



Spotlight on *The Evidence*

A continuing column highlighting the research from “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement” by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp.

This month we spotlight a 2001 longitudinal analysis conducted as part of the National Assessment of Title I. This piece of research can be found on page 195.

“The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools, Volume I: Executive Summary:

Identified in *The Evidence* as the Westat Policy Studies Associates, this particular piece of research was not designed to study parent involvement per se. However, it did discover that parent involvement, if established as a policy and practice at schools, is a factor in improved reading and mathematics achievement.

This piece of research was the first major study to examine the impact of standards-based reform practices on student achievement. Conducted between 1996 and 1999, it is a longitudinal analysis as a part of the National Assessment of Title I. Twelve hundred students from 71 schools in 7 states took part in the study that examined data from assessments administered each spring as students moved from the third grade through the fourth and fifth grades.

This study drew on several sources of data: standardized reading and mathematics achievement test scores, teacher surveys, district administrator and principal interviews, classroom observations, focus groups of school staff and parents, and documents regarding school districts’ policies related to standards-based reform. It traced the students’ achievement scores and examined the effect of a number of student and school-level variables involving school practices, teacher preparation, and reform policies on both initial achievement and changes over time.

Parent involvement was measured by the extent to which teachers reached out to parents of low-achieving students by:

- Meeting face to face.
- Sending materials on ways to help their child at home.
- Telephoning both routinely and when their child was having problems.

Key Findings as They Relate to Parent Involvement and Reading Achievement

When third-grade teachers were especially active in outreach to low achievers’ parents, students made faster gains in reading over the next 2 years, gaining 4.6 points more than students whose teachers made only an average amount of outreach. In addition, in schools where all third grade teachers were especially active in outreach to low achievers’ parents, students gained an additional 3.7 points by fifth grade. Third-grade classrooms with generally low achievement tended to be the ones in which teachers reported contacting more parents of low achievers.

Key Findings as They Relate to Parent Involvement and Mathematics Achievement

Outreach to parents was related to mathematics achievement gains for one subgroup of students, those who initially showed low achievement. It is possible that when teachers involved low-achieving students' parents early on, students were able to resolve their learning difficulties before they multiplied and went on to raise their test scores.

The study went on to find that test scores in math between third and fifth grade grew at a 40% higher rate for low-achieving students in schools where teachers reported high levels of parent outreach. Mathematics academic achievement increases were not at the same high levels when compared with students in schools whose teachers reported low level of parent outreach.

Additionally, the study revealed a positive correlation between professional development opportunities for teachers and academic achievement. When teachers gave higher ratings to their professional development in reading, students gained 3.1 more points than average in reading and 3.9 points in mathematics.

Conclusions

This study identified school practices and state or local policies that contributed to higher student achievement and greater achievement gains in Title I elementary schools in states and districts that had been engaged in standards-based reform for some time. Several school practices ranging from high-quality professional development and highly visible standards and assessments to less basic instruction had positive effects on student achievement in reading and mathematics. Most important is the fact that the study found that more intense outreach to low-achievers' parents had positive effects on student achievement in reading and mathematics. And the fact that such outreach was of long-term benefit to reading achievement for all students and to mathematics achievement for low-achieving students.

To read the Executive Summary please visit:
www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/esed/lescpc_highlights.html.

(Source: The Longitudinal Evaluation Of School Change and Performance (LESCP) in Title I Schools Final Report, Volume I: Executive Summary)