Teachers Involving Parents (TIP):

An in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement

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Abstract

Because parental involvement in children=s education has been associated with positive outcomes for students, teacher skills for engaging parental involvement are an important area of professional development. An in-service education program (Teachers Involving Parents [TIP]) was designed to increase elementary and middle school teachers= invitations to parental involvement by strengthening participants= sense of teaching efficacy, beliefs about parents= efficacy for helping their children learn, and attitudes toward parent involvement. The program was offered in two public schools serving predominantly low income families. Results for participating (n = 40) and non-participating (n = 23) teachers suggested that participants recorded significant gains in personal sense of teaching efficacy; both groups reported significant increases in beliefs about parental efficacy for helping children learn and practices of involvement. Results of this exploratory research are discussed in terms of teacher beliefs in personal and parental abilities to help children learn, links between these beliefs and teachers= parental involvement skills, possible diffusion effects within school settings, and implications for professional development efforts designed to increase effective parental involvement in children=s education.

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The dynamic interactions between home and school have been examined frequently over recent decades. Bronfenbrenner (1986), for example, suggested that children=s development is best understood as taking place within nested contexts (e.g., family, school, community) and that successful educational outcomes are in part a function of effective relationships among these contexts. Epstein (1987, 1992), ascribing similar importance to productive home-school relationships, argued that children=s educational outcomes are best served by policies and practices that enhance partnership between the overlapping spheres of family and school.

A growing body of empirical evidence supports these assertions. Effective parental involvement has been associated with stronger academic achievement by children and adolescents, and with improvements in varied student attributes conducive to academic success, including improved school attendance and behavior, more positive perceptions of classroom and school climate, stronger self-regulatory skills, stronger work orientation, and higher educational aspirations (e.g., Eccles & Harold, 1993; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Paulson, 1994; Siu-chu & Willms, 1996; Steinberg, Elman, & Mounts, 1989; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Other research has suggested that parents and teachers also benefit from effective parental engagement in children=s education. Parents respond positively to teacher invitations to involvement, appreciate teacher guidance in helping children, and appear to benefit in personal efficacy for helping their children learn when they are productively involved (e.g., Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995). Teachers who practice effective parental involvement strategies are more likely to be perceived by parents and principals as high in teaching ability, receive support from parents, and hold higher levels of teaching efficacy (e.g., Epstein, 1985, 1986; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987).

Despite the benefits of parental involvement, parents and teachers alike have reported barriers to partnership (e.g., Davies, 1993; Epstein, 1986; Lightfoot, 1981; Moles, 1993). For parents, identified barriers have included low sense of efficacy for helping children learn, the absence of requests and invitations from the school, and self-perceptions of inadequate skills and knowledge (e.g., Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Barriers from teachers= perspectives include low teaching efficacy, negative experiences with parents, uncertainty about working with diverse families, and inadequate school support for involvement efforts (e.g., Griffith, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1992; Midkiff & Lawler-Prince, 1992).

Consistent with both sets of research findings (i.e., that parental involvement facilitates student success and that parents and teachers often experience barriers to developing effective partnerships), some educators have developed programs to increase teacher skills and commitment to inviting and sustaining productive parental involvement. Morris, Taylor, Knight, and Wasson (1996), for example, offered early childhood and elementary pre-service teachers experiences designed to increase parental involvement skills (e.g., interviewing parents, developing specific plans for involvement activities). Students reported significant gains in skill and efficacy for conducting parent conferences and workshops, accessing resources, and creating

effective involvement strategies. Evans-Schilling (1999) described similar results with a long-term pre-service training program for graduate students. Overall, however, there have been very few such efforts in teacher education programs (e.g., de Acosta, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman,1991). In fact, Chavkin and Williams (1988) reported that while most (over 70%) teacher educators agreed with the importance of educating teachers for parental involvement, only four percent of those included in a broad survey reported offering a course on the topic. Analyses of teacher certification standards support this finding: Greenwood and Hankins (1989) reported that of 826 competencies assessed by teacher certification exams, fewer than two percent focused on the single area in which parental involvement might be included (Aextra-classroom influences@). It seems that while teacher educators and many teachers believe parental involvement is important, there has been little focus on the development of specific skills for enacting these beliefs.

This perpetuates a quandary. Teachers who have not been prepared to implement parental involvement may not know how to invite or sustain involvement efforts; parents whose involvement is not invited may perceive intentional exclusion or low regard for their efforts. Such perceptions diminish the likelihood of effective parental involvement, and may seriously hamper the efforts of all participants (teacher, parent, and child) to support children=s school success within the >overlapping spheres= that define the full context of children=s education.

Because pre-service opportunities designed specifically to develop teachers= parental involvement beliefs and skills are few in number, in-service approaches seem a potentially critical tool for constructing more comprehensive and effective family-school partnerships. Teachers Involving Parents (TIP), was designed as a short-term in-service program to increase practicing teachers= beliefs and skills critical to effective parental involvement.

The purpose of the study was to assess the program=s effectiveness in enhancing teacher beliefs underlying their parental involvement practices. The study was grounded in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler=s (1995, 1997) model of the parental involvement process, which suggested that teacher invitations to involvement influence parental decisions to become involved in their children=s education. In keeping with this model and related literature, it was expected that the program=s initial implementation in two public schools serving predominantly low income families would increase participating teachers= personal sense of teaching efficacy, beliefs about parents= efficacy for helping children learn, positive attitudes toward parent involvement, and beliefs about the importance of specific involvement practices. Increases in these teacher belief systems were expected to yield increased teacher invitations to parental involvement and, ultimately, increased parental involvement.

<center>The program</center>

The program was grounded in theory and research that suggested the importance of specific teacher belief systems to teachers= behaviors in inviting parental involvement. Its implementation was grounded in principles of effective professional development among educators.

Based on research underscoring the potential importance of specific belief systems to teachers= parental involvement practices, the program focused on increasing participants= personal sense of teaching efficacy, beliefs about parents= efficacy for helping children learn, attitudes

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toward involvement in general, and beliefs about the importance of specific involvement practices. *Personal sense of teaching efficacy* has been related to stronger confidence in one=s efforts, greater goal-related behavior, and persistence in overcoming obstacles (e.g., Bandura, 1993, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992; Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). These findings suggest that stronger sense of teaching efficacy--paired with beliefs in the importance of parents= involvement--will support higher levels of teacher invitations to involvement. *Teacher perceptions of parental efficacy for helping children learn* were included because teachers who believe that parents are capable of contributing to their children=s educational success are more likely than those holding less positive views to act in ways that will secure parents= involvement (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1992). *Teacher attitudes about parental involvement in general* and *teacher beliefs about the importance of specific involvement strategies* were included based on research supporting links between beliefs and behavior (e.g., Goodnow, 1988). The program assumed that teachers with more positive beliefs (general and specific) about parental involvement would be more likely than less positive teachers to invite parents= involvement (e.g., Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

The program=s implementation was grounded in specific principles of professional development (e.g., Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Fenstermacher, 1994; Lord, 1994; Wilson & Berne, 1999). The program focused on creating opportunities for collegial interaction among peers, assuming that learningBchanges in belief and behavior systemsBis best fostered in contexts that enhance both trust and critique. Before participating teachers could (re-)construct belief systems central to effective invitations to parental involvement, it was assumed that they needed a well-supported, safe community within which to examine and test beliefs about parental involvement. The program was also grounded in support for participants= active construction of new belief and knowledge systems. Changes in beliefs and behaviors are not the logical consequences of receptive learning alone; they require active engagement in exploring prior belief-behavior systems. Finally, the program was explicitly grounded in the assumption that collective generation and evaluation of ideas underlie a group=s ability to continue the development of beliefs, skills, and practices beyond the confines of the intervention. Overall, the fundamental goal of the program was to offer groups of knowledgeable professionals a forum for building and sustaining personal and organizational frameworks essential to creating more effective parental involvement in the school.

Offered in six one-hour modules, the program was designed to meet the needs of each participating school. Workshop sessions were offered at times and locations chosen by each school. Within each session, program facilitators worked to convey strong respect for individual participants= experiences, perspectives, and professional expertise. Participants= and facilitators= names were learned quickly (with the aid of permanent program logo name tags). Each session was begun with an >icebreaker= designed as an explicit transition from the demands of a full teaching day to the often equally intense demands of examining personal beliefs and behaviors. Substantial refreshments were offered throughout each session. Participants= time was explicitly valued: sessions were begun and ended precisely on time, and teachers received an honorarium for participating. Individual and group responses to activities during each session were recorded and returned to the group; they were also used to shape decisions about the content of subsequent

sessions. Anonymous participant evaluations of each session were also treated in this way. Facilitators emphasized their roles as guides and resources. They presented material and offered new activities, but explicitly regarded participants as experts in both the life of the school and the usefulness of group-generated strategies for inviting more effective parental involvement. Major topics and methods used across the six program sessions are summarized in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Method

Subjects

The program was implemented within the context of a network of social service programs focused on improving high-risk children≈s school outcomes in a large, mid-south urban area. The two public schools included in the study, Randolph Elementary and Johnson Middle School (both pseudonyms), were located in neighborhoods targeted for a variety of special interventions.

After receiving permission from the principal of each school, program facilitators solicited volunteer participants (up to 15 teachers and staff members in each school). Teachers in each school were told about the program≈s purpose, content, and structure in a general meeting; they were also told that participants would receive an honorarium of $150.00 ($25.00 per session). At Randolph Elementary, 13 teachers and support staff chose to participate; 10 non-participating teachers volunteered to serve as the school≈s comparison group. Randolph participants chose to spread the six TIP sessions over an eight-week period and to hold all sessions at school. At Johnson Middle, 17 teachers and support staff, including the principal, chose to participate; 12 teachers volunteered to serve as comparison group. Johnson teachers chose a more intensive format, asking that the six sessions be held in three two-hour meetings spread over a two-week period; these sessions were all held at the school. In all, there were 30 TIP participants and 22 comparison group teachers (see Table 1 for descriptive information on each group).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Randolph Elementary, serving grades K - 4, was built in 1952. It was located in an urban area that includes a large public housing project, many single-family and duplex residences, and some commercial development. Thirty-eight total faculty members served 412 students (75% of whom were African American, 21% white, 2% Asian, 2% Hispanic). Ninety-eight percent of the students received free or reduced-cost lunch. Approximately 73% walked to school from adjoining neighborhoods; the remainder were transported in day care vans, public bus or private car. A three-year average (1996-1999) standardized test score performance, combining test scores and gain scores, placed Randolph in the district≈s third quadrant, far below national averages for absolute scores but slightly above national averages for gains (Changas, personal communication).

Johnson Middle School served children in pre-K, K, 5th and 6th grades. Built in 1954, the school was located in an inner city area including a large public housing project, many single family homes, and a few commercial establishments. Thirty-nine faculty members served 473

students (67% of whom were African-American, 27% white, 3% Asian, 3% Hispanic). Eighty-one percent of the students received free or reduced cost lunches; approximately 70% walked to school from the adjoining neighborhoods and the remainder were bussed. A three-year average (1996-1999) standardized test score performance, combining test scores and gain scores, placed Johnson in the district=s lowest quadrant, below national averages for absolute scores and slightly below national averages for gain scores (Changas, personal communication).

Procedures

Program sessions were scheduled, in accordance with each group=s preferences, in the school library immediately after school hours. The library in each school was reasonably sized, allowing for a refreshments area, space for large group presentations and discussion, and more distant ×corners= for small group work.

Before the program began, participating and comparison teachers were given instrument packages with self-explanatory directions; they were asked to complete the questionnaires independently, and return them to the investigators before the program began (see Note 1). Post-program instrument packages were given to participating and comparison teachers after the program had been completed; all were asked again to complete the questionnaires independently and leave them in sealed envelopes for the investigators in a designated collection box at the school. For every completed questionnaire, TIP contributed $5.00 to a school fund to be used for parental involvement efforts identified by teachers participating in the program.

Measures

All measures were integrated into a TIP Teacher Questionnaire (see Note 1).

Teacher efficacy. The Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987) was used; the measure contains 12 items answered on a six-point scale (1 = disagree very strongly to 6 = agree very strongly). Sample items include: AI feel that I am making a significant educational difference in the lives of my students;@ AIf I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult and unmotivated students.@ Negatively worded items were reverse scored. Total possible score for the scale was 84; higher scores indicated greater teaching efficacy. Previously reported reliabilities range from .83 to .87 (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1987, 1992); standardized alpha for the pre-TIP administration was .81; post-TIP was .86.

Teacher perceptions of parent efficacy for helping children succeed in school. Hoover-Dempsey et al.=s (1992) scale was used. The measure incorporates seven items answered on a 6-point scale (1 = disagree very strongly to 6 = agree very strongly). It includes such items as AMy students= parents feel successful about helping their children learn,@ and AIf my students= parents try really hard, they can help their children learn even when the children are unmotivated.@ Total possible score was 42; higher scores indicated more positive teacher perceptions of parent efficacy. Previously reported alpha reliability was .79 (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992); pre- and post-TIP administrations yielded alphas of .80 and .69, respectively.

Teacher attitudes toward parent involvement. This measure was adapted from Epstein, Salinas, and Horsey (1994). Eight items from the original 17-item scale were used. Items were answered on a six-point scale, including three points of disagreement (disagree just a little, disagree, disagree very strongly) and three of agreement (agree very strongly, agree, agree just a little) Sample items included: AParent involvement can help teachers be more effective with more

students@ and @Parent involvement is important for a good school.@ Total possible score for the scale was 48; higher scores indicated more positive attitudes toward parent involvement. Standardized alpha reliability in the pre-TIP administration was .65; post-TIP was .75.

         <u>Teacher beliefs about the importance of specific parent involvement activities</u>. Based on the work of several other investigators, this 16-item scale was developed to assess teachers= beliefs about the importance of a set of specific parental involvement activities. Ten items were drawn from Epstein, et al. (1994; e.g., @Having a conference with each of my students= parents at least once a year,@ @Contacting parents when their children do something well or improve@). Four items were developed on the basis of Epstein=s (1986) 12 types of learning activities teachers ask parents to do with their children at home (e.g., @Asking my students= parents to help the child with homework,@ @Inviting my students= parents to visit my classroom@). One item was adapted from Stipek (personal communication: @Giving parents ideas to help them become effective advocates for their children@); one was drawn from a local, program-wide evaluation effort (@Sending home >letters= telling parents what the children have been learning and doing in class@). Teachers were asked to respond to each item on a six-point scale (@This is not at all important to me@ to @This is very important to me@). Total possible score for the scale was 96; higher scores indicated stronger beliefs in the importance of the set of parent involvement practices. Standardized alpha reliability for the pre-TIP administration was .90; post-TIP, .94.

         <u>Teacher reports of personal practices for inviting parental involvement</u>. This scale, designed to measure active teacher invitations to involvement, contained 16 items identical to the measure of teacher beliefs about the importance of specific strategies (above). The response format was changed from @How important do you think these practices and strategies are?@ to @How often have you done each of the following this year?@ Teachers responded to each item on a six-point scale (1 = never, 2 = once this year, 3 = once each semester, 4 = once a month, 5 = once every 1-2 weeks, 6 = 1+ time[s] each week).   Total possible score for the scale was 96; higher scores indicated more frequent parental involvement invitations and activities. Standardized alpha reliability for pre- and post-TIP administrations was .89.

         <u>Teacher perceived levels of parental involvement</u>. This scale was included to gain an estimate of parents= levels of involvement. The scale included 14 items drawn from the previous two measures. Sample items included: @Attend scheduled parent-teacher conferences,@ @Contact me when their children are having a problem with learning,@ @Help the child with homework.@ Teachers were asked to respond to each item on a six-point scale (1 = none, 2 = 10-25%, 3 = 30-45%, 4 = 55-70%, 5 = 75-90%, 6 = all) with reference to the question: @How many of your students= parents have participated in the following activities this year? Please record your best estimate for each item.@ Total possible score was 84; higher scores reflected higher teacher estimates of parents= involvement activities. Standardized alpha reliability pre-TIP was .89; post-TIP, .92. After completing the scale, teachers were asked to rate their level of confidence in the total set of responses (@How much confidence do you have in the accuracy of your estimates on the items above?@) by circling one of the following options: @I am completely confident,@ @I am pretty confident,@ @I am just somewhat confident,@ @I am not very confident.@ Confidence ratings were used as context for understanding teacher estimates of parents= involvement activities.

         <u>Demographic data</u>. Specific demographic data on teachers included grade level taught,

position (classroom or support), years of teaching experience, years in the school, degree level, ethnicity, and gender.

     Program evaluation data. At the end of each session, participants were asked to respond anonymously to a brief evaluation (AWhat was today=s most valuable experience?@ AWhat was the best thing you learned today?@ AWhat parts of today=s program could have been strengthened?@; see Note 1). At the end of the full program, participants were asked to complete a TIP 10-Minute Evaluation, rating the usefulness of varied workshop components and responding to specific questions about TIP program objectives, teaching materials, handouts and resources, and facilitators (see Note 1). Facilitators also kept records on participants= responses during workshop sessions, as well as notes from conversations with school personnel for several months after the program. These data were used to lend further insight into quantitative results.

<div align="center">Results</div>

     Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables for TIP participants and non-participants are summarized in Tables 2 and 3. There were no significant between-group

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differences in demographic or study variables prior to the TIP program. Because patterns of intercorrelations for the two groups= appeared somewhat different (i.e., the TIP group recorded fewer significant links between pairs of study variables than did the comparison group), factor analyses were run on the correlation matrices. Results underscored similar factors in each group.

     Repeated measures analysis of variance was used to test for TIP program effects. Results suggested that *teacher efficacy* increased significantly for TIP participants but not for comparison teachers (F [1,50] = 4.40, p < .05; group X efficacy: F [1,50] = 4.84, p < .05; see Table 4 and Figure 2). *Teacher perceptions of parent efficacy* (F [1,50] = 33.74, p < .000; group X variable:

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F [1,50] = .64, ns) and *teacher reports of personal practices for inviting involvement* (F [1, 50] = 6.10, p < .05, group X variable: F [1,50] = 1.51, ns) increased significantly for *both* groups (see Table 4 and Figures 3 and 4). There were no significant differences across the three remaining

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variables (attitudes toward parental involvement in general, beliefs about the importance of specific parent involvement activities, or teacher perceived levels of parent involvement).

     Further analysis of *teacher perceived levels of parental involvement* reported by *confident* teachers (Acompletely confident@ or Apretty confident@ in ratings of parental involvement: TIP n = 23/30, comparison n = 13/22) suggested that TIP teachersBprior to the programBreported significantly *lower* levels of parental involvement than non-participating teachers (31.32 [sd = 6.30] v.38.70 [sd = 10.55], F[1,32] = 5.59, p < .05). Both participating and non-participating

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groups recorded a significant over-time difference: TIP participants= estimates *increased* (31.32 [sd = 6.30] v. 33.38 [sd = 6.11]) while comparison teachers= *decreased* (38.70 [sd = 10.55] v. 36.46 [sd = 9.13]); F (1,32) = 4.18, p<.05; see Table 4).

Although there were no significant initial differences between the two schools, their different age populations (K-4 v. pre-K, K, 5, 6) and different choices for structuring the TIP program (6 one-hour sessions in 8 weeks v. 3 two-hour sessions in 2 weeks) suggested examining the data for post-program school differences. A significant three-way interaction in *teacher attitudes toward parent involvement* indicated that at Randolph, TIP teachers= scores increased (37.92 v. 41.02) and comparison teachers= scores stayed even (37.60 v. 37.90), while at Johnson, TIP teachers= scores decreased (40.07 v. 38.54) and comparison teachers increased (38.98 v. 39.78); F (1,48) = 6.13, p<.05. There was also a significant two-way interaction in *confident= teachers= reports of parental involvement*: at Randolph, confident TIP and comparison teachers reported increased involvement (TIP: 28.23 v.33.30; comparison: 36.88 v. 37.98), while both groups at Johnson reported decreased involvement (TIP: 34.15 v. 33.44; comparison: 41.57 v. 36.09), F (1,32) = 8.59, p<.01 (see Figures 5 and 6). There were no other significant post-program differences between schools.

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Insert Figures 5 and 6 about here

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Discussion

Participation in the TIP program led to increases in participants= sense of teaching efficacy. The finding is encouraging because teacher efficacy has been linked to stronger professional functioning in several domains (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1987,1992). A stronger belief in professional competence, if combined with commitment to the importance of parental involvement, is likely to support (re)new(ed) invitations to parents, initiation of potentially productive parent-teacher relationships, persistence in efforts to involve parents, and persistence in overcoming the obstacles likely to be encountered. Most important, teachers higher in efficacy are likely to view obstacles as problems to be solved rather than evidence of personal limitations.

Increases in participants= efficacy were also manifested in many evaluative comments, for example:

We need to develop a new approach; we can make a difference!

We are not adversaries, but too many times we put ourselves in that position; we should work together for our children.

Specific new plans for inviting parental involvement were described by many:

I will be friendlier from the beginning.

I will try to have regular contact with all parents, not just to discuss students= grades.

I hope we can actually form a committee to [organize] the PTO calendar for [the new school year].

Although not specifically assessed in this study, increased comfort with the risks associated with increased invitations to parental involvement--and increased commitment to treating involvement obstacles as problems to be solved rather than barriers to action--are theoretically among the

consequences of increases in sense of teaching efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Increases in both areas were also evident in participants= observations on major learning experiences during the in-service program; for example,

> AMany parents do want to be involved but are inhibited by fear, addiction, schedules; we need to help them feel familiar and comfortable.@
>
> ANever give up; there is always a way to get hold of a parent!@

Perhaps the most important vehicle for increasing participants= sense of efficacy was the TIP program=s provision of well-supported opportunities for collegial interaction among peers. This interaction appeared critical to changes in teacher beliefs about personal ability to >make a difference.= Specifically, participants identified the most valuable components of the program as group discussion of best and worst involvement experiences, group identification and analysis of obstacles to parental involvement, the group=s development of goals for increased parental involvement, and brainstorming with colleagues. These collective experiences were marked by individual articulation of personal experience, acceptance of all contributions by facilitators and group members, and the use of shared experience as foundation for the development of new ideas for solving important problems.

The power of the group=s collaboration in exploring beliefs and planning actions was underscored in several ways. In initial sessions, teachers spoke of being glad to meet and talk with each other (AI=ve heard your name before; it=s good to put a face with your name!@). Many expressed relief in hearing others describe personal experiences related to parent involvement; the comment AI=m not the only one!@ was heard repeatedly. Participants seemed most appreciative of their collective generation of refurbished and new ideas for addressing familiar problems; for example,

> AThere is a lot of knowledge and skill in this group and this workshop allowed us to share [it].@
>
> AI thoroughly enjoyed working with the group . . . it gave us a sense of community.@
>
> A[This was] incredibly motivatingBI want more information and am anxious to check out the materials and material lists.@

Increases in teacher efficacy beliefs seem most likely to lead to increases in teacher invitations to involvement if two other teacher belief systems are also positive and activated. The first is teacher beliefs about the importance of parental involvement. Assessed in this study as beliefs about the importance of parental involvement in general and beliefs about the importance of specific parental involvement practices in particular, findings suggested that participants and non-participants alike held strong positive beliefs in both areas in advance of the in-service program. (The two groups= mean pre-program scores were nearly identical and in the top quartile of each measure=s range: attitudes toward parent involvement, x = 39 [range 6-48]; beliefs about the importance of specific parental involvement practices, x = 85 [range 16-96]). Essentially, participating and comparison teachers believed--before the program--that parental involvement and teacher practices to involve parents are important. These initially strong beliefs left little room for change as a function of program participation. The finding suggests that professional development efforts designed to increase teacher invitations to parental involvement might best assume teachers= awareness of the importance of parental involvement and focus directly on

transforming this awarenessBthrough the development of requisite belief systems in personal efficacyBinto *actions* designed to increase the incidence and effectiveness of invitations to parental involvement.

A second variable believed necessary for the teachers= use of increased efficacy in crafting more--and more effective--invitations to parental involvement is teacher belief in parents= ability and commitment to helping their children learn. Consistent with expectations, teachers participating in the TIP program recorded increases in beliefs about parents= efficacy for helping their children learn. These beliefs were reflected in several participants= identification of most important learnings in the program, for example,

AParents are really trying, they just aren=t always sure what to do.@
AParents love their children too, and, like us, need encouragement.@
A[TIP] remind[ed] us of the good things that can happen when we see parentsBand parents see themselvesBas important.@

Participants were not alone in recording increases in this area, however; non-participating teachers also recorded increases in beliefs about parents= efficacy for helping children. Thus, while participation in the TIP program may have influenced participants= beliefs about parents= efficacy--as it was designed to do--the same mechanism does not explain increases non-participants= perceptions of parental efficacy. Subsequent conversations with staff members in each school suggested that diffusion effects may have accounted for program influence on non-participating teachers. Diffusion may have begun with initial meetings to describe the program and solicit teachers= participation; these meetings in themselves may have heightened the salience of parental involvement. Diffusion likely continued as large percentages of each school=s faculty (Randolph, 60%; Johnson, 69%) completed TIP questionnaires as participating or comparison group members. Both events may have primed many teachers in each school, not just TIP participants, to think about parental involvement as a salient component of school efforts. Once underway, the program itself created a notable if periodic physical presence in each school: on workshop days, facilitators entered the building with a caravan of supplies and refreshments just before school dismissal; facilitators made strong efforts to speak with all teachers near the program site in the 15-20 minutes preceding each session; ice-breaker activities used to initiate each session usually produced laughter and enjoyment that spilled over into adjoining hallways. Participants commented often on liking the program and the opportunities it afforded for positive, productive brainstorming of solutions to difficult problems. Staff members in both schools suggested that teachers often Aexchanged expertise,@ and did so with regard to parent involvement issues during the program. All of these events led logically to the diffusion of positively regarded innovations beyond the confines of direct participation.

Surprising in the set of results was the apparent absence of influence on the program=s ultimate outcome, teacher reports of parents= involvement. Initial explanations focused on the likelihood that program-generated increases in teacher invitations evolved gradually across the course of the program, and by program=s end had not yet been experienced by parents as an observable difference in teacher or school behavior. Absent notable new invitations (or a graduate pattern of increasingly salient invitations), it seemed logical that parents would not yet have increased their involvement activities. Analysis of *confident teachers= reports of parents=*

involvement, however, suggested an alternative understanding. Results for teachers who expressed confidence in their estimates of parental involvement suggested that one school site recorded increases in parental involvement (Randolph, which served K-4 students and received the TIP program in an eight-week format) while the other recorded decreases (Johnson, which served pre-K, K, 5th and 6th grade children and received the TIP program in a two-week format). Subsequent discussions with teachers in both schools suggested that in the case of predicted increases, program-generated involvement ideas began influencing day-to-day behaviors during the (longer) course of the program (e.g., a teacher=s more self-consciously welcoming attitude toward parents, a group=s active planning for an open house). In the case of observed decreases, teachers suggested that two events, one normative for the school and one unusual, may have been involved. Normatively, half of this school=s families (those with K and 6 children) move on to other schools at the end of the year, and preparations for new school assignments are often accompanied by end-of-year declines in involvement. The unusual event that may have depressed parental involvement activities was an announcement, soon after the program=s end, that the school would experience faculty cutbacks in the coming year. Staff suggested that this news itself may have depressed both teachers= and parents= activities beyond essential student learning tasks.

Overall, the program exerted positive influence on participating teachers= sense of efficacy, and may have had effects in part through diffusion on both participating and non-participating teachers= beliefs about parents= efficacy for helping children learn and teacher practices of involvement. At least in part because attitudes about parental involvement were initially quite positive, the program appeared to support existing beliefs rather than create new ones. Findings for the program=s distal impact on parents= involvement activities suggested positive outcomes in the school with more stable staffing and enrollment structures and longer, more distributed program structuring; in the other school site, a difficult intervening event, normative structural changes in enrollments, and a shorter, more intensive program structure appeared implicated in declines, rather than the anticipated increases, in parental involvement activities.

These findings for the program are set within the context of specific limitations, however. The intervention was of short duration, and post-program assessments took place immediately following the program. Future efforts to assess the longer term influence of such an in-service intervention program should include more planned variation in program duration, and should include assessments of teacher belief systems, related behaviors, and perceptions of parents= involvement at points more removed from the program itself. These efforts should also include the >next step= of systematic and direct examination of parents= perceptions of program effects and personal reports of involvement behaviors; in the case of middle elementary children (4th grade and above), children=s perceptions of both teacher invitation and parents= involvement should also be included.

Conclusion

Overall, study results supported the effectiveness of the TIP in-service program as a means to increasing teacher belief systems critical to the development of more effective invitations to parental involvement. Further tests of the program over a longer period of time, including the perspectives of teachers, parents, and children (in the case of older elementary students), should provide additional and more refined evidence of such an in-service program=s effectiveness.

The power of the program to influence teacher beliefs appeared most strongly related to its creation of platform for linking requisite belief systems with teacher behaviors enacting invitations to involvement. In essence, the program created >wheels= for teacher belief systems, enabling *actions* based on those beliefs. Most important in this process appeared to be the program=s provision of well-supported opportunities for collegial interaction focused on group generation of solutions to important educational problems. Discussion of experienced barriers to parental involvement appeared to increase teachers= personal and collective beliefs in the group=s power to create solutions to old problems. Once named and discussed, many long-perceived obstacles appeared to come within participants= perceptions of their own spheres of influence. Subsequent articulation of best experiences appeared to affirm that positive and effective parental involvement is possible, and can be created by personal and collective teacher action.

Participating teachers appeared to become a >community of learners redefining teaching practice= (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 194). Participants created small working groups, each focused on a specific involvement problem identified by the group. In these groups, participants developed new ideas for addressing the issue, drawing in part on prior strategies and in part on new information derived from the TIP program. Each group developed specific plans (activities, sequence, resources, roles, and expected outcomes) for increasing teacher invitations to involvement. In so doing, participants experienced *acting* to solve identified problems and, perhaps just as importantly, experienced *themselves* as productive, collaborative, problem-solving groups, capable of creating more effective invitations to parental involvement and responding well to increased parental engagement in children=s schooling.

The program also appeared to succeed because it offered a model of partnership and collaboration among peers that would be viable beyond the intervention itself. Facilitators= knowledge, combined with respect for participants and their expertise in both school matters and the wisdom of varied parent involvement practices, underscored the basic structure of potentially productive relationships between teachers and parents. Such relationships include skillful, knowledgeable teachers with strong respect for parents as individuals who possess expertise about their children and the ability to choose well among varied involvement options. Because the program was designed to enhance and highlight teachers= collective expertise, participants experienced a process modeling the viability and usefulness of teachers= *own* leadership in inviting effective involvement. As one participant observed near the program=s conclusion: A*I know what this is about: we=re already doing just what we should keep doing when the program is over!*@

Because preparing teachers for parent involvement has often been overlooked in teacher education, it is incumbent upon teachers, teacher educators, and administrators to develop in-service programs that encourage participants to identify and examine their own beliefs as a means to strengthening the motivation and skills necessary for involving all parents, especially those sometimes labeled Ahard to reach.@ If they are to succeed, such programs must be grounded in deep respect for teachers= knowledge, professionalism, creativity, commitment, and ability to work collectively in generating solutions to specific parental involvement problems. In creating a model for partnership and creativity among participants, the TIP program facilitated and strengthened connections among colleagues and supported *teachers=* continued creation of changes designed to enhance effective parental involvement.

14

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Notes

1. Several program documents are available from the authors. These include: a list of resources received by TIP participants; the TIP Teacher Questionnaire; the TIP Program Evaluation form; a verbatim summary of participating teachers= program evaluation responses.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of TIP participants and comparison teachers, by school and total

| | Randolph Elementary | | | | Johnson Middle School | | | | Total | | | |
| | TIP (n=13) | | Comparison (n=10) | | TIP (n=17) | | Comparison (n=12) | | TIP (n=30) | | Comparison (n=22) | |
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Grade Taught												
Pre-kindergarten	na		na		1	6%	2	17%	1	3%	2	9%
Kindergarten	3	23%	1	10%	4	24%	0		7	23%	1	5%
First	2	15%	2	20%	na		na		2	7%	2	9%
Second	3	23%	1	10%	na		na		3	10%	1	5%
Third	2	15%	2	20%	na		na		2	7%	2	9%
Fourth	0		2	20%	na		na		0		2	9%
Fifth	na		na		2	12%	5	42%	2	7%	5	23%
Sixth	na		na		2	12%	1	8%	2	7%	1	5%
Fifth/sixth split	na		na		1	6%	1	8%	1	3%	1	5%
Special Education	0		1	10%	1	6%	1	8%	1	3%	2	9%
Support positions	3	23%	1	10%	6	35%	2	17%	9	30%	3	14%
Years of teaching experience												
1-5 years	5	38%	4	40%	8	47%	2	17%	13	43%	6	27%
6-10 years	0		3	30%	2	12%	6	50%	2	7%	9	41%
11-15 years	4	31%	0		1	6%	2	17%	5	17%	2	9%
16-20 years	1	8%	1	10%	4	24%	2	17%	5	17%	3	14%
21+ years	3	23%	2	20%	2	12%	0		5	17%	2	9%
Years of teaching experience in present school												
1-5 years	6	46%	5	50%	12	71%	5	42%	18	60%	10	45%
6-10 years	2	15%	3	30%	4	24%	5	42%	6	20%	8	36%
11-15 years	3	23%	0		1	6%	2	17%	4	13%	2	9%
16-20 years	2	15%	2	20%	0		0		2	7%	2	9%
21+ years	0		0		0		0		0		0	
Degree level												
BA/BS	5	38%	4	40%	12	71%	5	42%	17	57%	9	41%
MA/MS/MED	7	54%	3	30%	3	18%	4	33%	10	33%	7	32%
Master's + 30	1	8%	3	30%	2	12%	3	25%	3	10%	6	27%
Ed.D./Ph.D.	0		0		0		0		0		0	
Ethnicity												
African-American / HispanicHiHispHispanic	3	23%	1	10%	10	59%	4	33%	13	43%	5	23%
White	10	77%	9	90%	7	41%	8	67%	17	57%	17	77%
Gender												
Female	13	100%	8	80%	11	65%	10	83%	24	80%	18	82%

Table 4: Repeated measures analysis of variance, TIP and comparison group scores on outcome variables, pre- and post-intervention

	TIP group		Comparison group		F: pre	p	F: post	p	F: post, var. X group	p
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post						
Outcome variable										
Teacher attitudes toward parent involvement	39.14	39.61	38.35	38.93	.70	ns	.87	ns	.01	ns
Teacher perceptions of parent efficacy	25.70	29.73	25.01	28.07	1.01	ns	33.74	.000	.64	ns
Teacher efficacy	49.83	52.99	51.50	51.03	.00	ns	4.40	.041	4.84	.032
Teacher beliefs about importance of specific parent involvement practices	85.49	86.78	85.43	86.03	.05	ns	.75	ns	.10	ns
Teacher reports of personal practices for involvement	63.51	68.62	60.94	62.66	1.65	ns	6.10	.017	1.51	ns
Teacher perceived levels of parental involvement	31.60	34.39	34.34	33.52	.20	ns	.72	ns	2.42	ns
Teacher perceived levels of parental involvement, for teachers confident of their estimates of parental involvement (n=36)	31.32	33.38	38.70	36.46	5.59	.024	4.18	.049	4.18	ns

Figure 1: Content, objectives, methods for the six TIP program sessions

Hour	Title/sample observation	Objective	Methods
1	Teachers' experiences of parental involvement: "I'm not the only one!"	Present parental involvement as an issue central to children's school success; Allow teachers time to reflect upon, identify, and discuss best and worst experiences with parents; Identify school-specific obstacles to effective parental involvement.	Facilitator presentation; Individual written responses to questions; Interactive presentation of responses to full group; Facilitator recording of group brainstorming responses.
2	Addressing and coping with obstacles: "Why do I still focus on those scary parents?"	Describe problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies; Build on Hour 1 by identifying obstacles as short-term or long-term, as appropriate for problem-focused or emotion-focused strategies; Document participants' work as basis for subsequent sessions.	Facilitator presentation; Individual written responses to questions; Small-group brainstorming on solutions to specific obstacles; Small-group reporting to full group; Facilitator recording of small group responses.
3	Perceptions of parents: "I should try walking a mile in our parents' shoes."	Review previous sessions and relate them to Hour 3; Trigger a ›gestalt shift‹ in teachers creating awareness of how beliefs influence attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in complex problem areas like parental involvement.	Facilitator presentation; Large-group discussion; Individual responses shared with full group.
4	Communicating with parents: "Be aware of what you're listening for!"	Build on understanding of perception formation; Ask teachers to consider their current approaches, styles, and strategies for establishing parent-teacher relationships; Identify which processes work well, which seem less effective. effective.	Facilitator presentation of processes in place at other schools (national sample); Small-group brainstorming new approaches for enhancing communication with parents; Small-group presentations to the full group.
5	Working with hard-to-reach parents: "Show me some new ideas; I don't see any new ideas here!" (Or: Searching for the ›magic bullet‹)	Review TIP resources; Expand on ›normal‹ channels of parent-teacher communication identified in previous session; Construct ideas for inviting hard-to-reach parents; Examine past successes for their ›magic‹ components, transfer them to form new strategies.	Facilitator "walk through" of resources included in training materials; Group discussion of new communication strategies identified in previous hour; Individual contributions to full group discussion.
6	From planning to enacting: "Reaching out to parents is important; it's not just another thing on my list of things that are hard to do."	Develop practical, specific plans and tactics for enacting strategies for enhanced parental involvement beyond the TIP program; Provide closing ceremony of appreciation of the group's collective work.	Facilitator presentation; Small-group brainstorming; Small-group presentation to full group; Closing ceremonies.