

Parental involvement in education important

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Does Indian parent involvement in school make a difference? This question is uppermost in the minds of many Indian educators as Title IV, the Indian Education Act, comes up for reauthorization by Congress in 1984. To answer this question, it is helpful to go back before the late 1960's when Indian parents started to become involved in school and examine the differences between then and now.

Historically, education was seen as the primary method of assimilating Indians into the mainstream American society. The assimilation period lasted from around the 1880's to the 1960's. The main message delivered to Indian parents through these efforts was that Indian language, culture, values, and ways of life were substandard, primitive and even savage. Indian parents characteristically reacted by silent resistance, suspicion and hostility towards schools. Indian student achievements was correspondingly very low.

During the late 1969's this started to change. Parental involvement was encouraged through federal supplemental education programs. In 1972 the Indian Education Act was passed. A major premise of that legislation was that Indian parents have a right and a responsibility to be involved with their children's education. Prior to this time, Indian parents had been made dependent upon an educational system which did not respond to the needs of their children. Now, by law, they had a method of becoming involved in the educational decision making which affected their children.

Most educators who serve Indian people would agree that the result, in terms of Indian student achievement, has been dramatic. More Indians are graduating from high school; more students are entering college; and more students are entering highly academic professions such as law and medicine.

Still the question is asked, "Are these achievements due to Indian parental involvement?" Unfortunately, the question has not been thoroughly researched, although the common sense inference seems clear. There has been research, however, among the mainstream population which seems to support the idea that parents in school do make a great deal of difference in the levels of achievement for their children. The National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) recently compiled results of two dozen studies which found that parental involvement in schools, in almost any form, improved student achievement.

The studies on parental involvement in school have shown that certain types of in-

volvement are more effective than other types. Some characteristics of parental involvement which seem particularly applicable to Indian education

follow:

-Parental involvement in "Early Intervention" programs, such as Headstart. Where preschool children's cognitive de-

velopment is stimulated, programs are especially effective when their parents are actively involved.

-Programs where parental

involvement in school forms attitudes towards education which are carried back to the family setting and which help

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parents spend time with their children to improve the child's attitude and consequently their performance in schools.

—Programs of parental involvement which are well planned, long term and comprehensive have a much more dramatic effect on student achievement than do one-shot, public relations, one visit to

the school a year programs.

—The type of parent involvement does not appear to make as much difference as the extent of parent involvement. However, parents that have maximum communication and interfacing with their child's teachers are almost certain to make a difference. It is important that Indian parents are visible in the school setting.

As mentioned above, parental involvement seems particularly important where Indian students are a minority of the student population and there are few, or perhaps no, Indian people working for the school. Title IV and Johnson O'Malley parent committees have shown a consistent, long term way that parents can become involved in school. It should

start with the relationship with administrator and school boards.

In summary, Indian parents have a right and responsibility to be involved in the education of their children and their involvement will help their children to accept the mainstream

American values and goals while still maintaining their own sense of uniqueness and identity. Parental involvement is a concept that cannot be reduced by budget cutbacks and will remain a fundamental part of education for the foreseeable future.