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Simon, Beth Shara (2000)*Predictors of High School and Family Partnerships and the Influence of Partnerships on Student Success*

Baltimore, MD: Doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University

Summary: This study used a large, long-term national database (NELS:88) to explore how high schools, families, and communities connect to support student achievement. It found that these connections have a positive influence on student success. It also found that schools' practices to engage families increase parent involvement.

How do schools, families, and the community connect to support adolescents? Although researchers have looked at partnerships in elementary and middle schools, much less is known about high schools. This study examines family and community connections with high schools, the effects on students' success, and the influence of high school outreach on family involvement.

This study used NELS:88 data for about 11,000 students, those with complete data through the follow-ups in 1990 and 1992. Family involvement was measured by family, school administrator, and student responses to questions about

- **parenting:** parents monitoring students' time and activities, making decisions about rules, discussing school and college plans, spending fun time together, attending college planning workshops.
- **communicating:** school contacting parents about program, courses, and information to help student; parents contacting school about student's program and courses.
- **volunteering:** parents helping at school, taking part in the parent organization.
- **learning at home:** parents reporting knowing how and what teen is doing in school; students reporting talking with parents about courses, activities, and grades; both report talking about school.
- **decision making:** parents reporting having enough/wanting more influence on school policies; administrators reporting on parent influence on school policies (like tracking, hiring, discipline, budget).
- **collaborating with community:** parents participating in community service programs, establishing partnerships with business and community groups.

Student achievement measures include test scores and grades in English and math, number of course credits, absences, school behavior, and school preparedness. Simon used regression analysis to test the influence of race, ethnicity, family structure, gender, prior student achievement, and family income and background.

School outreach to families was measured by reports on whether the school contacted parents about

- teens' academic program, plans after high school, and course selection.
- teens' attendance and behavior.

- parents' taking part in school fund-raising or volunteer work.
- schools' providing parents with information on how to help teen at home with skills or homework.

Through a series of regression analyses, Simon tested how parents' reports on their high schools' outreach activities predicted involvement in parenting, volunteering, and learning at home activities. She then tested how administrator reports of schools' outreach predict their ratings of families' involvement in parenting, volunteering, and decision-making practices.

Findings

Simon found that families and communities do participate in a range of partnership activities to support students through high school. Parent involvement increases with support from the school. For example, when school staff members contact parents about these opportunities, parents are more likely to

- attend planning workshops and talk to their teenagers about college and employment.
- volunteer as audience members at school activities.
- work more often with their teenagers on homework.
- talk with teenagers more often about school.

Her analysis also found positive effects of partnerships on students' success. Involvement in parenting, volunteering, learning at home, and decision-making activities was related to

- higher grades in English and math.
- more completed course credits in English and math.
- better attendance and behavior.
- increased preparedness for class.

Simon found stronger relationships between partnership practices and student outcomes that were logically linked. For example, parents' attending college-planning workshops and talking to students about college were linked more to better grades and courses completed than to behavior and attendance.

Conclusions

Contrary to popular belief, many teens do spend time with their families, and families matter for teens' school success. Simon's findings suggest that schools can increase family partnerships by reaching out to parents. She cautions, however, that NELS:88 data are limited because NELS:88 does not address the quality of families' or schools' involvement practices. Ideally, research should be able to contrast schools with strong and weak partnerships to test the influence of these varying practices on student outcomes and family involvement.

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This study concludes that while families already support student learning in various ways during high school, schools may influence the directions in which families guide teenagers' success in school. Students and their families deserve research-based partnership programs to ensure student success in high school and later in life. Simon calls for research to "shed new light on the complex relationships among schools, families and communities to help all students succeed" (p. 239).

Comprehensive partnership programs send consistent messages to all families that their involvement is wanted and needed to best support teens as learners. Unless high schools meet challenges to communicate with and invite all families to partner with the school, some families may miss out on important opportunities to support their teens' education. (p. 131)