fund-raising activities for the school.

About 88% *never* assisted in the library, cafeteria, or other school areas.

Even those parents who did become active were involved infrequently. The average number of days at school per year was:

4.1 days helping the teacher and class;

7.0 days helping with fund-raising activities; and

3.5 days helping in the school cafeteria, offices, or library.

Only about 4% of the respondents (51 parents distributed across 82 classrooms) were very active, spending over 25 days per year at the school. Many (42%) of the parents who were not active at school worked outside the home during school hours. Others had small children, family problems, or other activities that demanded their time. Others (about 12%) simply had not been asked to assist at

TABLE 2. Parents Who Never Received Personal Communication from Child's Teacher over One Year

Type of Communication	%
Memo from teacher	16.4
Talk to teacher before or after school	20.7
Conference with teacher	36.4
Handwritten note from teacher	36.5
Workshop at school	59.0
Called on phone by teacher	59.5
Visited at home by teacher	96.3

school. Despite these facts, parent assistance at the school is the type of parent involvement that most teachers and administrators currently support (Ogbu, 1974).

Involvement with learning activities at home. A less frequently used form of parent involvement—but one that reflects the theory of cooperation between schools and families—is teacher practices that involve all or most parents in learning activities with their children at home. In this study, teachers ranged from low to high in their use of this type of parent involvement. Parents were asked about their experiences with 12 techniques that teachers use to involve parents in learning activities at home. These were grouped under five categories: (a) techniques that involve reading and books; (b) techniques that encourage discussions between parents and children; (c) techniques based on informal activities and games that use common materials at home; (d) techniques based on formal contracts and supervision among parents, teachers, and children; and (e) techniques that involve tutoring and teaching the child in skills and drills. In an earlier survey, teachers rated these techniques as their most satisfying and successful parent involvement practices (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Most frequent requests to parents by teacher leaders. Parents whose children's teachers were recognized by their principal as leaders in parent involvement reported significantly more frequent use of nine of the 12 parent involvement practices, as shown in Table 3. These included reading aloud or listening to the child read, talking with the child about the events of the school day, giving spelling or math drills, giving help on worksheets or workbooks, signing the child's homework, taking the child to the library, playing learning games, using things at home to teach, and visiting the classroom to observe teaching techniques. Despite the frequent use of some activities by some teachers, from one-fourth to two-fifths of the parents never were asked to

conduct the five most frequently used parent involvement activities. On the three least used practices—borrowing books, entering contracts, and using TV for learning—there were no significant differences in reports from parents of teachers who were leaders compared with other teachers.

There were basic similarities between the teachers' reports in an earlier survey and the parents' accounts of their experiences with learning activities at home. The most popular techniques that teachers used (reading aloud, discussions, signing work) were the ones parents most frequently experienced. The least popular techniques for teachers (use of TV, use of formal contracts) were least frequently experienced by parents. Both teachers' and parents' responses suggested that, although infrequently used now, activities that the teacher designed to use the TV at home may be useful for structuring parent-child discussions and for building children's listening and speaking skills. The similarities in parent experiences and teacher practices lend credibility to the reports of both groups. Parents' experiences with teacher practices confirm that some parents are guided by teachers who follow the precepts of theories emphasizing the separation of school and family responsibilities, whereas others are directed in cooperative efforts on behalf of the children.

Experiences of parents with different educational backgrounds. Teacher-leaders whose practices supported cooperation between schools and families reported that they involved parents with many, average, or few years of formal schooling. Teachers who were not leaders in parent involvement, whose practices emphasized the separation of school and home, reported that parents with little education could not or would not help their children on learning activities at home (Becker & Epstein, 1982). We wanted to check the teachers' reports against the experiences of parents who had different educational backgrounds.

TABLE 3. Parents Reporting Frequent Requests for Parent-Involvement Techniques by Teacher-Leaders and Other Teachers (%)

Activity	Parents Reporting Requests By:		χ^2 Test*
	Teacher-Leaders	Other Teachers	
1. Read aloud to child or listen to child read	68	51	***
2. Sign child's homework	66	52	***
3. Give spelling or math drills	61	54	*
4. Help with worksheet or workbook lessons	57	47	**
5. Ask child about school day	49	42	*
6. Use things at home to teach child	44	34	**
7. Play games that help child learn	35	28	**
8. Visit classroom to watch how child is taught	34	25	**
9. Take child to library	26	17	**
10. Borrow books from teacher to give extra help	21	16	...
11. Make a formal contract with teacher to supervise homework or projects	21	19	...
12. Watch and discuss TV shows with child	15	15	...

* χ^2 tests indicate whether parents report more frequent use of parent involvement activities by teacher-leaders than by other teachers, with frequency categorized as several times or often vs. never, once, or twice.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Parents' reports of their involvement in learning activities at home are shown in Table 4. The left half of the table presents the responses of parents with little schooling, average schooling, and advanced schooling. The right half groups the parents by the teachers' leadership in the use of parent involvement. On the left we see that, in general, parents with less education reported significantly more frequent requests from teachers than did parents with average or advanced education. The right panel shows that the differences in reports from parents with different levels of education were significant only for parents with children in classrooms of teachers who were not leaders in the use of parent involvement. In classrooms of teachers who were leaders, parents at all educational levels reported about equally frequent requests by teachers to conduct learning activities at home.

The same pattern was found in separate analyses of each type of parent involvement activity, including reading, dis-

cussions, contracts, informal games, worksheets, and signing homework. The differences in the reports from low- and high-educated parents were significant only in classrooms of teachers who were not leaders in using parent involvement practices.

The reports from parents clarify and extend the earlier information from teachers on their use of parent involvement with differently educated parents. According to parents, teachers who *were leaders* in the use of parent involvement practices established more equitable programs, involving parents regardless of their educational backgrounds. Teachers who *were not leaders* in parent involvement did not try to reach all parents. They may have seen little need to approach parents whose children were doing well in school or parents who helped their children at home without directions from the teacher. Children of parents with less education often do less well in school than other children, need more help at home, and have parents who

TABLE 4. Parents Reporting Frequent Use by Teachers of Twelve Parent-Involvement Techniques, by Parents' Education and Teachers' Leadership

	% of Parents Reporting Zero, Some, or Many Techniques Used Frequently		
	Zero	Some (1-4)	Many (5+)
Parent education: ^a			
High	23	40	37
Average	15	39	46
Low	16	30	54
	$\chi^2 = 25.98; p < .001^b$		
Parent education/teacher leadership ^a			
High/leader	6	42	52
High/not leader	25	40	35
Average/leader	9	35	56
Average/not leader	17	40	43
Low/leader	18	26	56
Low/not leader	17	31	52
	χ^2 (teacher leader) = 4.55; $p < .34$ (N.S.) ^b		
	χ^2 (teacher not leader) = 18.45; $p < .001^b$		

^aLow education includes parents with some high school education ($N = 240$); average education includes parents with a high school diploma ($N = 462$); high education includes parents with at least some college education and beyond ($N = 543$).

^b χ^2 tests were conducted to determine the independence or association of parents' education with reports of teacher requests for frequent parent involvement for all parents; parents with children in classrooms of teacher-leaders; and parents with children in classrooms of teachers who were not leaders. Parents' reports were independent of their education only in teacher-leaders' classrooms.

do not know how to help without guidance from the teacher. Teachers may ask these parents to assist their children at home, even when the teachers believe that these parents will not be fully successful in their efforts (Valentine & Stark, 1979).

It could be that parents with less education agree more often with survey questions and that the patterns of parents' reports about the frequency of requests reflect response bias associated with educational level. This explanation would be plausible if we looked only at the general reports from parents by educational level. However, in the classrooms of teacher-leaders, parents of all educational levels reported about equal frequency of teachers' requests for involvement—an unbiased pattern of responses.

Effects of involvement on parents

Does it matter to parents whether teachers' practices emphasize separation

or cooperation with families? There is little research on whether teachers' efforts have any measurable effects on the parents who are involved. It has been left up to the teacher to decide—often in the absence of information—whether to invest time in parent-involvement practices.

Regression analyses were conducted to determine whether teacher leadership affected parents' reactions to teachers' efforts and parents' evaluations of teachers' merits. The analyses included other variables that have been found to influence teacher practices of parent involvement: three measures of the teaching situation—grade level, teacher quality as rated by the principal, and teacher education (highest degree); two measures of student characteristics—classroom performance in reading and math and racial composition of the class; and two characteristics of parents—educational level and extent of parent in-

volvement at the school. Because better-educated, more active parents and parents of more capable students may pressure teachers to use more parent involvement, these variables are taken into account in the statistical analyses, and their effects on parent reactions are examined. Although these cross-sectional data do not show causality, this model is used to identify potentially important independent effects of teacher practices on parent reactions that can be reexamined in longitudinal studies.

Table 5 summarizes how teacher practices of parent involvement affected parents' awareness of teachers' policies, knowledge of the child's program, and evaluations of teachers' merits. We compare the effects on parents of three measures of teacher leadership: (1) teachers' reputations as leaders in parent involvement (from principals' ratings); (2) parents' consensus (at the classroom level) that the teacher is a frequent user of the 12 techniques of parent involvement; and (3) parents' consensus (at the classroom level) that the teacher frequently communicates with parents by note, phone, memo, conference, or conversation at school. On each of these measures, teacher practices fall along a continuum from low to high interaction and cooperation with families. Table 6 should be read in conjunction with Table 5 and contains corresponding statistics of the contribution of each of the three measures of teacher leadership to the explained variance of each measure of parent reactions.

Parents' awareness of teacher practices.

Three items measured parents' awareness of teachers' practices. Parents were asked whether the teacher *worked hard* at getting parents excited about helping their child at home, whether they received *most ideas* for home learning from the teacher, and whether the teacher made it clear that they *should help* their child with homework.

Efforts of teachers. All three measures of teacher leadership had independent effects on parents' estimates of teachers' ef-

forts, as shown in column 1 of Table 5. Of the three measures, teachers' frequent use of learning activities at home made the most dramatic impact ($b = .695$) on parents' reports that teachers work hard to interest and excite them in helping their children at home.

In Table 6, rows 1-3 inform us about how the measures of teacher leadership and the other variables in the regression model explain—uniquely and in combination—parents' reports that the teacher works hard to involve parents. The figures in the far right-hand column show that routine communications from the teacher to the family explained 9% of the variance after all other variables in the model were accounted for. The other variables—especially grade level, racial composition, and parents' education—contributed over 40% of the explained variance after routine communications were accounted for.

The figures in the middle column of rows 1-3 indicate that parents' actual experiences with learning activities at home explained 18% of the variance in reports that the teacher works hard, after all other variables were accounted for. Other variables in the model added little information (4% of the explained variance) after teacher practices were taken into account.

The facts from Table 5 and Table 6 reveal a strong link between parents' actual experiences with teacher practices of parent involvement and parents' awareness that the teacher works hard to interest and excite parents in their children's education.

Ideas from teachers. Parents received most ideas for home learning activities from teachers who were rated by principals or by parents as leaders in parent involvement practices, as shown in column 2 of Table 5. Teachers' use of home learning activities ($b = .787$) was a more important mechanism for obtaining ideas from teachers than was the teacher's reputation for leadership in parent involvement ($b = .268$) or the teacher's use of

TABLE 5. Effects on Parents' Reactions and Evaluations of Three Measures of Teacher Leadership in Parent Involvement at Classroom Level (Standardized Regression Coefficient)

Measure of Teacher Leadership	Parents' Reactions			Parents' Evaluations		
	Teacher Works Hard to Interest Parents	Teacher Gives Many Ideas to Parents	Parents Think They Should Help	Parents Know More about School Program	Positive Interpersonal Skills	Excellence of Teaching Skills
Reputation as a leader ^a	.243**	.268*	.081	.065	.251*	.274*
Parents' (classroom) reports of teacher's use of parent involvement	.695**	.787**	.603**	.406**	.712**	.728**
Parents' (classroom) reports of teacher's use of other communication	.356**	.216	.150	.231*	.373**	.581**
Other consistently significant variables	Grade Race ^b	Grade ^b	Grade Race	Grade Race ^b
	Parent education	Parent education ^b	Parent education ^b	Parent education		

NOTE.—N = 82. Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported so that comparisons of effects across measures can be made. Effects model included these independent variables all at the classroom level: grade level, principal rating of teacher overall quality, teacher's highest degree (measures of the teaching situation), performance level of students, racial composition of students (measures of student population), parents' education composition, degree of parent activity at school (measures of parent factors).

^aReputation is the confirmation by principals of the teacher's leadership in the frequent use of parent involvement practices.

^bNot a significant variable when parents' agreement with teachers is the measure of teacher's leadership.

*Significant at the .05 level.

**Significant at or beyond the .01 level.

TABLE 6. Contribution of Three Measures of Teacher Leadership to Explained Variance in Parents' Reactions and Evaluations

Parents' Reactions and Evaluations	Row	R ² _a	% of Variance Explained By:		
			Teacher's Reputation as Leader in Parent Involvement	Parents' (Classroom) Reports of Teacher Use of Parent Involvement	Parents' (Classroom) Reports of Teacher Use of Other Communication
Teacher works hard to interest and excite parents	1	R ² _(a)	11	69	20
	2	R ² _(b)	5	18	9
	3	R ² _(c)	49	4	43
Teacher gives many ideas to parents	4	R ² _(a)	8	30	10
	5	R ² _(b)	6	23	3
	6	R ² _(c)	18	13	13
Parents think they should help	7	R ² _(a)	2	60	15
	8	R ² _(b)	1	14	2
	9	R ² _(c)	54	9	42
Parents know more about child's program	10	R ² _(a)	2	43	17
	11	R ² _(b)	0	6	3
	12	R ² _(c)	42	7	30
Parents' ratings of teacher's interpersonal skills	13	R ² _(a)	6	9	12
	14	R ² _(b)	6	19	10
	15	R ² _(c)	9	20	7
Parents' ratings of excellence of teaching skills	16	R ² _(a)	10	22	28
	17	R ² _(b)	7	20	24
	18	R ² _(c)	14	16	13

NOTE.—Equations included the following independent variables, all at the classroom level: measure of teacher leadership in parent involvement; grade level, teacher overall quality, teacher's highest degree (measures of the teaching situation); performance level of students, racial composition of students (measures of student population); parents' education composition, degree of parent activity at school (measures of parent factors).

*R²_(a) refers to the explained variance of the measure of teacher leadership *before* any other independent variables are entered in the equation. R²_(b) refers to the explained variance of the measure of teacher leadership *after* all other independent variables are entered in the equation. R²_(c) refers to the explained variance of all other independent variables *after* the measure of teacher leadership in parent involvement is entered in the equation. R²_(a) + (c) equals the total variance explained.

other, general types of school-to-home communications ($b = .216$).

The corresponding rows 4-6 of Table 6 show how the three measures of teacher leadership explain parents' receipt of ideas for home learning activities. The variance that teacher practices of parent involvement explained (23%) was from four to eight times the variance explained by the other measures of teacher leadership, after all other variables were taken into account.

Encouragement from teachers. Parents believed they should help when teachers frequently asked them to help ($b = .603$). Neither the teachers' reputations as leaders ($b = .081$) nor routine communications ($b = .150$) significantly affected parents' beliefs that they should help their child on school activities at home.

In Table 6, rows 7-9 display the dramatic differences in the contributions of the three measures of teacher leadership to the explained variance in parents' beliefs that they should help at home. Teachers' practices explained 14% of the variance after all other variables were accounted for. The other variables added only 9% to parents' beliefs that they should help after teacher practices of parent involvement in learning activities were accounted for. In contrast, the other variables contributed 42%-54% to the explained variance of beliefs parents should help after routine communications or teacher reputation were accounted for.

Effects on parents' knowledge about school. Parents feel competent when they know what the school is doing, can help their children through the program, or request changes to improve activities. But many parents do not understand the instructional program and cannot act in the child's interest as an advocate or mediator between the school and the family.

Increased understanding of the instructional program. In this survey, parents reported whether they "understood more this year than (they) did last year about

what (their) child is being taught in school." Parents increased their understanding about school most when the teacher frequently used parent involvement practices ($b = .406$) and when the teacher frequently communicated with the family ($b = .231$), as reported in Table 5, column 4. Principals' estimates of teacher leadership did not affect parents' knowledge about the instructional program ($b = .065$).

Rows 10-12 in Table 6 show that 6% of the variance in improved parent understanding about school instruction was explained uniquely by parents' experiences with teacher practices of parent involvement, after all other measures were accounted for. In contrast, little was uniquely explained by other types of school-to-home communications (3%) or the reputation of the teacher (0%).

Parents of children in lower grades, in predominantly black classes, and in classes with predominantly low-educated parents also reported that they understood more about the school program than they did in prior years. It is reasonable that parents with younger children or with less education themselves need more information than do other parents about instructional programs. The findings also reflect teachers' efforts to reach and teach parents of young students, educationally disadvantaged students, or other high-risk students. Rubin, Olmsted, Szegda, Wetherby, and Williams (1983) found that mothers in urban areas who were involved in activities at school or with a home visitor changed most in their behavior toward their children and in their opinions about themselves. Intervention programs often make special efforts to reach low-achieving children and less educated parents to involve them in learning activities at home (Safran & Moles, 1980). What is important in our findings is that teachers' frequent use of parent involvement practices improved parents' knowledge about their child's instructional program, after the grade level, racial composition, and parent education

composition of the classroom were taken into account. Also, teachers' use of these practices mitigated the disadvantages typically associated with race, social class, and grade level.

The importance of grade level. The most consistently important variable in these analyses of parents' reactions to teacher practices was the grade level of the student. Parents with children in lower elementary grades reported significantly more frequent teacher use of parent involvement, more frequent communications from school to family, and more frequent participation at the school. Certain practices occurred more frequently at the lower grade levels—reading aloud or listening to the child read, giving spelling or math drills, and playing learning games. Other techniques were used more with older children—entering contracts and signing homework. Still others were used about equally with children at all grade levels—discussing school with children at home.

Parents with children in grades 1, 3, and 5 felt differently about their participation in parent-involvement activities. Parents of older elementary children more frequently said that they did not have enough training to help their children in reading and math activities at home. They reported that they helped their children but that they felt less confident about their help. This expressed inadequacy was significant even after parent education was taken into account. There was, then, less use by teachers and less self-confidence of parents in helping children in the upper grades.

Compared with parents of first or third graders, fewer parents of fifth-grade students said that the teacher worked hard to involve parents or gave them many ideas for home learning activities. It may be more difficult for teachers to involve parents of older students in learning activities because the abilities and needs of children in the upper grades are more diversified

and the academic content is more complex. The data show, however, that when teachers of any grade level involve parents frequently in home learning activities, they can positively affect the parents' awareness of the teachers' efforts and knowledge about the school program.

Effects on parents' evaluations of teachers' merits. Parents evaluated teachers on two dimensions, interpersonal skills and professional merit. Parents were asked to judge the quality of their interpersonal contacts with the teacher by rating five positive characteristics (cooperation, friendliness, respect, trust, and warmth) and five negative characteristics (conflict, misunderstanding, distance, lack of concern, and tenseness). An index was constructed of the number of positive minus the number of negative ratings. Parents were also asked to rate the teacher on overall teaching quality on a six-point scale from poor to outstanding. The last two columns of Table 5 indicate that all three measures of teacher leadership—teachers' reputations, parents' experiences with frequent use of teacher practices of parent involvement, and parents' reports of other school-to-home communications—had significant positive effects on parental ratings of teachers' interpersonal skills and professional merit. Most dramatically, parents gave high marks to teachers for interpersonal skills ($b = .712$) and overall teaching quality ($b = .728$) if the teachers frequently used parent involvement practices.

In Table 6, rows 13–15 report that teacher practices of parent involvement added 19% to the explained variance in parents' ratings of interpersonal skills after all other variables in the model were taken into account—more than three times the unique contribution of teachers' reputational leadership and about twice the contribution of routine school-to-home communications with parents. The figures in rows 16–18 indicate that teachers' practices and other kinds of communication are

about equally important, explaining 20%–24% of the variance in parents' ratings of overall teaching quality.

These findings suggest that, in general, teacher practices of parent involvement maximize cooperation and minimize antagonism between teachers and parents and enhance the teachers' professional standing from the parents' perspective. Most parents (94%) disagreed with the statement that "it is not the teacher's business" to show parents how to help their child learn at home. When teachers frequently used home learning activities, parents rated them as more skillful teachers. Because these analyses are based on classroom-level averages from reports of the parents of all children in the classroom, the results do not reflect personal favoritism in the relationships of a few parents and teachers.

The analyses reported in Tables 5 and 6 treated each of the three measures of teacher leadership in separate equations. In other analyses, the measures were considered simultaneously to determine whether teacher practices of parent involvement continued to affect parents' reactions and evaluations, after other school-to-home communications were taken into account. For each measure of awareness of teachers' efforts, improved parental knowledge, and ratings of teachers' merits, the positive effects of parent involvement practices continued after school-to-home communications were accounted for. In contrast, except for the ratings of overall merit, the positive effects of school-to-home communication disappeared after the teachers' actual classroom practices of parent involvement were taken into account. Although communications from school to home are important, they do not have as consistently strong links to parent reactions as practices of parent involvement in learning activities at home.

In other analyses we found that parent activity at the school did not significantly affect parents' reactions to the school program or evaluations of the teachers' merits

(Epstein, 1984). Involvement of some parents at the school requires a different investment from teachers from involvement of all parents in learning activities at home. Involvement of parents at school may help teachers or administrators fulfill their teaching and other duties, but it does not affect most parents' attitudes and reactions to the school or teacher.

Summary and discussion

This survey of parents revealed some important facts about parents' attitudes toward public elementary schools and reactions to teachers' practices of parent involvement.

Facts

Parents of children in Maryland's elementary schools had, in general, positive attitudes about their public elementary schools and teachers. They believed the schools were generally well run, comfortable places for parents to visit and assist and that the goals of the teachers were similar to the goals that the parents had for their children.

Despite generally positive attitudes, parents believed the schools could do more to involve them in learning activities to help their children at home.

Surprisingly large numbers of parents were excluded from some of the most basic, traditional communications from the school—such as specific memos, conversations, phone calls, or conferences with teachers about their child's progress, problems, or programs in school.

Few parents were involved at school. A few parents in a classroom sometimes assisted the teacher, but the number of active parents at school did not affect the attitudes or knowledge of all of the parents who were not—and often could not—be active at the school.

Parents' education did not explain their experiences with parent involvement unless teacher practices were taken into account. In the classrooms of teachers who

were leaders in the use of parent involvement, parents at all educational levels said they were frequently involved in learning activities at home. In other teachers' classrooms, parents with less formal schooling reported more frequent requests than did other parents to help their child at home. Teacher-leaders conducted more equitable programs, reaching all or most parents as part of their teaching philosophy and instructional strategy. Other teachers did not involve better-educated parents. Their selective use of parent involvement, however, was more often built on negative expectations of a parent's and, possibly, a child's ability to succeed.

Fewer and fewer teachers helped parents become involved as the students advanced through the elementary grades. Thus, parents' repertoires of helping skills are not developed and improved over the school years, and they tend to taper off or disappear as the child progresses through school.

Parents were aware of and responded positively to teachers' efforts to involve them in learning activities at home. Parents with children in the classrooms of teachers who built parent involvement into their regular teaching practice were more aware of teachers' efforts, received more ideas from teachers, knew more about their child's instructional program, and rated the teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality. Teachers' practices had consistently strong and positive effects on parent reactions to the school program and on parent evaluations of teachers' merits for parents at all educational levels, net of all other variables. Teacher practices of parent involvement had more dramatic positive links to parents' reactions than general school-to-home communication or parent assistance at the school.

Implications for parents and teachers

What do these research findings mean to teachers' policies and practices of par-

ent involvement? We found interesting differences in whether parents thought the teacher wanted them to help their children (i.e., that they *should* help), whether they thought they had enough training to help their children in reading and math (i.e., that they *could* help), whether they actually spent time assisting and supervising homework and learning activities at home (i.e., that they *do* help), and whether they said they could spend more time helping their children at home (i.e., that they *could* help if given directions by the teacher).

Parents think they should help if the teachers give them learning activities to do at home. Other kinds of communications, from teachers' and principals' ratings of teachers' reputations, did not make parents think that they should help with home learning activities.

Parents' feelings that they can help (i.e., that they have adequate training to help their children with reading and math) are based primarily on their own education and their children's grade level. More parents said they could help if they had more education or if their children were in the lower elementary grades where parents needed less specialized knowledge to help the children.

Despite differences in parents' feelings about their ability to help, most parents do help. Only 8% of the parents reported they never helped their child with reading and math skills during the school year, whether or not they were asked to do so by the teacher. Over 85% of the parents spent 15 min or more helping their children on homework activities when asked to do so by the teacher. Most parents reported, too, that they could help more (up to 44 min, on the average) if the teacher showed them what to do.

The differences in whether parents believe they should help, can help, do help, and could help suggest strategies for organizing programs of parent involvement. For example, if teachers want parents to

think that they should help, then they must demonstrate this with an active program of parent involvement in learning activities at home. Teachers may design or select daily or weekly activities for parents to do with their children at home. These may be skills individualized for each student's needs, general skills for review and practice, or special activities that extend learning.

If teachers want parents to feel confident that they can help, they (and the school administrators) must organize and conduct workshops for parents in *how to help* in reading, math, and other subjects. With or without workshops, teachers need materials that are clear and easy to follow in order to prove quickly to parents that they can help. As Ogbu (1974) points out, parents' lack of knowledge does not mean lack of interest. Workshops or special instruction may be less necessary with well-educated parents who feel confident about helping their children with reading and math and who readily ask teachers questions about how to help (Litwak & Meyer, 1974). Parents of younger children tend to feel that they can help, but the parents of older students (including many well-educated parents) may need clear and sequential guidance from teachers. Special assistance to build and maintain confidence of parents with children in the upper-elementary grades is especially important.

Because many parents do help whether or not they are asked, teachers who are not already using parent-involvement techniques should consider how to mobilize this available resource more effectively. Because parents say they could help more if shown how, teachers need to consider ways to organize home learning activities to help more parents make productive use of the time they could spend helping their children.

Teachers can work as individuals, with colleagues on grade-level teams, or in other groups to develop trial programs to in-

crease parents' involvement in learning activities at home, to improve parents' understanding of the school program, and to encourage home learning activities that build on the common goals parents and teachers hold. Basic features of these programs should include clear objectives of short- or long-term activities, clear instructions for parents, and information that tells parents how the activity fits into the teacher's instructional program. Procedures should be devised that permit parents to call or contact the teacher or some other knowledgeable representative to ask questions about how to help or to comment on the child's progress or problems with the activity. Systematic follow-up of parents' efforts must occur to determine whether the activities were completed and how successfully. There should be opportunities for parents to suggest activities or changes in the parent-involvement techniques.

When teachers use parent-involvement activities, are they fulfilling or shirking responsibility? Grasping at brass rings or grasping at straws? Displaying strengths or displaying weakness? These findings suggest that from the parents' perspective, teachers' use of parent involvement in learning activities at home is a teaching strength. Frequent use of parent involvement results in larger collections of ideas for parents to use at home, increased understanding by parents of school programs, and higher ratings of teacher quality.

Ideas about the opposing theories of school and family relations have most often been discussed from the school or teacher's point of view. This study contributes an interpretation of school and family relations from the parents' perspective. Parents' reports did not reflect deep conflict and incompatibility between the schools and families. On the contrary, they responded favorably to programs that stressed the cooperation of schools and families to help their children succeed in school. Teachers who included the family

in the children's education were recognized by parents for their efforts and were rated higher than other teachers on interpersonal and teaching skills. Parents' reports suggest that teachers control the flow of information to parents. By limiting communications and collaborative activities, teachers reinforce the boundaries that separate the two institutions.

The message from parents is that almost all parents can be involved in learning activities at home. The message for teachers is that many parents help their children, with or without the teacher's instruction or assistance, and many would benefit from directions and ideas from the teacher that could be useful for the child's progress in school. These results from this study raise many questions for new research at the elementary and secondary levels on the benefits and disadvantages for parents, teachers, and students of cooperation or separation of families and schools.

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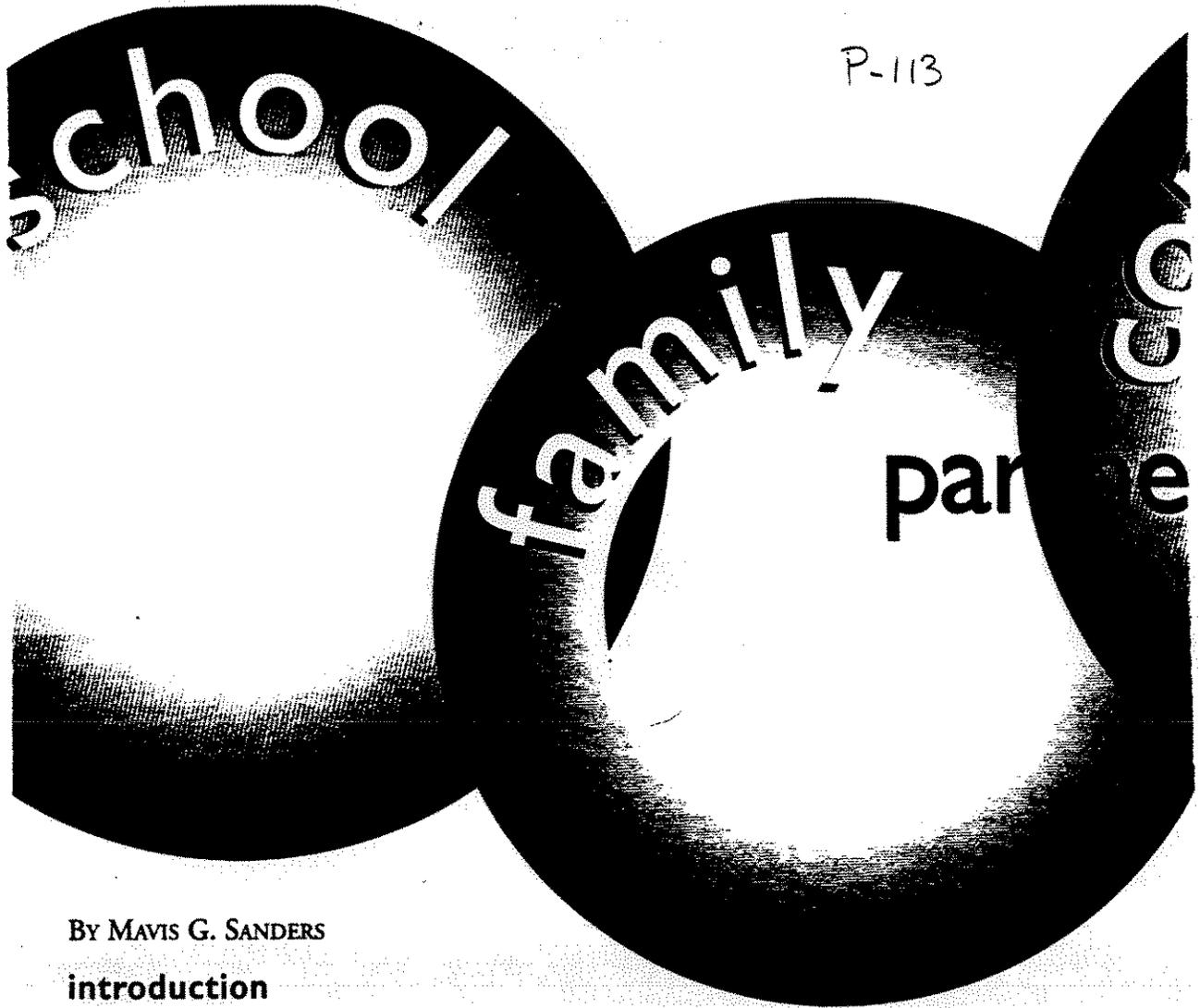
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A report from the

SCHOOL, FAMILY & COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS PROJECT

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING



BY MAVIS G. SANDERS

introduction

Schools are responsible for the formal education of children and youth. However, "good schools," that is, schools that carry out this responsibility most effectively, understand themselves and their students as part of a larger system that includes families and communities. Research conducted for over a decade indicates when schools, families, and communities work together as partners, students' success in school is enhanced (Epstein, 1995). Partnerships between schools, families, and communities can create safer school environments, strengthen parenting skills, encourage community service, improve academic skills, and achieve other desired goals that benefit students at all ages and grade levels.

Although some families maintain a strong partnership with schools

throughout their children's education, involvement for most families decreases as their children progress from elementary to middle and high school (Stevenson and Baker, 1987; Epstein, 1992). This decline occurs despite studies illustrating the importance of parental involvement for secondary students' school success (Dornbusch and Ritter, 1988). To better understand how some high schools are working to reverse the decline in family involvement, administrators, students, teachers, and parents at two large, urban high schools were interviewed in the spring of 1997 (Sanders, 1997). The high schools are members of the National Network of Partnership-

2000 Schools (Epstein et al., 1997), which provides technical assistance to schools, districts, and states committed to developing comprehensive and permanent programs of school-family-community partnership. Let's take a look at the schools' progress and the challenges they face in developing schoolwide programs of partnership.

the high schools

University Park High School serves 1,900 students in grades 9-12. About 57 percent of its students receive free or reduced-price lunches, and 22 percent receive special education services. Approximately 60 percent of the stu-



Schools agreed family and community participation in students' education is important. Their reasons varied as did each individual's notion of the "ideal" relationship between the school, the family, the community, and students. The word that resurfaced time and again as the respondents discussed the importance of partnerships was "support." Respondents agreed high school is an important, but difficult time in a student's educational career, and support from significant others is important in helping students successfully navigate this period. Respondents also agreed communication and cooperation between individuals in a student's home, school, and community increased the likelihood the student would receive the support they needed to make the transition into the workplace, a post-secondary institution, or both.

According to Ms. Smith, a teacher at Northshore, high school is where students are preparing to go out there and do something with their lives, whether it is work, whether it is a post-secondary institution, or whether it is a technical school.... Someone or some people need to be there for support, to say, "Now, come on you can do it. You can do it. I know you can. Now, what do I need to help you with?"

The tenth grade students who were interviewed, Patricia and Shaun, identified family involvement as important to their success at Northshore. The following dialogue serves as illustration.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think family involvement is important to your success?

BOTH STUDENTS: Yes

INTERVIEWER: Why?

PATRICIA: Because my parents or my mother encourage me to go to school, and I go. But if I had a parent



the national network of partnership-2000 schools

Founded during the 1996-97 school year, the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools at Johns Hopkins University helps schools, districts, and state education agencies develop programs that involve all families and communities. There are no fees to join, but members must agree to a few requirements to support adequate staff, training, and program costs. The Network promotes a research-based, action team approach enabling each school to devise a strategy to improve and maintain their school, family, and community partnership programs. The Network helps its district and state members organize activities to assist all schools under their purview to this end.

Network members receive a handbook, certificate, annual training workshops, semi-annual newsletters, research and evaluation opportunities, and phone, e-mail, and

website assistance. All members are required to communicate with the Network staff annually to report their progress and challenges. Over 750 schools, 60 districts, and 8 state education agencies are currently members. For an invitation and membership form, and for lists of related publications, write to: Joyce L. Epstein, Director, National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. Or contact the Center at (410) 516-8818; fax (410) 516-8890; or <http://csos.jhu.edu/p2000>.

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Planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving activities are the steps schools take to develop well-designed, comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnership. These processes occur within the context of a long-range vision that guides each school's progress.

visions of school-family-community partnerships

Parents, teachers, administrators, and students have clear ideas about the types of partnership activities they would like to see implemented at Northshore and University Park High Schools. At both schools, teachers, parents, students, and administrators expressed the need for better communication between families and the school. In addition, teachers and administrators envision developing a comprehensive volunteer program. The respondents believe volunteers are needed to assist with calling teens who are absent from school, develop a monthly school newsletter to inform parents of important programs and events, tutor students, and carry out other important activities at school and in other locations to support students. The schools also would like to enhance and expand their Type 5, "Decision Making" activities. Mr. Keith, a parent member of the PTA at Northshore, would like to see the PTA and the school's Action Team for School-Family-Community Partnerships work more closely together to involve families and communities in the education and development of Northshore's students. Mr. King, assistant principal at Northshore, feels a more active PTA would provide a forum from which parents could advocate for increasing and improving school resources.