Parental School Involvement and Perceptions of School Climate in California

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Abstract

Parental school involvement plays a significant role in students' social and academic outcomes. Nevertheless systemic ways of gathering parental views have not been used or highlighted in policy arena or the literature. Using the first major parent statewide survey in California drawn from the California School Climate Survey for Parents and Guardians (N= 15,829), this study examined parental perceptions of school climate, school problems, and school encouragement of parental involvement. The findings question the roles that the schools, the federal, state, and local policymakers, play in supporting active school involvement of parents and families from nondominant ethnicities in the community.

Keywords: parent school involvement, school climate, school problems, ethnicity, social economic status.

Parental School Involvement and Perceptions of School Climate in California

Parental involvement plays a significant role in the children's social-emotional, developmental, and academic school functioning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Examples of parental school involvement include parent participation in the education of their children through different behaviors, such as volunteering at school functions, communicating with school personnel, homework assistance, attending school events, participating in parent–teacher associations (PTAs), and attending parent–teacher conferences (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Stewart, 2008). Meaningful parental involvement also means allowing parents actual decision-making power about what and how their children learn (Reyhner, 1992). By maintaining close relationships and frequent communication with the schools, parents can greatly contribute to their children's school-related outcomes and to the enhancement of more caring and responsive school environments (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; Barnard, 2004; Houtenville, & Hall, 2007).

In the United States, schools are being called upon to increase student academic proficiency through both state and federal reform legislation, such as the *Public School Accountability* Act (PAAS) of 1999 in California (California Department of Education, 1999), the *No Child Left Behind* Act (NCLB) of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), or the *Race to the Top* Act (RTTP) of 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Such performance-driven accountability policies tend to focus narrowly on student academic outcomes, neglecting the social and emotional aspects of learning and its potential contribution to academic outcomes (Cohen, 2014). Yet, research clearly indicates that the social, emotional, and affective qualities of a school environment (i.e., a school's climate) are related to students' academic (Identifying Reference, 2015; Wang & Holcombe, 2010) and other social-emotional outcomes (Cohen,

McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Moreover, research suggests that parents' perceptions of the school climate are related to students' academic outcomes (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Reynolds & Gill, 1994).

There is a relationship between positive parental perceptions of school climate and greater parental involvement in the school (McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003; Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, & Younoszai, 1998). In an open, inviting, and welcoming school climate, parents are likely to become more involved in their children's schooling (Robinson & Harris, 2014a; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Further, when parents are highly engaged in the school community, the school climate is more caring and supportive (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Parcel & Dufur, 2001; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

This body of research suggests that parents can improve a school's climate by maintaining close relationships with their children's schools and, thus, can contribute to students' school-related outcomes. School climate reflects the experiences of students, school personnel, and parents regarding school life (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Some prior research has examined parents' perceptions of their children's school climate; Griffith (2000) for example examined the consensus among student and parent perceptions of school climate. Spera, Wentzel, and Matto (2009) focused on the relationship between school climate perceptions and parental aspirations for their children's educational attainment. However, both studies lack broad and comprehensive evaluations of parents' views of the school environment regarding demographic background characteristics, as well as an evaluation of parental perceptions of efforts made by the schools to encourage parental participation. Specific groups of parents who have largely negative views of schools or who do not experience encouragement from their children's schools for participation are unlikely to be involved. Evaluating parents'

perceptions of their children's schools by major subgroups of race or ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) could help leverage students' academic and non-academic school-related outcomes and reduce gaps among students of different backgrounds.

Parental attitudes and views of schools may also likely change depending on their child's age and grade level, and due to history, economic changes, cultural events, and reform efforts. Therefore, partnering with parents would require ongoing collection of feedback, interpretation, and action based on their views and needs. Ascertaining parental views on key issues in school over time may help guide policies and reform statewide and within specific regions. This step is especially important for the social and emotional goals of the U.S. public school system. However, the prevailing literature does not take into account historical events or social changes over time.

NCLB and RTTP have encouraged schools to incorporate more parental engagement as a strategy to support. NCLB, for example, requires states, districts, and schools to develop and implement policies and plans to reach all families to improve the quality and results of partnership practices (Epstein, 2005). In addition, the U.S. Department of Education's *Safe and Supportive Schools* initiative (S3) supported 11 states evaluating school safety, acknowledging the importance of parents perception of the schools, in addition to that of students and staff's (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Thus, researchers and policy makers recognize the need for a systematic ongoing data collection in administrative or state surveys on parental perceptions of the school environment to establish data driven interventions for healthier safer schools.

California, for the first time as a state, chose to use the strategy of collecting parents' voices as a supplement to surveys already annually conducted for students and staff in all

California districts—the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). This addition of parental views offers an opportunity for parents to provide their views and could be a model for states, countries, and regions wanting to emulate or add ongoing evaluations of parental views. The study used the first comprehensive school climate parental and guardian survey conducted in public schools throughout the state of California to examine parental school-related perceptions of school climate, problems, and encouragement of parental involvement. These data filled gaps in the research and policy literatures.

It is important to note, however, that research have not yet reached a solid agreement as to which dimensions are essential in measuring school climate (Cohen & Geier, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education school climate model, for example, suggests engagement, safety and environment (2014); The National School Climate Center's suggested model includes safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the school institutional environment (Cohen et al., 2009). Although referring to the same aspects of the school climate (e.g. safety, responsiveness to diversity, academic pressure, school encouragement of involvement, substance abuse, bullying and victimization) The WesEd CHKS survey measurement does not fully align with other models of school climate measurement.

Theoretical Perspective of Schools within Ecological Systems

Multiple educational researchers have conceptualized schools as the center of a larger ecological system, embedded within multiple social contexts that interact with the surrounding social, cultural, and physical environments (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Identifying Reference (2005) for example draw a heuristic theoretical model that places the school context in the center, and conceives of school violence as interplay among several subsystems, such as the student personal characteristics, the school neighborhood characteristics, students' family characteristics, and students' cultural context, and within school contexts. These subsystems interact and reciprocally influence each other (Identifying Reference, 2005). Thus, through an ecological lens, parents influence and are influenced by the school. This interplay impacts children's school-related outcomes.

A growing body of literature has suggested that parental engagement and degree of positive connection with the school critically contributes to the improvement of children's learning, healthy development, and success in school (Barnard, 2004; Bunting, Drew, Lasseigne, & Anderson-Butcher, 2013; Hill & Craft, 2003; Jeynes, 2003; Lawson, 2003; Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006). Through their participation, parents model the importance of schooling and academic achievement for their children, and this modeling may influence their child's degree of involvement in class and school activities and academic success (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Stewart, 2008).

Parents' Perceptions of School Climate and Encouragement of their Involvement

Several demographic variables such as parents' education levels, income, grade level, and race or ethnicity were associated with parental school involvement and school climate. These variables are being considered in the current study and, thus, will be discussed further in the next sections.

SES and parental perceptions of school climate. In some communities, stress linked to poverty, crime, violence, and other social problems make it more challenging to operate schools in a way that enhances positive student outcomes (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, &

Luppescu, 2006; Identifying Reference, 2004). Hence, the current study hypothesized that parents' perceptions of the school climate would be more positive among parents of higher SES background as compared with others. The study further hypothesized that parents of higher SES backgrounds would report fewer problems in the schools.

Most parents want to be involved in their children's education, regardless of their SES background (McKay & Stone, 2000). Nevertheless, it has been stipulated that low-income parents are more likely to be preoccupied with satisfying their family's basic financial needs before they are able to get involved in their children's schools. These parents may face many more barriers to school involvement, including nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources, transportation problems, and stress due to residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Often having fewer years of education themselves, they may feel unequipped to interfere and get involved with school processes (Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2001). Therefore, the study hypothesized that parents of lower SES would experience less effort on behalf of the schools to encourage parents' participation.

Race, ethnicity and parental perceptions of school climate. School systems in the U.S. include a diverse population of students, yet most teachers often come from the majority culture (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002). Low representation of teachers from minority cultures, as well as perceptions of parents' backgrounds and of the roles expected of them by the school, may significantly impact parental involvement (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Carlisle et al., 2005). Previous research indicated less involvement by parents of minority status (Reynolds, Weissberg, & Kasprow, 1992).

Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, and George (2004) provided an ecological perspective on parental school engagement, positing that parents from language and ethnic minority families may experience conflicts in their children's schools because schools tend to maintain the ideals and beliefs of a capitalist culture, positioning the poor, minority, or immigrant cultures as subordinate. This is also illustrated in previous research findings (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McKay et al., 2003; Ogbu, 1995; Sheldon, 2002; Roscigno, 2000). For example, a previous study found that schools that serve larger percentages of Black parents are less likely to initiate attempts to involve parents (Vaden-Kiernan, 2006). In addition, language barriers are considered potential obstacles for minority parents' involvement (Wong & Hughes, 2006). Therefore, the study hypothesized that racial and ethnic minority parents would experience fewer efforts on behalf of their schools to encourage their involvement, as compared with others.

Previous research also pointed out a significant relationship between ethnicity and SES, indicating an overrepresentation of ethnic minorities among populations living in poverty (Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013). Studies have noted patterns of inequality in school funding for those schools serving diverse ethnic communities, where public funding is greater in those communities serving White students and lower in the schools serving primarily African-Americans and Latinos (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Restrictions placed by states on public schools serving communities from nondominant American Indian and Alaska Native cultures to use curriculum and textbooks not specifically designed for Native children and to employ teachers without special training in Native education limit the effectiveness of Native American parent involvement and inhibit their meaningful participation (Reyhner, 1992). Native American students and parents often experience cultural

discontinuity at school resulting from educators asking students to give up their Native American

culture and assimilate into the Anglo dominant culture of the school (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

Hence, the current study hypothesized greater negative perceptions of school climate and more

school problems among the parents of ethnic minority children, as compared with others.

Grade level and parental perceptions of school climate. The literature has noted a

more positive experience of school climate among younger students in elementary schools

compared with older students in middle and high schools (Bowen, Rose, Powers, & Glennie,

2008; Chen, 2005; Pianta & Allen, 2008; Thapa et al., 2013). Further, parents seem to be more

involved in school activities if their child is younger (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Hoover-

Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999).

When students transition from elementary to middle and high schools, they confront

changes in the physical and organizational structure of the school. Middle and high schools are

typically larger in size, enroll a larger number of students, employ greater numbers of teachers,

and, thus, adhere to more bureaucratic management systems as compared with elementary

schools. These differences may result in less personal contact, intimacy, and trust between

teachers, students, and their parents (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Pianta & Allen, 2008; Thapa et al.,

2013). These changes could increase parents' feelings of alienation from school. Therefore, we

hypothesized that the parents of kindergartens and elementary school students would experience

more positive school climate and would report less school problems compared with the parents

of middle and high school youth.

However, teachers may also think that investing efforts to get parents of older students

involved in the school is not necessary and too much of a burden for parents. As a result of these

beliefs, school personnel have been found to actively discourage parental involvement at the

middle and high school levels (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Izzo et al., 1999). Hence, the study hypothesized that parents' perceptions of school encouragement of their involvement is greater among kindergartens and elementary schools compared with middle and high schools.

In summary, the current study hypothesized more negative perceptions of school climate, more school problems, and less effort on behalf of the schools to encourage parent participation among parents of ethnic minority children, those of lower SES, and parents of middle and high schools.

Methods

This study used data gathered from parents and guardians who completed the Core Module of the California School Climate Survey for Parents and Guardians (CSPS) in 2011. The sample included 15,829 parents from California. The majority of them (95.2%) indicated they were the parents of the children, and less than 4% indicated they were grandparents, other relatives, or legal guardians.

Sample Characteristics

Most of the parents (45.7%) indicated they were Hispanic or Latino, more than one-quarter (29.7%) indicated White or Caucasian, approximately 12% indicated Asian or Asian American, approximately 6% indicated other or multiethnic, approximately 5% indicated African American, and approximately 1% indicated Native-American Indian or Alaskan Native. Almost half of the parents (49.5%) indicated their child was eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Finally, most of the students were in middle school (40.2%) or high school (39.1%), approximately one-fifth (19.6%) were in elementary school, and of those students, only approximately 1% of the children were in kindergarten. Many of these demographics mirror the demographics of California public schools.

Instrument

      This study used the Core Module of the CSPS. This anonymous survey for parents and guardians was developed and administered for the first time in 2011 by researchers at WestEd on behalf of the State of California**.** The CSPS is available in California in two formats: a statewide online version and a paper scan-form version. In the online version, parents complete the survey via the Internet using a school-specific login. Instructions for completing and returning the survey are included on the paper version. English and Spanish surveys are available as online and paper surveys. All other languages (e.g., Tagalog, Ukrainian, and Hebrew) are available as paper versions only.

Measures

      School climate. Parents were asked to assess various aspects of school academic and social emotional climate, including issues of student safety, responsiveness to diversity, and academic pressure. Responses for these 14 items were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *disagree*, and 4 = *strongly disagree*). School climate was computed as the mean of the items assessing school climate and performance (Cronbach's α = .950).

      School encouragement of parental involvement. Parents were requested to rate their perceptions of the extent to which their child's school informs them, welcomes them, and encourages their involvement. Responses for these items used the same scale as above. Parental involvement was computed as the mean of these five items (Cronbach's α = .870).

      School problems. Parents were asked to what extent they thought the school had a problem in various school climate areas, including alcohol and drug use; harassment or bullying of students; physical fighting between students; racial/ethnic conflict among students; students not respecting staff; gang-related activity; possession of weapons; and vandalism (including

graffiti). Responses for these eight items were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *not a problem*, 2 = *small problem*, 3 = *somewhat a problem*, and 4 = *large problem*). School problems was computed as the mean of the items assessing school problems (Cronbach's α = .949).

Background characteristics. Parents were asked to provide background and demographic information including race or ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, and students' grade levels.

Data Analysis

Analyses of variance (One-way ANOVAs) tests and Scheffe's post hoc comparisons were used to examine differences in parents' views of school encouragement of parental involvement and school problems according to parents' background characteristics.

Analyses were conducted using the SPSS (22) statistical software.

Results

Parents Perceptions of School Climate

A *t*-test was conducted to determine differences in the School Climate Index and eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. Contrary to the research hypothesis, the findings revealed that parents of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch had a significantly more positive assessment of school climate ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.54$) compared to those who were not eligible ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.52$; t (15,120) = -3.45, $p < .01$).

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare the six categories of race and ethnicity with regard to parents' perceptions of the School Climate Index (Table 1). Scheffe's post hoc comparisons determined the significance of differences between Native American Indian or Alaskan Natives who had the worst perception of school climate compared with all other races and ethnicities (Table 1).

********************Insert Table 1 about here******************

An ANOVA test was used to compare parents' school climate perceptions by students' grade

levels (Table 2). In line with the research hypothesis, the results revealed that parents of

kindergarten students had significantly more positive perceptions of school climate ($M = 3.33$,

$SD = .60$), followed by parents of elementary school students ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .51$), then those of

middle school students ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .52$), and, finally, parents of high school students ($M =$

3.04, $SD = .54$), who had the most negative perceptions of school climate.

********************Insert Table 2 about here******************

Parents' Perceptions of School Problems

A *t*-test was conducted to determine differences in the School Problems Index and

eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. In line with the research hypothesis, the findings

revealed that parents of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch indicated significantly

more school problems ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.00$) compared to those whose children were not eligible

and indicated fewer school problems ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 0.83$; $t (13914) = 19.74$, $p < .001$).

An ANOVA test was used to compare ethnicity or race categories with regard to the

School Problems Index (Table 3). Scheffe's post hoc comparisons revealed that Native American

Indian or Alaskan Native parents indicated the highest levels of school problems, which was

significantly different than all other groups. Slightly lower levels of school problems were

indicated by Hispanic or Latino parents. Finally, parents of Asian and Pacific Island origin and

those who indicated their races as other or multiethnic, African American, and White suggested

fewer school problems and were significantly different than Native American Indian or Alaskan

Native and Hispanic or Latino parents.

********************Insert Table 3 about here******************

An ANOVA test was used to compare the parents' perceptions of school problems by students' grade levels (Table 4). In line with the research hypothesis, Scheffe's post hoc comparisons revealed that middle school and high school parents indicated the highest levels of school problems. Lower levels of school problems were indicated by parents of elementary school students, and parents of kindergarten students indicated the fewest school problems.

*********************Insert Table 4 about here******************

School's Encouragement of Parental Involvement

A *t*-test was conducted to determine differences in the Parental Involvement Index and eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. Findings revealed no significant differences in parental involvement between parents of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.62$) and parents of children not eligible ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.61$; t (15,102) = 1.954, n.s.).

An ANOVA test was used to compare ethnicity or race categories with regard to the Parental Involvement Index (Table 5). Scheffe's post hoc comparisons revealed that parental involvement was significantly lower among Native American Indian or Alaskan Native parents compared with all other ethnicities or races.

*********************Insert Table 5 about here******************

An ANOVA test was used to compare parental involvement by students' grade levels (Table 6). In line with the research hypothesis, the results revealed greater parental involvement among parents of younger children compared with those of older children. Significant differences were obtained between parents with children in kindergarten ($M= 3.38$, $SD = 0.67$) and elementary schools ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.55$) reporting higher levels of parental involvement compared to parents of middle ($M = 3.07$. $SD = 0.60$) or high school children ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.63$).

********************Insert Table 6 about here******************

Discussion

Frequent school involvement by parents is known to have a positive impact on a child's

school functioning and enhance a positive school climate (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee,

1989; Houtenville & Hall, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Therefore, an ongoing ascertainment of

parental views about their children's schools can help guide policy and reform and contribute to

student proficiency and better social-emotional outcomes at school. Using the CSPS, researchers

in California collected parental views on key issues regarding their children's schools. The

current study examined variations in parents' perceptions of their children's schools with respect

to ethnicity, SES, as manifested by eligibility for free/reduced-price lunch, and students' grade

levels.

Contrary to the study hypothesis, which states that parents of ethnic minorities would

report a less positive school climate, the study revealed only minor variability in ethnic reports

on school climate. In this study, Native American Indian or Alaskan Natives reported the worst

perceptions of school climates, but other ethnicities reported positive perceptions about school

climates. Further, findings revealed that parents of all SES were similar in their positive

perceptions of issues concerning school climate. These results mirror previous findings

demonstrating that schools of different SES have similar levels of school violence (Hawkins,

Farrington, & Catalano, 1998; Olweus, 1993). Such findings demonstrated no systematic

associations between ethnicity or SES background and school climate perceptions; thus,

maintaining and promoting a positive climate in schools serving marginalized communities seem

attainable. For example, a study on school violence in theoretically atypical schools (Identifying

Reference, 2009) supported the idea of positive school climates in schools of disadvantaged or

lower socio-demographic neighborhoods. The authors demonstrated case studies of atypically peaceful schools that emphasized the leadership of a visionary, inspirational, and strong principal who could mobilize students, teachers, and staff to create a caring, inclusive, and nurturing school environment that would eventually support and enhance positive outcomes for all students (Identifying Reference, 2009).

Although our findings indicate that most parents in a populous state like California feel that school climate is quite satisfactory, some minority groups, including Latino parents and Native American Indian or Alaskan Native parents, feel that schools suffer from many problems. This gap in positive perceptions of school climate and negative school problems may indicate that parents, especially those from ethnic minorities, may not have profound knowledge and familiarity with their children's schools. Taken together, the current results may question the roles that the schools, as well as the federal, state, and local policymakers, play in supporting active school involvement of parents and families from nondominant ethnicities in the community.

Correspondingly, the current findings suggest that schools may fail to attract the involvement of parents from nondominant cultures, especially Native American Indian or Alaskan Native parents. These parents experienced the least efforts from their children's schools to encourage their participation. These findings can be explained in light of the relatively low control that Native parents have over their children's schools and curriculums, as suggested by Reyhner (1992). Furthermore, the experience of cultural discontinuity with schools could disempower Native families from meaningful and contributory participation (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

To create pathways of access to Native American Indian and Alaska Native parents, schools need to encourage a positive identity, respect cultural differences, and reduce racial prejudice (Wilson, 1991). School staff needs to recognize and appreciate other important forms of education as socialization and advocacy that nondominant parents often engage in and welcome it with congeniality (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Schools could encourage teachers to view parents of all backgrounds as irreplaceable experts on their children. Schools could also educate Native American Indian and Alaska Native parents about how the schools function and provide the parents with real opportunities to participate in the decision-making process (Reyhner, 1992). States should promote legislation in favor of adapting curriculum and textbooks to Native students that recognize, sustain, and respect Native cultures (Reyhner, 1992) to support more tolerant and inclusive school climates and to attract more parental involvement among ethnic minorities.

The ethnic variability of efforts to encourage parental involvement in the current study reflects the same variability in parental perceptions of school climate. Thus, the findings may suggest that regardless of race or ethnicity, parents' experiences of school climate are related to the schools' efforts to encourage parental involvement. Therefore, school-related factors, such as teachers' attitudes in favor of parental involvement or expectations of involvement from the schools or teachers, are critical in the efforts to promote parental involvement and school climate.

For example, it is important to foster a positive emotional response in support of parental involvement among teachers because some teachers may feel that parental involvement is ineffective in essence and regard themselves as the only authorities of student education (Carlisle et al., 2005). Teachers may also fear being judged by parents on their work as teachers and, thus,

discourage parents from being involved in the school (Robinson & Harris, 2014a). To address these obstacles, schools could adopt pro-family involvement attitudes and engage in community outreach efforts while demonstrating cultural competency and community empowerment within the school (Lewis et al. 2011). For example, schools can take actions to engage parental expertise by inviting them to share their cultural traditions and skills with students at the school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Parental involvement should not be exclusively the responsibility of the parent to initiate and sustain (Robinson & Harris, 2014a). Because of barriers that some parents experience when partnering with schools, there seems to be a need to expand the meaning of parental school involvement to include the use of services offered by the school to parents and families in need. A positive school climate strategy could include offering assistance, resources, and social support to parents, rather than merely expecting the parents to support the school. By addressing the unmet needs of parents, schools can help parents become more involved by increasing their time, flexibility, skills, motivation, and energy (Bunting et al., 2013).

Furthermore, parents of diverse cultures may prefer to engage in different types of activities (Yan & Lin, 2005). For example, Graves and Wright (2011) found that European American parents were more likely to be involved in home-based parental involvement activities, such as reading to their children, whereas African-American parents were more likely to be involved in school-related activities, such as volunteering at the school. Greater involvement at home than at school may be especially true for ethnic minorities whose primary language is not English (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Some of these preferences may reflect the SES of the parents, as well. School personnel who understand and are sensitive to cultural diversity in parental involvement approaches might manage to attract higher parental participation. Further,

it seems that not all parent involvement practices contribute to all student outcomes and may change depending on family background characteristics.

An extensive study conducted by Robinson and Harris (2014a) examined whether the depth of parental engagement in children's academic lives improved their test scores and grades. The authors found that when parental involvement did benefit academic outcomes, it depended on the behavior the parents were engaging in, the academic outcome being examined, the child's grade level, race/ethnicity, and SES of the family (Robinson & Harris, 2014a). Based on these findings, the authors concluded that "policy makers should not advocate a one-size-fits-all model of parental involvement" (Robinson & Harris, 2014b). Reform efforts ought to consider and acknowledge diverse forms of parental involvement practices to engage parents and communities of different backgrounds.

The National School Climate Council's standards for effective school climate improvement efforts framework, builds upon intensive community and parental involvement. For example, they suggest that schools should gather accurate and reliable data about school climate from students, school personnel and parents/guardians for continuous improvement and share it regularly with the school community (NSCC, 2014). Additionally, it should be recognized that whereas developing standards for improving school climate that include parental involvement in diverse communities is a goal worthy of pursuit, the implementation of such policies should include not only "what's implementable and works," but also what works under which conditions, that is, policies in line with particular community values and needs and the interaction between "policies, people [diverse communities and teachers/staff] and places" (Honig, 2006, p. 2).

The findings of the current study further indicate that parents tend to have mild involvement in their children's schools, and they have little knowledge about or familiarity with the schools, regardless of ethnicity. Yet, previous findings indicate that parents of all races, cultures, or SES backgrounds wish to be involved in their children's education (Christenson, 2004; Tett, 2001). Although parents and family characteristics typically receive the focus when determining responsibility for parental engagement with schools, schools could create involvement opportunities and welcoming environments to allow meaningful participation for parents of all backgrounds. This study and previous work suggest that efforts by schools to make parents better acquainted with the school and staff, as well as to provide reports to the parents about positive student achievements, is a good place to start (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999).

In line with research hypotheses, the study suggests lower perceptions of school efforts to encourage parental involvement and more negative perceptions of school climate and problems by parents of students in middle school and high school compared with those of children in elementary school and kindergarten. However, these results do not mean that the positive effects of parental involvement on students' academic, psychological, and behavioral school-related outcomes decline, as well. Previous research theorized that developmentally appropriate forms of parental involvement can continue to effectively support older students as they progress through high school (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). For example, parents of older students can maintain their school involvement through helping to organize community–school events, chaperone school trips, and support other parents. Schools, on the other hand, should be aware of the potential contribution of parental involvement in higher grades and continue

encouraging and using that involvement in the upper grades to leverage student outcomes

(Simon, 2001, 2004).

Current accountability programs create barriers for family–school relationships,

diminishing school efforts to encourage parental involvement, because they appropriate funding

and conceptual support mainly for educational purposes. Nevertheless, Title I programs, which

seek to support schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income

families, also acknowledge the importance of parents and community–school relationships.

Indeed, with the growing recognition about the contribution of school climate to students'

academic and nonacademic school-related outcomes, more and more states and districts have

been looking for alternatives to include school climate in school improvement efforts (Cohen,

2014). Yet, the current findings demonstrate that low-income parents experience more negative

school climates, more school problems, and less involvement.

To address these issues on a large scale, schools and, perhaps, school districts need

ongoing support anchored in educational policy to be able to successfully accomplish meaningful

parental participation to improve school climate. Educational policies at the local, state, and

federal levels can dramatically influence how schools prioritize partnering with parents. School

climate policies at every level can potentially set standards for schools to create a welcoming

culture for diverse students and their families. Districts could provide professional development

to build educators' and parents' capacities for understanding partnerships and helping schools

develop evidence-based, goal-oriented partnership practices. State departments of education

could disseminate effective partnership programs and review district plans to ensure schools are

not relying on sporadic local initiatives for engaging parents and that schools have enough

funding to build collaborative, solid relationships at the staff and teacher and community levels.

Those engaging in education policy reform also have to take a look at the stark reality that people of color in this country continue to be subjugated and that racism is a fixture "…embedded with the institutions, values and norms of society" (Dumas & Anyon, 2006; p. 155). The authors provide the following exemplary quote demonstrating how critical race theory is applied to schools:

> Policies on curriculum, school funding, and teacher training and promotion may be crafted and implemented without any mention of race, and yet have racially "curious" effects, such as a reduction in the number of people of color in leadership positions…[and] fewer fiscal resources in schools serving communities of color (Dumas & Anyon, 2006; p. 155).

The Council of State Governments Justice Center has also acknowledged the issue of race and disproportionate impact on students of color (Morgan, Salomon, Plotkin, & Cohen, 2014). They highlight the difficulties and barriers experienced by students of color and their parents in a school system that is perceived to be biased or unfair. Accordingly, it's recommended that schools recognize the distrust experienced by minority groups at school. Thus "school and district officials need to hold at their respective levels difficult discussions about the disparate impact of school discipline on particular groups of students, to ensure that recommendations are carried out equitably. Quality data collection and transparent reporting to help monitor progress must support these efforts" (Morgan et al., 2014; p. xi).

Further, future research should also examine casual relationships between parental involvement, school climate, school problems, and students' school-related outcomes. Causality examination would allow for the determination of whether higher achieving students and those with better emotional or behavioral outcomes attract more parental involvement. It could also be

the case that greater parent and family involvement improves student outcomes. Furthermore, do students' age, ethnicity, or SES background influence these parent–school relationships? Does parent involvement impact teacher–student relationships in middle schools and high schools, where a student may have many teachers? An ongoing collection of data from parents could fit for the examination of these important questions. An annual collection of parental voices could help monitor trends and changes and interpret parental attitudes throughout the years. Finally, future research should not only examine the causal relationships between parental school involvement, school climate, and student outcomes, but also between the intersectionalism of race and class, as suggested by Dumas and Anyon (2006), on policy development and implementation.

The results of the current study, while informative, are also limited in certain respects. The information on parent involvement is based solely on parents' reports; thus, we may not have had accurate estimations of parents' behaviors. Future research should also examine teachers' and students' reports on parental involvement to allow for a full and holistic perspective of parent involvement practices with regards to demographic characteristics.

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Statewide Parent School Climate Study

Table 1

Univariate ANOVA for School Climate Index by Race/Ethnicity (N = 14,845)

	N	Mean (SD)
Asian and Pacific Islander	1,812	3.17 (.50)[ad]
Hispanic or Latino	6,774	3.14 (.53)[a]
African American (not Hispanic)	807	3.10 (.52)[a]
White (not Hispanic)	4,418	3.09 (.53)[a]
Other or multiethnic	870	3.06 (.52)[ac]
Native American Indian or Alaska Native	164	2.69 (.62) [bcdef]
F	$F(5,14839) = 32.814***$	
Post hoc	A,HL,AA,W,O > AI	

Note. Higher scores in the School Climate Index indicate more positive perceptions of school climate; *** $P < .001$. HL = Hispanic or Latino; AA = African American; O = Other or multiethnic; AI = Native American Indian or Alaska Native; A = Asian or Pacific Islander; W = White.

Statewide Parent School Climate Study

Table 2

*Univariate ANOVA for School Climate Index by Grade Levels (*N = *15,047)*

	N	Mean (*SD*)
Kindergarten	160	3.33 (.60)
Elementary school	2,962	3.23 (.51)
Middle school	6,040	3.11 (.52)
High school	5,885	3.04 (.54)
F	F(3,15403) = 97.97***	
Post hoc	K > E > M,H	

Note: Higher scores in the School Climate Index indicate more positive perceptions of school climate; K = kindergarten; E = elementary school; M = middle school; H = high school; *** *P* < .00.

Statewide Parent School Climate Study

Table 3
*Univariate ANOVA for School Problems Index by Race/Ethnicity groups (*N=*13,681)*

	N	Mean (*SD*)
White (not Hispanic)	4039	1.99 (.79)
African American (not Hispanic)	739	2.06 (.89)
Other or multiethnic	779	2.07 (.88)
Asian and Pacific Islander	1635	2.09 (.97)
Hispanic or Latino	6330	2.28 (1.00)
Native American Indian or Alaska Native	159	2.46 (.86)
F	*F*(5,13675) = 55.468***	
Post hoc	W,AA,O,A > HL > AI	

Note. Higher scores in the School Problems Index indicate more school problems; *** *P* < .001; HL = Hispanic or Latino; AA = African American; O = Other or multiethnic; AI = Native American Indian or Alaska Native; A = Asian or Pacific Islander; W = White.

Statewide Parent School Climate Study

Table 4

Univariate ANOVA for School Problems Index by Grade Levels (N = 15,047)

	N	Mean (*SD*)
Kindergarten	130	1.37 (.61)
Elementary school	2,739	1.60 (.82)
Middle school	5,495	2.31 (.92)
High school	5,489	2.27 (.88)
F	$F(3,13849) = 485.81$***	
Post hoc	M,H > E > K	

Note: Higher scores in the School Problems Index indicate more school problems; K = kindergarten; E = elementary school; M = middle school; H = high school; *** $P < .00$.

Statewide Parent School Climate Study

Table 5
Univariate ANOVA for Parental Involvement Index by
Race/Ethnicity groups (N = 14,826)

	N	Mean (SD)
Asian and Pacific Islander	1807	3.15 (.56)[ad]
Hispanic or Latino	6764	3.12 (.61)[a]
White (not Hispanic)	4420	3.09 (.62)[a]
African American (not Hispanic)	805	3.06 (.64)[a]
Other or multiethnic	869	3.02 (.63)[ac]
Native American Indian or Alaska Native	162	2.73 (.72)[bcdef]
F	$F(5,14821) = 19.618***$	

Note. Higher scores in the Parental Involvement Index indicate more parental involvement; *** $P < .001$; [a]significantly different than Native American Indian or Alaska Native; [b]significantly different than Hispanic or Latino; [c]significantly different than Asian and Pacific Islander; [d]significantly different than other or multiethnic; [e]significantly different than African American; [f]significantly different than White (at least $p < .01$) in post hoc comparisons.

Table 6
Univariate ANOVA for Parental Involvement Index by Grade Levels (N = 15,030)

	N	Mean (*SD*)
Kindergarten	160	3.38 (.67)
Elementary school	2,959	3.32 (.55)
Middle School	6,028	3.07 (.60)
High school	5,883	2.99 (.63)
F	$F (3,15026) = 207.57$***	
Post hoc	K,E > M,H	

Note: Higher scores in the Parental Involvement Index indicate more parental involvement; K = kindergarten; E = elementary school; M = middle school; H = high school; *** *P < .00.*