

July 2023

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Recommended Citation

Bradley, Faye C. (2023) "Practical Strategies for School Leaders to Improve African American Males' Reading Achievement," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 7: Iss. 3, Article 5.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol7/iss3/5>

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Practical Strategies for School Leaders to Improve African American Males' Reading Achievement

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Keywords

Reading Achievement, African American Males, At Risk Learner, Parental Involvement, School, Family, and Community Partnership



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Abstract

The study identified parental involvement activities that significantly influenced the reading achievement of the African American male learner. Teachers and administrators were surveyed using an instrument adapted from Epstein's School, Family, and Community Partnership Survey. The Virginia Standards of Learning reading and language arts assessments provided data for reading achievement of fourth-grade African American males. Significant differences were found between principals and teachers in their ratings of Teacher Reports of Total School Program to Involve Families. A correlation was found between teacher estimates of parents' involvement and the mean SOL English score for African American male fourth-grade students.

Introduction

According to McPike (1995), "reading has been termed the "gateway" to all other knowledge" (p. 3). Students learning paths are blocked when they do not learn to read early in their school years. The dispute over the best instructional reading programs, strategies, methods, and techniques has been raging for decades (Adams, 1990; Husband & Kang, 2020; Juel, 1988; Tatum, 2005; Tatum et al. (2021). During the mid-1950s, American education was dominated by the "look-say" teaching method. Students were encouraged to look at and recognize the whole word instead of using the phonetic method that had been taught for generations. Flesch warned in the best-selling book *Why Johnny Can't Read* that American schools would produce a generation of illiterates if they continued to rely on faddish techniques for teaching reading (Flesch, 1955).

For the last decade, there has been a renewed focus on improving the instruction of children at risk for not learning to read well. Students who do not *learn to read* early in the first and second grades find themselves trapped in a maze when they cannot *read to learn*. Most poor readers need to catch up with their peers in reading and writing abilities, and the gap between low and high readers widens as children progress through the grades (Fiester, 2010; Stanovich,

1986). Students who have difficulty learning to read are disproportionately poor and members of minority groups (Kennedy et al., 1986; Tatum et al., (2021); Whaley et al., (2019). As the number of students fitting this profile grows, the focus has been on early intervention. Early intervention is necessary before children experience a sense of failure, and the gap between those who are succeeding and those who are having difficulty remains relatively narrow. During the third grade, many African American male students experience a decline in their academic progress, and some form of literacy intervention is essential for success. (Baker, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2002 & 2022; Whaley et al., (2019); Wilson, 2003).

Despite the African American male's potential for success in reading, this population is not achieving as well as their Caucasian male peers (NAEP, 2005; 2019). The data from The National Center of Educational Statistics, The National Report card, NAEP 2019, indicates an increasing disparity between dropout rates and achievement outcomes between African-American males and White and Asian male populations.

The linkage between student achievement and parental involvement is at the forefront as students' scores decline compared to their national counterparts. (Overstreet et al., 2005). This is especially true for African-Americans, specifically black males. According to Epstein's decades of research on the school, family, and community partnerships, these social organization connections directly affect student learning and development. Epstein refers to them as spheres of overlapping influences. The more these spheres interact, the more likely students are to receive common messages emphasizing the importance of "school, working hard, of thinking creatively, or helping one another, and of staying in school" (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 8). The school, family, and community partnership is critical in changing African American males' decline (Epstein et al., 2019).

Review of The Literature

The need to intervene in early reading instruction expeditiously and expediently is generated by the understanding that a child's success in learning to read in the first grade appears to be the best predictor of ultimate success in schooling (Adams, 1990; Juel, 1988). According to Adams, "proficient reading depends on an automatic capacity to recognize frequent patterns and to translate them phonetically" (Adams, 1990, p. 33). The failure to learn the mechanics of phonics "may be the single most common source of reading difficulties" (Adams, 1990, p.33).

The inability to read fluently by third grade is associated with a significantly higher risk of dropping out, delinquency, and illiteracy (Bayer, 1994; Clay, 1985; Tatum, 2005; Tatum et al., 2021).

The limited progress of such students creates enormous pressure to achieve full academic accreditation on state-mandated assessments. It contributes to the abundance of referrals for special education and related services. Schools are exploring effective program models and approaches to prevent early reading failure. The teacher must employ instructional strategies in the classroom to meet a broad range of student needs (Atkinson et al., 1997; Husband & Kang, 2020; Tatum et al., 2021).

There is a growing awareness of the benefits of early reading success and the detrimental effects of early reading failure. Many African American males experience a dramatic decline in reading achievement as early as the third grade of elementary school. Although African American male learners can succeed in school, they are experiencing reading achievement at a different level than their male peers. (Adams, 1990; Baker, 1999; Bayer, 1994; Clay, 1985; Desimone, 1999; Juel, 1988; NAEP, 2005 & 2019; O'Sullivan, 1992; Polite & Davis, 1999; Stanovich, 1991; Tatum et al., 2021; U. S. Department of Education, 2002; Wilson, 2003).

Teaching Reading to African American Males

Although no one size fits all instructional program addresses African American males' learning and developmental needs. Irvine (1990) argues that teachers' lack of understanding and appreciation of African American students' cultural backgrounds, language, living environments, values, or learning styles directly relates to students' academic failure. Irvine's historical research is supported by (Gyimah & Allen, 2016; Kirkland, 2013; Tatum et al., 2021). Teachers who are influential in teaching African American males take responsibility for their teaching and actively engage all students in the learning environment. They help their students maneuver the school bureaucracy, solve problems daily, and provide coping skills to help them with misfortunes and hardships (Irvine, 1990).

According to Tatum (2005), many low socio-economic African American males are "too preoccupied with thoughts of their own mortality and the day-to-day energy required to survive to think about literacy as a bridge to the future" (Tatum, 2005. p.14). Therefore, literacy instruction must be presented as having a value in the daily lives of African American males.

"Effective teachers of African American males understand that they must go beyond reading instruction" (Tatum, 2005. p.24). Teachers must understand the life experiences of African American males and how they respond to them. Tatum declares, "Teachers must become personally invested in the African American male students in a way that moves beyond the existing curriculum" (Tatum, 2005. p.35). Effective teachers of African American males provide planned literacy instruction that encompasses academic, cultural, emotional, and social literacy.

Collins (1990) contends that disengaged students will only do well in school if they can handle the multiple environments in which they must exist. Deficiencies in their reading abilities only exacerbate their inability to perform successfully in school and their communities. Since their deficiencies were identified, most students have been exposed to various reading programs. Students' continued failure with reading programs has given them a sense of hopelessness, and they view reading as an obstacle they cannot overcome. Therefore, the at-risk learner often views reading as a task to be avoided (Collins, 1990). The at-risk learner needs experiences with reading that have personal relevance and enhance their comprehension. Building low-achieving students' self-esteem, assisting, and motivating them is essential to improving performance (Collins, 1990).

The attitudes of effective teachers reflect their beliefs in their African American male students' desire to learn and master the school curriculum. Polite et al., 1999 argues that effective teachers believe that student' academic achievement results from their concerted and consistent efforts, not the students' abilities. Effective teachers of African American males are constantly seeking ways to engage students in learning activities that interest them and connect them to their real-life situations. Linking the academic content to students' experiences emphasizes the relevant practice of effective teachers of African American male students. Students can vividly see the relationship between what they learn in school and their personal lives (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Consequently, effective teachers believe that using real-life experiences fosters learning.

School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Community involvement is deemed beneficial for children, schools, and society. Traditionally schools and families have had the most significant impact on the development of children. Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence emphasizes that schools, families, and communities are major institutions that socialize and educate children (Sanders, 2001).

Academic excellence is best achieved through the cooperation and support of the major institutions. However, Heath and McLaughlin (1987) argued that "the problem of educational achievement and academic success demands resources beyond the scope of the school and of most families" (Heath & McLaughlin, 1987, p.579). According to the researchers, the changing family structure, workplace demands, and the growing diversity among students are reasons that schools and families alone cannot provide sufficient resources for children to succeed today.

Community partnerships can differ significantly in their focus, scope, and content (Ascher, 1988). Partnerships can be a vital facet of a school's improvement plan. Although variations exist among school-community partnerships, there are seven critical steps for building successful collaborations. Sanders states these steps include "(a) identifying issues or goals to address; (b) defining the focus and scope of the partnerships; (c) identifying community assets (potential partners); (d) selecting partners; (e) monitoring progress; (f) evaluating activities; and (g) sharing success stories" (Sanders, 2001, p. 21).

Sanders sought specific guidelines for effective partnership program development by analyzing survey data collected from the National Network of Partnership Schools [NNPS] (2006) to provide detailed information on how schools can develop effective community partnerships. Sanders analyzed to "(a) identify and categorize the community agencies and organizations with whom the schools partnered; (b) document the focus of their partnership activities; (c) identify obstacles to the implementation of their school community partnerships and strategies to overcome these obstacles; and (d) examine factors that influenced schools' satisfaction with their community involvement activities" (Sanders, 2001, p.23).

The sample population consisted of 443 schools that were NNPS John Hopkins University members before December 1997. The NNPS provides theory-driven and research-based assistance, support, and training to schools, districts, and states that are committed to building permanent school, family, and community partnership programs (Epstein, 2001; Sanders, (2001). Each participating school must use an Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and Epstein's framework of six types of involvement. Each school was also required to complete an annual end-of-year survey.

The schools in the NNPS possess diverse demographic characteristics. Of the 434 schools in the sample, 34 percent are in large cities, 27 percent are in suburban areas, 20 percent are in

small cities, and 19 percent are in rural areas (Sanders, 2001). Most (70 %) of the schools in the sample serve elementary aged-students. Sixty-five percent of the sample schools receive some Title I funds, and 43 percent are school-wide Title I programs (Sanders, 2001).

According to the data from returned surveys, 70 percent of the schools reported at least one community partnership activity. Three-fourths (75%) of the schools indicated that their schools were developing ways for schools, families, and students to contribute to the larger community. The research findings also revealed that schools with active community partners were more likely to be satisfied with the quantity and quality of the partnership. There was a significant negative correlation between schools in large urban cities and their satisfaction with the quality of their community partnership activities. When a regression analysis was conducted, the results indicated that urban schools, elementary schools, and schools facing more obstacles to partnerships did not report an overall satisfaction rating with their community partnership activities. A cross-sectional analysis indicated that an additional variable, such as longitudinal patterns, may better explain schools' overall satisfaction with their community partners.

The study suggests that the district and school support for elementary partnerships may influence the number of obstacles schools face when establishing partnership activities. Additional quantitative research on factors that promote and impede school-community partnerships would inform policy and practice. Research in this area would help educators to integrate comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs that support student achievement of the at-risk learner.

Recent research was conducted on school, family, and community partnership programs and student performance on state-mandated achievement tests (Sheldon, 2003). Utilizing Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres and six types of involvement as a framework, Sheldon examined the relationship between the quality of the school, family, and community partnership programs and student achievement on state assessments. Epstein has conceptualized the school, home, and community environments as "spheres of influence" (Epstein, 2001). Institutional policies and individual beliefs and practices impact these overlapping spheres' relationships.

Sheldon (2003) contends that the greater the overlap of the spheres of influence means that "schools are more family-like, families are more school-like, and community support schools, students, and families." "School outreach to involve families and the community in

children's education is an important strategy for increasing the number of families involved and the consequences of their efforts" (Sheldon, 2003, p.151).

Epstein, Sanders, and other faculty members from John Hopkins University established the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). The purpose of the NNPS is to assist educators in researching results while developing programs of school, family, and community partnerships (Sanders, 2001; Sheldon, 2003). The NNPS provides guidance "to develop leadership structures and processes for partnership programs that encourage families and communities to become involved in students' schooling" (Sheldon, 2003, p.151).

An Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) that consists of school administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students in high school is a requirement for NNPS members. The ATP is charged with "planning and conducting family and community involvement activities, evaluating progress, and sustaining the school's program of partnerships" (Sheldon, 2003, p.152). The ATP is expected to employ all six types of involvement and coordinate activities supporting school improvement goals.

According to Sheldon, research on the impact of school, family, and community partnership programs only existed in 2003. Therefore, he examined the relationship between the quality of the school, family, and community partnership and student achievement on criteria-referenced standardized achievement tests used in many states throughout the United States.

In this study, the researcher gathered information from NNPS for 113 public schools in one large urban school district that assessed the characteristics of the quality of the schools' partnership programs in each school from 1998-1999. However, only 82 schools provided complete data on their respective partnership programs. Sheldon combined these data with 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 achievement data from third and fifth-grade students' performance on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). The MSPAP is a performance-based, criteria-referenced test required by Maryland's law for all third, fifth, and eighth-graders. The students are assessed in Reading, Language Usage, Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The results of the tests are a primary indicator of school performance throughout the state of Maryland (Sheldon, 2003). The elementary schools investigated in this study had large student enrollments of more than 500 students. The schools served low-income and mobile student populations. Approximately 80 percent of the students receive free or reduced-price

meals. Mobility was also an issue for the selected schools because 41 percent of the students still needed to complete an entire school year at one school.

The leaders of the sample elementary schools used in this study were asked to complete an UpDATE survey to evaluate the quality and progress of their school's partnership program for the 1998-1999 school year. Completing the annual survey with members of the Action Team for Partnerships and program leaders from each respective school was required. In this study, 86 percent of the surveys were completed by two or more people at their respective schools. Sheldon (2003) indicates that nearly half of the surveys were completed with the team leader's collaboration and a school administrator's assistance. Almost three-fourths of the surveys were completed with the assistance of teachers, and about half of the surveys were completed with the input of a parent or parent liaison. Using a six-point scale, schools rated the quality and provided an in-depth description of their partnership program. The ratings included: not yet started, start-up program, fair/average program, good program, very good program, and excellent program. According to Sheldon (2003), an example of a fair/average program was indicative of the following characteristics:

An Action Team was formed, and a One Year Action Plan was written for 1998-1999. A few activities were implemented for some of the six types of involvement. Schools' program meets a few challenges to include all families. Several teachers involve families at several grade levels. Some teachers, parents, and students know that our school is working to improve school, family, and community partnerships, and some know that our school is a member of the National Network of Partnership Schools" (Sheldon, 2003, p. 154).

A pairwise t-test analysis compared the 82 schools that returned the UpDATE survey with the 31 schools that did not. The results indicated that the two groups of schools did not differ in size, mobility, or income. It is important to note that the schools that returned their surveys had slightly higher percentages of fifth-grade students scoring satisfactory or above on the Math subtest ($t = 2.46, p \leq .02$). Overall, both groups of schools were similar in background and achievement test scores. High mobility schools had significantly lower percentages of students who scored satisfactory or above on the MSPAP Reading and Math tests. This result pattern is also for Writing, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies.

The researcher used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses to investigate the impact of the quality of schools' partnership programs predicted MSPAP achievement after controlling for school size, income, and student mobility. Schools in this sample with a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced-priced lunches reported significantly lower percentages of third graders scoring at least satisfactory in Reading ($\beta = -.295, p < .004$), Writing ($\beta = -.261, p .016$), and Language Usage ($\beta = -.215, p, 049$). With the school factors of mobility, size, and income taken into account, the results indicated that students scored satisfactory or above in Reading ($\beta = .260, p \leq .009$), Writing ($\beta = -.249, p \leq .019$), Math ($\beta = .248, p \leq .008$), Science ($\beta = .283, p \leq .011$), and Social Studies ($\beta = .281, p \leq .009$).

According to Sheldon's research, school programs involving families and communities are essential to students' achievement. After accounting for mobility, school size, and income of the school population, the results indicate that the degree to which schools are working to overcome several challenges to increase parent involvement is associated with students' performance on state tests (Sheldon, 2003). This study provides vital programmatic information that predicts students' performance on achievement tests and is directly linked to the school's efforts to meet family and community involvement challenges. One challenge that schools must improve upon is providing better communication about the school and student progress with parents who need to speak or read English better. Another challenge to overcome is finding ways for parents who cannot visit the school to help their children at home.

According to Sheldon, "the data suggest that schools that do not address these types of challenges are less likely to have family and community involvement programs that affect students' achievement on tests such as the MSAP" (Sheldon, 2003, p .16).

There are several limitations cited in this study. A causal relationship between program partnership outreach and student achievement cannot be presumed. The cross-sectional survey data is a limitation of this study. The low scores and low variation of student performance on the MSPAP prohibited the use of longitudinal data that was collected. Lastly, although the regression analyses controlled some school factors, the available data did not measure variables such as classroom instructions, teachers' years of experience, and levels of teacher training and licenses.

The results of this study suggest that school partnerships that reach all families and the community are vital to schools located in low-income urban environments. This partnership is important because students are more likely to perform at higher levels on state-mandated achievement tests. This study provides recent empirical data that supports school programs to involve all families may be one helpful reform strategy to help improve student achievement.

In addition to Sheldon's research on the partnerships that connect families and the community's involvement in school improvement, Epstein provides a case study of Partnership Schools-Comprehensive School Reform. The Partnership Schools-CRS is a current model designed for implementation to bring about change within the entire school. The Comprehensive School Reform was created using the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at John Hopkins University. It is based on Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein maintains "that students learn more when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development." Epstein, (2005, p.152).

In the Partnership Schools-CRS model used in this study, several action teams consisting of teachers, administrators, and community leaders were organized to link school improvement to specific goals. Leadership on each action team was shared. Specific structures, processes, tools, and approaches were developed to enhance the action teams' planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuation to improve their programs (Epstein, 2005). Under the guidance of the principal and school improvement team, all action teams were accountable for their plans, work, and results. The action teams' plans must include activities for six types of family and community involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community).

In addition, the Partnership Schools- CRS model was designed to meet the requirements for federal funding. Funded CRS programs must meet the following criteria: (1) effective, research-based, replicable methods and strategies for improvement; (2) comprehensive design with aligned components; (3) professional development; (4) measurable goals and benchmarks; (5) support for the program within the school' (6) support for teachers and principals; (7) parental and community involvement; (8) external technical support and assistance; (9) evaluation strategies; (10) coordination of resources and (11) strategies improve student

achievement. The National Network of Partnership Schools provided services to the CRS to meet these criteria through continuous support from an on-site Partnership Schools-CRS facilitator.

Epstein's case study was the first longitudinal examination to determine if the Partnership Schools-CRS model could be implemented and what were the school's results on the state's standardized achievement test (Epstein, 2005). The CSR School selected in this three-year research was an elementary school located in an urban school district in Connecticut. Cityside Elementary School was designated as a school-wide Title 1 program that approximately 375 students in grades K-5 attended. About 51% of the students received free or reduced-price lunch. Cityside Elementary was a neighborhood school serving a diverse population that spoke many languages. The students and their families were highly mobile. Some families removed their children mid-year to visit other countries that did or did not return to school. Most parents were not actively involved at school or with their children on schoolwork at home.

The school's administration and faculty sought to change this lack of parental involvement. Therefore, they organized action teams that included administrators, faculty, families, and community partners to focus on the fourth-grade reading, writing, and mathematics achievement assessments of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). In addition, the action teams focused on the eight essential elements of high-quality programs of school, family, and community partnerships: leadership, teamwork, plans for action, implementation of plans, funding, collegial support, evaluation, and networking (Epstein, 2005).

The results indicated that CRS, Cityside Elementary increased connections with families on seven of eight family and community involvement indicators for the three years of the study. Data collected from Cityside and a comparison school on the fourth grade Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) yielded the following results: In reading, Cityside increased the percentage of students attaining Level 4 proficient scores from 38% to 45% over the three years. The comparison school's reading data decreased from 39% to 37% of its fourth-grade students attaining Level 4 proficient scores during the same period. The data revealed that the fourth-grade students at Cityside showed the most improvement in writing. During the three years, the students performing at Level 4 increased from 21% to 43%. The students performing at Level 4 in math also increased from 54% to 66% during this period. The gaps between the Cityside students' and the district's test scores were closing during these three years.

The literature reviewed thus far indicates that teacher's instruction and parental involvement are the two most important factors that influence the reading achievement of the African American male. The literature review emphasizes the evolvement of parental involvement wherein the focus is not on the parents but on student success. In addition, the literature provides insight into how school, family, and community partnerships can effectively improve school programs and collaborations with families and community partners to affect reading achievement positively. Most of all, the literature review reiterates the need for the researcher's study.

Findings

Research Question

Is there a significant relationship and difference between school, family, and community partnerships and the reading achievement of fourth-grade African American males? A significant finding was that Teacher Estimates of Parents' Involvement are correlated with the reading achievement of the fourth-grade African American male. A significant correlation ($r=0.328$, $p=0.048$) was found between teacher estimates of parents' involvement and the mean SOL English score for African American male fourth-grade students. These data are shown in Table 1. Significant differences were found between principals and teachers in their ratings of Teacher Reports of Total School Program to Involve Families. The mean rating for teachers ($M=3.4$, $SD=0.38$) was significantly higher than the mean rating of principals ($M=3.1$, $SD=0.30$) in their ratings of Teacher Reports of Total School Program to Involve Families ($F=5.693$, ($df=1$), $p=.022$).

Table 1

Pearson Correlations between Scales and School Mean and African American Mean Score on English SOL

	School Mean		African American Mean		
	N	Corr. Sig.	N	Corr.	Sig.
Teacher Attitudes--family and community involvement	44	0.109	44	0.059	0.703
	46	0.480	46	-0.148	0.327
Teacher Views of Family Strength	46	-0.080			
Importance of Teacher of Type 2 Activities		-0.289	46	-0.177	0.240
		0.052			
Importance of Teacher of Type 6 Activities	46	0.018	46	0.056	0.713
	46	-0.114	46	-0.203	0.175
Importance of Teacher of Type 4 Activities	44	-0.193	44	-0.201	0.191
Importance of Teacher of All Practices					
Teacher Reports of the total school program to involve families	44	0.201	44	0.176	0.254
Teacher Reports of school program Type 1 parenting	44	0.052	44	0.136	0.378
Teacher Reports of school program Type 2 communicating	44	0.030	44	-0.050	0.745
Teacher Reports of school program Type 3 volunteering	44	0.417*	44	.457*	0.002
Teacher Reports of school program Type 4 learning at home	44	0.134	44	0.087	0.573
Teacher reports of parent responsibilities	44	-0.230	44	-0.247	0.106

Teacher views of support for partnerships	45	-0.158	0.299	45	-0.028	0.855
Ways teachers contact families	24	-0.040	0.851	24	0.176	0.412
Teacher estimates of parents' involvement	37	0.215	0.201	37	0.328*	0.048
Teacher estimates of parents' involvement-part4	40	0.157	0.333	40	0.245	0.128
Serve on a PTA/PTO or other school committees	46	-0.178	.308	46	-0.178	0.236

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion of Findings

Research Question

Is there a significant relationship and difference between school, family, and community partnerships and the reading achievement of fourth-grade African American males? The data to answer this question was drawn from survey question four. The items on this scale included: (a) Attend workshops regularly at school; (b) Check that child's homework is done daily; (c) Practice schoolwork in the summer; (d) Attend PTA meetings regularly; (e) Attend parent-teacher conferences with you; (f) Understand reading skills at your grade level; (g) Understand writing skills at your grade level; and (h) Understand math skills at your grade level.

A significant correlation was found between teacher estimates of parents' involvement and the mean SOL English score for African American male fourth-grade students. This finding is in keeping with Epstein and Sheldon. According to Sheldon, school programs involving families and communities are essential to students' achievement. School partnerships that reach all families and the community are vital to schools in low-income urban environments. This partnership is important because students are more likely to perform at higher levels on state-mandated achievement tests. The current empirical data that supports school programs to involve all families may be one helpful reform strategy to improve the reading achievement of the fourth-grade African American male.

The mean rating for teachers was significantly higher than the mean rating of principals in their ratings of Teacher Reports of Total School Program to Involve Families. This finding was appalling to the researcher because the respondents' schools are a part of the National Network of Partnership Schools. The major thrust of the NNPS is to have the school, family, and community partnerships connect to help the students learn and grow. Epstein refers to the social organizations of school, family, and community as "spheres of overlapping influences." These spheres of influence directly affect student learning and development. The more these spheres interact, the more likely students are to receive common messages emphasizing the importance of "school, working hard, of thinking creatively, or helping one another, and of staying in school" (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 8). However, the rating differences in this study suggest that Epstein's spheres of influence are pushed apart instead of being drawn together. Therefore, the schools must re-examine their school improvement plans. Implementing the school, family, and community partnership is paramount to increasing parental involvement. Epstein states, "If a school improvement model is not well implemented, there is no justification for analyzing its effects on achievement." (Epstein, 2005, p. 164). Intentional vital programs of school, family, and community engagement "are part of good school organization and district and state leadership" (Epstein et al., 2019, p. 9).

Implications

The research provides evidence for educating African American parents about reading development and instruction. This will help them to have a better understanding of their children's progress and to participate in the school system actively. Educating African American parents would also allow parents a shared responsibility in educating their children rather than delegating this authority solely to the school. Parental knowledge about reading is crucial because it supports, encourages, and guides reading development in their children. Thus, positively influencing the reading achievement of their children. Schools should conduct numerous workshops on the reading curriculum for parents and community partners. Some of these workshops should occur during the early evening hours so working parents can participate. It would also behoove the schools to hold a few workshops in the students' living environments. Schools should collaborate with local colleges and universities to provide in-service training to parents about the literacy curriculum.

Parental involvement is a catalyst to improve school experiences and achievement for the African American fourth-grade male learner. Schools should strategically utilize the untapped resource of the African American parent and community stakeholders by providing many meaningful opportunities for the parent and stakeholders to volunteer at school within the learning environment. This will promote positive relationships between the teacher and parent and a better understanding of cultural differences. Volunteering at school will also extend the school's learning environment to the home. Therefore, school leaders should focus on collaborating with community agencies to volunteer to help the African American male. Because it will help the learner co-exist in his social environment and successfully navigate a learning environment that has been viewed in the past as hostile and unpredictable for many of these students.

Pre-service training provided by colleges and universities should be helpful to most school leaders by providing them with professional development topics that their teachers can utilize to improve the literacy instruction of African American male students. Ultimately, education is paramount in colleges and universities to enhance the abilities of the teacher and administrator to understand school, family, and community partnerships. Colleges and universities need to help local school districts develop effective school, family, and community involvement programs linked to improving African American male reading achievement.

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