Barriers and Facilitators to School-Based Parent Involvement for Parents of Urban Public Middle School Students

Key Details

KEY WORDS
Parent Involvement, Parent Engagement, Middle School, Parent Support

POPULATION GROUP
Racialized Youth; Youth Living in Poverty;

STEPPING UP THEMES
Strong, Supportive Friends & Families
Education, Training & Apprenticeships

RESEARCH ORIGIN
USA

SOURCE
Academic

"...schools can help increase school-based parent involvement by implementing more reliable and timely methods of communication, scheduling school meetings and events at varied or multiple times, and soliciting parents' ideas on other ways to overcome work- and scheduling-related barriers" (p. 9).

1. What is the research about?

This research looks at factors that make it easier and that make it harder for Black parents in a low-income, urban area to be involved in their children's education. "Parent involvement" refers to the time and resources that parents put into the school-related part of their children's lives, including setting up a positive home environment for learning, communicating with teachers, and having a positive attitude about learning themselves. Existing research shows that this type of involvement, especially during the key middle school years, helps improve how kids do in school, including getting higher grades and increasing their participation.

However, this time period also comes with greater challenges for involvement, due to the more impersonal nature of higher levels of education and teenagers' need for more independence. This is in addition to the variety of barriers specifically facing Black parents within low-income communities, such as limited resources, personal beliefs, and experiences of discrimination, which further limits their involvement. This study tried to better understand the factors that limit and encourage involvement from Black parents in this community in order to improve engagement in school programs. Importantly, as compared to a lot of other studies, the authors did this by interviewing parents specifically, instead of teachers or other school administrators.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research review took place in the United States.

3. Who is this research about?

The participants in this study are 44 primary caregivers (30 mothers, five fathers, and nine other caregivers), approximately half of whom had children who were in sixth grade and half of whom had children who were in the seventh grade. Thirty-nine of the participants identified as Black, and half of them reported earning an income of less than 15,000 USD.

4. How was the research done?

The researchers recruited caregivers from two schools, which were chosen due to issues with violence and child health and safety. Caregivers had to have a child in sixth or seventh grade who was not in any special education classes. The researchers developed a list of questions about "parent involvement" and barriers, and used it as a guide to interview each of the caregivers. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed (typed) word-for-word. Researchers then used special software to assist them in looking for common themes from the interviews, matching similar ideas among participants. These similar ideas and themes became the key findings of the study.

5. What are the key findings?

Based on their analysis, the researchers found several key motivators and barriers to these parents' involvement in their children's schooling, divided into three key themes:

Motivational Beliefs:

- Overall, parents said that it was important for them to be involved in their children's education, and they believed they had a key role to play in ensuring their children's success.
- Despite this, some parents said they were not as involved in their children's schooling as they would like to be, or believed that they should be.

Invitations for Involvement:

- Having their children invite them to be involved was one way that parents felt encouraged to become more engaged.
- When teachers were the ones to invite their involvement, parents said that it was often for mandatory parent-teacher conferences, and these meetings were usually hostile, discouraging parents from setting up future meetings.
- Parents said that there was poor communication about upcoming events, which created practical barriers to attendance (e.g. not enough time to get off work).
- Finally, parents stated that "aggressive" students and an unwelcoming school environment further created barriers to their involvement.

Personal Life Barriers:

- The number one personal barrier to involvement was issues with work and scheduling time for attending school and engagement efforts.
- Having multiple demands on their time (e.g. two jobs, housework, child care) left parents with little physical energy and personal resources to get involved in school engagement.
- Some parents may also feel that they do not have the personal skills or education to meaningfully support their children, which may create additional barriers.

6. Why does it matter for youth work?

Based on these findings, the authors give some practical advice for people working in school environments to help create stronger parent-school relationships and greater parent engagement. These include:

- Using more accessible, reliable ways to communicate with parents, such as texting.
- Scheduling school meetings and other events at varying times and/or multiple sessions to increase attendance.
- Speaking with parents directly to ask how to make it easier for them to participate.

Youth workers and other helping professionals can also work on both ends to improve parent-teacher relationships, by educating teachers and staff about the importance of facilitating these bonds and by encouraging parent visits and listening to parent concerns.

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