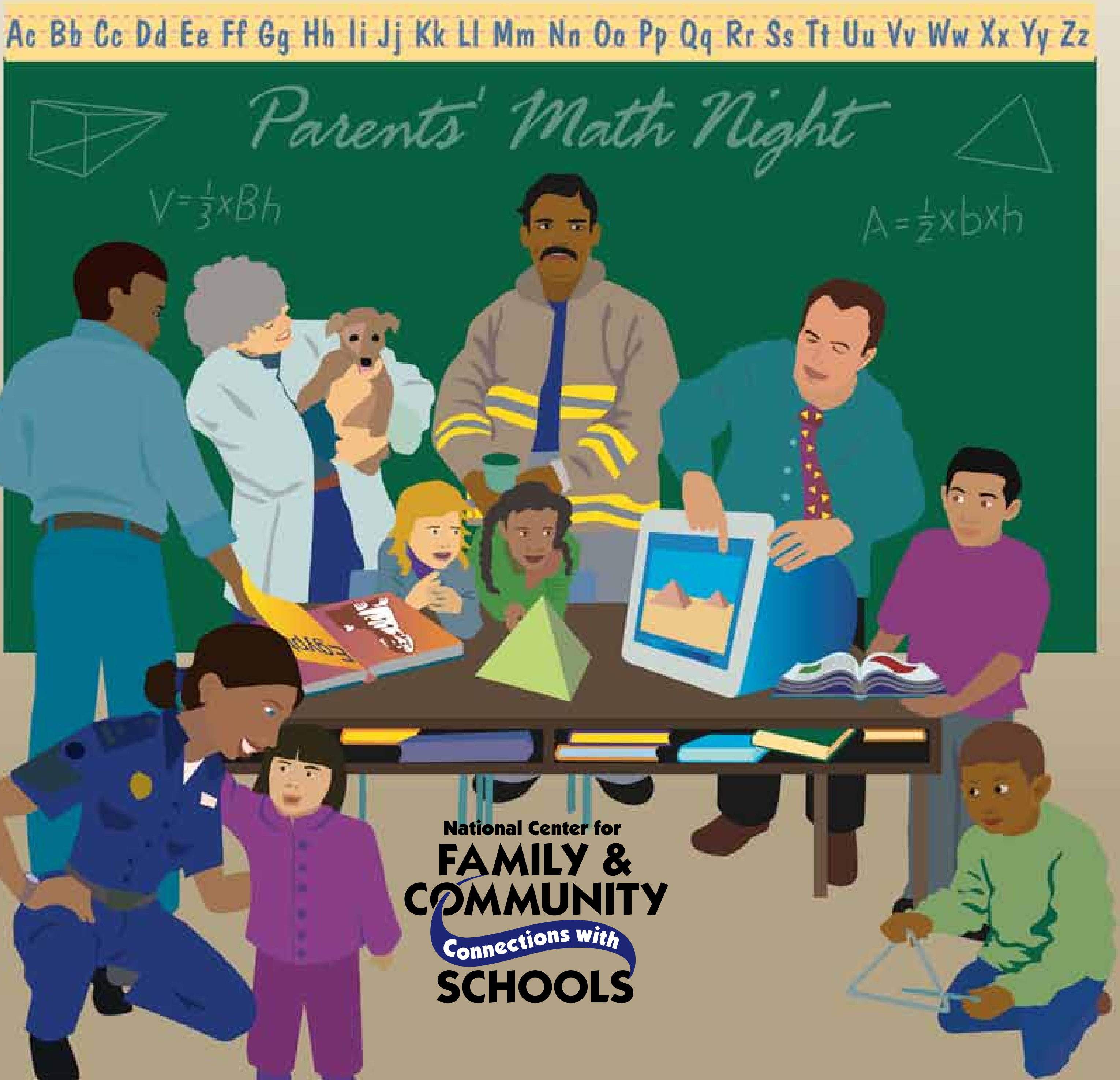
SEDL – Advancing Research, Improving Education

Diversity

School, Family, & Community Connections

Annual Synthesis 2003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Parents' Math Night
V=⅓xBh
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National Center for
FAMILY &
COMMUNITY
Connections with
SCHOOLS

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Diversity

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Annual Synthesis 2003

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Acknowledgments

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) is a private nonprofit education research and development corporation based in Austin, Texas. SEDL is committed to solving the significant problems communities and school systems face to ensure a quality education for *all* learners. It is one of ten Regional Educational Laboratories in the United States funded by the U.S. Department of Education. It serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

In December 2000, SEDL created the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (the Center) to serve as a national resource to schools, community groups, research organizations, policymakers, and families. The Center creates bridges between research and practice—linking people with research-based information and resources they can use to effectively connect schools, families, and communities.

SEDL acknowledges the Center's steering committee members who gave their time and expertise to the development and review of this research synthesis:

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Executive Summary

This research synthesis is the third in a series of reports to help local school, community, and family leaders obtain useful research-based information about key educational issues. This synthesis addresses diversity as it relates to student achievement and school, family, and community connections.

Scope. The literature on diversity includes a wide range of student and family characteristics and affiliations. This synthesis focuses specifically on three categories: race or ethnicity, culture (including language), and socioeconomic status. The need to improve academic achievement among "diverse" student populations—notably African American, Latino, Native American, immigrant and language minority students, and students from poor families—is one of the most persistent and challenging issues that education faces. This research synthesis looks at the roles families can and do play in addressing that issue. The report also explores barriers to involvement for minority and low-income families, strategies that have been used to address those barriers, and recommendations that local educational leaders can adapt to address their specific needs.

Findings. We identified 64 studies with focuses and methodologies that met our basic criteria. From the array of information among these studies, we identified seven broad findings that summarize the overall knowledge base related to family, community, and school connections among minority and low-income populations:

1. No matter their race, ethnicity, culture, or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children's success. However, there are limited findings as to whether minority and low-income families' high aspirations for their children have a positive impact on students' school achievement.
2. Families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities are actively involved in their children's schooling, although their involvement may differ somewhat from those of White, "mainstream" U.S. families. The extent and types of involvement among low-income families may be linked to poverty and economic stressors.
3. Family and school staff reports on the extent of family involvement and school outreach tend to be inconsistent, with the differences increasing in schools with larger minority populations. The reasons for such inconsistencies are not clear.
4. Research studies have identified barriers to minority and low-income family involvement in their children's schooling—barriers that schools often can help overcome. These barriers include contextual factors (particularly time constraints, child care needs, and transportation problems); language differences; cultural beliefs about the role of families in their children's schooling; families' lack of knowledge and understanding of U.S. educational processes; and exclusion and discrimination issues.

5. Research findings are limited and inconsistent regarding the extent to which increased family involvement is linked to improved academic achievement among minority and low-income student populations. Findings specifically addressing the effectiveness of family involvement programs in boosting student achievement are also inconsistent. Although some research findings are encouraging, too little high-quality research has been conducted to support a firm conclusion.
6. The research base is thin, but some intervention strategies appear to be promising in strengthening family-community-school connections among minority and low-income student populations.
7. Some studies suggest that, in seeking to close the achievement gap, it is necessary to address the complex interactions among families, communities, and schools. Focusing on only one of these factors is not enough.

As these findings reflect, much more rigorous, high-quality research needs to be done before it is possible to draw firm conclusions about the ways in which families, communities, and schools can and do influence achievement among specific student populations.

Recommendations. From the 64 studies, we were able to make some recommendations that may help to strengthen local diversity programs and practices. Because the research base is so thin, these recommendations should be taken as tentative, subject to the need for both local wisdom and further research.

Recommendations for building relationships among schools, communities, and families include:

- Adopt formal school- and district-level policies that promote family involvement, including an explicit focus on engaging families who reflect the full diversity of the student population.
- Demonstrate active and ongoing support from the school principal.
- Honor families' hopes and concerns for their children.
- Acknowledge both commonalities and differences among students and families.
- Strengthen school staff capacity to work well with families.
- Provide supports to help immigrant families understand how schools work and what's expected of both families and students.
- Make outreach a priority; take the extra steps necessary to make it possible for families to get involved at school, as well as at home.
- Recognize that it takes time to build trust.

Recommendations for helping families strengthen academic achievement among minority and low-income students include:

- Provide families with training and resources to support early literacy.
- Help families use specific communication and monitoring strategies to support their children's learning.
- Encourage and support student involvement in a range of school- and community-sponsored extracurricular and after-school activities.
- Help low-income families obtain the support and services they need to keep themselves safe, healthy, and well fed.

Introduction

Chapter 1

Purpose and intended audiences

The need to improve academic achievement among diverse student populations—notably African American, Latino, Native American, immigrant and language minority students, and students from poor families—is one of the most persistent and challenging issues that education faces. This research synthesis looks at the roles families can and do play in addressing that issue. The report also explores barriers to involvement for minority and low-income families, strategies used to address those barriers, and recommendations that local educational leaders can adapt to address their specific needs.

This is one of a series of reports that examine family and community connections with schools. The reports are intended to help local school, community, and family leaders obtain useful information derived from empirical research. The federal commitment to grounding educational strategies in rigorous scientific research—a commitment laid out in the No Child Left Behind Act and elsewhere—has led to close examination of the research base addressing a number of important educational topics.

The primary audience for this synthesis is practitioner leaders—superintendents, principals, curriculum supervisors, lead teachers, family involvement staff, community leaders, and others who may be responsible for or interested in helping shape local policy or practice regarding school, family, and community connections. The report is organized so that, depending on their needs and interests, local leaders may quickly access practical information *or* explore the topic in depth.

Secondary audiences for the report include local and state policymakers, program developers, professional development providers, and researchers.

Scope of the report

According to the dictionary, “diversity” means “difference.” Given this definition, the critical question becomes, “Different from whom, or what?” In current educational discourse, the terms *diverse* and *diversity* most commonly refer to students who are different from what the literature describes as the “mainstream” of U.S. society, i.e., students who are not White, middle-class, native-born, and/or native English-speaking.

As the word is commonly used, a diverse classroom or school population does not necessarily indicate a heterogeneous group of students. Rather, the term tends to be used for any group of students, however homogeneous, most of whose members do not reflect mainstream characteristics. Diversity often serves as a stand-in for other terms, such as “minority” or “disadvantaged”; it is sometimes used euphemistically, to mask or avoid issues (such as race) that are embedded in other terms.

From the universe of possibilities, this synthesis focuses specifically on three categories: race or ethnicity, culture (including language), and socioeconomic status.

The literature on diversity includes a wide range of student and family characteristics and affiliations. From the universe of possibilities, this synthesis focuses specifically on three categories: race or ethnicity, culture (including language), and socioeconomic status. These three categories reflect the most common use of the term “diversity.” For example, Hoffman (1997) notes that “almost every definition [of diversity] focuses on the experiences of minorities that have historically been ill-served by American education and socioeconomic structure” (p. 378). Moll (in a foreword to ***Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair (1999),***[1] specifically defines diversity in terms of “racial, cultural, or class differences” (p. x). Conceptual frameworks, research studies, and educational programs often span these three categories.

The literature strongly suggests that issues related to race, culture, or class are among the biggest challenges for improving U.S. education, in terms of both numbers of students addressed and persistent challenges in effectively serving these populations. In his foreword, Moll states:

> The issue of how to address diversity in schools. . . promises to be the foremost educational issue well into the 21st century. In fact, in my estimation, educational researchers who do not address issues of diversity in one form or another, especially in the United States, are at risk of their work becoming irrelevant. (p. x)

Moll’s concern is borne out by statistics. African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, students whose first language is not English, and students living in poverty all tend to score lower than affluent, White, and some groups of Asian students on standardized tests. They also tend to have lower grade point averages and higher dropout rates (Futrell, 1999). Futrell reports that some 30 percent of U.S. children are from families living in poverty. In addition, “approximately 35 percent of our schoolchildren are from linguistic or racial-minority families, and that figure is expected to increase to 40 percent in less than a decade.” At the same time, she notes, “demographics within the teaching profession are moving in the opposite direction” (Futrell, 1999, p. 30).

There are also logistical reasons for limiting the scope of this report to race, culture, and class. Though other categories of diversity certainly merit attention, trying to address all possible categories would result in a conceptually fragmented report that fails to do justice to any single category or set of categories.

A note about terminology: In this report, we avoid using the phrases “diverse students” or “diverse families” unless we are quoting another source. Where possible, we refer to the specific student populations under discussion. In referring to the full range of students and families this report addresses, we refer to “minority and low-income” students and/or families, by which we mean racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minorities, and students and families who are poor. We also use the term “family involvement” except where citing or quoting specific studies that use the term “parent involvement.” Much of the literature uses “family involvement” and “parent involvement” interchangeably, although “parent involvement” is by far the more common usage. We have chosen “family involvement” in recognition that there are many kinds of families. A child’s primary caregiver may not be her or his biological or even adoptive parent.

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[1] Throughout this document, studies included among the 64 reviewed for this synthesis are listed in ***bold italics*** to distinguish them from other documents that are merely referenced for background information.

How the synthesis is organized

This report is organized for ease of use by busy readers. Depending on immediate needs and time constraints, readers may find it helpful to take one of the shortcuts suggested below.

Chapter 1 describes the purpose, context, and organization of the synthesis.

Chapter 2 provides background on the studies themselves: how we selected them, what they cover, what general methods they use, how they address or define key concepts, and their overall limitations. The chapter also briefly describes what to look for in trying to make sense of research results.

Chapter 3 provides the meat of the matter. It describes the major findings in the 64 studies reviewed for this synthesis as well as the individual research studies from which we drew our findings. To obtain a quick look at what the research says, go to Chapter 3 and look for the key points, set off in boxes, and the brief narrative discussion that accompanies each finding.

Chapter 4 offers recommendations to help practitioners put the research findings to practical use. To find specific ideas for schools and communities, turn first to this chapter.

A complete **index** and **references section** of both the research studies and supplementary background material appear at the end of the report. To get specific information about any of the studies reviewed,

- use the index to look for discussions of the study within this report,
- access the Connection Collection bibliography database maintained by the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (www.sedl.org/connections/resources), which includes all 64 studies, as well as some of the background documents, or
- go directly to the source; see the references section for information on access and availability.

How the synthesis fits into a larger context

SEDL and the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools

As noted earlier, this report is one of a series funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide practitioner leaders and others with reliable information they can use to improve local policies and practices. Funding for development and dissemination of the report was provided to the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), one of ten Regional Educational Laboratories within the United States. SEDL serves the Southwestern region, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Since December 2000, SEDL has operated the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools. The Center serves as a national resource to schools, community groups, research organizations, policymakers, and families, linking people with research-based information and resources. For more information about the Center and its services, contact

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E-mail: connections@sedl.org

Other synthesis documents

The Center has published two other synthesis documents addressing research related to school, family, and community connections:

> *Emerging issues in school, family, & community connections (annual synthesis 2001),* by Catherine Jordan, Evangelina Orozco, and Amy Averett
>
> *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement (annual synthesis 2002),* by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp

Both documents are available at www.sedl.org/connections/resources.html.

Additional syntheses also are planned for 2004 and 2005.

About the Studies

Chapter 2

This synthesis reviews research findings from 64 studies that contain some aspect of diversity as it relates to student achievement and school, family, and community connections. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of what to look for in reading about research. It then describes the procedures by which we selected studies for this report and presents a brief overview of the broad concepts related to diversity and family involvement that the studies address (or, in some cases, do not address). Finally, the chapter lists the included studies by author and publication date, categorizing them by research method, population, and educational level. This chapter also includes the principal limitations of the studies.

What matters in looking at research

The current federal emphasis on rigorous research is intended to improve the decisions about the ways in which local schools, communities, and families invest their resources to improve student outcomes. But what exactly is "rigorous" research? Here are some basics to keep in mind.

Research is driven by questions that someone is seeking to answer. In education, as the National Research Council (Shavelson & Towne, 2002) has noted, research tends to address three, often interrelated, types of questions:

- "description — What is happening?"
- "cause — Is there a systematic effect?"
- "process or mechanism — Why or how is it happening?" (p. 99)

Different types of research methodologies are effective for addressing different types of questions.

Types of quantitative research

Studies using *experimental designs* explore causal relationships; for example, the extent to which a particular family-involvement strategy influences student achievement. Critical elements of experimental designs include random sampling of subjects, random assignment of subjects to intervention and control or comparison groups, isolation of variables, and pre- and post-assessments.

Quasi-experimental designs reflect most of the features of experimental studies but do not include randomized assignment to intervention and control groups. Other studies are described as *nonexperimental studies*; they involve neither random samples nor the use of control or comparison groups. These studies may contain a wealth of information, but they cannot unequivocally demonstrate causal links because they cannot control for other potential causal factors in the same way that experimental designs can (Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

Comparative-population studies (sometimes also referred to as *causal-comparative studies*) and *correlational studies* are two nonexperimental research methods that use statistical manipulations of data to explore relationships among specific variables. Unlike experimental and quasi-experimental methods, these methods do not involve an intervention. *Comparative-population studies* are used to compare data for two groups of individuals who are generally alike but who differ on a critical variable. For example, a study might compare two groups of parents of second graders, one group consisting of Chinese American parents and the other of European American parents, to see how these two groups are similar or different in helping their children with homework.

While comparative-population studies make comparisons *between* groups, *correlational studies* look at relationships among variables *within* groups. For example, a study might focus on the group of Chinese American parents mentioned above and explore the relationships between specific family characteristics—such as the parents' educational background or parenting styles—and children's school performance.

Comparative-population studies and correlational studies often rely on previously collected data that may be available through data sets. A number of the studies included in this synthesis rely on data collected for other, past research efforts.

Survey research is used to explore how people, organizations, or institutions feel, think, believe, and act, as well as their interests. Survey research "can be useful for collecting information from relatively large numbers of dispersed groups of people" (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999, pp. 449–450). Critical factors in designing high-quality survey research are selecting an appropriate sample and constructing effective questions.

Quantitative vs. qualitative research methods

Experimental and quasi-experimental designs and nonexperimental approaches, such as correlational studies and survey research, are *quantitative* in nature. They use instrument-based questions for collecting data and close-ended questions to facilitate statistical analyses. Quantitative studies also generally involve a relatively large number of participants; sample size is usually (though not always) a concern. The results of quantitative studies are described in numerical, or statistical, terms.

There are also *qualitative* research methodologies. Qualitative research

> is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. (Merriam, 2001, p. 5)

Qualitative studies tend to collect "open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data" (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). Qualitative studies usually rely on open-ended interview questions, observations, or analysis of documents and audiovisual records. The results of qualitative studies are described in narrative terms. The different types of qualitative studies commonly found in educational research include *ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory,* and *case study research*. However, all of these types share "the essential characteristics of qualitative research" (Merriam, 2001, p. 11).

Many studies now employ *mixed methods,* combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Reviews of research

Reviews and *syntheses* of research, such as this document, are not classified as research. However, by summarizing a broad range of studies on a given topic, they can be useful in describing trends and gaps in the research literature. Important considerations in assessing the quality and usefulness of literature reviews are how studies were identified (Did the authors cast a wide enough net?), the criteria used for including studies (Did the authors weed out low-quality studies and irrelevant studies?), and the amount of information included about each study.

There are also *meta-analyses* of research, which use statistical methods to compile and analyze data across a number of quantitative research studies. Meta-analyses, when done correctly, may offer more reliable conclusions than literature reviews because they include statistical controls and findings grounded in the analysis of empirical data. However, meta-analyses are limited in the studies they can include. Qualitative data and certain types of quantitative data do not lend themselves to this type of analysis. When reviewing meta-analyses, note the number and quality of studies included and the statistical procedures used to analyze the data.

Is there one best type of research?

Experimental methods are often described as the "gold standard" for research design. This is because experimental designs can control for variables that represent competing explanations for what caused a particular outcome. But some questions cannot be answered by experimental methods. There are also circumstances when randomly assigning participants to an intervention or control group is not feasible because it may breach a school or organization mandate to serve specific populations. And, sometimes, "leaders of exemplary programs are reluctant to participate in experiments involving random assignment of participants because they consider an individual's or family's ability to exercise choice crucial to the effectiveness of an intervention" (Schorr, 2003, p. 5).

In studying interventions, if the use of experimental methods is not feasible, the use of a quasi-experimental design is generally recommended. In exploring behaviors or characteristics that occur naturally (without the stimulus of an intervention), researchers often turn to correlational or comparative population methods. Simple correlational studies cannot assess causal relationships. However, in some cases, studies that apply sophisticated statistical analyses and "model-fitting" approaches to control for the effects of relevant variables can suggest causal inferences (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999; Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

As the National Research Council (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) has observed, "A common misconception is that qualitative methods lack rigor and therefore are not scientific. In fact, qualitative methods can be just as scientific (meaning objective and empirical) as quantitative methods" (p. 204). Qualitative studies cannot reliably assess causality, and their results cannot reliably be generalized to other settings. However, their findings can be valuable in clarifying or exploring specific circumstances behind quantitative research findings; in understanding how systems, programs, or groups work; and in laying the theoretical groundwork for future research.

Finally, in making use of research findings, it is important not to neglect "professional wisdom," that is, the understandings that come from practical experience *and* from knowing the specific environment and students in which research findings are to be used. The National Research Council explained, "The scientist discovers the basis for what is possible. The practitioner, parent, or policymaker, in turn, has to consider what is practical, affordable, desirable, and credible" (Shavelson & Towne, 2002, p. 49).

Selection procedures

How we identified the studies

To identify relevant research studies, staff from SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools repeated the steps that had proven effective in preparing the annual research syntheses for 2001 and 2002. Staff

- reviewed the Center's existing database to identify relevant studies that were included in one or both of the earlier syntheses;
- searched the major education information databases, including ERIC and Education Abstracts;
- scanned Web sites of organizations and agencies involved in the field to locate reports or articles available online;
- reviewed bibliographies and reference lists from relevant studies to identify additional publications; and
- contacted researchers in the field and members of the Center's steering committee for recommendations.

We then conducted an initial screening of all identified publications. We reviewed in more detail the remaining studies. From an initial set of more than 250 publications, we selected 64 studies that met our selection criteria.

Our selection criteria

In setting criteria for inclusion in this synthesis, we could have screened more narrowly in terms of focus (e.g., including only quantitative studies that used student achievement measures as a variable), of methodology (e.g., including only experimental or quasi-experimental studies), or of quality (e.g., including only studies published in peer-reviewed journals). Or we could have chosen more relaxed criteria that did not emphasize currency or separation of conclusions from policy- and practice-based papers with research findings. Both extremes have their advantages and disadvantages.

We have chosen a middle path in the interest of balancing what we perceive as our readers' needs for an understanding of the "state of the art" of knowledge related to this critical topic and for reliable information that can help form the basis for sound planning and decision making at the local level. We have set basic standards that allow for review of a range of research methods, epistemological perspectives, and conceptual underpinnings regarding diversity, the achievement gap, and family involvement. Where studies show weaknesses, individually or collectively, we describe those weaknesses. It is our belief that, with the appropriate tools, local practitioners can be discriminating consumers of educational research findings.

It is our belief that, with the appropriate tools, local practitioners can be discriminating consumers of educational research findings.

In taking a middle path, we looked for research studies that

- presented *up-to-date* findings, a factor we assessed by limiting our focus to documents published or made available in 1997 or later,[2]
- met basic standards for *quality* and *rigor* of research methodology (see below for additional detail),
- addressed *diversity* in terms of race or ethnicity, culture (including language differences), and/or socioeconomic status, and
- addressed the relationships between *student achievement* and school, family, and community connections (see below for additional detail).

Setting the stage. We were also interested in providing readers with *contextual background*—a brief overview of current theories, concepts, assumptions, and definitions related to diversity issues that could place specific research studies and findings in the larger context of thinking in the field. Our rationale for this inclusion echoes that of ***Baker and Soden (1997)***, who, in their review of the parent-involvement knowledge base, presented the following justification for their inclusion of "non-empirical studies":

> Including opinion papers, program descriptions, and theory in this literature review allowed a determination of the extent to which current programs and practice build upon theory and existing empirical evidence. This approach also highlights theories and models which have yet to be tested empirically. (p. 3)

Background information is largely confined to this chapter under "How the studies address key concepts." The recommendations in Chapter 4 also refer occasionally to background documents that may help explain a recommended strategy.

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[2] Although our focus here is on the most recent research, these studies build on extensive, useful literature from earlier years. See the appendix in Henderson and Mapp (2002) for information about accessing earlier research-based and conceptual literature on parent-involvement issues.

So that readers may easily distinguish between material drawn from the empirical studies under review and material from background sources, the synthesis has been formatted using the following convention:

- Citations from the set of research studies under review appear in bold italics, e.g., ***Chrispeels and Rivero (2001)*** or ***(Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001)***.
- Citations from background sources are listed in plain text, e.g., Bruner (1996) or (Bruner, 1996).

Identifying sound research studies. In looking for research studies that reflect rigorous methodology and high quality in both design and implementation, our first priority was to identify *quantitative studies* that used experimental procedures. However, we found almost no studies fitting those characteristics. The lack of experimental studies has been a consistent concern with research exploring the links between family involvement and student achievement. ***Baker and Soden***, in their 1997 review of research on the topic, identified 145 empirical studies for review; however, only three of those used experimental methods. More recently, ***Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002)*** issued a critique of the methodologies and findings of a number of studies evaluating the effectiveness of parent-involvement programs. From an initial pool of 213 studies, the authors selected 41 that met the basic requirements for thorough reporting. Of the 41, they identified only seven that "used a methodologically sound evaluation design that would justify making causal inferences" about effects (p. 569). When a focus on diversity is factored in, the number of experimental studies shrinks even more.

We also identified other types of studies that employed quantitative methods, including quasi-experimental, comparative-population, and correlational studies, as well as a small number of surveys. In screening studies, we focused on a number of methodological issues, including the extent to which assumptions and definitions were described and the consistency with which they were applied in implementing the study, use of appropriate research designs with statistical controls, the extent to which effects were isolated, and the use of objective measurement. We excluded studies of interventions that did not include a comparison or control group.

Because they reflect the bulk of available research related to our topic, and because they often address emerging theories and issues, we also identified a number of studies that employed *qualitative methods*. These include case studies, ethnographies, and phenomenological studies. As with the quantitative studies, we noted specific methodological issues, including the extent to which assumptions and definitions were described and the consistency with which they were applied, the studies' grounding in sound theory, and the use of research designs applying recognized qualitative methods.

Finally, we identified several literature reviews and meta-analyses of research that addressed the links between family involvement and student achievement. While only one of these focused specifically on diversity as it relates to family involvement, each of the reports included some attention to minority and/or low-income populations. In addition, the reports provided useful comparative information regarding the status of research in general on family involvement and student achievement. We included only literature reviews that addressed issues of quality in the studies they selected for review. Reports on the two meta-analyses did not describe screening criteria on quality or offer any critiques of the studies included; however, they did limit the selection of studies to those that employed certain statistical measures.

Addressing links between family involvement and student achievement. We found a relatively small number of studies that focused directly on the links between academic achievement and school, family, and community connections for diverse student populations. A number of other studies focused on factors that may encourage or discourage family involvement and/or on strategies intended to increase family involvement. For these studies, the apparent presumption is that family involvement is a positive influence on achievement among students from diverse backgrounds—an assumption that, as this synthesis describes, has not yet been adequately tested.

For studies that do address student achievement, achievement measures include

- for young children, performance on readiness and skills tests.
- for school-aged children,
  –report card grades, grade point averages, standardized test scores;
  –attendance, staying in school, or promotion to the next grade; and/or
  –enrollment in advanced courses.

How the studies address key concepts

Research doesn't happen in a vacuum. It is embedded within the context of specific ideas, theories, and beliefs. These conceptions are reflected in the definition and application of key terms, the subjects selected for study and measurement, the research methods used, and the analysis and interpretation of findings. The following section includes background information on the key concepts that are relevant to research on diversity and school, family, and community connections.

Conceptualizing race/ethnicity

The ways in which "race" and "ethnicity" are defined and used vary considerably in the conceptual literature related to diversity. For the most part, however, the studies reviewed here did not concentrate on the concepts or definitions of "race" or "ethnicity." Rather, the studies used specific descriptors—for example, "African American" or "Latino" or "Southeast Asian"—to describe populations rather than using broader, socially constructed, and often politicized terms. A small number of studies that explicitly addressed issues of race or racism were the exceptions.

Conceptualizing culture

The studies under review also tended to avoid use of the word "culture," a term that has varied definitions and usages. Virtually none of the studies characterized the populations under examination as cultural groups. They again used specific descriptors such as "Southeast Asian immigrants" or "language minority groups." Some studies did refer to "cultural beliefs" among specific populations. Some immigrant-population studies also distinguished between more and less "acculturated" individuals, but they did not define or list specific characteristics within those two categories.

Conceptualizing class

The studies reviewed for this synthesis included a focus on student and family class or socioeconomic status, often in tandem with a focus on specific racial, ethnic, and/or cultural groups. Most studies referred to "socioeconomic status" or "low-" and "middle-income" groups rather than using the term "class."

Criteria for identifying levels of income. The studies used a variety of criteria for distinguishing levels of income. In identifying low-income students, most studies used either student eligibility for free- or reduced-lunch programs or family income levels below the federal poverty threshold. It should be noted that even though the criteria used for assessing socioeconomic status in most studies tended to be specific and well supported by common practice, the criteria allowed for potentially significant variations in families' economic circumstances. For example, ***Gutman and McLoyd (2000)*** used the criterion of families living "at or below the 1995 U.S. poverty threshold" of $25,000 (p. 7). Annual income for families included in their study, however, ranged from a low of $3,500 to a high of nearly $25,000—a substantial variation that seems likely to have differential impacts on families' capacities to support their children's learning and well-being.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) used a categorization system different from other studies reviewed here. They classified families as "middle class," "working class," or "poor," using criteria that included not only income but also job and educational status:

- "Middle-class families are those in which at least one parent has a college degree and is employed in a professional or managerial position."
- "Working-class families are those in which at least one parent graduated from high school (or is a high school dropout) and is steadily employed in a skilled or semi-skilled position, including lower-level white-collar work."
- "Poor families are those in which the parents are on welfare; most of these parents are high school dropouts or graduates." (p. 40)

Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997) used the Duncan-Featherman Scale to assess socioeconomic status. The scale features an employment score ranging from 0 (unemployed) to 88 (professionals such as doctors or lawyers). The range among the families in their study was from 0 to 55, with a median of 21.

The hazards of confounding poverty with other factors. One concern in assessing research findings—and in considering diversity issues in general—is the danger of confounding circumstances and outcomes related to families' socioeconomic status with factors related to race, ethnicity, or culture. Though the percentage of African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and non-English-speaking immigrants who are poor is greater than the percentage of White Americans who are poor, many members of racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority groups do not live in poverty. And in terms of absolute numbers, more White Americans live in poverty than members of any other racial or ethnic group (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002). While minority status and poverty often intertwine, they are by no means synonymous.

It is also inaccurate to assume that all families who live in poor neighborhoods are poor. As Jarrett (2000) noted:

> When neighborhoods are viewed up close. . ., a more complex picture emerges. . . Distinct micro-ecological niches with varying physical characteristics ("nice blocks, bad blocks") and social relations (street-oriented and family-oriented lifestyles) often co-exist in inner-city neighborhoods. Families residing in these niches may live quite different lifestyles and provide distinct, and in some cases, enriching developmental climates for their children. (p. 314)

For the most part, studies included here managed to avoid these pitfalls. However, as ***Mattingly et al. (2002)*** pointed out in their literature review, many interventions—and many evaluations of those interventions—do not. These authors noted that, of the 41 intervention studies they reviewed, a majority "targeted low-income and non-White households, although few assessed the interaction between program effectiveness and household characteristics (such as race and class)" (p. 565). Moreover, the authors stated, "while a majority of the programs were located in schools with large low-income and non-White populations, they failed to take into account that within such schools there are many effective parents, strong families, and academically successful children" (p. 571).

Conceptualizing causes of, and solutions to, the achievement gap

Though few are explicit about it, almost all studies addressing family involvement as a strategy for boosting minority and low-income student achievement are grounded in some beliefs about the problems underlying the achievement gap. Numerous explanations exist for the achievement gap, ranging from school factors such as curriculum and teacher quality, to student and family factors such as students' racial identity and families' literacy practices. We have identified four broad categories of explanation relevant to the topic of school, family, and community connections that are reflected in some of the studies reviewed here. These include "deficit" explanations, "difference" explanations, "power differential" explanations, and "complex interaction" explanations.

Deficit explanations. The deficit—or "deficiency" as Sleeter and Grant (1988) described it—explanation identifies the source of achievement differences as characteristics of students themselves, their families, and/or their home communities. This perspective presumes a lack of necessary traits, resources, or experiences that places some students at a disadvantage. Proponents of this perspective identify the sources of these deficits as cultural and/or socioeconomic. The solution, according to this perspective's adherents, is

> to change the students by enhancing their early socialization experiences. Cultural deprivation and disadvantaged theorists believe that the school must help low-income students to overcome the deficits that result from their early family and community experiences. (Banks, 1995, p. 15)

An example of the deficit point of view may be found in ***Starkey and Klein's (2000)*** background discussion for their study of an intervention program for parents of children enrolled in Head Start. While the authors acknowledge that "little research has been conducted on early environmental supports for children's mathematical development," they note that the few studies that do exist. . .

> suggest that the home and preschool environments of impoverished children provide limited learning opportunities in mathematics. In a study of the home environment of Head Start children, it was found that many low-income parents provided a very narrow base of support for their children's mathematical development. . . Parents generally fostered counting and traditional numeracy skills such as numeral or shape recognition, but they rarely provided activities to support other types of informal mathematical knowledge such as numerical or geometric reasoning. (p. 661)

One problem with this perspective, as Banks (1995) observes, is that focusing on deficits among minority and low-income students and their families often obscures their strengths. In addition, "The emphasis on the students' deficits. . . does not allow the deprivationists to consider seriously structural changes that are needed in schools" (Banks, 1995, p. 15).

Banks (1995) observes that focusing on deficits among minority and low-income students and their families often obscures their strengths.

According to several scholars, the deficit perspective "is still widespread in the field of education" (Ada & Zubizarreta, 2001, p. 234). Montemayor and Romero (2000) point out that

> The preponderant volumes of research are looking at family patterns, education and relationships at home. From these studies, researchers will continue to portray families through deficit model lenses: some families are broken and need to be fixed. The easy or expedient path in parent involvement research is to document "good" vs. "not-so-good" family patterns and then develop a program to turn the "not-so-good" to the "better" and document how the children improve in school when their parents become "better" parents. Usually, this pattern merely serves to reinforce race, ethnic, and class biases. (p. 14)

A majority of the studies we identified—and almost all of the interventions aimed at increasing family involvement—focus at least in part on perceived deficits within families or the family environment. As ***Mattingly et al. (2002)*** noted of the intervention programs they reviewed, "the majority of programs focused on changing parent behavior—especially in the areas of parenting and supporting home learning — rather than on changing teacher practices or school structures" (p. 565).

Difference (or mismatch) explanations. Sleeter and Grant (1988) noted the existence of "difference" perspectives, which identify the source of the achievement gap as the intersection between the school and the student and/or her or his family and home community. This perspective presumes a lack of congruity between the student's home environment or culture and the school's culture that places the student at a disadvantage.

One statistic often cited in support of the “difference” explanation is the growing disparity between the background and demographic characteristics of teachers and those of the students they teach. Futrell (1999), for example, notes that more than a third of U.S. students “are from linguistic- or racial-minority families.” In contrast, only 5 percent of teachers “are from racially diverse groups” (p. 30). Abi-Nader (1993) notes,” The literature suggests that teachers daily enter a culture they admit is foreign to them and practice a pedagogy just as foreign to their students” (p. 213).

Researchers generally describe differences in terms of “culture,” with that term used broadly to include the culture of class, as well as of racial or ethnic identity, geographic origin, sociolinguistic background, and the like.

Epstein’s (1995) model of “overlapping spheres of influence” provides a conceptual framework highly relevant to the “difference” explanation. The model presents three overlapping circles representing family, school, and community. Various forces, including time and the experience, philosophy, and practices of the family, the school, and the community, determine the degree of overlap among the circles. In some cases, and at some points in time, the school’s community (and its cultural characteristics, values, and behaviors) and the student’s/family’s community may be virtually one and the same (i.e., completely, or almost completely, overlapping). With minority and/or low-income students, however, these spheres of influence are more likely to be divergent.

The general assumption contained in Epstein’s model, and in related “difference” explanations for the achievement gap, is that the more overlap there is among the “spheres of influence,” the greater the likelihood that the student will achieve academic success in U.S. schools—at least as they are now structured (Epstein, 2001). However, there are varied perspectives on (1) where changes are needed, i.e., which “spheres of influence” need to move and how, and (2) how congruence, or overlap, should be defined. Congruence may mean sameness in values, lifestyle, behavior, etc., or it may mean mutual acceptance, understanding, and respect for differences.

In addition, some schools of thought challenge certain dynamics of the model itself. For example, some sources observe that school “success” and “achievement” are relative, culturally defined terms. Other sources challenge elements of the basic structures and functions of U.S. schools. (See, for example, Nieto, 1996 and 2002; Banks, 1995; and Sleeter & McLaren, 1995.)

None of the studies reviewed for this synthesis explicitly address Epstein’s model of overlapping spheres of influence (though it is mentioned in the theoretical discussion or literature review section of several studies). However, a number of studies reflect perspectives or findings that fit comfortably into her framework. For example, in a mixed-methods study, ***Azmitia and Cooper (2002)*** discussed “continuities” and “discontinuities” between “the family and school worlds” of Latino students (p. 7). And in a comparative populations study of the links between “family background and young children’s cognitive skills” (p. 103), ***Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, and Crane (1998)*** concluded, “For parents who want their children to do well on tests (which means almost all parents), middle-class parenting practices seem to work" (p. 127).

One common example of the "difference" explanation that a number of the studies reviewed here reflect is the focus on immigrant populations' lack of understanding about the ways in which U.S. educational processes work (e.g., see ***Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; McClelland & Chin, 1997; Levine & Trickett, 2000,*** all qualitative studies). Such lack of understanding is described as a problem grounded in the differences, or mismatch, between educational systems in the United States and those in the immigrants' countries of origin.

Strategies for addressing the "mismatch" between school culture and that of students and their families may involve adaptations on both sides. Schools and teachers may need to become more knowledgeable about and sensitive to cultural and experiential differences, and families and students may need explicit information about schools' expectations, mores, and procedures. As with the deficit explanation, however, the difference explanation generally accepts school culture as normative, without questioning basic educational goals, processes, or norms (Sleeter & Grant, 1988).

Power differential explanations. Perspectives grounded in theories about "power differential" relationships identify the source of the achievement gap as the school and the school community's "culture of power" (Delpit, 1995). This explanation presumes that patterns and mores exist that tend to promote the inclusion of some groups and the exclusion of others from activities, experiences, and resources that contribute to academic and economic success. Those patterns and mores, according to adherents, are transmitted implicitly via schools, as well as through interactions among families within the "power elite." Students whose home and community environments reflect mainstream culture grow up within social networks that implicitly transmit knowledge of these styles, patterns, and norms, equipping them to function well within the school environment. Students outside the mainstream, however, lack easy access to this "insider" knowledge, knowledge that is not explicitly taught in school.

In addition, according to this perspective, students from mainstream backgrounds are linked to social networks that provide access to institutional agents who can open doors, smooth their way, and assure opportunities for success:

> The structural features of middle-class networks are analogous to social freeways that allow people to move about the complex mainstream landscape quickly and efficiently. . . A fundamental dimension of social inequality in society is that some are able to use these freeways, while others are not. (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 4)

School staffs and institutional policies generally fail to acknowledge or address this implicit transmission of exclusion and inclusion patterns. As Nieto (2002) observes, "Power and privilege, and how they are implicated in language, culture, and learning. . . typically have been invisible in school discourse" (p. 1). Similarly, Jerome Bruner, in *The Culture of Education* (1996), notes:

> Surely one of the major educational tenets of cultural psychology is that the school can never be considered as culturally "free standing." What it teaches, *what* modes of thought and what "speech registers" it actually cultivates in its pupils, cannot be isolated from how the school is situated in the lives and culture of its students. For a school's curriculum is not only *about* "subjects." The chief subject matter of school, viewed culturally, is school itself. That is how most students experience it, and it determines what meaning to make of it. (p. 28)

For some authors, one part of the solution to addressing power inequities involves the use of strategies similar to those posed by proponents of the "difference" perspective, that is, orienting those outside the power elite to the culture of power. For example, Nieto (2002) states,

> In order to change academic failure to success, appropriate social and instructional interventions need to occur. For teachers, this means they need to first acknowledge students' differences and then act as a bridge between their students' differences and the culture of the dominant society. (p. 18)

Nieto describes teachers who are performing this "bridging" function as "sociocultural mediators" (p. 18). Delpit (1995) states things even more bluntly: "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (p. 24).

Although issues of power and privilege are prominent among theoretical and conceptual discussions of diversity, they are rarely addressed in the research studies identified for this review.

Although issues of power and privilege are prominent among theoretical and conceptual discussions of diversity, they are rarely addressed in the research studies identified for this review. Few of the qualitative studies — and none of the quantitative studies — address the "power differential" perspective. An example of a qualitative study that does explore this perspective is ***Lareau and Horvat (1999),*** who described "moments of inclusion and exclusion" in schools' interactions with diverse families. Another example is the qualitative study by ***Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001),*** who found that "highly defined, socially constructed scripts" that bestowed differential power on families and schools influenced family-school interactions (p. 75).

"Complex interaction" perspectives. In discussing the literature regarding factors that place youth at risk, Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, and Sameroff (1999) observed, "Too often, complex social processes or interactions between person and environment are neglected in an effort to predict outcomes" (p. 10). A number of researchers draw similar conclusions regarding factors that contribute to, or help to mitigate, the achievement gap. These researchers point to the possibility that complex interactions among multiple factors — including school, student, family, peer group, and/or community influences — may account for differences in academic performance among minority and low-income student populations. Closing the achievement gap, then, also will require attention to all of these factors *and* their interactions among one another.

One theoretical construct that fits into this category is that of *resilience* among children and youth. The literature on resilience seeks to explain why some children facing adverse conditions, such as persistent poverty, fare better than others in similar circumstances do. Research on resilience attempts to identify *risk* and *protective* factors that may influence children's ability to succeed in school and other environments (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997). Several studies reviewed in this synthesis examine aspects of families' backgrounds and activities from the perspective of risk and protective factors.

The "complex interaction" perspective relates strongly to one of the major findings within this synthesis of the literature. (See the discussion in Chapter 3 for additional information.)

Conceptualizing "family" and "family involvement"

Defining "family." Most researchers are sensitive to the multiplicity of family types and configurations. A majority of the studies reviewed for this synthesis focus on "parent" involvement; however, they often describe "parent" as a child's primary caregiver, regardless of who that caregiver may be.

For example, ***Gutman and McLoyd (2000)*** and ***Gutman and Midgley (2000)*** — whose studies both derived from a larger research study—addressed involvement by "primary caregivers." In most cases, the caregiver was a student's mother; however, fathers and other legal guardians, "mostly an aunt or grandmother" (Gutman & Midgley, 2000, p. 232) also were listed. Similarly, ***Miedel and Reynolds (1999)***, in their study of preschool and kindergarten family involvement, noted that mothers were most often the involved caregivers, but that others included grandmothers, aunts or uncles, legal guardians, and foster parents.

Some studies, however, limited their focus to a single caregiver, usually mothers. Focusing narrowly on a single caregiver, or even on two parents, may be a limiting problem for both researchers and educational practitioners. Research on families in poor neighborhoods has found that "a range of significant others" assist parents in the care of their children (Jarrett, 2000). These include grandparents, great-grandparents, siblings, other relatives, and neighbors.

Defining "family involvement." Most of the research studies addressed in this synthesis note the lack of consistency in the ways in which researchers describe and—most critical for the utility of research findings—measure family involvement. There are differences both in the broad categorizations of family or parent involvement, and in the specific activities used to represent and assess those broad categories. In their critical review of the research base regarding parent involvement, ***Baker and Soden (1997)*** observed that, "even when focusing on the same aspect of parent involvement, researchers have operationalized it inconsistently" (p. 13).

Epstein's (1995) framework identifying six types of parent involvement tends to be cited in the literature more often than any other. The six types of involvement identified by Epstein are

- parenting (helping families with parenting skills),
- communicating (assuring effective communication about school programs and students' progress),
- volunteering (organizing volunteers and providing volunteer opportunities),
- learning at home (involving families in working with their children at home),
- decision making (including families in school decisions), and
- collaborating with the community (coordinating resources and services).

A key dimension in assessing involvement among minority or low-income families is whether the involvement takes place at school or at home.

Some researchers have made adaptations to Epstein's typology. For example, ***Mattingly et al. (2002)*** added a seventh category: "parent academic education," such as school-sponsored ESL or GED classes (p. 565).

Although Epstein stresses that the six types of involvement may be initiated by anyone—including schools, family members, or a community organization—some scholars have criticized her categorization as limited by its "school-centered" focus. For example, ***Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000)*** note that Epstein's categories "measure teacher- and school-initiated behaviors rather than parent-initiated involvement" (p. 505). They and other researchers have characterized family involvement in terms of who initiates the activity, and/or in terms of power relationships.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991, reported in Jones, Burke, & Picus, 2001) identified three types of parent involvement: (1) conventional school-initiated activities in which the school dominates the relationship and parents must conform to school policies; (2) activities reflecting shared power, in which parents are offered instrumental roles; and (3) activities in which parents autonomously set their own agendas and invite school staff to work with them (p. 7). Similarly, ***Abrams and Gibbs (2002)*** identified four roles taken by parents in their involvement with schools: helper, monitor, advocate, and active decision maker.

Family involvement at school vs. family involvement at home. A key dimension in assessing involvement among minority or low-income families is whether the involvement takes place at school or at home. Studies suggest that minority and low-income families tend to be strongly involved at home but less involved at school than White and more affluent parents (see, for example, the literature review by ***Henderson & Mapp, 2002)***. Studies that confine their assessments of family involvement to school-based activities, then, risk serious underrepresentation of the level and range of involvement activities among minority and low-income families.

Differences in family involvement by grade level. In their synthesis of research addressing the impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement, ***Henderson and Mapp (2002)*** outlined variations in types of family or parent involvement depending on whether activities addressed elementary, middle, or high school students. The bulk of research on family involvement, however, has addressed younger children, at preschool, primary, and elementary grade levels. ***Keith et al. (1998)*** point out that "research has been less supportive of the effects of PI [parent involvement] for high school students" than for younger students (p. 336). They also note that "few studies have examined the longitudinal effects of PI" (p. 337).

How the studies in this synthesis characterize family involvement. Some of the studies included in this synthesis focus exclusively on families' direct interactions with schools. Other studies address families' learning-related interactions with their children at home. Still others address families' general supports for their children's well-being. In terms of broad categorizations, the scheme most frequently cited is Epstein's (1995) framework.

Here is a partial list of specific activities used as measures of family involvement in the studies under review:

- Parent rules about children's habits, behaviors, and/or school performance
- Communication between parents and children
- Parents' talk about students' post-high-school plans
- Monitoring homework
- Helping with homework
- Academic stimulation at home
- Contact between parents and their child's teacher
- Contact with the school about academics
- Participation in parent-teacher organizations, or attendance at PTO meetings
- Participation on school committees or governance structures
- Volunteering in the classroom or with fundraising

A list of studies by category

Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide a list of studies included in this research synthesis. Table 1 categorizes studies by the type of research method used, Table 2 lists studies by the populations they address, and Table 3 shows the studies by the education levels they discuss.

One concern about the studies included in Table 2 that only one focused exclusively on Native American student populations, and only three specifically addressed Asian or Pacific Island populations. Several of the multiple race studies included both Native Americans and Asians/Pacific Islanders, but more studies on the specific circumstances of these populations are needed.

In the categorizations in Table 2, "multiple races" refers to studies with subjects that included two or more racial or ethnic minority populations; studies that compared a single minority population with White students or families are listed according to the minority population addressed. This listing does not include the literature reviews and meta-analyses of research.

Table 1: Types of studies by research method

Experimental studies

Moon & Callahan, 2001
Starkey & Klein, 2000

Quasi-experimental studies

Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000
Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998
Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001

Comparative population studies

Desimone, 1999
Huntsinger & Jose, 1997
Keith, Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo, & Killings, 1998
Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000
McNeal, 1999
Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane, 1998
Valadez, 2002

Correlational studies

Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, & Armistead, 2002
Campbell, Pungello, & Miller-Johnson, 2002
Cook, Herman, Phillips, & Settersten, 2002
Fan, 2001
Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001
Gutman & Midgley, 2000
Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002
Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997
Kim, 2002
Miedel & Reynolds, 1999
Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002
Moreno & Lopez, 1999
Sanders, 1998
Willeto, 1999

Surveys

Abrams & Gibbs, 2002
Adger, 2001
Chen & Chandler, 2001
López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000
Richman-Prakash, West, & Denton, 2002

Mixed-methods studies

Azmitia & Cooper, 2002
Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001
Zellman, Stecher, Klein, & McCaffrey, 1998

Qualitative studies

Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998
Auerbach, 2002
Birch & Ferrin, 2002
Chin & Newman, 2002
Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001
Gutman & McLoyd, 2000
Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997
Lareau & Horvat, 1999
Leistyna, 2002
Levine & Trickett, 2000
López, 2001
Lopez & Cole, 1999
López, Scribner, & Mahitavanichcha, 2001
Mapp, 1999
McClelland & Chen, 1997
McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999
O'Connor, 2001
Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999
Peña, 2000
Reese, 2002
Reese & Gallimore, 2000
Rodríguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999
Sanders, 2000
Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999
Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001

Meta-analyses of research

Fan & Chen, 1999
Jeynes, 2003

Literature review

Baker & Soden, 1997
Henderson & Mapp, 2002
Mattlingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002

Table 2: Populations addressed

Multiple races

Chen & Chandler, 2001
Cook, Herman, Phillips, & Settersten, 2002
Desimone, 1999
Fan, 2001
Keith, Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo, & Killings, 1998
Leistyna, 2002
McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999
McNeal, 1999

Multiple races, low income

Abrams & Gibbs, 2002
Chin & Newman, 2002
Mapp, 1999
Moon & Callahan, 2001
Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002
Richman-Prakash, West, & Denton, 2002
Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001
Starkey & Klein, 2000
Zellman, Stecher, Klein, & McCaffrey, 1998

African American

Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002
Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000
Lareau & Horvat, 1999
Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane, 1998
Sanders, 1998

African American, low income

Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, & Armistead, 2002
Campbell, Pungello, & Miller-Johnson, 2002
Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000
Gutman & McLoyd, 2000
Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997
Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998
Miedel & Reynolds, 1999
Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001
Sanders, 2000

Asian American

Huntsinger & Jose, 1997

Asian, immigrant

Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001
Kim, 2002

Latino/Hispanic[3]

Azmitia & Cooper, 2002
Lopez & Cole, 1999
Moreno & Lopez, 1999
Valadez, 2002

Latino/Hispanic, low income

Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998
Auerbach, 2002
Levine & Trickett, 2000
Peña, 2000
Reese, 2002
Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999

Latino/Hispanic, immigrant

Birch & Ferrin, 2002
Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001
Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001
López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000
McClelland & Chen, 1997
Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999
Reese & Gallimore, 2000
Rodríguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999

Latino/Hispanic, immigrant, low income

Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997

Latino/Hispanic, migrant

López, 2001
López, Scribner, & Mahitavanichcha, 2001

Native American

Willeto, 1999

Language minority

Adger, 2001

White, low income

O'Connor, 2001

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[3] Some studies used the term "Latino"; others used "Hispanic." Our usage in this synthesis mirrors that of the studies themselves.

Table 3: Educational levels addressed

Preschool/kindergarten

Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000
Lopez & Cole, 1999
Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane, 1998
Reese & Gallimore, 2000
Starkey & Klein, 2000

Preschool and elementary

Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000
Miedel & Reynolds, 1999
Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001
Rodríguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999

Elementary

Birch & Ferrin, 2002
Chin & Newman, 2002
Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001
Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001
Gutman & McLoyd, 2000
Gutman & Midgley, 2000
Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997
Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998
Huntsinger & Jose, 1997
Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997
Lareau & Horvat, 1999
Levine & Trickett, 2000
López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000
Mapp, 1999
Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002
Moon & Callahan, 2001
Moreno & Lopez, 1999
O'Connor, 2001
Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999
Peña, 2000
Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001
Zellman, Stecher, Klein, & McCaffrey, 1998

Elementary and middle

Azmitia & Cooper, 2002
Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, & Armistead, 2002
Campbell, Pungello, & Miller-Johnson, 2002
Chen & Chandler, 2001
Sanders, 2000

Middle

Cook, Herman, Phillips, & Settersten, 2002
Desimone, 1999
Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002
McClelland & Chen, 1997
McNeal, 1999
Sanders, 1998

Middle and high school

Kim, 2002

High school

Auerbach, 2002
Fan, 2001
Keith, Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo, & Killings, 1998
Valadez, 2002
Willeto, 1999

K–12

Abrams & Gibbs, 2002
Adger, 2001
Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998
Leistyna, 2002
López, 2001
López, Scribner, & Mahitavanichcha, 2001
McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999
Reese, 2002
Richman-Prakash, West, & Denton, 2002
Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999

Not specified

Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001

Limitations of the research

In their review of research addressing the links between school, family, and community connections and student achievement, ***Henderson and Mapp (2002)*** described limitations in the research studies they reviewed. Their description also fits the universe of studies included in this review:

- too few experimental or quasi-experimental studies;
- too little long-term research;
- small sample sizes;
- frequent dependence on self-reports "rather than independent verification";
- "mixed, ambiguous, or incomplete findings and conclusions";
- frequent use of correlational methods, which are considered reliable but do not generally allow for inferences as to cause and effect; and
- frequent use of survey data, which "tend to cover many topics, but without probing them deeply" (p. 19).

Other limitations include:

- a lack of consistency in definition and measurement of family involvement, making comparisons of results across studies exceedingly difficult;
- often poor and fragmentary definition and measurement of family-involvement activities;
- a virtually complete lack of studies addressing the impact of changing school family-involvement policies, practices, and interactions with minority and low-income families;
- too few studies focusing on exclusion and power inequities;
- a lack of well-designed studies on the complex interactions among minority and low-income families, schools, and communities; and
- a lack of studies on family involvement among Native American, Native Hawaiian, Native Alaskan, and Pacific Islander populations.

What the Research Says (and Doesn't Say)

Chapter 3

From the array of information across 64 studies, we identified seven broad findings that summarize the overall knowledge base related to family, community, and school connections among minority and low-income populations:

- No matter what their race/ethnicity, culture, or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children's success. However, there are limited findings as to whether minority and low-income families' high aspirations for their children have a positive impact on students' school achievement.
- Families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities are actively involved in their children's schooling. However, the types of involvement may differ somewhat from those of White, "mainstream" U.S. families. Poverty and economic stressors may be linked to both the extent and types of involvement among low-income families.
- Families' and school staffs' reports about the extent of family involvement and of schools' outreach tend to be inconsistent, with the differences increasing in schools with larger minority populations. The reasons for such inconsistencies are not clear.
- Research studies have identified barriers to minority and low-income families' involvement in their children's schooling—barriers that schools often can help to overcome. These barriers include contextual factors (particularly time constraints, child care needs, and transportation problems); language differences; cultural beliefs about the role of families in their children's schooling; families' lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of U.S. educational processes; and issues of exclusion and discrimination.
- Research findings are limited and inconsistent regarding the extent to which increased family involvement is linked to improved academic achievement among minority and low-income student populations. Findings specifically addressing the effectiveness of family-involvement programs in boosting student achievement are also inconsistent. Although some research findings are encouraging, too little high-quality research has been conducted to support a firm conclusion.
- Although the research base is thin, some intervention strategies appear to be promising in strengthening family-community-school connections among minority and low-income student populations.
- Some studies suggest that, in seeking to close the achievement gap, it is necessary to address the complex interactions among family, community, and school. Focusing on only one of these sets of factors is not enough.

The following sections discuss these major points, adding supporting detail and summarizing the specific research studies from which we drew the findings. For each major finding, we present first a brief narrative overview, followed by summaries of individual studies with results that relate to the finding. In many instances, we discuss individual research studies in relation to more than one major finding. We present procedural descriptions of each study only once, usually the first time a study is introduced.

There are consistent findings that most minority and low-income families have high aspirations for their children's academic success.

No matter what their race/ethnicity, culture, or income, most families have high aspirations and concerns for their children's success. However, there are limited findings as to whether minority and low-income families' high aspirations for their children have a positive impact on students' school achievement.

One explanation sometimes put forth as contributing to the achievement gap is that families of minority and low-income children may have low aspirations or expectations for their children's academic achievement, and that those attitudes may negatively influence students' performance. This explanation sometimes comes from a *deficit* perspective, that is, considering families to lack some awareness, understanding, or appropriate motivation. It is also sometimes presented as a *power differential* perspective, that is, that families may have realistic views about their children's opportunities for success due to persistent exclusion or discrimination.

A variation on this theme is the belief that specific cultural values and traditions may discourage students' motivation for academic achievement. For example, a correlational study by ***Willeto (1999)*** explored the "common assumption" that the involvement of Navajo youth in their traditional culture is associated with lower academic achievement among those students.

Based on the studies reviewed, however, there are consistent findings that most minority and low-income families have high aspirations for their children's academic success ***(Fan, 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997)***. In addition, these families maintain those high aspirations as their children progress through school ***(Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Kim, 2002)***. Most minority and low-income families also express strong and persistent concerns about their children's educational experiences and how their children are faring in school ***(Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Auerbach, 2002; O'Connor, 2001)***.

The studies we reviewed found high aspirations among families in both multiracial ***(Fan, 2001)*** and single population samples. The findings held true for Latino populations, including Latino immigrants ***(Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Goldenberg et al., 2001; Reese, 2002),*** and for low-income, working-class, and middle-income Latino families ***(Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Auerbach, 2002; Azmitia & Cooper, 2002)***. These findings also held true for low-income African American families ***(Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997),*** for Asian immigrant families ***(Kim, 2002),*** and for low-income White families ***(O'Connor, 2001)***. In addition, studies noted families' high aspirations for students throughout school, at the elementary ***(Goldenberg et al., 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997),*** middle ***(Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Kim, 2002),*** and high school levels ***(Auerbach, 2002; Fan, 2001)***.

The studies reporting on families' aspirations primarily used correlational methods (four studies) or qualitative methods (six studies). One study employed mixed methods. In addition, ***Fan and Chen's (1999)*** meta-analysis of research reported consistently high aspirations among families; however, Fan and Chen did not conduct separate analyses for specific population groups. No experimental studies addressed this topic. However, experimental methods would not be appropriate in trying to assess parents' naturally occurring aspirations (i.e., in the absence of an intervention designed to influence those aspirations).

Of the correlational studies, one ***(Fan, 2001)*** used data from a large national sample, i.e., the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88).[4] Samples used in the other three correlational studies were much smaller, ranging from 41 students and their primary caregivers to 209 students and their parents.

For the most part, studies appeared to use the terms "aspirations" and "expectations" interchangeably. At least two studies, however, distinguished between the terms, characterizing "aspirations" as what parents hope and desire for their children and "expectations" as what parents realistically expect to happen ***(Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001).*** Both of these studies noted differences between families' hopes and their realistic expectations regarding their children's attainment. Azmitia and Cooper found that low-income families were more likely than affluent families to "express reservations" about their children's attainment, and that low-income European American families were more likely than Latino families "to express lower expectations. . . than aspirations" (p. 6).

One notable qualitative-studies finding is that parents from minority and low-income families sometimes described their own, often negative, experiences as motivating their aspirations and concerns for their children ***(Auerbach, 2002; Mapp, 1999).*** They also sometimes used their own educational or work experiences to motivate their children to succeed ***(López, 2001). Auerbach (2002),*** among others, noted that family members' personal stories and experiences can be a valuable way to build relationships between families and schools, as well as to serve as a resource for their children.

Another point noted in several studies is that families' and schools' aspirations for student success are not necessarily the same (e.g., ***Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).*** Families tend to be concerned about the whole child, while schools tend to focus on academics. Though this difference is likely to be true regardless of family background, it may have extra significance for relationships between schools and families of minority and low-income students. As we will describe elsewhere, school personnel tend to report lower levels of involvement among families of minority and low-income students than the families themselves report ***(Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).*** One factor in this discrepancy may be the differing perspectives as to what matters for the student.

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[4] Many of the research studies included in this synthesis use data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), a large-scale national study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. This study followed a cohort of students as they moved from middle grades to high school and into post-secondary schooling or careers. The original sample of 24,599 students from 1,052 public and private schools in the United States was surveyed in 1988 about their attitudes and experiences in school as eighth graders, and then again in grades 10 and 12 and two years after high school graduation. Surveys were administered to principals, teachers, and 20,000 parents. As in all large-scale surveys, the NELS:88 data tend to be broader than they are deep, with only a few items to explore each of the many facets of school and family life that are addressed in the surveys. NELS:88 does not necessarily measure all forms of family involvement. It is also important to keep in mind that researchers used a variety of subsets from these data, so the sample size is not the same in all studies. More information about the NELS:88 data can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/nels88/>.

What is not clear from the research is the influence that families' beliefs may have on their children's actual school performance. Two correlational studies did find relationships between parents' "aspirations" ***(Fan, 2001)*** or "expectations" ***(Kim, 2002)*** and their children's achievement. One was a study of multiracial high school populations; the other was a study of Korean adolescents. (It is not clear whether the two studies used "aspirations" and "expectations" to mean the same thing.) Fan and ***Chen's (1999)*** meta-analysis also found a strong association between parents' aspirations and student achievement. However, as noted above, their analysis did not examine this link for specific populations.

If the links between minority and low income families' aspirations and their children's academic achievement are tentative and uncertain, why should those aspirations merit our attention? Here are several reasons we believe this information is useful for local practitioner leaders:

- It provides insight into the values and concerns of families with whom school staffs often have the least contact and understanding.
- It highlights commonalities across populations that are often considered primarily in terms of their differences from one another and from "mainstream" U.S. families.
- It suggests common ground that can form the basis for building relationships of mutual respect and concern among families, school staffs, and community groups.

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Aspiazu, Bauer, and Spillett (1998) conducted a qualitative study of the creation of a community-based family education center as a strategy for improving achievement among Hispanic students. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with 16 parents residing in the federally subsidized housing complex where the educational center was established. Parents who were interviewed included six who were actively involved in the center's creation, and ten others who sent their children to the center but did not help to create it. Interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The parents in the study all expressed strong concern for their children's well-being. All supported the center's establishment "because they firmly believe that they or their children will personally benefit" from its activities (p. 112). All 16 parents also noted that their main concern in supporting their children's schooling "had to do with their children 'doing homework and doing it well'" (p. 114).

Auerbach (2002) conducted a qualitative study of experiences among working-class Latino parents whose children were in an experimental college-access program. She interviewed four parents and observed their interactions with the school program, supplementing the interviews with field notes. Auerbach concluded that the parents "evolved a philosophy of proactive parent involvement, especially the need to push children to succeed, in response to what they saw as the tough lessons of their [own] youth" (p. 1377).

Azmitia and Cooper (2002) reported on two longitudinal studies investigating Latino students' transition from elementary to middle school. The first study followed two cohorts of Latino and European American students (a total of 176 students) through their transition from sixth to seventh grade. Researchers recruited students and families to participate in the study and collected data from students, families, and teachers, and from direct observation. The second study addressed a college-based student and family support program for middle and high school students. College students trained as "researcher practitioners" collected data from participants (p. 4). Information describing data analysis procedures was sketchy for both studies.

The authors found that, in both studies, "families played a key role in supporting students' present and future academic careers and moral pathways. Importantly, Latino parents' aspirations for their children did not dim over the transition to middle school" (p. 2). In the first study, two thirds of Latino parents and three fourths of European American parents "held college aspirations for their children" (p. 5). There were no significant differences in aspirations between low-income and middle-income parents from either ethnic group. However, the authors noted that families in their study did tend to distinguish between their hopes for their children and their realistic expectations:

> Despite high hopes for their children's educational attainment, as a group, Latino and low-income European American parents expressed more reservations about their children attaining their dreams than middle-/high-income European American parents. (p. 6)

Low-income European American families were more likely than Latino families "to express lower expectations (actual attainment) than aspirations (hoped-for attainment)" (p. 6). Azmitia and Cooper also noted that parents tended to stress the importance of the whole child's development, while schools stressed academic achievement.

Birch and Ferrin (2002) conducted a qualitative case study investigating "Mexican American parental attitudes, characteristics, background, and resources that affect involvement in children's education" within a small community. They interviewed a randomly selected sample of 20 Mexican American families whose children attended a single elementary school, and conducted descriptive analyses of the results. All of the parents had been born and educated in Mexico. Most parents (12 of 27) had only an elementary-school-level education. Only one family's income was more than $20,000 per year, and nine families had an annual income of less than $10,000. The researchers found that "Mexican American parents view their role in their children's schooling as a major responsibility of parenthood" (p. 72). However, the parents told interviewers that they felt they had little help to offer their children "because they didn't have the ability or time to make a difference," and "they did not know the specific steps they should take to advance their children's academic achievement" (p. 73).

Fan (2001) examined links between parent involvement and students' academic growth in high school. He used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88) for the correlational study, reflecting a multiracial sample. He identified several dimensions of parent involvement, which differed somewhat depending on whether parents or students were reporting the activity. He concluded that one parental-involvement dimension, parents' educational aspirations for their children, stood out as having a consistent. . . association with students' academic growth.

Fan and Chen (1999) found that, among parents in general, "parents' aspirations and expectations for children's educational achievement appears to have the strongest relationship with the students' academic achievement" (p. 14).

In their meta-analysis of research addressing the influences of parent involvement and student achievement, ***Fan and Chen (1999)*** found that, among parents in general, "parents' aspirations and expectations for children's educational achievement appears to have the strongest relationship with the students' academic achievement" (p. 14). However, they did not report on the extent to which this finding held true for specific racial/ethnic, cultural/linguistic, or socioeconomic groups.

Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001) conducted a longitudinal study of a random sample of 81 Latino children and their immigrant parents. The study tracked parents' aspirations and expectations regarding their children's school experiences from kindergarten through sixth grade and explored the relationship between student performance and parents' aspirations and expectations. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect background, student performance, and interview data from families and schools.

The authors found that when participating students began kindergarten, parents' expectations were "unrelated" to their children's achievement, but that "over the course of the elementary grades, parents' expectations become increasingly linked to how well children are doing in school." In contrast, parents' aspirations remained consistently high and "appear almost entirely independent of student achievement" (p. 562). More than 90 percent of parents in the study aspired for their children to attend college. The authors noted, "Regardless of years in the United States, parents see a strong positive value to formal schooling, and they want their children to get as much of it as possible" (p. 566).

In a correlational study, ***Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997)*** explored "the achievement-related beliefs and behaviors of parents of economically disadvantaged African American youth, and the relations among parental factors and children's academic self-concept and achievement" (p. 527). They conducted interviews with a sample of 41 third- and fourth-grade students and their primary caregivers. Results indicated that the relationships between parents' beliefs or aspirations and their children's achievement were stronger than the relationships between parent behaviors and student achievement. Regarding parents' beliefs, the study found:

> Parents' expectations for their children's future scholastic attainment and parents' perceptions of their children's current abilities were reliably related to their reported achievement-fostering behaviors in the home. Parental beliefs were also related both to children's self-perceptions and to children's achievement as measured 9 months later. (p. 533)

The study also found that "parents' expectations for their children's future were generally optimistic; all parents reported high confidence that their child would finish high school, and 46 percent were confident that their child would finish college" (p. 531).

Kim (2002) conducted a correlational study exploring the relationship between parent involvement and children's educational achievement among Korean immigrant families. Kim distributed questionnaires to 482 Korean American seventh and eighth graders through schools, churches, and a community center. Of the 482 questionnaires, 209 were returned. This author also surveyed parents of the participating youth. To assess academic achievement, Kim relied on students' self-report of GPAs in basic subject areas.

Results of the study indicated that the parents who returned surveys "had a very high degree of expectation concerning their children's educational achievement" (p. 532), and that parents in low-income families were even more likely to have high expectations than high-income parents. The study also concluded that "parental expectation was closely related to children's educational achievement" (p. 537). However, Kim found that, among the families studied, "parents' school participation did not have a significant impact on children's educational achievement" (p. 537). Findings from this study are limited by the likelihood that students and families who elected to return the surveys may have been more positively oriented toward schooling than those who did not participate.

Mapp (1999) conducted a qualitative study of family involvement among 18 parents at an urban elementary school serving a racially and socioeconomically diverse student population. She observed family involvement activities at the school, interviewed parents and school personnel, and reviewed school documents. Mapp found that "the parents [in the study] expressed a genuine and deep-seated desire to help their children succeed academically, regardless of differences in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and cultural background" (p. 50). The parents Mapp interviewed talked about their own educational experiences in terms of their motivation to be involved in their children's schooling:

> Some parents stated that, while in school, they focused on their social lives and did not take their education seriously. Others said that they were lured into the workforce before graduating from high school; some dropped out of school to raise children; some said that they missed out on higher education opportunities. . . [M]any stated that they were determined to keep the distractions they experienced from impeding their own children's educational opportunities. (p. 128)

O'Connor (2001) conducted a qualitative study exploring the perspectives of parents and teachers on the relationships between family and school. She drew participants from an elementary school serving a low-income, predominantly White, urban neighborhood. O'Connor found that low-income parents "demonstrated a great interest in their children's schooling" (p. 179).

Reese (2002) conducted a qualitative study comparing "the child-rearing practices and values of Mexican immigrants raising their children in the United States with those of their siblings who are raising children in Mexico" (p. 30). Reese used a sample of 21 families from the Los Angeles area and 12 families in Mexico; interviews were conducted with parents and their adolescent children. One similarity between both the immigrant and Mexican families was "the extent to which parents espoused the value of schooling" (p. 39). Study results showed no significant differences "in the extent to which families on both sides of the border supported and monitored their children's schoolwork and encouraged their children to do their best in school" (p. 39).

Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) conducted a qualitative study of "high-performing" South Texas schools with predominantly Hispanic populations. Included in the study were three elementary, three middle, and two high schools that were outperforming most other schools in meeting the state's academic standards and that had received state and national recognition for meeting criteria for educational quality. The researchers interviewed students, families, and school personnel; observed in classes and at meetings; and took extensive field notes. They found that,

> for the most part, teachers defined parent involvement as a way of supporting the academic achievement of students, whereas parents conceptualized involvement as a means of supporting the total well-being of children. Parents' concerns were not only with how well children performed academically, but also with nurturing values of respect, honor, cooperation, good behavior, and responsibility of their children at school. (p. 37)

A correlational study by ***Willeto (1999)*** did not address families' aspirations, but rather the idea that a culture that values cooperation over individual achievement may negatively influence families' aspirations and students' academic achievement. Willeto explored "the common assumption" that Navajo youths' involvement in traditional Navajo culture is associated with lower academic achievement. She obtained questionnaire data from 451 randomly selected Navajo high school students from 11 different high schools, some located within the Navajo reservation and some in towns bordering the reservation. The questionnaires addressed students' participation in ritual behaviors, their support for Navajo cultural conventions, their language use, family background, and family processes. Willeto also collected data from students regarding their grades, their commitment to schooling, and their college aspirations. Results of correlational analyses found no significant relationship "between the academic achievement and behavior of these young people and their multifaceted involvement in Navajo culture" (p. 1).

Families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities are actively involved in their children's schooling. However, the types of involvement may differ somewhat from those of White, "mainstream" U.S. families. Poverty and economic stressors may be linked to both the extent and types of involvement among low-income families.

In looking for research to include in this synthesis, we did not find a single recent study with the specific purpose of comparing similarities and differences in the levels and types of family involvement among mainstream and minority or low-income populations. A number of studies did address the question in part, however, usually in the context of comparing achievement outcomes, a topic we discuss in a later finding. Results from the studies varied somewhat, depending on what types of family involvement were included in the assessment, and on who was doing the reporting.

Studies addressing this topic used correlational, comparative-population, or qualitative research methods. It should be noted that, to assess the ways and extent to which families are involved in their children's learning on their own initiative (i.e., without an intervention), experimental studies would not be an appropriate research method.

A weakness in almost all the studies addressing this finding is that they rely on reports from teachers and/or self-reports from families to gauge levels and types of family involvement, rather than using more objective measures, such as observation. One way to strengthen confidence in such reported data is to collect reports from multiple sources and compare the results. As we will discuss in the next finding, however, substantial inconsistencies often exist in family-involvement reports made by teachers, students, and parents or other caregivers.

The research indicates that families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities do get actively involved in supporting their children's education, and at all grade levels. A major source for this finding is the NELS:88, the data sets of which form the basis for a number of correlational and comparative population studies. See in particular, ***Fan, 2001,*** and ***Keith et al., 1998;*** see also the literature review by ***Henderson and Mapp, 2002,*** which cites several other studies using NELS:88 data to support their conclusion that "Asian, Hispanic, and African American parents were as active in their middle and high school children's education as white parents, but in slightly different ways" (p. 37). Several qualitative studies also note that minority families are active in supporting their children's schooling. These address mixed-race populations ***(Mapp, 1999),*** African Americans ***(Gutman & McLoyd, 2000),*** and Latinos ***(Birch & Ferrin, 2002; López, 2001).***

Studies suggest that, although many low-income families (of whatever racial, ethnic, or cultural background) also strive to support their children's education, their overall levels of involvement are lower than those of families who do not live in poverty ***(Fan, 2001; Keith et al., 1998; McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999).*** Families with specific background characteristics that tend to be correlated with higher rates of poverty, parents' education level, and single-parent status also tended to report lower levels of involvement than other families ***(Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Moreno & Lopez, 1999; Richman-Prakash, West, & Denton, 2002).*** In addition, we found two studies with the specific purpose of exploring the effects of economic stresses on families' involvement and interactions with their children. These studies, one qualitative ***(Chin & Newman, 2002)*** and one correlational ***(Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002),*** described the negative associations between increased economic pressures and families' capacity to devote time and energy to supporting their children's well-being.

A number of studies found that the types of involvement among African American, Latino, immigrant, and low-income families differ somewhat from involvement among middle-class White and, in some cases, middle-class Asian American families. Minority families—and, to a lesser extent, low-income families—tended to be involved at home but often took a different or more limited role at school than White families ***(Fan, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; López, 2001; Mapp, 1999; McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999).*** One qualitative study, for example, reported that:

> In cases in which teachers and parents differed both linguistically and culturally, parents were more likely to monitor their children at a distance from school, checking their homework, asking them questions, attending formal school meetings, but seldom initiating contact on their own or raising questions on topics not raised by the teacher. ***(Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999,*** p. 110)

Another qualitative study ***(Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999)*** noted that teachers tended to define parent involvement in terms of at-school activities, whereas parents identified at-home activities as more important in supporting their children's schooling. Other reasons for differences in families' types of involvement included a lack of time and other family resources, families' distrust or discomfort with school staffs or school procedures, and language barriers, among others ***(Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Mapp, 1999; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999).*** We discuss these factors in a later finding addressing barriers to family involvement among minority and low-income populations.

Several studies suggested that, to obtain an accurate and useful view of family involvement among different populations, researchers must look beyond broad labels and categorizations ***(Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Huntsinger & Jose, 1997).*** For example, one qualitative study ***(Gutman & McLoyd, 2000)*** found that all of the low-income African American families they interviewed were involved in supporting their children's learning at home. However, parents of higher-achieving fifth and sixth graders used different strategies for that support than did parents of lower achievers. A correlational study comparing Chinese American and European American parents' support for their young children's mathematics development found more similarities than differences in the parents' involvement, including an explicit focus on children's homework. However, with oversight from their parents, Chinese American children—who scored significantly higher on math assessments—spent considerably more time each day doing their homework.

This finding has important implications for building relationships between school staffs and the families of minority and low-income students. Understanding that "family involvement" may mean different things to different people can help both teachers and family members avoid misunderstandings and negative or stereotyped assumptions. By focusing on—and showing respect for—families' activities at home, schools and community groups can find common ground and a base of support from which to strengthen relationships with families and students.

Understanding that "family involvement" may mean different things to different people can help both teachers and family members avoid misunderstandings and negative or stereotyped assumptions.

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In their qualitative study of 20 low-income Mexican American immigrant families, ***Birch and Ferrin (2002)***[5] found that Mexican American and Anglo American parents' reports of their involvement "initially appeared similar in many respects. . . but when the parents began discussing how they participated, their commentaries showed the depth of their involvement was not the same" (p. 73). The authors concluded that Anglo American parents were more deeply involved in their children's schooling in specific ways, including reading with their children and volunteering at school. Birch and Ferrin also noted that "the responses of the Mexican American parents suggested that their lower rate of participation at school was a result of their perceived lack of parental resources (including time), the fear that they have little to offer, and their limited English proficiency" (p. 74). Nearly half of the Mexican American families in the study lived on an income of less than $10,000 per year.

Chin and Newman (2002) conducted a qualitative case study, following nine African American and Latino families with elementary-age or younger children over a 1-year period. The study explored the increased pressures on low-income families from the combination of increased student testing and changing welfare laws. The authors were concerned that "welfare reform and the demands imposed by the increased costs of living in major American cities have pulled poor and low-income parents in the opposite direction [from involvement in their children's schooling]: toward more hours committed to the workplace and the scramble to earn an adequate living" (p. 3). The study found that most of the nine families

> are doing what they can to balance the demands of adult work and children's school, though not with much success. Some are erring on the side of their children, and paying a price in terms of economic security. Others are privileging work in order to keep a roof over their families' heads, and are encountering varying degrees of problems in their kids' school lives. (p. 45)

Fan (2001), using NELS: 88 data for high school students, looked at differences and similarities in involvement among Asian American, Hispanic, African American, and White families. He identified a number of family involvement activities, both home-based and school-based, that were addressed in the NELS data sets. Overall, he concluded that, "once adjusted for SES [socioeconomic status], the reported. . . degrees of parental involvement of the four major ethnic groups were comparable" (p. 56). He did find statistical differences in levels of involvement among the four racial/ethnic groups; however, he noted that the differences on each measure specific of involvement were "generally very small, with the largest being less than 1.9 percent. . . and most of them being less than 1 percent" (p. 44).

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[5] Unless otherwise noted, we present a procedural description of each study, including an overview of methods and sample sizes, *only* the first time the study is listed. The absence of such procedural information indicates that we have introduced the study under a different finding. Use the index of studies for easy reference.

Fan (2001) reports that "once adjusted for SES [socioeconomic status], the reported. . . degrees of parental involvement of the four major ethnic groups were comparable" (p. 56).

In a qualitative study, ***Gutman and McLoyd (2000)*** examined involvement activities among low-income African American family members of both high-achieving and low-achieving fifth and sixth graders. Study participants were drawn from a larger longitudinal study of early adolescents. Researchers selected one school district serving a large percentage of African American and "economically disadvantaged" families, identifying a sample of 62 African American families who lived at or below the federal poverty threshold. Student achievement was measured using grade point averages. Participating family members were interviewed in their homes.

Gutman and McLoyd found that parents of both high-achieving and low-achieving students were involved at home. Both groups "reported helping their children with their schoolwork and having discussions with their children" about school (p. 10). However, the ways in which the two groups interacted with their children varied. In addition, more parents of high-achieving students reported at-school involvement than did parents of lower achievers (10 parents of high achievers vs. five parents of low achievers). Parents of high-achieving students also were more likely to initiate contact with school staffs. Though both sets of parents stressed the importance of family contact with schools, "parents of low achievers. . . seemed more wary of the school's actions on their children's behalf" and reported "previous negative interactions with the school" (p. 14).

In their review of 51 research studies addressing the links between student achievement and school, family, and community connections, ***Henderson and Mapp (2002)*** reported finding across several studies that "Asian, Hispanic, and African American parents were as active in their middle and high school children's education as White parents, but in slightly different ways" (p. 37). All of the studies cited (Catsambis, 1998; Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Keith & Keith, 1993) used NELS: 88 data sets. Citing Keith and Keith (1993), however, the authors also reported that "families with higher income and social class tend to be more involved at school" (p. 37).

In a longitudinal comparative populations study, ***Huntsinger and Jose (1997)*** explored ways in which "Chinese-American and Euro-American parents facilitate the mathematics development of their young children" (p. 4). Study participants were 76 suburban families with first- or second-grade children; 36 of the families were Chinese American and 40 were European American. The researchers assessed children's mathematics knowledge, administered questionnaires to parents regarding "parental beliefs, attitudes, and practices," (p. 4), and videotaped parents helping their children with a word problem. Quantitative analyses of parent-child interactions "revealed more similarities than differences between Chinese- and Euro-American parents" (p. 1). However, Chinese American children scored "significantly higher" than European American children on the math assessment. One difference between the two groups was that

Chinese American children "spent almost four times more per day on mathematics homework" (about 20 minutes as compared to about 5 minutes for European American children).

In a comparative populations study using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88), ***Keith, Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo, and Killings (1998)*** explored correlations between students' reports of parent involvement and high school students' grades among different populations. They identified two major dimensions of parent involvement: "aspirations" and "communication between parents and their children about school and school activities" (p. 343). The authors found that "Ethnicity, Family Background, and Previous Achievement each had important effects on Parent Involvement" (p. 348). These authors found that, "when other influences are controlled, minority students report more involved parents than do White and Asian students" (p. 348). Involvement also was reported to be higher among parents from higher socioeconomic strata.

In a correlational study, ***Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000)*** researched the links between three specific "family and demographic risk factors" and levels of family involvement among African American families and White families in "high-risk neighborhoods." They used a sample of 385 students from four sites across the mainland United States, drawing study participants from a larger longitudinal study. The authors interviewed both parents and teachers of the student sample. They found that each of the three risk factors—parents' education level, maternal depression, and single-parent status—was negatively associated with a different subset of six identified parent-involvement outcomes. Those outcomes included: "(a) Parent-Teacher Contact, (b) Parent Involvement at School, (c) Quality of Parent-Teacher Relationship, (d) Teacher's Perception of Parent's Value of Education. . ., (e) Parent Involvement at Home, and (f) Parent Endorsement of School" (p. 510).

The researchers found that maternal depression was associated with five of the six parent-involvement outcomes; parents' education level was associated with four of the six; and single parent status was linked to three of the six. All three of the risk factors were negatively associated with parents' involvement at school and with teachers' perceptions of the parent. The researchers found that "no significant differences emerged in the overall patterns of relations among risk and PI factors between African-American and Caucasian families" (p. 519).

López (2001) conducted a qualitative study of the involvement patterns of four migrant Latino families whose children had graduated in the top 10 percent of their class. He found that, though the families' school involvement tended to be low, they described themselves as being highly involved in their children's education, emphasizing the importance of hard work and a good education. Each of the families took their children to work with them at an early age, and spent time discussing the value and rewards of education. López observed:

> If seen through a traditional academic lens, all the families in this study would appear to be largely "uninvolved" in their children's education. In fact, in three of the four families, the parents did not regularly attend school

> functions, nor were they involved in other traditionally sanctioned ways (e.g., PTA, back-to-school nights. . .). Nevertheless, the parents in this study strongly perceived themselves as being highly involved in their children's educational lives. . . For these families, "involvement" was seen as teaching their children to appreciate the value of education through the medium of hard work. (p. 8)

In her qualitative study, ***Mapp (1999)*** found that the 18 parents she studied were "involved in their children's education in ways that go beyond traditionally recognized activities such as participation in volunteerism or school governance committees" (p. 51). She identified four types of parents' at-home support: "verbal support to do well in school; verbal support and encouragement to do homework; direct one-on-one help with homework; and involvement in other groups, such as church or other youth oriented groups" (p. 109). Mapp also noted that, in several families, "extended family members, such as grandparents or siblings, play[ed] a key role in many of the at-home support activities" (p. 115). She noted, too, that parents who were more involved at school were more likely to report that they helped their children with homework than were parents with less at-school involvement.

McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) conducted a qualitative study of "social class and racial differences in parents' school involvement" (p. 603). The focus of this study was specifically on families' at-school involvement. The authors conducted a yearlong observation of parent-school relations within a single school district. They followed teachers and administrators through their school days (a total of 53 days, divided among six schools), and observed a number of meetings and public forums parents attended. The authors found that parents' levels of school involvement "differed by gender, race, and social class," with most involved parents being White, upper-middle-class mothers (p. 609).

Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, and McLoyd (2002) studied the links between families' economic stress and children's well-being. The correlational study used a sample of 419 elementary-age children from low-income families; 56 percent of families were African American and another 28 percent were Hispanic. The study found that economically distressed parents "reported feeling less effective and capable in disciplinary interactions with their child and were. . . less affectionate in parent-child interactions. In turn, less than optimal parenting predicted lower teacher ratings of children's positive social behavior and higher ratings of behavior problems" (p. 935). Similar results were found for both African American and Hispanic families.

In a correlational study, ***Moreno and Lopez (1999)*** interviewed 158 Latina mothers of first-grade children attending five Los Angeles elementary schools. Interviewers administered a questionnaire that addressed sociocultural, personal and psychological, and contextual factors, as well as mothers' involvement in their children's schooling. The study found that mothers with more education participated more frequently in parent-involvement activities. The researchers also assessed participants' degree of acculturation but found no significant differences in reported levels of parent involvement between more and less acculturated mothers. They did find, however, that less acculturated Latina mothers "have higher expectations and higher expected attainment for their children than their more acculturated counterparts" (p. 96).

Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999),[6] in their study of an intergenerational literacy project targeting families of Latino students, found correlations between the ways in which parents monitored their children's schooling and the extent to which parents' backgrounds resembled those of school personnel. These authors emphasized that parents were engaged in their children's learning, but that their engagement took a different form depending on the degree to which their own backgrounds matched or did not match the teachers':

> We found that in those cases in which parents shared the linguistic and social background of the teachers, they monitored their children's school learning by visiting with the teacher frequently, asking questions, and seeking clarification as necessary. In contrast, in cases in which teachers and parents differed both linguistically and culturally, parents were more likely to monitor their children at a distance from school, checking their homework, asking them questions, attending formal school meetings, but seldom initiating contact on their own or raising questions on topics not raised by the teacher. (pp. 109–110)

Parents and teachers tended to describe different sets of activities that, to them, represented parent involvement.

Richman-Prakash, West, and Denton (2002) surveyed parents of children who were part of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (ECLS), to explore differences in family involvement for children living in poverty. The ECLS addresses a nationally representative sample of approximately 22,000 children from "diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds" who were enrolled in more than 1,000 schools during the 1998–1999 school year (n.p.). The study used the federal poverty threshold to identify low-income families. According to parents' self-reports, low-income parents "with higher education levels are more likely to participate in school activities than parents with less education. Parents of White children are more likely than parents of Black, Hispanic, and Asian children to attend school events or participate in volunteer work or fundraising. On the other hand, parents of minority children (i.e., Black, Hispanic, Asian) are more likely to attend PTA meetings than parents of white children" (n.p.).

In their research on high-performing Hispanic schools, ***Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999)*** concluded that "the meaning of parent involvement is defined through the eyes of the beholder, especially in terms of differing perceptions of activities, relationships, and roles" (p. 41). These researchers noted that parents and teachers tended to describe different sets of activities that, to them, represented parent involvement.

Teachers mostly considered parent activities at school to be "school events, meetings, workshops, and governance activities, and working as teacher aides, tutors, and school advocates within the larger school community." Parents, on the other hand, identified informal activities at home "as the most important parent contributions to children's success in school," including monitoring homework, reading and listening, arranging for tutorial help, as well as "providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with children, and sending them to school well fed, clean, and rested" (p. 37).

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[6] We provide a full procedural description of this study in a later finding related to the extent to which family involvement is linked to improved achievement among minority and low-income students.

Families' and school staffs' reports about the extent of family involvement and of schools' outreach tend to be inconsistent, with the differences increasing in schools with larger minority populations. The reasons for such inconsistencies are not clear.

Three studies noted inconsistencies between school staffs' (primarily teachers') and families' (student and parent) reports on levels of family involvement. Perhaps most significant among these, due to the national samples used for the study, is a report by ***Chen and Chandler (2001).*** They analyzed data from two National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys, one of a national sample of schools (grades K–8) and the other of a national sample of parents. Chen and Chandler found discrepancies between parents' and schools' reports about the levels of family involvement in school-sponsored events. Differences between parents' and schools' reports generally increased with school size and the percentage of minority enrollment.

One correlational study ***(Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000)*** and a mixed-methods study ***(Azmitia & Cooper, 2002)*** also noted discrepancies between teachers' and families' reports of family involvement. These studies, too, focused on families' at-school rather than at-home involvement. Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon focused on White parents and African American parents in "high-risk" neighborhoods; Azmitia and Cooper addressed low-income Latino and European American families.

In addition to looking at reports of families' involvement in school activities, Chen and Chandler also analyzed data regarding the extent to which schools initiated active outreach to families. There, too, they found discrepancies, with schools reporting more extensive outreach activities than families reported. Discrepancies between parents' and schools' reports were larger in larger schools and in schools with higher percentages of minority enrollments. None of the other studies among the 64 reviewed here addressed this particular topic.

It is difficult to know what to make of these discrepancies because all three of the studies relied on teachers' and families' perceptions and memories rather than on objective measures. It is possible that school staffs underrepresented minority family involvement and overrepresented schools' outreach activities, or that families overrepresented their own involvement and underrepresented schools' outreach efforts, or both. In addition, Chen and Chandler noted that they were comparing data from two different surveys; therefore, differences in question construction may have been a factor.

Despite the uncertainties, however, it seems important to note that minority and low-income families and teachers often appear to have different perceptions about family involvement. Addressing those perceptions and exploring the reasons for them may make a difference in schools' and community organizations' efforts to reach out to families and vice versa.

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Azmitia and Cooper (2002) reported that, in their two studies on Latino students' transition from elementary to middle school, "teachers underestimated Latino families' involvement in school" (p. 2):

> Teachers rated Latino parents as significantly less involved in their children's schooling than European American parents, even though our analysis of the parent and student interviews showed that, at least at home, Latino and European American parents were equally active in promoting their children's future ideation and providing homework assistance (or recruiting others who could help). (p. 7)

The authors speculated that teachers might have based their assessments on families' at-school involvement, which for Latino families tended to be lower than their at-home involvement, according to families' self-reports. Because the study relied on teacher, parent, and student reports, it is impossible to determine which reports were more accurate. The congruity between parents' and students' reports lends some support to that data, but results still must be considered inconclusive.

For a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report on parent and family involvement in schools, grades K–8, ***Chen and Chandler (2001)*** analyzed information from two separate national surveys, one of families and another of school staffs. The study found discrepancies between the perceptions of the two groups:

> Discrepancies were apparent between the schools' and parents' reports on whether schools used various practices to involve parents in their children's education. For each school practice examined in this study, public K–8 schools were more likely than parents of children in such schools to indicate that schools used that practice to involve parents. (p. iv)

Discrepancies were much larger regarding some specific family-involvement practices. The largest discrepancies related to schools' "providing information to parents about school's overall performance on tests," "providing information to parents about children's group placement," and "including parents in school decisionmaking" (p. 11). Discrepancies tended to be larger in urban schools, increasing with size, grade level, and the proportion of minority populations. There were also discrepancies between parents' reports regarding their own involvement and the schools' reports of levels of family involvement, again with the differences increasing with level, size, and percent of minority involvement.

The study by ***Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000)*** found differences in the levels of parent involvement reported for African American parents in the sample. Teachers reported less involvement than that of White parents, while African American parents reported the same level of involvement as White parents.

Research studies have identified barriers to minority and low-income families' involvement in their children's schooling — barriers that schools often can help to overcome. These barriers include contextual factors (particularly time constraints, child care needs, and transportation problems); language differences; cultural beliefs about the role of families in their children's schooling; families' lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of U.S. educational processes; and issues of exclusion and discrimination.

Nearly half of the studies we reviewed for this synthesis noted specific barriers that hinder or discourage involvement among minority and/or low-income families. For the most part, these barriers relate to families' at-school involvement, though some extend to involvement at home as well. Most of the barriers identified also extend across grade levels.

The great majority of studies identifying barriers to family involvement used qualitative methods. In addition, correlational studies ***(Kim, 2002; Moreno & Lopez, 1999),*** surveys ***(Adger, 2001; López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000),*** mixed-methods studies ***(Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001),*** and two of the literature reviews ***(Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mattingly et al., 2002)*** included at least some focus on factors discouraging family involvement, again particularly at school. One study using experimental methods ***(Starkey & Klein, 2000)*** also included a brief description of barriers to parents' participation in the intervention under study, although this was a secondary finding; the experimental design did not specifically address data collection on barriers to parent participation.

Hindrances to family involvement tend to fall into one of six major categories: (1) contextual factors; (2) language barriers; (3) cultural beliefs regarding appropriate roles for parents, teachers, and students; (4) families' lack of understanding of U.S. schools; (5) families' lack of knowledge about how to help their children with homework; and (6) issues of exclusion and discrimination. Many school initiatives or programs established by community-based organizations can and have addressed these barriers.

Contextual factors, or "life demands" as one study ***(Levine & Trickett, 2000)*** characterized them, include family resource and logistical constraints. Commonly cited barriers include lack of time, particularly for low-income families, many of whom work two jobs to make ends meet; an inability to take time away from work when school meetings and other activities are set during working hours; lack of transportation; and child care problems ***(Levine & Trickett, 2000; Mapp, 1999; McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999; Richman-Prakash, West, & Denton, 2002; Starkey & Klein, 2000).*** Strategies for addressing these factors include flexible scheduling; locating family-involvement centers in highly accessible places, such as a public housing project; and using community organizations as resources to provide transportation, child care, and other logistical help ***(Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997).***

Language barriers were identified as a critical factor for many immigrant families ***(Adger, 2001; Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999; Peña, 2000).*** One correlational study ***(Kim, 2002)*** specifically explored the relationship between parents' English proficiency and several types of parent involvement, both at school and at home. The study found that "parents' English proficiency is consistently related to all parental involvement variables," except for parents' aspirations for their children's success (p. 534). These studies generally recommended that schools conduct meetings and other school events in the language(s) with which families are most comfortable, and have a bilingual teacher or other translator available for parent conferences. One study ***(López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000)*** documented high levels of involvement among immigrant Latino families at a school where almost all teachers and administrators were fluent in Spanish.

Cultural beliefs among some families also were described as discouraging family involvement. For example, several studies ***(Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Peña, 2000)*** found that Latino immigrant parents tended to consider their role in supporting their children's schooling as relatively limited. ***Reese and Gallimore (2000)*** also found that Latino immigrant parents tended to view learning to read as a formal instructional activity rather than a process that could be facilitated by informal literacy activities at home. Taking a "mismatch" perspective that presumed better outcomes for students if families were more closely aligned with the school's culture, all of these studies concluded that family education programs could modify families' cultural beliefs and practices.

Families' lack of understanding about the policies, practices, and expectations of U.S. schools also were described as a barrier to involvement by immigrant families ***(Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001; McClelland & Chen, 1997; Peña, 2000).*** Most studies characterized this factor as the result of a mismatch among the U.S. educational system, families' own educational experiences, and those of their children in their country of origin. Several studies ***(Birch & Ferrin, 2002; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; Levine & Trickett, 2000)*** found that school programs, community organizations, and/or other parents could serve effectively as "cultural brokers," helping orient families to the U.S. educational system and (more rarely) vice versa.

Families' lack of knowledge about the subject matter their children were learning was cited in several studies as a barrier to families' help with homework ***(Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Peña, 2000).*** This barrier generally related to parents' own educational attainment. One strategy is to provide opportunities for adult learning ***(Mattingly et al., 2002);*** another is to offer families strategies and educational materials to help their children study at home (see the finding on intervention programs for more information on this topic).

Instances of exclusion and discrimination were noted in several studies ***(Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Auerbach, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leistyna, 2002; O'Connor, 2001; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001),*** although virtually no studies were designed to focus specifically on these issues. Families sometimes described discriminatory treatment or "overt practices of exclusion" ***(Abrams & Gibbs, 2002,** *p. 404)*** by school staffs and sometimes by parents who were in charge of school committees or parent-teacher organizations. ***Gutman and McLoyd (2000)*** reported that parents who had reported “previous negative interactions with the school” appeared to be “more wary” of school staff’s intentions and activities (p. 14). ***Lareau and Horvat (1999),*** in a qualitative case study, found patterns that—though the researchers did not specifically mention this model—appear to fit Epstein’s conception of “overlapping spheres of influence” (see Chapter 2 for background discussion). Families whose expectations and patterns of behavior matched well with the school’s expectations and culture experienced less conflict than did families whose actions and expressions of concern fell outside of “a narrow band of acceptable behaviors” (p. 42).

Understanding the factors that deter minority and low-income families from getting involved at school is a critical first step in developing strategies for strengthening their involvement.

Researchers did not suggest any simple solutions to these complex and deeply rooted problems of exclusion and discrimination. However, several studies noted that conflicts rooted in race, culture, or class tend to be exacerbated when school staffs attempt to avoid explicit discussion about them. ***Auerbach (2002)*** also recommended that schools

> provide safe spaces where parents can learn, share, and reflect on stories of schooling with fellow parents, sensitive educators, and others who look like them. These can range from parent support groups and advocacy training to informal Parent Center gatherings. (p. 1388).

The small group of studies described here represents the few that came closest—though in very limited ways—to addressing the “power differential” perspective as the root of the achievement gap (see Chapter 2 for background discussion). This is a topic that clearly requires more research.

The following list of individual studies is longer than those included under other findings. We have elected to include such extensive information, however, because understanding the factors that deter minority and low-income families from getting involved at school is a critical first step in developing strategies for strengthening their involvement.

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Abrams and Gibbs (2002) conducted a qualitative study of 10 mothers involved with one of three school-related organizations at a new, reform-oriented elementary school. They identified four different roles the parents played in the study: “helper,” “monitor,” “active decision maker,” and “advocate,” and noted that the reform strategies being implemented in the school were helping to “widen the range of established roles for parents” (p. 404). However, they also found race to be a factor in power relations among mothers involved in school support activities. White, middle-class mothers felt “more entitled to leadership roles, accessing power, and being in charge,” while Latina mothers “perceiv[ed] their own agency to be restricted by White power, linguistic barriers, and overt practices of exclusion” (p. 404). As an example, the Latina mothers pointed out “that Latino/Latina parents are overtly excluded from PTA committee meetings by White parents’ impatience with their translation needs” (p. 401).

Adger (2001) reported on the results of a national survey of partnerships between schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) identified as effective in serving language minority students. She surveyed 62 programs, making site visits to 17 of them. Adger identified "four program elements that practitioners find essential to program success: adequate resources, partnership and program flexibility, responsiveness to the clients, and evaluation" (p. 18). All partnerships stressed the need for cultural responsiveness as a critical dimension of being responsive to clients' needs:

> Because these programs target language minority students, linguistic congruence and cultural appropriateness are essential. All of the partnerships and programs studied consider this matter fundamental. They address it by hiring staff members who share clients' linguistic and cultural heritage and who recognize their experiences in and out of schools. (p. 20)

In her survey, Adger identified three basic types of CBOs: "ethnic organizations, special-purpose CBOs, and multipurpose CBOs." Ethnic organizations were described as serving "a general culture-brokering function for the school, the students, and their families" (pp. 10, 14); among other successes, they were able to help families learn to negotiate U.S. school systems.

Aspiazu, Bauer, and Spillett's (1998) qualitative study shows that low-income Hispanic families were responsive to the opportunity to participate in a community-based family center. The authors identified the center's accessibility as a significant factor in the level of response from families. In this case, it was located within the federally subsidized housing complex where the targeted families lived. However, the authors also noted that "14 of the 16 [study] participants said that their lack of English proficiency and limited educational attainment prohibited them from effectively helping their children" (p. 115).

Parents in ***Auerbach's (2002)*** qualitative study noted "dissatisfaction in dealings with school staff, especially counselors in their role as gatekeepers" (p. 1379). The author reported that "several parents remarked on the rudeness of school staff who made them wait for appointments without apology, did not include them in discussions with their children, or reneged on promises" (p. 1381). Auerbach noted, "Even seemingly trivial bureaucratic rebuffs can have a cumulative effect on family-school relations and student careers" (p. 1381).

In their mixed-methods study, ***Azmitia and Cooper (2002)*** noted that "Latino parents lacked information about U.S. schools and how to guide their children towards college" (p. 2).

Birch and Ferrin (2002), in their qualitative study, found that Mexican American parents seemed to place more responsibility for learning on their children, while Anglo parents "tended to expect that school personnel, parents, and other adults, not their children, have the greater responsibility when it comes to learning in the classroom." The authors noted that "Mexican American responses showed that as a result of their lack of experience with the public educational systems and processes, they would generally rely on the expertise of the professional educators, not their child, to assist them in their evaluation of a child's success or failure in school" (p. 75). In contrast, Anglo parents used more varied cues, including the child's attitude.

Birch and Ferrin also found that, "although the Mexican American parents felt an obligation and desire to help, they also felt helpless because they did not know the specific steps they should take to help advance their children's academic achievement" (p. 72). The study found, however, that Mexican American parents did attend school meetings when encouraged to do so by a community-based organization. The organization's coordinator "would notify Mexican American parents of upcoming meetings, explain what they would need to do when they attended the meeting, and then pick them up and take them to the meetings if they needed a ride" (p. 74). Mexican American parents also participated in school fundraising via "a community-sponsored activity known as the Festival of the Piñatas, where piñatas were made and sold to raise money for the Mexican American children to participate in community programs" (p. 74).

In a qualitative study that also drew on limited quantitative data, ***Chrispeels and Rivero (2001)*** explored immigrant Latino parents' perceptions of their "role" or "place" in their children's education, before and after the parents' participation in parent education classes provided by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE. Also see ***Zellman et al., 1998,*** for an evaluation of the PIQE program). Their study explicitly hypothesized "that Latino parent participation [in their children's schooling] was limited by a mismatch between their sense of place and the school's expectations." The authors postulated that the parent training program under study "could serve as a cultural broker, assisting parents in redefining their roles and sense of place and enhancing their efficacy to be involved" (p. 159).

Chrispeels and Rivero analyzed parents' responses to pre- and post-class surveys, videotapes of classes, and interviews with program graduates. Study participants included 95 families who had completed surveys, and 19 parents who participated in interviews. Families in the study reported that they changed their parenting style and increased their contact with teachers after participating in PIQE. Parents also reported an increase in the number of family literacy activities, such as reading and visits to the library. The researchers found that "concepts about a parent's role, based on cultural traditions brought from Mexico and [on] prior experiences, can limit" parent involvement. However, "these concepts are not fixed but can be altered by information provided by a cultural broker," such as the PIQE program (p. 165).

Collignon, Men, and Tan (2001) explored challenges Southeast Asian immigrant families face to participate in their children's schooling, and ways in which community-based organizations were helping them to overcome these challenges. The authors used qualitative data from several sources, including focus group interviews with 60 Southeast Asian community members and documents from two community-school projects. These researchers identified "a lack of attention to issues of language proficiency and cultural competency in service provision to members of the Southeast Asian communities" as a major barrier to families' involvement with their children's schooling (p. 35). "Insufficient knowledge of the educational system in the United States among Southeast Asian community members" was another major barrier this study identified (p. 35).

Johnstone and Hiatt (1997) conducted a qualitative study of low-income Latino immigrant parents at a single school. The researchers observed activities at the school's parent center, analyzed archival material from the center, and interviewed parents and staff members. The study found that English as a Second Language classes offered to parents served as a "'gateway' activity to parent involvement in other types of activities. . . . Of the 41 parents who regularly attended ESL classes in the parent center, 59 percent remained on campus to volunteer in classrooms, 51 percent got involved in parents as teachers training and 49 percent were actively involved in PTA and School Site Council" (pp. 12–13). The authors also found that parents' acquisition of English language skills via the ESL classes helped families "gain access to the broader English speaking community. Language was the key to providing political, economic, and social access to the extended community" (p. 13).

The correlational study by ***Kim (2002)*** examined the relationship between parents' English proficiency and several types of parent involvement. Results showed that "parents' English proficiency is consistently related to all parental involvement variables," except for parents' expectations about their children's academic success (p. 534).

In a qualitative case study, ***Lareau and Horvat (1999)*** focused on two third-grade classes with a mix of White and African American students. The researchers interviewed the teachers, parents, and guardians of 12 White children and 12 Black children from a single elementary school and observed in the students' classrooms. They found that the interaction of race and family factors led to "moments of inclusion and exclusion" that affected students' school success. The authors concluded that minority families often have greater difficulty conforming to schools' expectations for parents to be supportive: "We suggest that it is more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply with the institutional standards of schools" (p. 38). Reasons for this difficulty relate largely to the schools' institutionalized expectations that parents will be trusting and supportive. This presents a problem due to many Black families' negative experiences with schools and other institutions:

> The educators thought that they enthusiastically welcomed parent involvement and believed that their requests for parent involvement were neutral, technically efficient, and designed to promote higher levels of achievement. In reality, from a range of potential socioemotional styles, they selected a narrow band of acceptable behaviors. They wanted parents not only to be positive and supportive but to trust their judgments and assessments—a pattern noted by other researchers. (p. 42)

Leistyna (2002) conducted a three-year qualitative study of one school district's work to create a school-community partnership to support the district's multicultural education program. The author documented the activities of a steering committee responsible for involving the community and developing recommendations for the program. Leistyna found, "the critical problem is that parent involvement is often not recognized as being determined within specific and unequal relations of power—that attempts at school/community partnerships are often based on white, middle-class assumptions about parents' outlooks, language, resources, and time available for school work" (p. 1). Even though one of the committee's major functions was to engage families and the community in school activities, Leistyna found that, over a three-year period, "Other than the visit of some outside speakers from a local Baptist church and a few parental presentations on food and clothing, there was very little connection between the [district's] schools and the public, and very few parents/caregivers got involved in school life" (p. 19).

Levine and Trickett (2000) conducted a qualitative parent-involvement study of 14 low-income, Spanish-speaking Latino parents of elementary school children. Through detailed parent interviews, the researchers explored both parent and school contexts that influenced the parents' involvement with schools. Barriers to parents' efforts included (1) language differences, (2) parents' lack of familiarity with the local educational system, (3) parents' perceptions of discrimination by the school, (4) some parents' fear of being identified as undocumented immigrants, (5) "life demands, especially employment and child care, and, to a lesser extent, (6) health and housing problems, (7) lack of transportation, and (8) conflicts between church and school commitments" (p. 127). Language accessibility was a major factor in family involvement for almost all parents. Levine and Trickett also described ways in which Spanish-speaking Latino parents attempted to familiarize themselves with local educational processes:

> Parent advocacy was also facilitated by "learning the system"—increasing their understanding of school processes relevant to addressing goals for their children. For most parents, this learning was achieved via participation in school activities, obtaining school-based employment, targeting questions to a knowledgeable Latino parent, accessing bilingual school personnel, learning basic English, or utilizing information provided by the school. (p. 130)

López, Sánchez, and Hamilton (2000), in a survey of U.S.-born Mexican American families and Mexican immigrant families, found that immigrant parents reported participating in more parent-involvement activities than did the native-born parents. The researchers surveyed 393 parents of students attending a Texas elementary school located near the U.S.-Mexico border. The survey questionnaire listed eight school-related family involvement activities, including attending a variety of school functions, helping students with schoolwork, and volunteering at school. The authors found that

> more immigrant parents than U.S. born parents indicated they helped their children with school work, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in parent-teacher conferences, went to school functions, served as room mother, engaged in school fundraising, and were present during parent advisory committee meetings. (p. 521)

The authors of this study noted that all of the school's administrators and nearly 80 percent of teachers spoke both Spanish and English. They speculated that the Spanish proficiency of school personnel might have facilitated immigrant parents' involvement in ways that are not typical in most U.S. schools.

In her qualitative study, ***Mapp (1999)*** identified both family and school influences on parent involvement. Family influences included parents' own school experiences, their parents' involvement, cultural norms and values associated with family involvement, and time and schedule commitments. School influences included relations between families and school staffs, and "welcoming practices."

In a case study of barriers to parent involvement within one Latino immigrant family, ***McClelland and Chen (1997)*** identified language barriers, the mother's lack of understanding about school procedures, and lack of a sense of belonging or feeling welcome at the school. Her son began having troubles with school personnel in the seventh and eighth grades. Although the mother attempted to work with school staff on her son's behalf, she was uncomfortable doing so, and her efforts were generally ineffective. Due to her lack of English and the school's lack of Spanish-speaking personnel, the mother had to rely on family members to translate—usually her son, who tended to be selective in his translation of information, or her brother, who tended to speak for her, leaving her out of the interaction with school staff. The researchers concluded with a metaphor using Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall": "For a person who neither speaks English nor understands the culture of U.S. schools, the lack of knowledge is like two walls that keep one out" (p. 285).

In their qualitative study, ***McGrath and Kuriloff (1999)*** found that involvement in many school activities required flexibility in scheduling that most working-class families could not meet. These authors also found that White mothers involved in school activities excluded African American mothers, and that minority mothers who complained were labeled as troublemakers.

Moreno and Lopez (1999), in their correlational study of immigrant Latina mothers, found a significant relationship between participants' level of acculturation and their knowledge about school activities and procedures.

In her qualitative study of school-family relationships among low-income, predominantly White families in an urban neighborhood, ***O'Connor (2001)*** found that teachers expressed ambivalence about parent involvement: "They wanted to include parents and also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of such inclusion" (p. 184). The author observed that "most teachers and staff to whom I spoke did not regard the low-income parents in their school community as equal actors in their children's education and expressed serious doubts about parents' interest" (p. 186). As a result, O'Connor found that, "in this climate, parents reported their fears of becoming involved in educational decisions. . . Parents' caution about interfering in teachers' classrooms and their general self-perception of inferiority helped to maintain the separation between the roles of parents and teachers" (p. 187).

In identifying school contexts that did not work well for parent involvement, ***Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999)*** noted: "Particularly, inviting Spanish-speaking parents to conferences and meetings with English-speaking teachers diminished several parents' contact with the school" (p. 110).

Peña (2000) conducted a yearlong qualitative case study of an urban Texas elementary school with “a large concentration of Mexican American families” (p. 44). She observed family-school activities such as PTO meetings, interviewed parents, and reviewed school documents. She found that parents’ backgrounds — including education levels and language — and cultural values, family issues such as availability of transportation and child care, the existence of “parent cliques,” and attitudes among school staff members “influenced the ability of parents to take advantage of the parent activities organized by the school staff” (p. 46).

The case study by Peña noted that “language was particularly influential in determining the activities in which parents chose to participate” (p. 46). English was the language predominantly used in most parent meetings, regardless of the parents’ language. Peña also reported that families’ cultural beliefs influenced their involvement. She pointed out that “many Mexican American parents believe that educating students is solely the responsibility of the school and do not intervene in the teacher’s professional duties” (p. 46).

Reese’s (2002) qualitative study of Latino families in Mexico and the United States also found that “parents in Mexico exhibited much clearer ideas of how well their children were doing in school than did immigrant Latino parents with children in American schools” (p. 45).

Reese and Gallimore (2000) conducted qualitative studies of Mexican and Central American immigrant families of kindergarten students in the Los Angeles area. They collected data from two study samples — an ethnographic study of 10 families and a case study of 29 families — that formed part of a larger longitudinal project. The authors were exploring families’ “cultural models and practices of early literacy development of children” (p. 103). They found that Latino immigrant parents tended to view learning to read as a formal instructional activity rather than as a process that can be helped by informal literacy activities at home, and that this perspective was grounded in parents’ own educational experiences: “Parents share a model of what reading is and how it develops that is based on their own experiences with learning to read” (p. 115).

The authors found that, “when immigrant Latino parents do read to children, they begin to do so at an age when they believe the child will understand and appreciate what it is they are reading” (p. 114) — generally not before age 3. More than half waited to starting to read to their children until they reached age 5. However, the study found that parents were willing to change their behaviors in response to stimulus from schools.

In their survey research, ***Richman-Prakash, West, and Denton (2002)*** explored barriers to parent involvement among low-income parents; those most frequently reported were “inconvenient meeting times and difficulty in getting time off from work” (n.p.). The authors also reported that “barriers to involvement vary by parental education; parents with less education tend to more frequently report inconvenient meeting times, no child care and transportation problems than parents with more education” (n.p.). Language minority parents also identified language concerns as a barrier, with Asian parents doing so most frequently.

In a qualitative study, ***Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001)*** explored ideas and attitudes about education among low-income minority parents as a way of "understanding their interaction patterns with schools" (p. 75). Using a random stratified sampling process, the researchers conducted telephone interviews with 10 families of elementary-age children from a predominantly minority community (African American, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander) in northern California. Results indicated that parents consistently saw their involvement role as attending meetings and helping with homework.

Although the authors described these role perceptions as culturally derived, they did not attribute parents' role perceptions primarily to beliefs growing out of parents' culture of origin. Rather, the authors concluded that such roles are "socially constructed," primarily by the dominant, institutional culture of the school:

> In contrast to the perceptions of many principals and teachers, low instances of parent involvement did not reflect a parental lack of interest in their child's development. . . It seemed clear that patterns of family-school interactions were controlled by highly defined, socially constructed scripts that institutionalize the relationships among parents, teachers, and school administrators. (p. 75)

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel noted that "parents learn over time the circumscribed roles that they are expected to assume. They learn to think of themselves more as supporters, helpers, and fundraisers than decision makers, partners, and collaborators" (p. 87). Parents learn these roles via the structures, procedures, and norms of the school:

> Patterns of family-school interactions seemed to be preset in a particular language, in a particular set of formal and informal exchanges, and in particular physical arrangements. They reflected certain assumptions about the status of families in social life and the role of educational systems in the public domain. These separate roles, or spheres, were legitimated through elaborate bureaucratic structures, policies, programs, and procedures. (p. 95)

In their experimental study of a family education program for low-income Latino and African American families, ***Starkey and Klein (2000)***[7] identified barriers to parent participation, including child care needs, transportation problems, and scheduling problems due to work conflicts.

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[7] A full procedural description of this study appears in a later finding related to intervention strategies.

Research findings are limited and inconsistent regarding the extent to which increased family involvement is linked to improved academic achievement among minority and low-income students. Findings specifically addressing the effectiveness of family involvement interventions in boosting student achievement are also inconsistent. Although some research findings are encouraging, too little high-quality research has been conducted to support a firm conclusion.

Jeynes (2003) concluded that involvement among African American, Asian American, and Latino families had a significant impact on their children's academic achievement.

Perhaps the most critical question in the field of family involvement is, "Does such involvement make a difference in students' academic achievement?" Based on recent reviews of research, the answer regarding family involvement in general is strongly encouraging but not definitively confirmed ***(Baker & Soden, 1997; Fan & Chen, 1999; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Mattingly et al., 2002).***[8] A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding involvement among families of minority and low-income families.

Whatever families' backgrounds or circumstances, how much family involvement influences student achievement involves answering a two-part question. One part relates to the influence of activities that families undertake naturally, that is, without the impetus of a program or intervention. The other part relates to the impact of interventions. As noted in Chapter 2, experimental methods are the strongest means of assessing causality—but their applicability is limited to intervention studies. Other methods are required to assess what comes naturally. The strongest in terms of suggesting at least tentative cause-effect relationships are well-designed correlational and comparative population studies that use statistical manipulations to control for competing variables.

One researcher who has strongly asserted a link between student achievement and minority families' involvement in the most general sense is ***Jeynes (2003).*** Jeynes conducted a statistical meta-analysis of 20 studies, specifically "to determine the impact of parental involvement on the academic achievement of minority children" (p. 202). He did not explore the links between achievement and family involvement according to levels of income.

Based on his meta-analysis, Jeynes concluded that involvement among African American, Asian American, and Latino families had a significant impact on their children's academic achievement. (Native Americans were not included in the meta-analysis, due to a lack of available data.) Jeynes did find some variations between populations, based primarily on the academic achievement measures used and the specific parent involvement activity being measured, but overall, "the effects of parental involvement held across all the races under study" (p. 213).

Jeynes's meta-analysis is weakened by the fact that he did not provide a description of the studies he included (one of which is included in this synthesis). It appears that the majority of studies were correlational or comparative-population studies. Several studies appear to address interventions, though Jeynes did not indicate whether these studies used experimental or other methods.

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[8] Summary descriptions of these reviews appear in this section for comparative purposes.

Jeynes's findings obtain mixed support from the studies included in this synthesis. Results from the few experimental studies were mixed; results from other studies were somewhat more encouraging, but still mixed.

For this synthesis, we were able to identify only two recent studies that used experimental methods to assess the effects of an intervention targeting minority and/or low-income families and their children's academic achievement. Although both studies documented positive student outcomes, only one ***(Starkey & Klein, 2000)*** demonstrated improved student performance over that among the comparison group; that study addressed low-income Latino and African American preschoolers. The other study ***(Moon & Callahan, 2001)*** concluded that the intervention, which targeted low-income, early elementary students and their families, "had no statistically significant effect on student achievement in any grade" (p. 305), although all students were achieving at grade level.

Moon & Callahan (2001), concluded that the intervention, which targeted low-income, early elementary students and their families, "had no statistically significant effect on student achievement in any grade" (p. 305), although all students were achieving at grade level.

The literature review conducted by ***Mattingly et al. (2002)*** provides some additional information drawn from experimental studies. As noted earlier, this review analyzed a number of studies and found that most had "serious design, methodological, and analysis flaws," which undermined the studies' claims that parent-involvement programs "are an effective means of improving student learning" (p. 549). Among the 41 studies identified, the review describes four experimental studies that met the authors' criteria for rigor; all four of the studies addressed minority and/or low-income populations. Of the four, two showed significantly improved performance on standardized achievement tests among children whose parents had participated in an intervention program. However, the other two studies showed no significant effects. The studies showing significant outcomes dated from the 1970s.

Other studies using different methodologies show mixed, though generally promising, results. Some show a direct correlation between specific types of family involvement and students' academic performance ***(Keith et al., 1998; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999).*** Others suggest that family involvement may have links to other positive student outcomes, such as students' mental health ***(Cook, Herman, Phillips, & Settersten, 2002)*** or behaviors such as truancy or dropping out of school ***(McNeal, 1999).***

In most studies addressing student populations in general, family help with homework is negatively associated with student achievement. This finding is supported in some of the correlational research on minority and/or low-income populations as well ***(Desimone, 1999; Fan, 2001).*** However, at least one study using mixed methods ***(Azmitia & Cooper, 2002)*** contradicted this trend, finding that both family and teacher help with homework "positively correlated to students' math and English grades" (p. 2).

There are a number of possible reasons for these inconsistencies in the research findings. Given the complexity of family involvement, the variations in families' backgrounds and circumstances, the varied quality with which educational interventions tend to be implemented in local schools, and the current state of the art of educational research, it is perhaps not surprising to find mixed, and sometimes contradictory, research outcomes.

The question as to what extent families' involvement can positively influence their children's achievement is especially critical for minority and low-income populations. This is not only because of the well-documented achievement gap, but also because several studies—all using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88)—suggest that family involvement may be less effective in supporting achievement among minority and low-income students ***(Desimone, 1999; McNeal, 1999; Valadez, 2002).*** The findings of some qualitative studies suggest that families may be able to achieve a stronger impact if they adopt a mainstream, middle-class model of family involvement ***(Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Lareau, 2000).*** Taken together, these findings raise complex questions regarding power, privilege, and the extent to which differences are tolerated or valued.

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In their study of Latino students in transition from elementary to middle school, ***Azmitia and Cooper (2002)*** found that, along with several other factors, "family and teacher assistance with homework" was "positively correlated to students' math and English grades" (p. 2).

In a literature review addressing the links between parent involvement and student achievement in general, ***Baker and Soden (1997)*** reviewed more than 200 articles published between 1970 and 1996; of these, 145 were empirical studies. Of the empirical studies, 108 "investigated the link between parent involvement and student achievement outcomes" (p. 7). None of those studies was included in this synthesis.

Baker and Soden found only three studies that used experimental designs, and further found that many of the studies they reviewed "were seriously flawed" (p. 7). Therefore, they noted, "results reported must be considered suggestive and awaiting confirmation in more rigorous empirical efforts" (p. 11). The experimental studies they identified did provide "evidence of the impact of parent involvement on student achievement" (p. 16). Baker and Soden also noted that some studies used correlational methods "to good effect," employing analytical procedures that controlled for competing variables and reporting the results "in terms of strength of association rather than in terms of causation" (p. 10). Overall, the authors concluded that the research evidence was "less than conclusive." However, they also took note of "years of practice wisdom, theory, and related areas of research" that suggest the importance of parent involvement for students' academic success (p. 17). Although Baker and Soden noted that ethnicity is a factor that needs more exploration, they did not report any specific findings related to involvement among minority and/or low-income families.

In their correlational study of schools, neighborhoods, and family and peer relationships, ***Cook, Herman, Phillips, and Settersten (2002)***[9] found that "each setting influenced a different set of outcomes. Families were more potent in the mental health domain; peers influenced negative social behavior; schools impacted academic performance; and neighborhoods influenced school attendance and participation in . . . social activities" (p. 1305). These findings generally held true for all three racial/ethnic groups included in the study: African American, Asian, and White students.

In a correlational study using NELS:88 data for middle school students, ***Desimone (1999)*** found that "statistically significant differences existed in the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement according to the students' race-ethnicity. . . and family income. . . as well as according to how achievement was measured, type of involvement, and whether it was reported by students or parents" (p. 11). She concluded:

> Traditional demographic variables and parent-involvement measures were better predictors for advantaged populations than [for] disadvantaged. The parent-involvement model was a better predictor for White, Asian, and middle-income students than for Hispanic, Black, and low-income students. One explanation could be that school quality may mediate the relationships between individual-level parent-involvement practices and student achievement and that disadvantaged students are more likely to be in lower quality schools. An alternative explanation is that demographic and parent-involvement factors are less predictive of achievement outcomes for traditionally disadvantaged students than for advantaged students because of organizational or macro-level influences that tend to affect the disadvantaged group more than the advantaged group. Examples of those factors include school organization and social structure…, school tracking system. . ., peer group influences. . ., or macro-level factors such as discrimination. (p. 19)

Desimone also found that "parent-school involvement was more predictive of grades than test scores for children across all racial-ethnic and income groups" (p. 19). And she found that families' "contact with the school about academics had a negative association with all types of achievement" (p. 21); the same was true of parent help with homework.

Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, and Henrich (2000) reported on an intervention study of the CoZi model of school reform, which focuses heavily on family involvement. The CoZi model combines elements of Edward Zigler's School of the 21st Century and James Comer's School Development Program. Major components of the model include: "(a) parent and teacher participation in school-based decision making that is grounded in child development principles, (b) parent outreach and education beginning at the birth of the child, (c) childcare for preschoolers and before- and after-school care for kindergarten through sixth graders, and (d) parent involvement programs" (p. 270). The 1-year evaluation study at the preschool level used quasi-experimental methods; a standardized receptive vocabulary test was used to assess student achievement.

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[9] See a subsequent finding addressing complex interactions among schools, families, and communities for a procedural description of this study.

Results indicated that, although implementation of the CoZi model increased low-income African American parents' involvement levels at school, it did not increase student achievement. However, the study period was only for 1 year, perhaps too short a time span for such potentially significant impacts.

Fan (2001), who used NELS:88 data for high school students, found that "some parental involvement dimensions showed negative effects on students' academic growth" (p. 56), including help with homework. Fan also found that "the correlations among parental involvement dimensions within the same data source were typically low, suggesting that these dimensions may be relatively independent. . . If different aspects of parental involvement are indeed relatively independent as suggested here, those dimensions may have differential effects on students' academic achievement" (p. 45). In addition, Fan found that families' socioeconomic status (SES) had the strongest effect on students' academic growth. After controlling for SES, he found that ethnic differences in parent involvement had insignificant effects on student achievement.

Fan and Chen (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 research studies published between 1984 and 1997 that addressed the relationship between parent involvement and students' academic achievement. These researchers confined their analysis to studies that reported the results of their own empirical data and that included specific statistical manipulations. None of the studies included in Fan and Chen's analysis are among the 64 studies reviewed for this synthesis.

Fan and Chen found that studies varied considerably in how they defined both "parent involvement" and "student achievement." Even so, the results of the meta-analysis showed "a moderate, and practically meaningful, relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement" (p. 2) when all types of parent involvement were included in their analysis. The authors noted that some categories of parent involvement showed a stronger relationship with achievement than others, with parents' aspirations and expectations having the strongest link. However, they also noted that the relatively small number of studies in their analysis of specific types of parent involvement weakened the reliability of those results.

Fan and Chen found that, among the studies included in their analysis, "ethnicity" had "very small moderating effects on the relationship between parent involvement and students' academic achievement," so they did not consider it necessary to conduct separate analyses by race or ethnicity. Their report does not mention family income as a factor of concern, although several of the studies they included focused on it.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000), in their qualitative study of African American families living in poverty, found that families of high-achieving African American students used more specific strategies for helping their children at home than families of low achievers:

> Parents of both high-achieving and low-achieving students discussed using similar strategies to support their children's academic goals. Both reported helping their children with their school homework and having discussions with their children. However, parents of high achievers reported using more specific strategies to assist their children and had more supportive conversations with their children than parents of low achievers. (p. 10)

Examples of "more specific strategies" include tutoring children with practice lessons and problems as a strategy for helping with homework, supervising children's homework schedules, and focusing their conversations "on encouraging their children to set and pursue goals" (p. 12).

Gutman and McLoyd also found that "high achievers were involved in more extracurricular and religious activities than low achievers. More parents of high achievers explicitly engaged their children in these community activities to support their children's academic goals than parents of low achievers" (p. 10). Perhaps more significantly, the types of activities also varied, with high achievers more likely to be involved in enrichment activities such as art and music classes, in religious activities such as choir or Bible study, and in academic programs. The authors recommended that schools re-examine policies related to students' participation in such activities. They concluded, "Policies that exclude children from participating in extracurricular activities because of their low grades may serve to hamper rather than support their academic achievement" (p. 21).

In a correlational study of low-income African American students' transition from elementary to middle school, ***Gutman and Midgley (2000)*** examined the links between a number of student, family, and school factors and students' grade point averages. The authors collected a variety of data from 62 African American families of fifth and sixth graders in a single school district. They found that the strongest link to improved grades was students' "academic self-efficacy" rather than other factors, including parent involvement.

In their correlational study of African American families' achievement-related beliefs and behaviors, ***Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997)*** found less correspondence between parents' behaviors and their children's achievement than between parents' beliefs and children's achievement: "Surprisingly, few significant associations were found between our measures of parental behaviors and child achievement" (p. 532). They also noted that, "although structuring the home environment as measured by provision of books was related to reading achievement, neither math nor reading achievement was related to parents' reported instruction in the home" (p. 533).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) conducted a synthesis of research literature addressing family and community involvement and student achievement. They looked at 51 studies published between 1995 and 2002. The studies addressed one of three topics: "the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement," "effective strategies to connect schools, family, and community," or "parent and community organizing to improve schools" (p. 21). Selection procedures and criteria for their synthesis were similar to those for this synthesis. Of the 51 studies included in Henderson and Mapp's review, 13 are also included in this synthesis. Based on their review, Henderson and Mapp concluded:

> Taken as a whole, these studies found a positive. . . relationship between family involvement and benefits for students, including improved academic achievement. This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students at all ages. (p. 24)

In a correlational study using NELS:88 data, ***Keith, Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo, and Killings (1998)*** found that parent involvement in the early years had a significant effect on students' grade point average in the 10th grade. The authors explored similarities and differences based on students' gender and ethnic groups. They found that grade improvements held true for all ethnic groups, though there were some differences:

> Parent involvement was an important influence on GPA across all groups. Nevertheless, there were differences, especially for students of Asian and Native [American] descent. The parent involvement model did not fit as well for Asian students as for other students, and the magnitude of various effects were [sic] often different for Native than for other youths. (p. 355)

Study results indicated that "parent involvement seemed particularly important for the grades of Native American students. . . in comparison to other groups, meaning that increases in parent involvement should lead to larger increases in GPA for Native students than for students from other ethnic groups" (p. 353). However, the authors noted that, despite the large sample size the NELS data provided overall, "there were only 126 Native students in the sample used in this research" (p. 353). Findings for this group in particular, then, must be interpreted with caution. In addition, the study found, "Family background had smaller direct and total effects on parent involvement for students of Asian descent, meaning that for Asian students the family environment does less towards determining PI than it does for students from other ethnic groups" (p. 354).

Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) analyzed "41 studies that evaluated K–12 parent involvement programs in order to assess claims that such programs are an effective means of improving student learning" (p. 549). Two of the 41 studies are included in this synthesis. Mattingly et al. found that "the majority of existing evidence" regarding the links between parent involvement and student achievement "comes from correlational studies. . . rather than rigorous, systematic evaluations of the impact programs have on student learning" (p. 550).

Of the 41 studies, the authors found only four that "used the most vigorous research design (matched controls, pretest and posttest)" (p. 570). Two of these studies found significantly improved performance on standardized achievement tests among children whose parents participated in the intervention program; two found no significant effects. All four of the studies addressed minority and/or low-income populations. The two programs that showed a significant effect had been conducted in the 1970s. Each one focused on training parents or older siblings to help tutor students or to help with homework. The two programs also extended the duration of parent training over a longer period (4 months and 8 months) than did the two programs showing no significant effect (8 weeks and 10 weeks).

Mattingly et al. also noted that the majority of intervention programs they reviewed "focused on changing parent behavior—especially in the areas of parenting and supporting home learning—rather than on changing teacher practices or school structures" (p. 565).

In a correlational study using NELS:88 data for middle school populations, ***McNeal (1999)*** examined four aspects of parent involvement—"parent-child discussion," participation in parent-teacher organizations, monitoring, and "educational support strategies" (pp. 124–126). He found that parent involvement among middle school populations linked more to behavioral outcomes such as truancy and dropping out of school than to cognitive outcomes. McNeal also found that "specific dimensions" of parent involvement had more impact for affluent and White students than for low-income and minority students, at least at the middle school level (pp. 124–126).

Miedel and Reynolds (1999), in another correlational study, explored the relationship between parents' involvement in an early intervention program for low-income, inner-city children and students' later school achievement. The authors interviewed 704 parents (97 percent of them African American) who were participating in the Chicago Longitudinal Study, asking parents to report retrospectively on their participation in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. The Child-Parent Centers (CPCs) provide educational and family support services to children ages 3 to 9 and their families. Programs for parents included "a parent resource room in each center and a parent resource teacher who [oversaw] parent activities both within the center and within the community" (p. 385).

The authors found that the number of parent-involvement activities in which parents had engaged when their children were in preschool and kindergarten was associated with eighth graders' higher reading achievement, lower retention rates, and fewer years spent in special education. In discussing explanations as to why their findings ran counter to those of other studies suggesting that "parent involvement in early intervention is not an important influence on short- or long-term benefits for children," these authors concluded:

> One reason for the discrepancy. . . may be that we incorporated outcome measures that are more consistent with the CPC Program theory. Involved parents may not be able to increase children's IQ scores per se, but they can monitor their children's educational progress and intervene when their child gets into trouble at school. This can prevent grade retention, placement in special education, or both. Parents may be able to stop the cycle of school failure by stepping in when their child begins to falter. (p. 396)

In a later, quasi-experimental study of the same program, ***Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, and Mann (2001)*** reported the results of a longitudinal study to assess the long-term effectiveness of the CPC Program. They used an intervention sample of 989 children and a nonrandom comparison group of 550 children who had participated in an alternate early childhood program. More than 90 percent of children in the intervention group were African American. Results showed that preschool participants in the CPC Program had "a significantly higher rate of high school completion at age 20" and had completed more years of education than the comparison group (p. 2343). However, only the preschool component was linked to student achievement; school-age participation in the program "was not associated with any measure of educational attainment" (p. 2343).

Moon and Callahan (2001) reported on the effectiveness of an intervention program in boosting the academic achievement of low-income, early elementary students. Using an experimental design, the study drew from a sample of kindergarten and first-grade students from 16 schools; students had been identified as having verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, or spatial talents. Students were randomly assigned to intervention or comparison classrooms. The sample included a high proportion (64 percent) of African American students. Students were assessed over a 3-year period.

Starkey and Klein (2000), using an experimental design, found that a family education program addressing family math had positive outcomes for both Latino and African American families.

The intervention, Project Support to Affirm Rising Talent (START), included three components: mentoring, family outreach, and use of multicultural curricula. The family outreach component included training for school personnel and employment of family outreach coordinators who developed and implemented plans for involving families in their children's schooling. The family-involvement component was not assessed independently of the other intervention components. Results of the study showed that the START intervention "had no statistically significant effect on student achievement in any grade" (p. 305). However, all students, including both intervention and comparison samples, were achieving at grade level. In addition, START students were placed in gifted and talented programs more frequently than comparison students were.

Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999) conducted a qualitative study of the Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP), a family literacy program serving recent immigrant families. Classes were intended to help "parents and other adult family members who wish to improve their own English literacy and language and who wish to become familiar with ways to support their children's education" (p. 8). Researchers identified a sample of 12 children whose family members had participated in the ILP. These researchers collected a variety of data from students, their adult family members, and teachers of the family literacy classes and explored the links between family involvement in the literacy project and children's academic success. The researchers found that, among all 12 families in the sample, "the practice of family literacy was an important and integral part of family life long before parents joined the ILP" (p. 108). However, among students "who were identified as having high or moderate success. . . the literacy interactions [in the family setting] were frequent, most often daily, and varied." Family literacy activities in these households were often for "pleasure and enjoyment," as well as for learning (p. 108).

Starkey and Klein (2000), using an experimental design, found that a family education program addressing family math had positive outcomes for both Latino and African American families. These authors conducted two related experimental studies, one with 28 African American children enrolled in a Head Start program and their mothers and the other with 31 Hispanic Head Start students and their mothers. Students were randomly assigned to control or intervention groups. In the intervention group, mothers participated in a program designed to enhance parents' support for their children's mathematical development. Pre- and post-tests indicated that parents increased their involvement and students developed more mathematics knowledge.

Valadez (2002), with NELS:88 data, explored family influences on student outcomes and used students' selection of advanced mathematics courses as a measure of academic achievement (a relatively weak measure of achievement). He examined "the process involved in high school mathematics course selection among Latino schools," with a particular focus on the ways in which parent involvement influenced those processes. His sample included Latino students and, for comparison, White students. Valadez found ethnic differences in the correlations between two specific parent-involvement activities and students' mathematics course selection; the two activities were parents' discussions with their children and parents' participation in parent-teacher organizations. Regarding the latter, "Findings for PTO participation show that this activity increases the odds for algebra and advanced mathematics for White students. There is no significant effect for Latino students" (p. 331). Valadez also found that the ameliorating influences of parent involvement, such as discussion and monitoring, were more effective for higher SES Latinos than for lower SES Latino students.

Although the research base is thin, some intervention strategies appear to be promising in strengthening family-community-school connections among minority and low-income student populations.

Based on the studies identified for this synthesis, it is possible to conclude that some schools and community-based organizations have found ways to increase minority and low-income families' involvement in their children's schools. It also appears that these strategies are linked to positive outcomes for students. What is less clear, as noted earlier, is to what extent these strategies are likely to lead to increased student achievement.

Studies describing intervention strategies included a small number using experimental methods (see ***Mattingly et al., 2002; Moon & Callahan, 2001; Starkey & Klein, 2000***), quasi-experimental designs ***(Desimone et al., 2000; Hampton et al., 1998),*** or mixed methods ***(Zellman et al., 1998).*** As was true in other areas, however, the majority of studies used qualitative methods.

Although there are doubtless many programs and projects that include strategies for involving minority and low-income families, only a relative few have been addressed in research studies meeting the basic criteria identified for this synthesis. Strategies described in those studies include:

- family literacy and other parent-training programs ***(Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998; Lopez & Cole, 1999; Rodríguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999; Starkey & Klein, 2000; Zellman et al., 1998);***
- comprehensive services for families and students ***(López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999);***
- awareness and outreach training for teachers ***(Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000);*** and
- a range of outreach strategies, including the use of outreach coordinators, home visits, and community-based outreach centers ***(Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Moon & Callahan, 2001; Levine & Trickett, 2000).***

As ***Mattingly et al. (2002)*** noted in their literature review regarding family involvement in general, most programs targeting minority and/or low-income families focus on changing parents' behaviors rather than on changing schools' practices. Only two studies identified here ***(Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; Moon & Callahan, 2001)*** specifically included training for teachers to improve their skills in working with families.

By far the predominant approach is to provide training (and sometimes follow-up supports) for parents, to increase their knowledge and skills in one or more of several areas:

- basic parenting skills ***(Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998; Zellman et al., 1998);***
- knowledge of school systems and procedures ***(Zellman et al., 1998);***
- strategies for helping their children with specific subject matter or with homework in general ***(Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1998; Lopez & Cole, 1999; Rodríguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999; Starkey & Klein, 2000);*** and/or
- English language or other adult education content ***(Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999).***

One of the experimental studies included in this review described strategies for increasing family involvement that resulted in positive student outcomes: ***Starkey & Klein (2000)*** studied a family education program addressing low-income preschoolers' math readiness skills. A second experimental study ***(Moon & Callahan, 2001)*** assessed a multifaceted program that included mentoring and curricular components, as well as family outreach. Students in this program did not perform significantly better than students in the comparison group, though students in both groups performed at grade level.

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Aspiazu, Bauer, and Spillett (1998), in their qualitative study of a family education center located within a federally subsidized housing complex, found that the center's accessibility and friendly atmosphere were key elements in drawing support from parents and their children.

Although the quasi-experimental study of the CoZi intervention model by ***Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, and Henrich (2000)*** did not demonstrate a direct link between increased parent involvement and student achievement, the program did describe other promising outcomes. The evaluation indicated that implementation of the CoZi model could be linked to increased low-income African American parents' involvement at school, though the study did not find an increase in parent involvement at home. The program also appeared to influence teachers' perceptions of the value of parent involvement and of the possibilities for working effectively with parents from diverse backgrounds. Teachers in the intervention school reported using more varied strategies for communicating with and involving parents. In addition, "compared with teachers at the intervention school, comparison-school teachers were significantly more likely to name cultural differences between parents and teachers and the parents themselves as barriers to parent involvement" (p. 294).

Hampton, Mumford, and Bond (1998) reported on a 4-year study of Project FAST (Families Are Students and Teachers), "a multifaceted model of school improvement that relies on parent involvement, multiyear class assignments (kindergarten through second grade), effective teaching, summer enrichment, and team implementation" (pp. 413–414). The project was implemented in five kindergarten classrooms serving a low-income, predominantly (99 percent) African American community.

A major purpose of both the multiyear assignments and summer enrichment activities was to help in "establishing long-term and meaningful relationships between the home and school. . . Both of these program components allowed teachers and parents to have continuous year-round contact for 3 years" (p. 414). Staff emphasized that "parent involvement is a process, not an event," recognizing "that parent involvement occurs on various levels, at various times, and that parents' most critical support does not necessarily occur at the school" (p. 417). The project offered monthly parent workshops during the school year that classroom teachers planned and conducted. Workshops addressed "(a) knowledge and tools parents need to reinforce instruction, (b) creating a home environment that facilitates achievement, (c) the development of children's self-concept, and (d) discussions to enhance basic parenting skills" (p. 418).

Johnstone and Hiatt (1997) found that schools' outreach practices and the school principal's support for parent involvement were critical factors in increasing involvement.

In evaluating the program's impact, the researchers did not employ an experimental design. They compared the performance of students in Project FAST classrooms with the performance of other students in the same grade in the same school and with the performance of same-grade students districtwide. The study's authors noted that, despite the absence of experimental controls, confidence in the results was bolstered because the school principal randomly assigned students to teachers' classrooms before any teachers elected to participate in the project. Evaluation results showed that students who participated in Project FAST scored significantly better on standardized achievement tests in both math and reading.

Project FAST personnel offered one significant caution about the project's design: the need for careful selection of competent teachers. "Because Project FAST involves multiyear assignment[s]. . ., it is imperative that some screening of teachers take place. The many advantages of multiyear assignments can, in fact, become a distinct and aggravated impediment to student growth if the project teacher is incompetent" (pp. 424–425).

In their qualitative study, ***Johnstone and Hiatt (1997)*** found that schools' outreach practices and the school principal's support for parent involvement were critical factors in increasing involvement.

In their study of family involvement among Latino parents, ***Levine and Trickett (2000)*** observed, "typical circumstances that made parents feel welcome included being invited to school events, feeling that the principal had listened and offered plausible avenues for change, being treated respectfully by school personnel, being asked for their opinion, or having a teacher who was readily accessible, Spanish-speaking, or outspokenly grateful for parent input" (p. 129).

In their qualitative study of a literacy training program, ***Lopez and Cole (1999)*** found that the training could be linked to improvements in preschool Latino children's academic readiness skills. The researchers evaluated a program that trained parents of Puerto Rican kindergarten students to work with their children using a letter-recognition drill. They found that "all the parents, regardless of their English proficiency or educational level, were able to consistently implement the drill intervention. In addition, all five children made marked improvements on identifying letters" (p. 439). The study's small sample size (five children and their parents) limited the study's reliability.

In their qualitative study, Rodríguez-Brown, Li, and Albom (1999) found that a literacy training program increased parents' involvement both at school and at home.

López, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) conducted a qualitative study of four school districts serving large migrant populations. The districts also operated effective parental involvement programs (as judged by various agency personnel who recommended the programs). Three districts were in Texas and one in Illinois. The researchers conducted observations and interviewed both school staff and parents. The authors concluded that the main factor in the schools' success was "an unwavering commitment to meet the multiple needs of migrant families above all other involvement considerations" (p. 261). This meant addressing "the social, economic, and physical needs of migrant families" (p. 261). Home visits were a key tool in engaging families; "school personnel saw themselves as unrestrained agents who go out into the homes, bringing the school to migrant families where they are" (p. 281). This study was severely limited by its lack of objective measures.

Moon and Callahan (2001), in an experimental study, assessed the effectiveness of Project Support to Affirm Rising Talent (START). Project START included three components: mentoring, family outreach, and use of multicultural curricula. The family outreach component included training school personnel and employment of family outreach coordinators to develop and implement plans for involving families in their children's schooling. The project failed to show higher levels of achievement for students in the START cohort than in the comparison cohort. However, all students, including both intervention and comparison samples, were achieving at grade level. In addition, START students were placed in gifted and talented programs more frequently than comparison students were.

In their qualitative study of a literacy training program for Mexican immigrant parents, ***Rodríguez-Brown, Li, and Albom (1999)*** found that such training increased parents' involvement both at school and at home. The training program they studied focused on helping parents increase their early elementary-age children's opportunities for home literacy activities, model literacy activities, and read to their children and talk with them about books.

Because of inconsistencies in parents' participation, the researchers were not able to conduct pre- and post-training comparative analyses. The small sample size of mothers from 60 families also limited statistical analyses. Participating parents did report increases in home literacy activities, availability of literacy materials, and use of the public library. Mothers also reported increasing the frequency with which they read to their children.

Sanders (2000) conducted a qualitative study of two urban schools serving predominantly low-income, African American special needs students. The National Network of Partnership Schools had identified the schools as "excellent programs of partnership" (p. 39). She found that the use of multiple communication strategies and opportunities for parent decision making contributed to parents' increased participation. Communication strategies included a monthly newsletter, parent and faculty surveys, student notebooks that were sent home for parents' review, telephone calls from teachers, calendars, flyers, meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. Decision-making opportunities included "deciding topics at parent meetings, . . . helping to assess treatment needs of their children, . . .and planning for student transitions" (p. 46). Schools also conducted surveys seeking parents' opinions on a range of topics.

A PIQE study evaluated a program that consisted of eight parenting classes, which addressed basic parenting skills, family supports for children's learning, and the workings of the local school system.

In their qualitative study of "high-performing" South Texas schools with predominantly Hispanic populations—including three elementary, three middle, and two high schools, ***Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999)*** identified five "best practices" related to parent involvement: The schools "(1) build on cultural values of Hispanic parents, (2) stress personal contact with parents, (3) foster communication with parents, (4) create a warm environment for parents, and (5) facilitate structural accommodations for parents" (p. 52). Schools were identified as high-performing based on above-average scores on the Texas standardized student assessment, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.

Starkey and Klein (2000), using an experimental design (but with a relatively small sample), found that a family education program addressing family math had positive outcomes for both Latino and African American families. They conducted two related experimental studies, one with 28 African American children enrolled in a Head Start program and their mothers and the other with 31 Hispanic Head Start students and their mothers. Students were randomly assigned to control or intervention groups. In the intervention group, mothers participated in a program designed to enhance parents' support for their children's mathematical development. Pre- and post-tests indicated that parents increased their involvement and students developed more mathematics knowledge than those in the comparison group.

Zellman, Stecher, Klein, and McCaffrey (1998) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation study, focused on a California program for parents of minority, inner-city youth provided by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). Many of the participating parents were recent immigrants to the United States. The PIQE program consisted of eight parenting classes, taught in "the language most comfortable for parents" (p. 3). The classes addressed basic parenting skills, family supports for children's learning, and the workings of the local school system. An introductory session was devoted to soliciting parents' concerns about their children.

The evaluation was conducted in two large, urban school districts. In one district, evaluators focused on two elementary-level school sites, collecting teachers' reports "of student classroom behaviors and parent-school contact," as well as parents' reports. In the second district, evaluators looked at attendance records, student grades, and disciplinary actions in five elementary schools. Parents reported "substantial changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior" and increased involvement with their child's school (p. 8). Teachers "noted that parents seem less intimidated since PIQE" (p. 10).

However, there were "no effects of PIQE on teachers' assessments of parental involvement" in their children's academic performance (p. 11). There was also "a low correlation between teacher and parent reports of classroom visits" (p. 11). The evaluation found "no pre-post changes in student grades or behaviors when comparing students whose parents had participated in PIQE with those whose parents had not" (p. 13). In a separate analysis that included only Hispanic children, "there were very small, nonsignificant but consistent improvements in pre-post outcomes between those children with a PIQE graduating parent and those without one" (p. v).

Zellman, Stecher, Klein, and McCaffre did not use an experimental design but instead examined available data after the fact. The study relied heavily "on parent and teacher recall to assess change over time" (p. v). These authors also noted that they did not collect data from schools that had been involved with the program for multiple years.

Some studies suggest that, in seeking to close the achievement gap, it is necessary to address the complex interactions among family, community, and school. Focusing on only one of these sets of factors is not enough.

A small number of studies — most of them using correlational or comparative-population methods — have explored the complexities of interactions among minority and/or low-income families, schools, and the larger community. Some studies have attempted to identify risks and supports for students in these contexts and to explore the extent to which strengths or weaknesses in one setting can increase or mitigate risks in another setting ***(Brody et al., 2002; Campbell, Pungello, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Cook et al., 2002).*** Given the persistence of "deficit" perspectives related to minority and low-income families (see Chapter 2), it is not surprising that these studies tended to focus more strongly on family and neighborhood contexts rather than on schools.

In the course of exploring family involvement, some studies have observed the effects of what ***Sanders (1998)*** has labeled "total support" from families and schools. For example, a correlational study ***(Gutman & Midgley, 2000)*** found that middle school students with high levels of both parent and teacher support had better grades than their peers did. The authors concluded:

> These results suggest that rather than focusing exclusively on either parental involvement or the school environment, the combination of both family and school factors may be most effective in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the transition to middle level schools. (p. 223)

Similarly, a qualitative study of a parent-involvement program for immigrant families ***(Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999)*** concluded:

> We. . . did not find instances of either success or failure that could be explained solely by the types of events that occurred either at home or at school. Instead, we came to understand that, for these children, success in school was a complex process, dependent on both the actions of parents and teachers separately, and perhaps most importantly, on their interactions. Children who succeeded had parents and teachers who took actions that were, either by design or by accident, both complementary and consistent. (p. 107)

Though the research in this area is scattered and is limited by methodological concerns, it appears to point in a promising direction. It may be that "total support" from family, community, and school may be key to closing the achievement gap.

Campbell, Pungello, and Miller-Johnson (2002) found that "the predictive power of the early home environment weakened."

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Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, and Armistead (2002) studied the effects of specific parenting and classroom "processes" on "children's self-regulation and adjustment" (p. 274). The correlational study drew on a sample of 277 low-income, single-parent African American families with a child aged 7 to 15. Almost all of the families in the study had a per capita income of $3,800 or less. The study did not address children's academic achievement; rather, it used measures of children's "self-regulation" and adjustment. The study found that "classroom practices served a protective-stabilizing function for African American children when parenting was compromised, and vice versa " (p. 283).

Campbell, Pungello, and Miller-Johnson (2002) explored the roots of family, early education, and school achievement on low-income African American adolescents' sense of their own scholastic competence. The sample consisted of 88 participants in the Abecedarian Project, 87 of whom were African American. The results of the study

> . . .suggest that the provision of full-time high-quality educational intervention from birth through age 5 may decrease the influence of the early home environment on perceived scholastic competence, and that children without such intervention are influenced by the early home environment in the expected direction (i.e., higher quality home environment is associated with higher perceived scholastic competence). (p. 295)

However, the study also found that, as students moved into middle adolescence, "the predictive power of the early home environment weakened" (p. 295).

Cook, Herman, Phillips, and Settersten (2002) conducted a correlational study of "some ways in which schools, neighborhoods, nuclear families, and friendship groups jointly contribute to positive change during early adolescence" (p. 1283). They collected a variety of data on more than 25,000 middle school students from an urban county outside of Washington, DC; about half of the county's general population is African American. The authors found that "although social contexts were generally positively related in individual lives, they were generally only loosely related. Knowing the quality of any one context [e.g., family, school, neighborhood] did not help to reliably predict the quality of others, except for the friend-family link" (p. 1296). However, when the authors looked beyond the individual to an aggregate student level, things changed:

> Correlations between these same context indices were noticeably higher at the tract and school levels. Knowing the quality of a school or neighborhood permitted good prediction of the aggregated peer and family contexts that could be found within a school or neighborhood, and knowing the quality of any two contexts permitted quite accurate prediction of the quality of others. (p. 1296)

The authors examined the data by racial/ethnic group, though Latinos were dropped from the sample due to the small sample size, and no Native Americans were included in the original sample. The study found that "the same relation between joint social contexts and changes in the success index generally held across variation in gender, SES, family composition, elementary school CAT score, and even across Black and White students, although Blacks may have been more responsive to contextual quality than were Whites" (p. 1307). The one exception was Asian students, "who were not affected by the four contexts as measured in this study" (p. 1307).

Cook, Herman, Phillips, and Settersten concluded that "there appear to be no quick fixes during early adolescence. Improving the developmental quality of any one context will help; but it will not dramatically alter the multidimensional welfare of many young people" (p. 1307).

The correlational study by ***Gutman and Midgley (2000)*** indicated that "students with high levels of both parental involvement and perceived teacher support had higher grade point averages across the middle school transition than did their peers with high levels of one or none of these factors" (pp. 240–241). As a result, the authors concluded:

> These results suggest that rather than focusing exclusively on either parental involvement or the school environment, the combination of both family and school factors may be most effective in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the transition to middle level schools. (p. 223)

Gutman, Sameroff, and Eccles (2002) explored the effects of a number of risk, promotive, and protective factors on achievement for African American seventh graders. The correlational study looked at the effects on three different achievement-related measures: grade point averages, absences, and math achievement test scores. The authors used a sample of 807 students from a single countywide school district. These researchers interviewed both students and their mothers.

Risk factors in the study included mothers' education, depression, marital status, and number of children; stressful events in the family; family income; and several neighborhood factors. From these factors, the researchers compiled a "multiple risk score." Positive family factors included consistent discipline, democratic decision making, and parental involvement at school. Other positive factors included teacher and peer support.

Results indicated that "adolescents had lower grade point averages, more absences, and lower achievement test scores as their exposure to risk factors increased" (p. 367). Students who had lower multiple risk scores "were more likely to have mothers who provided consistent discipline and were involved in their school" (p. 382).

In their qualitative study of a family literacy program for immigrant families, ***Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999)*** concluded, "Contrary to commonly held beliefs, we did not find that parents' proficiency in English, years of education, or personal literacy skills played an important role in their ability to support their children's academic success" (p. 107). Rather, their study found that a complex set of both school- and family-related factors influenced students' success: "We. . . did not find instances of either success or failure that could be explained solely by the types of events that occurred either at home or at school. Instead, we came to understand that, for these children, success in school was a complex process, dependent on both the actions of parents and teachers separately, and perhaps most importantly, on their interactions. Children who succeeded had parents and teachers who took actions that were, either by design or by accident, both complementary and consistent" (p. 107) .

Sanders (1998), in a correlational study of 807 African American middle school students from a single school district, stressed the significance of what she called "total support" from family, school, and community (in this instance, church). She found that a combination of these supports magnified the positive associations of any one element with students' "attitudes about self and the importance of schooling" (p. 18). She linked three student factors to achievement (academic self-concept, achievement ideology, and school behavior), noting that academic self-concept positively influenced students' grade point averages. Sanders found that each of the support variables she studied (parent support, teacher support, and church involvement) was positively associated with student grades. However, only church involvement and teacher support had direct and significant associations with student achievement.

Putting the Research into Practice

Chapter 4

Much more research remains to be done in this field. Nevertheless, results from the studies described here offer some guidance to local school, community, and family leaders. Below are recommendations drawn from the findings of the 64 studies reviewed in this synthesis. Our recommendations should be taken as tentative—they are subject to the need for both local wisdom and further research.

The first set of recommendations addresses strategies for building relationships among schools, communities, and families of minority and low-income students. These strategies are not specifically linked to gains in student achievement. Rather, they focus on laying the groundwork for schools and minority and/or low-income families to develop ongoing working relationships. As ***Johnstone and Hiatt (1997)*** concluded, "Relationships are the foundation of parent involvement in schools" (p. 9). When programs and initiatives focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staffs, families, and community members, they are more effective in creating and sustaining connections that can support student achievement.

The second set of recommendations focuses specifically on strategies for helping families improve their children's academic performance.

For the most part, these recommendations address what schools can do. However, anyone can take the initiative in encouraging schools to increase or improve their family outreach and involvement activities. And there is a role for everyone—working in partnership offers the best chance for families, communities, and schools to support achievement for all students.

Building relationships among schools, communities, and families

- *Adopt formal school- and district-level policies that promote family involvement, including an explicit focus on engaging families who reflect the full diversity of the student population.* Several studies noted the importance of administrative support for family involvement in helping minority and low-income families to feel welcomed at school ***(Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000; Mapp, 1999).*** In addition, a multi-state survey of school district superintendents by Kessler-Sklar and Baker (2000) found that "few parent involvement programs are initiated in the absence of a formal district-level policy" (p. 113). Policies may address the following:

- communicating often with families, both formally and informally ***(Sanders, 2000; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999);***
- adapting materials and activities to accommodate the needs of families of all backgrounds, languages, and circumstances ***(McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999; Richman-Prakash, West, & Denton, 2002; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999);***
- emphasizing family and community outreach ***(Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; Mapp, 1999; Moon & Callahan, 2001);***
- involving families in school planning and decision-making processes ***(Leistyna, 2002; O'Connor, 2001);***
- training teachers to work effectively with families ***(Desimone, Finn-Stevenson, & Henrich, 2000; Moon & Callahan, 2001);*** and
- offering to help families build their own capacities to support their children's schooling ***(López, Scribner, & Mahitavanichcha, 2001).***

Support from principals made a difference in helping diverse families become more engaged with their children's school.

- *Demonstrate active and ongoing support from the school principal.* Echoing the broader research on school effectiveness and leadership, two studies noted that support from principals made a difference in helping diverse families become more engaged with their children's school ***(Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; Levine & Trickett, 2000).*** Principals can show their support by
  - communicating often with families (in their native language) through school newsletters, bulletins, and other written materials;
  - holding informal meetings with families to seek their perspectives and to keep them updated on school policies and practices;
  - maintaining a strong presence at parent-teacher meetings and at other school-sponsored events for families;
  - making the implementation of family-involvement policies a priority;
  - and emphasizing that commitment with both families and school staffs.
- *Honor families' hopes and concerns for their children.* Most families, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, or income, care about their children's future and do what they can to support them ***(Fan, 2001; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Mapp, 1999).*** If given opportunities and appropriate supports, they will do even more ***(Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; Lopez & Cole, 1999; Starkey & Klein, 2000).*** Find ways to let families know that you recognize and value their efforts. Let them know, too, that you appreciate the fact that their concern is for their children's general well-being. In orienting school staffs and community organizations to family-involvement strategies, include information on the varied ways in which families support their children's learning, as well as the varied perspectives as to what family involvement should address.
- *Acknowledge both commonalities and differences among students and families.* As noted above, the research studies included in this synthesis suggest that there are more similarities than differences in families' hopes and concerns for their children, no matter what their background. However, differences *do* exist in families' experiences, cultural values and practices, and world views. Seeking common ground while acknowledging and respecting differences is a challenging but essential process—for everyone involved.

It is important for schools and community organizations not to simply ignore issues related to diversity or to act as if differences don't exist. The study by ***Lareau and Horvat (1999)*** showed that ignoring racial issues, for example, can push parents and schools farther apart. Similarly, a report on community youth programs by the National Research Council (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) points out that "'institutional silence,' an atmosphere in which race is never mentioned, can lead to unspoken perceptions of discrimination and intergroup tensions; group differences must be acknowledged" (p. 99).

As these studies showed, acknowledging and valuing diversity means more than celebrating food or holidays. It means making room for a range of voices, perspectives, resources, and styles of interacting. One important way of valuing diversity is for the school staff to reflect the varied makeup of your community ***(Adger, 2001; López, Sánchez, & Hamilton, 2000).*** Another is to use families as resources for incorporating culturally relevant material into the local curriculum. ***Chen and Chandler (2000)*** note that, "to increase the involvement of parents of children in high-minority schools, schools may need to address cultural differences through multicultural awareness programs" (p. 32). And the National Research Council report on community youth programs emphasizes the importance of making instructional materials relevant to students' "community culture" (p. 108).

- *Strengthen school staffs' capacity to work well with families.* As ***Henderson and Mapp (2002)*** pointed out, "Few teacher preparation programs include instruction on how to partner with parents and community" (p. 65). Teachers need help to build both understanding and practical strategies for engaging effectively with families, particularly when those families' backgrounds and life circumstances are quite different from their own.

- *Provide supports to help immigrant families understand how schools work and what's expected of both families and students.* A number of studies indicated that lack of knowledge about U.S. schools' policies, procedures, and expectations hinder the at-school involvement of many immigrant families. Studies showed, too, that schools, community-based organizations, and other families can help orient families and facilitate their involvement ***(Adger, 2001; Birch & Ferrin, 2000; Levine & Trickett, 2000).***

  Think of school as a small country, with its own patterns of behavior and unwritten, as well as formal, rules and expectations. This might make it easier to find helpful ways to familiarize families with the ins and outs of that culture. This is particularly true for immigrant families, who likely have experienced a different kind of school culture. Use both formal and informal strategies to help families get oriented, from conversations in the parking lot to formal meetings and classes. Organize volunteers to meet with other families and to offer guidance in negotiating the school system. In addition, find resource people who can help orient school staffs to the backgrounds of students and families that may not be familiar to them.

- *Make outreach a priority; take the extra steps necessary to make it possible for families to get involved at school, as well as at home.* A number of studies stress the importance of outreach and "welcoming" practices (e.g., ***Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Mapp, 1999; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999).*** As these studies suggest, important elements in any outreach plan include

- ensuring that families and school staffs can communicate in the language with which family members are most comfortable. Have a bilingual teacher or translator available for all family conferences and meetings; hire teachers, aides, and other school staff who speak languages other than English; provide written materials in families' native languages; post welcoming signs and other information in the languages spoken in the community.
- making it as easy as possible for families to participate in school activities. For example, schedule meetings to accommodate working parents; work with volunteers or community-based organizations to help with child care and transportation. Organize parents who are actively involved at school to communicate with immigrant, newly arrived, and hard-to-reach families, and encourage their participation.
- finding multiple ways for families to get involved. Where possible, draw on families' experiences and interests, such as the project that engaged Latino immigrant families in fundraising by organizing them to make and sell piñatas (Birch and Ferrin, 2002).
- getting out into the community. Home visits are an important way of getting to know families and showing commitment to family involvement. Participating in community activities, such as church and social or civic events, is another way of getting to know, and becoming known by, the varied members of the school's community.

- *Recognize that it takes time to build trust.* As several studies described, many minority and low-income families have had frustrating experiences with schools and other public institutions ***(Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Auerbach, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).*** Until real commitment is shown, they may be unwilling to risk much in the way of time and energy or to speak their minds. Start with small steps. School- or community-sponsored services and activities that are relevant to families' needs, such as ESL or adult literacy classes, can serve as a "gateway" to other forms of family involvement ***(Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997).***

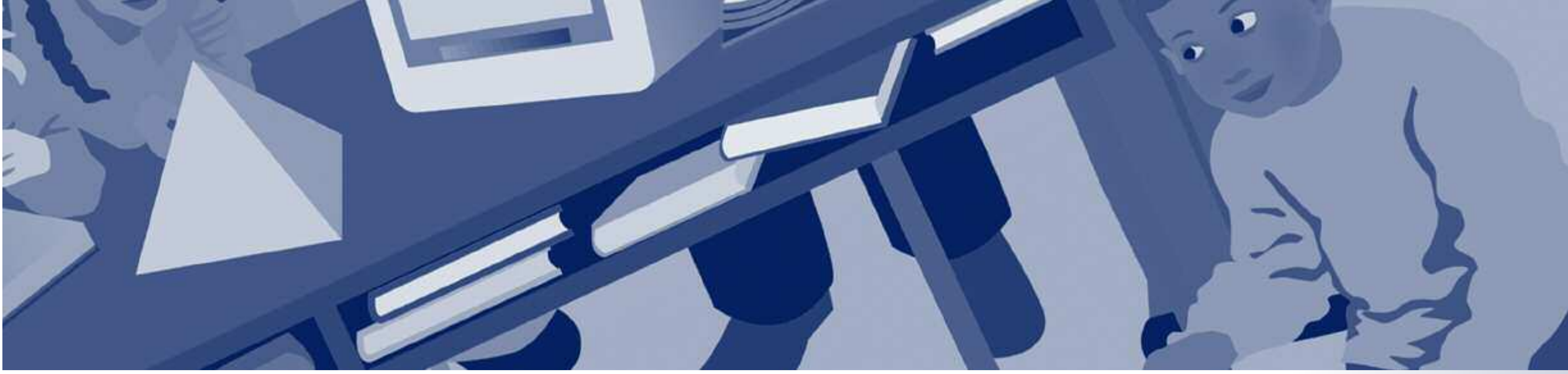
  Don't be offended or deterred by skepticism, suspicion, or criticism, or by low initial numbers. A report on Colorado's Even Start program found that parent participation increased significantly only after 2 years of local program operation (Anderson, 2000).

Helping families strengthen student achievement

The studies that have shown the most promising results tend to focus on preschool and kindergarten students, and on reading and math readiness.

- *Provide families with training and resources to support early literacy.* The studies that have shown the most promising results tend to focus on preschool and kindergarten students, and on reading and math readiness. (At least in part, this may be because a majority of interventions targeted the preschool level. As ***Henderson and Mapp (2002)*** observed, supports for family involvement are needed at all levels, preschool through high school.) Studies suggest that programs can support student learning by providing materials, especially books and other literacy materials; offering training for families, along with activities they can do at home; and facilitating families' awareness of the benefits of reading to young children ***(Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Mattingly et al., 2002; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999; and Starkey & Klein, 2000).***

- *Help families use specific communication and monitoring strategies to support their children's learning.* ***Gutman and McLoyd (2000)*** found that, among low-income African American families, families of higher achievers used "more specific strategies" to support their children at home. Examples of those strategies included tutoring children with practice lessons and problems, supervising their children's homework schedules, and focusing conversations "on encouraging their children to set and pursue goals" (p. 12).
- *Encourage and support students' involvement in a range of school- and community-sponsored extracurricular and after-school activities.* Take extra steps to support extracurricular and after-school involvement among minority and low-income students. This may involve working with church and other community-based organizations. It also may mean revisiting school policies that restrict extracurricular involvement. Some studies suggest that students' engagement in extracurricular activities may be linked to higher achievement—particularly activities that are linked to academic goals—and that extracurricular activities can help orient students to the rules and behavior patterns of school culture ***(Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999).***
- *Help low-income families obtain the supports and services they need to keep themselves safe, healthy, and well fed.* Studies have shown that economic stressors can have huge negative impacts on families' abilities to support their children; these, in turn, often impede children's progress in schools ***(Chin & Newman, 2002; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002).*** Schools can help by working with community-based organizations to set up school-linked service and referral programs ***(Adger, 2001; Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; López, Scribner, & Mahitavanichcha, 2001).***



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