Introduction

Background
Parental involvement in education has been widely studied as one of the most important predictors of school success for all students (Smit & Dressen, 2007). Additionally, children of all ages with involved parents tend to have higher attendance, achievement levels, and more positive attitudes toward school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) than whose parents are less involved.

Recent U.S. Department of Education statistics reveal that over five million school-aged children are categorized as English Language Learners (ELL) (NCEL, 2006). The parents of ELL students often face unique barriers to being more actively involved in their children’s academic lives. They face school-based barriers, which may include a negative climate toward immigrant parents, individual barriers such as a lack of dominant language proficiency (Quaas, Dey, & Sanchez, 2003), and logistical barriers such as childcare and work responsibilities which often make it difficult for parents to attend school functions (Vail, 1996).

Selected References

Methods

Procedure
Instruments were translated into fifteen different languages to represent the largest language groups in each school district. The surveys were copied so that the native language version was on one side of the page and English on the other, allowing the parent the choice of language in which to respond. Surveys were sent home in students’ backpacks with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Measure
The same survey developed for Vera and colleagues (2012) was used for this study. It consisted of 31 items with a five-point response scale where “1-strongly disagree” and “5-strongly agree.” The first scale, Educational Aspirations, assessed the parent’s goals for their children’s education. School Climate, the second scale tapped into how participants currently perceived the climate at their children’s school. Next, the measure assessed six different types of barriers the parents may face. The barriers included: language, a reluctance to intervene with teachers’ work, negative experiences with the educational system, being overwhelmed by other aspects of life, logistical barriers (such as lack of time to attend events), and a lack of familiarity with the U.S. educational system. Finally, the survey assessed the parents’ current level of involvement in their child’s education. Six different types of involvement were measured: reading with children, using community resources, communicating with teachers, communicating with children about education, establishing routines, and monitoring children’s activity.

Participants
Participants for this study (N=659) were selected for inclusion because they agreed to participate as parents of students enrolled in each of four school districts participating in the research. The school districts in this study were selected due to their enrollment of ELL students and their diversity in terms of their cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic characteristics.

Results

Parental Involvement in ELL Students’ Education

Current Levels of Involvement
In order to assess if the type of school (public or private) impacts parental involvement a series of t-tests were used to determine if any differences are present in the activities that parents of ELLs engage in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Child Communication</th>
<th>School Climate</th>
<th>Routines</th>
<th>Overwhelmed</th>
<th>Logistics</th>
<th>Family/Friendship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Barriers
A similar analysis was conducted regarding the barriers that the parents of ELLs perceived in public versus private schools. In these analyses only one type of barrier, logistical difficulties (such as transportation or child care), was significantly different between the groups. Parents of private school children reported a greater difficulty with logistics than parents of public school children.

Multiple Regressions
In both analyses the type of school (public or private) impacts parental involvement was found. In the second analysis, both types of barriers were found to be greater in public schools.

Discussion

It was interesting to see that the perceptions of the parents from the public schools seemed to find fewer logistical barriers to involvement and were more involved in routines, monitoring, and the community. There are two possible explanations for this. The public school district included in this study is located in a suburban area and parents are likely to be more affluent than the parents in the private school district who are from typically lower SES areas in a city. This would perhaps indicate that the families with more financial resources experience fewer barriers and are more able to be involved. Another possible explanation for these results, is that the parents in private school systems trust that the teachers and school will provide the necessary structure for their children and do not find it necessary to be as involved in these aspects of their children’s lives.

The first predictor of reading with children, a parent’s highest level of education, aligns with the findings of Vera et al. (2012). Additionally, in both studies a language barrier did not significantly predict reading involvement signifies that parental reading is not a “language issue.” Rather, it seems that parents with lower levels of education may not see it as important to read regularly with their children or may not feel confident in doing so. Furthermore, parents who are overwhelmed by their other responsibilities, such as need to expend energy on reading to their children, are less likely to engage in such involvement. Lastly, the current study concluded that parents who perceive a more positive school climate towards parental involvement were more likely to read to their children. In parimutual, their school encourages parents to be involved with the education of their children, these parents likely see the importance of doing so through reading with their children.

The predictors for community involvement appear to be quite logical and are similar to the results obtained previously (Vera et al., 2012). They suggest possible avenues for ways to increase levels of parental use of community resources because only less likely to take advantage of community resources, the schools may inform parents about local resources. Additionally, this intervention may also help with parents who are less educated. Parents who feel overwhelmed are understood to be less likely to become involved in using community resources. It is unclear how negative experiences at school may impact parents’ use of community resources, except that perhaps these parents may also have gone through similar situations in the community.

Parents who are overwhelmed may not have the time or energy to develop routines with their children. As mentioned previously, the type of school may either be a result of social class or expectations for the school. Parents who are more educated may have a greater understanding of the importance of routines. It was interesting that the response language predicted the use of routines. This may indicate that perhaps there are acculturation or cultural differences that make parents who did not respond in English less likely to use routines.