

## **Understanding Parental Involvement in American Public Education**

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### **Abstract**

*To understand parental involvement in American public schools it was important to examine the literature on the evolution of parent involvement in education in America in terms of its development and policy perspective. Further, the review of the literature examined parent involvement overall, including the purpose and impact of parent involvement as well as the barriers to parent involvement and parents' motivation for involvement.*

### **Introduction**

American parental involvement in the welfare of children had long been a concern of public officials. Family involvement in the welfare of children in both health and education spanned decades. The recognition of the value family involvement played in the healthy development of children had origins spanning thirty years (Dokken & Ahmann, 2006). Relative to the care of children's health, PL99-457 required the development of individualized family service plans that mandated a family centered approach and family and professional collaboration. Likewise, family involvement in education had a similar history.

According to Trotman (2001) parent involvement was designed to create a partnership that allowed for greater collaboration between home and school for the expressed purpose of improved student outcomes. It was intended to enhance the school's capacity to understand and appreciate values and cultures of families and be more effective in meeting student needs. Parent involvement in education was important because it added value to the educational development of students of all ages and populations (Ascher, 1988; Hickman, Greenwood & Miller, 1995; Rhine, 1981, as cited in Wehlberg, 1996; Montesinos, 2004). Wehlberg (1996) also indicated that parent involvement programs might require making opportunities available for some parents while having to provide knowledge and skills for other parents so they could learn how to be involved and feel comfortable taking advantage of the opportunities to be involved. Parent involvement was by definition ambiguous and was often discussed in terms of inconsistent categories or types of parent involvement. Wehlberg (1996) cited Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) who defined parental role in the two categories of home based activities such as helping with homework and school-based activities such as tutoring and volunteering in schools.

Parental role was defined in six categories: (a) traditional (parent as audience or bystander-observer), (b) parent as a decision maker (PTA), (c) parent as a classroom volunteer, (d) parent as a paid paraprofessional or teacher's aide, (e) parents as learners (participants in child development or parenting classes), and (f) parents as teachers of their own students at home (Gordon, 1977; Bauch, Vietze, & Morris, 1973, as cited in Wehlberg, 1996).

According to Wehlberg (1996) and Epstein (1988), parent involvement was: (a) basic obligations of the parent (health, safety, etc.), (b) basic obligations of the schools (schools communicate to parents about programs/progress), (c) parent involvement in schools (volunteering and participating in extracurricular activities, sports, plays, etc.), (d) parent involvement in learning activities in the home (parents initiating activities with their child or child initiating help through questions), and (e) parent involvement in Governance and Advocacy (parents assume decision making roles). Jasso (2007) indicated there were still other definitions of parent involvement; however, he pointed out that often while social factors had been blamed for children's school failure, more in-depth examination revealed that parental intervention had a greater impact on student success than socioeconomic status and family dynamics. Further, he suggested that parental involvement extended beyond simply ensuring homework was completed successfully or attendance at Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. Luneburg and Irby (2002) reported that parental expectation for their children's achievement—participating in school activities, offering encouragement, and providing home learning environments—produced more positive outcomes for children.

Capitalizing on parent involvement, according to Luneburg and Irby (2002), required strategies to help parents decide how they will become involved in the school, how they will receive support from the school, and how school, family, and community partnership could better enhance student achievement. Schools must recognize there was no one-size-fits-all model for school-parent partnerships, but the model chosen should reflect site-based goals for revitalization and student success. Parents varied in their beliefs about their role in the education of their child (Jasso, 2007; Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan & Ochoa, 2002). However, Wehlburg (1996) pointed out that parent involvement had a positive effect on the achievement of students and that all parents should be viewed as having valuable resources to contribute to increased student learning.

### **Historical Evolution of Parental Involvement**

Hiatt (1994) highlighted the fluctuations in parent involvement over the decades and noticed changes in both the level and type of parent involvement in education, from the seventeenth century forward. In the early years, education of children was the primary responsibility of the parents, with little or no formal involvement from a structured educational entity. As the American population began to experience a swell in immigration, the large cities, like farming communities, began using children in the labor force until organized unions protested and disrupted the practice. This left a large population of youth roaming the streets with nothing to occupy their time and appeared threatening to some. This coupled with the viewpoint from some that many of these parents were low-skilled, uneducated, and therefore unable to properly educate children equipped to improve society, caused parents to begin to lose control of educating their children, as more formalized public schools began to spring up across the nation. Continued formalization and standardization of the teaching and learning processes in education evolved over time, which caused parents to be more and more detached from the education of their children (Hiatt, 1994). Over time, however, parents resisted this isolation and devaluing of their contributions to their children's education and pushed back by forming the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, the forerunner to the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This group's intent was to counter the exclusion of parents in the education of their children.

Martinez (2004) offered a chronology of parent involvement in education in America. She noted that post World War II (WWII), in 1945, parent involvement focus included parents' participation in school-based activities such as parent conferences, PTA meetings, fundraising events and serving as school monitors. Most was mother-focused, with roles like room mothers. During the 1960s, more policy evolved that touted parent involvement as a promising way to improve education for poor and disadvantaged children. This resulted in various parent involvement mandates and models of parent involvement that focused on movements for community control of education—integration of African American and Latino children.

Coupled with a focus on compliance versus partnering with parents, the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s presented an era of research designed to address the federal mandates related to parent involvement, yet increased parent involvement did not translate into decision-making and governance roles for parents. During the same era, the President Reagan administration withdrew federal mandates and best practices, and parent involvement models began to emerge. Presently, parent involvement mandates, movements for community control of education, and the continued quest to develop and implement effective parent involvement strategies continue (Martinez, 2004).

According to Pattnaik and Rajalakshmi (2010), the role of parent involvement was most often affiliated with the role of mother; however, beginning in the 1960s, more attention focused on the father's role in childrearing and education. Over recent decades, the father's role in the family continued to be redefined by the era of expectations of the time. These roles evolved from the preindustrial era through modern time, to include clearly defined stages from moral teacher, breadwinner, and gender role model, to nurturing father. Pattnaik and Rajalakshmi (2010) also pointed out research that highlighted the evolution of fatherhood from the 1900s to present times, classified from the stern patriarch, to the distant breadwinner, to the co-parent or involved father.

Research confirmed that parent involvement had moved from education being the primary responsibility of the family to an almost hands off approach from the family and back again. Over time, parents have come to be viewed as critical partners in the education of their children. As parent involvement was defined and clarity regarding roles emerged, the dialogue between parents and professionals provided opportunities to develop new and effective strategies for innovative and authentic home-school partnerships (Hiatt, 1994). The creation of such partnerships served to fulfill the various policy mandates for parent involvement in the education of children.

### **Parental Involvement and Public Policy**

It was also clear that policymakers and school practitioners recognized parent involvement's importance to the success of school programs; it was included in policy at the state and national levels and mandated at local levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Hiatt (1994) posited that though parent involvement policy extended back as far as the seventeenth century, parent involvement policies that focused on disadvantaged children surfaced in the 1960s with federally funded policy and continued today. The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, which was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001, clearly indicated that parent involvement was a significant factor in improving educational outcomes for students (Parent Plus, n.d.).

Parent involvement policy dated back as early as 1642, when the Massachusetts colony passed a law that required all parents to provide their children with an education in reading, religion, and trade. Given that all parents were not adequately equipped to comply with such a law, education soon fell under the purview of the government (Hiatt, 1994). According to McLaughlin and Shields (1986), efforts to involve parents of disadvantaged children in their child's education surfaced in the 1960s, despite earlier parent involvement policies. Project Headstart was enacted in 1964 and was the first federally funded legislation as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty," with explicit requirements relative to the involvement of parents; it was intended to support disadvantaged children in inner cities (Hiatt, 1994). This law was followed by passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, which required that parents serve on school advisory boards and participate in classroom activities. Policy related to the handicapped was passed in 1974, which required parents to be active partners in educational decisions related to their children (Hiatt, 1994; Jones, 2010). In addition to the Headstart Project in 1964, ESEA in 1965, and the Handicap Act in 1974, other policy related to the involvement of parents in education included the Economic Opportunity Act P.L. 88-452; Follow Through, 1967; and the Bilingual Education Act, 1968; all of which required parent participation in the development and implementation of school programs in advisory or collaborative roles (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986).

Parent involvement in education continues to be considered important. The America 2000 Act, mandating parent involvement, was signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton, (Coleman, 1991). While policy mandated for the inclusion of parents in the development of education programs for students had a history that spanned several decades, no policy was more specific than No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Section 1118, regarding the role families should play in education. This policy connected the development of parent involvement policy with the receipt of federal dollars more succinctly than any other policy regarding this issue (Webster, 2004). Continued concern about the expanding roles required for schools to manage beyond education prompted policymakers to commission a policy paper on the involvement of parents in education.

Coleman (1991), the author of the commissioned policy paper, reported that the diminishing role of the family as both fathers and mothers migrated from the farm and home into the workforce left a void in the family's role relative to teaching things that in the past had been a primary function of the family. Character and skills, values that traditionally were taught in the normal execution of daily tasks and chores, were now being relegated to the schools unless there was conscious effort and structures in the home to address them.

While it was clear that policymakers see the need to include parent involvement in laws impacting education reform, there still remained work to be done in these areas as parent involvement continued to be a challenge for some populations, according to O'Bryan, (2006). They contended that policymakers should also consider the role extracurricular activities such as sports play in connecting African American parents to schools. Their research demonstrated that this was a fertile opportunity to engage more African American parents and increase their level and type of involvement. Parents in their study revealed that they generally had conversations with teachers about academic issues while engaging in athletic and other after school functions.

Epstein (2005) discussed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirement of parent involvement in schools; the discussion was from a sociological perspective, which suggested that parent involvement should be revamped to allow for more equitable and effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships. State, local, and school authorities must be engaged in professional development programs designed to equip teachers and employees to meet the task of engaging parents on all levels to develop effective partnerships. Any school that received Title I dollars was required to include parent involvement as a part of the school and classroom organization. Parent involvement plans must articulate how parents will be involved as partners in the design and decision-making stages of these programs. Parent involvement programs must recognize parents as partners with shared responsibilities for children learning, and parent involvement must be designed to reach the hard to reach parents, those not typically or easily engaged in the act of schooling. NCLB required that communication with parents was clear, useful and in languages that all parents understood. It stressed equity for all parents.

#### Benefits of Parental Involvement

The research on parent involvement was clear about the positive impact it had on student achievement outcomes; the impact was seen in improved attendance, behavior, grades and efforts in completing homework, and it extended beyond elementary school and included the special needs population (Morris & Taylor, 1997; Deslandes, Royer, Potvin & Leclerc, 1999; Hornby, 2011). According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987), while great value was placed on improved parent-teacher relationships, research suggested that parent involvement remained a challenging goal to meet in schools.

Price (2002) addressed the importance of parent involvement in the lives of children. He reported that according to the Carnegie Task Force on Learning, the primary grades, the early years from three to ten, were a crucial age-span in a young person's life. For most children, long-term success in learning and development depended to a great extent on what happened to them during these potentially promising formative years (Price, 2002; Lau, Li & Rao, 2011). Price (2002) went on to say that even though many parents believed the school system was not set up to prepare their children for academic success, enough research and pockets of successful schools existed to show that children could be educated well if there was a commitment to them, regardless of unfavorable odds. African American parents, like other parents, must realize that their involvement in school was crucial to their child's development and engagement in the act of learning, and that these are critical years in the child's life.

When parents chose to become involved at school, they were showing their children how important education was to them and gave value to their child's education (Price, 2002; Jasso, 2007; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Student benefits were evident when there was a positive partnership between home and school (Trotman, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Zellman & Waterman, 1998; Cakiriglu, 2004). The school also benefited from having supportive parents (Trotman, 2001).

Promoting child welfare was also a critical point as children were more likely to thrive when parents were involved and built supportive relationships as adults and caretakers. Parent involvement served to reverse disappointing school performance and created an emotionally supportive environment. There was data on the impact of parent involvement substantiating improved academic and nonacademic outcomes for children, which included longitudinal studies relative to parent involvement at home (Wehlberg, 1996; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Jasso, 2007).

Research suggested that when parents took a personal interest in the education of their children, several things happened. The child got a strong message that education was important to success in life; it was not something that parents dump in someone else's lap. Caring, involved parents usually instilled in their children a love of learning—a love that translated into a sense of pride and achievement as knowledge was accumulated and put to good use (Williams, 2000; Jackson, 2010).

The characteristics of parent involvement were multi-faceted and included school-based and home-based activities and initiatives, parents serving as advocates, and parents as teachers and encouragers (“National,” n.d.). Research consistently demonstrated that increased parent involvement yielded increased student achievement (Jesse, n.d.; Ramirez, 2001; Trotman, 2001; Weiss, et al., 2003; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). There was sufficient evidence that suggested when there was a school-family-community partnership students' benefited (“National,” n.d.). Specific types of parent involvement appeared to offer considerable benefits to student achievement: programs that were linked to learning, programs that allowed parents to speak up for their children, programs that allowed families to make contributions to students' learning, and programs that included organizing community resources and support.

Over a period of time and across many studies, parent involvement surfaced as a critical benefit to child and adolescent school achievement (Hoover-Dempsey-Walker & Sandler, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). According to Peterson and Kreider, (n. d.), students with involved parents, no matter what their background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enrolled in higher-level programs, be promoted and earned credits, adapted well to school and attended regularly, had better social skills and behaviors, and graduated. Such students were apt to participate in some form of post-secondary education.

According to Lee and Bowen (2006), there was a positive relationship between family demographic characteristics and achievement outcomes. Parent involvements at school and parent education expectations reflected the strongest association with children's educational achievement. Further, parents' higher educational expectations for their children were associated with higher academic achievement across demographic groups. This was consistent with other findings that indicated the importance of high expectation, although it was weaker for children who participated in free and reduced lunch programs; it was indicative of lower levels of human, cultural, and social capital in lower income homes (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Though parent involvement positive impact on student achievement for children was widely accepted by researchers, educators and policymakers, parent involvement by definition continued to be inconsistent, according to Jesse (n.d.). Jesse (n.d.) went on to say that parent involvement continued to be challenging because of the lack of understanding of the barriers and feasible solutions to those barriers. A critical barrier, according to Jesse (n.d.), was the absence of a consistent definition for parent involvement. He indicated that many researchers have offered up a variety of definitions for parent involvement for all populations of students of all ages (Jesse n.d.).

The article, “Literature Review,” (2007) raised questions about the empirical data supporting overwhelming claims of the positive impact parent involvement had on student achievement. This issue also raised questions of how parent involvement and achievement were defined and whether any studies offer empirical evidence to support a generally accepted claim that parent involvement was supportive of student achievement. Other researchers, such as Moorman and Pomerantz (2010), suggested that parent involvement could have a negative impact on student achievement. Their research treated as critical the mother's mindset relative to the child's malleability to parents' influence. Their position was that an entity mindset, which suggested that ability was fixed, spurred interactions that were controlling and more directives, produced situations in which challenge was threatening and negatively impacted the child. These parents saw children's poor performance as a permanent deficit that led to unconstructive involvement. On the other hand, an incremental mindset produced a positive outcome for children because the premise was that children's abilities were malleable and could be developed. Parents with an incremental mindset engaged in constructive involvement that encouraged children to develop competence. The parents' view of poor performance by their child was that it could be changed and focused to help children become mastery oriented. They were supportive and encouraging, which taught their children to generate their own strategies. Contributing to this issue was the lack of clarity relative to the when, what, and how of parent involvement. Schools tended to dictate when parents should be involved, in which activities they should be engaged, and how they should be engaged in those activities (Zellman & Waterman, 1998).

On the other hand, some parents wanted full involvement in the management and decision-making of the school operations relative to programs, staffing, and budgeting (Jesse, n.d). There had to be a meeting of the minds, and the concept of parent involvement must be evolved to reflect the changes in today's familial and societal structure and viewpoints (Jesse, n.d.; Price-Mitchell, 2009).

### **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Barriers to parent involvement could be attributed to school practices and perceptions as an institution and the perceptions parents brought to bear relative to their role and life situation (Trotman, 2001; Schultz, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Trotman (2001) asserted that the schools were required to assume more and more responsibilities that were once performed by parents, and often this became a barrier, which could contribute to a school's less-than-positive approach to parent involvement. Additional issues stemmed from changes in the family dynamics, which might limit involvement due to busy schedules, childcare issues, dual family employment, role perception and role construct. Jasso (2007) suggested that parents' perceived barriers could be partially to blame for any inconsistencies that might exist between parental involvement beliefs and behaviors. Effective communication, efficacy, lack of adequate information, and perceptions of whether teachers want them to be involved contributed to the problem.

The multiple responsibilities of work, school, and family had converged to create a dilemma for minority and low-income families (Weiss et al., 2003). These families had a strong desire to be involved in their children's education. Specifically noted by Weiss et al. (2003), women appeared to be more affected by this dilemma than men because they bore the primary responsibility for managing work and family. This might be true of both single and married women. Weiss et al. (2003) suggested that working mothers utilized a variety of support strategies to compensate for their inability to be involved, which spoke to these mothers' initiative and self-efficacy.

Trotman (2001) suggested that contributing to the problem of low parent involvement in urban schools was the inconsistency of the definition of parent involvement, which represented a plethora of definitions that included parents being active with ongoing participation in a child's education. She noted Epstein's classification system, which included school and home interactions and activities, communication, providing home learning activities and parents serving as decision-makers. Further, she highlighted Weitock's notation of "'high' parental involvement," defined as parents who attend PTA meetings and school programs. Additionally, Trotman (2001) noted as a barrier the disparities between parents' perception of parent involvement and schools and policymakers' perception of parent involvement. Other barriers included school-imposed barriers such as not taking time to contact parents until there was a problem. Parents indicated that this approach was problematic for parents and did not serve to encourage meaningful parent participation.

Jasso (2007) pointed out that parent involvement varied between ethnic groups because of home experiences and parenting styles impacted involvement. He reported that African American and Hispanic parents were less involved and had less knowledge about their children's need than their Caucasian counterparts and suggested more research should be done to determine why and develop remedies. He further posited that variables such as low academic achievement, poverty, lack of resources, etc., and "teacher's negative attitudes" might contribute to the problem, but does not explain this parental gap (p.11). Jasso (2007) grouped barriers into four (4) categories: (a) Communication; (b) Personal/Life factors affecting availability of resources; (c) Role of Construction, Efficacy and School Environment; and (d) Socioeconomic Status.

Bracey (2001), on the other hand, suggested that the working poor had less time to devote to their children because they lacked paid sick time. Smith and Wohletter (2009) suggested that educators could lack awareness and appreciation for the invisible strategies minority or low-income parents used to support their children's education. Such things as making sacrifices so children could attend better schools, limiting children's chores to allow for more study time, and transmitting the lessons of hard work, all demonstrated that cultural narratives were a form of parent involvement that might not be recognized by traditional models. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) explored ideas and attitudes about education, with a focused on factors that contribute to parents' participation in home and school based activities; they examined the source (e.g. culture, community, institutionalized norms) and nature of parents' ideas about schooling. They reported that the low instance of parent involvement does not reflect parental lack of interest; instead, such factors as time, distance, and daycare obligations were cited.

In essence, the inclusion of parents was left up to the schools; parents' voice could easily go unheard, and this could lead to a negative impact on the family-school dynamic. How parents perceived their roles could be a function of how the school organization treated them. Swap (1993), as cited in Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001, suggested that despite high verbal support for parent involvement, parents continued to be kept at a distance in most schools. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) contended that parents' valued education and would like to be more involved, but their involvement was limited by the sense that their roles were distinct from those of schools. School officials assumed that parents were too lazy, incompetent, or preoccupied to participate in school programs; such enduring beliefs that limit communication between the home and school led to bitter confrontations about academics and behavior. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) suggested the need for democratic classrooms (Henry, 1996), as a concept of mutual, communal and equitable exchange, which will benefit the students' achievement. They contended that the more "democratic" classroom concept would diminish conflicts, closed the gap between parents and schools and offered more choice in the ways families could demonstrate participation. This fact was supported by Morris (2004) examination of two high-performing, high-minority elementary schools and the strategies they used to achieve success, which included parent outreach. These schools made room for alternate types of parental involvement and met with success. According to Comer (2005), dysfunctional schools themselves tended to serve as barriers to parent involvement.

In "Involving the African American Parent: Recommendations to Increase the Level of Parent Involvement," Trotman (2001) noted that African American children were failing at record rates and parent participation was low, but he concurred with other researchers that parent involvement significantly impacted Urban schools, which accounted for 43% of the minority school population that usually resided in poverty. Parent involvement for these students had a significant impact on student achievement and cognitive development, and it could have a positive impact on the parent-child relationship and student behavior. Frazier (1997) found a significant inverse correlation between parent involvement and student suspension—as parent involvement increased, student suspension decreased, yet parent involvement outreach efforts in Urban settings continued to meet with minimal success (as cited in Trotman, 2001).

To improve involvement of African American and Urban parent's schools, there needed to be deliberate outreach strategies designed to include hard to reach and disconnected parents (Trotman, 2001). This was part of the Goals 2000 legislation, which mandated parent involvement of minority and hard-to-reach parents. Success with increasing the parent involvement of African Americans might depend more on how schools sought to engage them than on their response rates in general (Hollifield, 1995, as cited in Trotman, 2001). School choice for Urban students had been offered as a remedy for improving parent involvement and student achievement through both magnet and charter school options (Hiatt, 1994). Some fifteen states, Tennessee and Utah included, specifically stated in their Charter School Law that one purpose of Charter Schools was to afford and provide parents substantial, meaningful opportunities for parent involvement, yet it remained a struggle. Smith and Wohlsetter (2009) examined whether these choice options themselves served to eliminate barriers and increase parent involvement. Their research suggested that charter and magnet schools continued to struggle to overcome the same barriers as traditional public schools.

There was no shortage of evidence that parent involvement was important to the academic welfare of students in all populations and at all levels (Epstein, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; "Parent Plus," n.d.; Trotman, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Ramirez, 2001). More than twenty years of research indicated that children benefited from parent involvement. Parents, teachers, and schools identified it as the most important factor in the success of children. Strong parent involvement in education was one of the elements essential for cognitive, social-emotional development and success of children in education. Effective parent involvement depended on various factors, which included culture, socio-economic status, and personal experience of parents (Cakiroglu, 2004).

### **Motivation as the Key to Parental Involvement**

Research on parent involvement was moving from the "what" of parent involvement to the "why" of parent involvement. Understanding why parents may or may not choose to become involved in their child's education provided a framework to help schools develop effective parent involvement programs (Sheldon, n.d.). Green et al. (2007) reiterated the notion that parent involvement was associated with improved student outcomes, but noted that much less was known about the factors that motivated parents to become involved.

According to Sheldon (2002), parent involvement was now commonly accepted as essential to improve education, and many resources and policies had attempted to increase parental involvement, but it remained elusive and challenging in some schools. Sheldon's examination of the impact of parent social networks as predictors of involvement indicated that parents benefited from the social capital derived from being a part of such networks; benefits included increased efficacy, knowledge, and skills. Walker et al. (2010) reported a conceptual model that provided insights needed to understand why parents may or may not choose to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). This model was based on the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1986) and examined the parents' perceptions of their role, their ability, the outcome, the invitation to be involved, and the availability of other resources such as time, energy, knowledge, and skills.

Martinez, Thomas and Kremer (1994) suggested that research on school choice could shed some light on why parents got involved in schools, as choice was viewed as a form of parent involvement that affects student outcomes. They suggested, based on their research of who chose and why, that parents' primary reasons for choice were education quality, followed by learning climate, discipline, and the general atmosphere of the school. School Choice, in theory, gave parents a wider range of options to influence the quality of their child's education but was not an automatic lever to increase parent involvement (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994).

Parent motivation might be affected by the parent's sense of roles relative to personal motivation, invitation, and life context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Jones 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These three aspects of parent motivation might be further specified according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). Personal motivation could be seen as what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) described as parental role constructs and parental efficacy. Parental role constructs referred to the "parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education," a parent's sense of responsibility (p. 2). Parental self-efficacy was, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), "the extent to which parents believe that through their involvement they could exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes," a parent's sense of empowerment (p. 2). Invitation referred to the origin of the invitation—whether it was a general school invite, a specific school invite, or a specific child invite—which they described as "parents' perceptions that the child and school wanted them to be involved" (p. 2). Life context examined the parent's perception of their time and energy, knowledge, and skills (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). To effectively involve parents in the education process will not just require knowledge about why parents choose whether or not to engage, but educators must deliberately identify and remove barriers to parent involvement (Trotman, 2001; Jesse, n.d).

### **Summary**

This article addresses the historical evolution of parental involvement, parental involvement in public policy, barriers to parental involvement and motivational issues related to parental involvement. Parent involvement was critical to students' success and was fraught with the same issues in 1957 as parents face today in many schools. It's exceptional an issue for urban schools where the challenge of education children is complicated by the lack of parental involvement. This article provides insight into practices schools and communities can employ to engage parents today. It highlighted implications for parent involvement for parents, students, school practitioners and policymakers. It also provides a unique perspective on an aspect of American public education that may not be common in other countries.

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