Education and Urban Society

Improving Student Behavior and School Discipline with Family and Community Involvement

The online version of this article can be found at:

Additional services and information for *Education and Urban Society* can be found at:

>> Version of Record - Nov 1, 2002

What is This?

IMPROVING STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND SCHOOL DISCIPLINE WITH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

STEVEN B. SHELDON
JOYCE L. EPSTEIN
Johns Hopkins University

This study reports the results of efforts of school officials to implement family and community involvement activities to reduce the number of disciplinary actions and to ensure a school climate focused on learning. Using longitudinal data from elementary and secondary schools, analyses indicate that regardless of schools' prior rates of discipline, the more family and community involvement activities were implemented, the fewer students were disciplined by being sent to principals' offices or given detention or in-school suspension. Activities for two types of involvement, parenting and volunteering, were most predictive of reducing the percentages of students who were subject to discipline. Also, schools that improved the quality of their partnership programs reported fewer students in need of discipline. The results suggest that creating more connections and greater cooperation among the school, family, and community contexts may be one way for schools to improve student behavior and school discipline.

Popular and political rhetoric about education in the United States is focused heavily on issues of testing and accountability. New federal education policy calls for annual standardized testing of all students in public schools in Grades 3 through 8 (*No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001), with the possibility of reorganizing schools in which students consistently perform unsatisfactorily on these tests. Parents, educators, and citizens in the community, however, may view student behavior and safety as at least as important as test scores (Rothstein, 2001). Although incidents of student disruption and minor

conflicts do not receive the same media attention as achievement test scores, issues of student behavior are no less important for student success in school (Clark, 2002; Tosto, 2002).

During the past few years, extreme incidents such as school shootings have led many to the erroneous conclusion that student violence is occurring at an alarming rate in schools and that school is no longer a safe place for students. Yet, national data on school violence and delinquent behavior suggest that schools remain safe for students (Berends, Pallas, & Spade, 1996; Kaufman et al., 2000; V. E. Lee & Croninger, 1996) and are, in fact, becoming safer over time (Brener, Simon, Krug, & Lowry, 1999). Still, for a small percentage of youngsters, schools are not safe, and educators need to work to reduce behavior problems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines the efforts of school officials to draw on family and community resources to create or maintain safe schools and a school climate focused on learning. Epstein (1987, 1995) asserted that students are influenced by the family, school, and community contexts in which they develop. She referred to the three contexts as "spheres of influence," which overlap to a greater or lesser extent depending on the nature and degree of communications and collaborative activities among school personnel, parents, and community members. Student learning and development are enhanced when there is purposeful overlap of the spheres of influence. One possible outcome of this kind of collaboration is better student behavior within and outside of school.

Educators play an important role in determining the degree to which family, school, and community contexts overlap. Schools can increase collaboration by implementing activities for the following six types of family and community involvement: Type 1, parenting or helping all families establish home environments to support children as students; Type 2, communicating or designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication; Type 3, volunteering or recruiting and organizing families to help the school and support students; Type 4, learning at home or providing families with information and ideas to help students with homework; Type 5, decision making or including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders; and Type 6, collaborating with the community or identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen schools, students, and

families. Schools with comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships address all six types of involvement through activities directed toward specific goals and student outcomes (Epstein, 1995, 2001).

Previous research on the impact of school programs using the framework of the six types of involvement has shown that the implementation of specific involvement activities is associated with higher levels of parent involvement; improved attendance; improved reading, writing, and math achievement; improved report card grades; and improvements in other student outcomes (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1991, 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, in press; S. Lee, 1994; Sheldon & Epstein, 2001; Simon, 2000; Van Voorhis, 2000). However, the effects of partnership activities on student behavior are unclear. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by asking to what extent the implementation of school-family-community partnership activities designed to improve student behavior affects school-level reports of student behavior and school disciplinary actions. We begin by setting the context for the study with a review of research on the extent of behavior problems in schools and predictors of student misbehavior.

LEVELS OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL

Nonfatal student victimizations (i.e., thefts and assaults) at school are serious but rare (Flaxman, 2001). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics and Bureau of Justice report, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* (Kaufman et al., 2000), in 1998, about 8% of all 6th through 12th graders reported being victims of criminal incidents and 7% of students reported being threatened with weapons. About 16% of public school principals reported any serious discipline problem at their schools (Kaufman et al., 2000). About 11% of school board leaders report that school violence is a major concern in their districts (Hess, 2002).

Supporting these findings, most students say they feel safe at school. The same report revealed that for a 6-month period in 1999, 5% of students aged 12 to 18 reported they feared being attacked or harmed at school and 5% reported they avoided certain places at school (Kaufman et al., 2000). These figures confirm earlier findings that 90% of high school students reported they felt safe at school (V. E. Lee & Croninger, 1996). Although there are areas in some schools where students do not feel comfortable (Astor, Meyer,

& Pitner, 2001), the vast majority of students do not avoid school to protect themselves from violent or criminal behavior.

In contrast to violent offenses, less serious disruptions occur more frequently in schools, such as being late for school, talking in class, and talking back to teachers. In 1997, for example, 33% of students reported their property was stolen or deliberately damaged (Barton, Coley, & Wenglinsky, 1998). Although less serious than assaults or threats from weapons, the frequency of these incidents make them potentially disruptive to student learning.

In summary, most schools are safe places where students feel safe and are unlikely to be victims of violent crimes. Despite the low occurrence of violence in schools, these incidents are important and severe enough to warrant attention by researchers and educators. Also, minor disruptions in schools are important to consider because the frequency of these events may reduce the amount of time and conditions for student learning. Therefore, it is important to identify effective strategies for reducing levels of major and minor delinquency at schools.

PREDICTORS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL

Research on student behavior has focused mainly on identifying predictors and correlates of delinquency and other behavior problems. Studies reveal that selected characteristics of students, families, communities, and schools help predict students' behavior in schools.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Data on delinquent behavior in school show that students' gender, age, and race are associated with the occurrence of fatal and nonfatal violent incidents. Male students are significantly more likely to bully others, be in fights, be threatened or injured with weapons, drink alcohol and smoke marijuana, and be involved in other delinquent and criminal offenses (Brener et al., 1999; D. C. Gottfredson, 1996; Kaufman et al., 2000; Nansel et al. 2001). Also, older students tend to be more involved in these types of serious disruptions at school (Anderson et al., 2001; D. C. Gottfredson, 1996). Criminal incidents tend to occur more often in high schools than in elementary or middle schools (Kaufman et al., 2000), whereas incidents of bullying are higher among

middle school students than among high school students (Nansel et al., 2001). The fact that delinquent behaviors vary by age and gender suggests that interventions to reduce specific problems need to consider the developmental level of students most likely to be involved in these behaviors.

Some incidents of delinquent behaviors vary across race and ethnic groups. Compared to White students, non-White youth report feeling less safe at their schools and tend to be more involved in delinquent behaviors (V. E. Lee & Croninger, 1996). However, Nansel et al. (2001) found that Black youth, compared with those from other racial/ethnic groups, reported the least amount of bullying. According to D. C. Gottfredson (1996), "The correlation of delinquent behavior with race is dwarfed by the correlation with age or gender" (p. 343). Race, then, is a relatively poor predictor of student behavior and should not constitute the central feature of approaches to reduce disruptions and delinquency in schools.

FAMILY CONTEXTS

The home environment is an important influence on student behavior. In their review of literature, Snyder and Patterson (1987) concluded that certain parenting styles, disciplinary approaches, parental monitoring, family problem-solving strategies, and levels of conflict within the home all are predictive of delinquency among juveniles. Furthermore, when these types of family interaction patterns are statistically accounted for, the association between sociodemographic characteristics and delinquency is greatly reduced or disappears. These findings suggest that interventions designed to improve the interactions between parents and children may help reduce delinquency and problem behaviors of students in schools.

COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

In addition to individual student and family characteristics, the neighborhoods in which families and schools are located may affect student behavior. Many have argued that the social and cultural organization of neighborhoods shapes the socialization processes of families and schools (Elliott et al., 1996; Wilson, 1987). For example, adolescents' exposure to violence in the community is associated with poor school attendance, low grades, and problem behavior in school (Bowen & Bowen, 1999).

The impact of communities, however, is not always negative. The community in which students live may be an asset and contribute to higher school achievement. School-community collaborations such as mentoring, safety patrols, and business partnerships may improve school programs and affect student achievement and attitudes toward school (McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Nettles, 1991; Sanders, 2001; Sanders & Harvey, 2000). However, studies have not explored whether school-community partnership activities measurably improve student behavior or reduce incidents of delinquency in schools over time.

SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Several studies suggest that school organizational characteristics may influence student behavior. Perry and Weinstein (1998) found that the ways students are grouped, graded, and interact with teachers affect student behavior, beginning in children's first years of formal schooling. Noguera (1995) noted that most approaches to student discipline in schools emphasize social control. He suggested that a school environment that reduces the amount of disconnect between students' lives within and outside of school would reduce the potential for violence.

Other aspects of school organization also have been identified as predictors of student behavior across grade levels, including school size and school climate (Clark, 2002). Students reported feeling less safe in large high schools but more safe in small or large schools if they experienced positive student-teacher relationships (V. E. Lee & Croninger, 1996). Several school-climate characteristics have been associated with disorderly schools and problem behavior, including punitive attitudes of teachers; rules that are perceived as unfair, unclear, or unenforced; inconsistent responses to student misbehavior; disagreement among teachers and administrators about school rules and appropriate responses to misbehavior; students who do not support conventional social rules; and inadequate resources for teaching (G. D. Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1985).

PRACTICES TO REDUCE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Although many have suggested that school, family, and community resources could help reduce problem behavior and improve learning in

school (Adelman & Taylor, 1998; Epstein, 1995; Noguera, 1995; Taylor & Adelman, 2000), most interventions to improve student behavior have focused on what educators need to do in school to ensure a safe environment. Parents have been given modest roles in helping to improve student behavior, such as being asked to reinforce programs at the schools (e.g., D. C. Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993).

There is some evidence that families and community partners can help schools become safer and more focused on student learning. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education distributed guidelines to schools for ensuring school safety that include encouraging educators to collaborate with parents to prevent and help deal with extreme acts of violence (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998). Also, a study of elementary school students discovered that school social workers who helped families and schools communicate with one another improved students' behavior and academic skills (Bowen, 1999). Other studies also have shown that schools' implementation of family involvement activities (e.g., attending workshops, volunteering at the school, helping with learning at home, and being involved with school policy reviews and revisions) is associated with better behavior of middle and high school students (S. Lee, 1994; Ma, 2001; Simon, 2000).

Research further suggests that school-community collaborations may help improve student behavior and school safety (Learning First Alliance, 2001). In a study of three urban schools, Sanders (1996) found that school safety was increased when community members were involved with after-school programs, community patrols to make sure students arrived to school safely, and mentoring at-risk students.

Despite some promising approaches, few studies have focused on the effects of organized intervention programs of family and community involvement on student behavior and school discipline. In this study, we examine the use of family and community involvement activities specifically designed to improve student behavior and to reduce the number of disciplinary actions taken by school officials. The activities implemented by schools are categorized according to Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement to learn whether certain activities are more likely than others to improve student behavior. The study addresses the following questions:

- What is the extent of behavior problems and disciplinary actions in the sampled schools? How do the schools respond to different behavior problems?
- Are family and community involvement activities viewed as helpful for improving student behavior?
- How do family and community involvement activities and the quality of partnership programs affect schools' disciplinary actions from one year to the next?

METHOD

PROCEDURE

In the fall of 1998, schools in the National Network of Partnership Schools, an ongoing project conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, were invited to participate in the Focus on Results study if they were working to improve student behavior using practices of school, family, and community partnerships. Voluntary participation required the completion of baseline and follow-up surveys at the beginning and end of the 1998-1999 school year. To encourage participation, school officials were offered gift certificates that could be redeemed for partnership-related publications and items to help schools advance their work on school, family, and community partnerships.

The baseline survey asked for the following information on discipline policies from each school's key contact for the team working to improve family and community involvement: estimates of disciplinary actions during the prior academic year (1998), ratings of the seriousness of behavior problems at the school, partnership activities to improve student behavior scheduled to be implemented in the current academic year, and the overall quality of the school-family-community partnership program. The follow-up survey at the end of the school year asked respondents for information on disciplinary actions taken during the 1999 school year, the effectiveness of the partnership activities implemented to improve student behavior, and observed changes in student behavior and the overall quality of the partnership program.

SAMPLE

A total of 47 schools participated in both rounds of data collection. The schools were located in 12 states, with just more than half of the schools in Maryland and Ohio. Of the 47 schools, 71% ($n = 37$) were elementary schools. The remaining 10 secondary schools were middle schools, high schools, or a middle–high school combination. The sample includes schools located in large urban (24%), small urban (22%), suburban (22%), and rural (31%) areas. Student enrollment averaged 430 students, with elementary schools averaging about half the size of secondary schools (417 versus 790 students).

The participating schools served students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. About two-thirds (66%) of the schools received schoolwide or

targeted Title I funds. Respondents reported that on average, 41% of their students received free or reduced-price lunches, ranging from 0% to 100%. A small percentage of students lived in homes where English was not spoken (7%), ranging from 0% to 60%. Finally, respondents reported that on average, 10% of students enrolled after the school year had begun, ranging from 0% to 58%.

As might be expected, elementary schools had fewer students than did secondary schools ($r = -.359$, $p \le .01$) and greater percentages of students who received free or reduced-price lunches ($r = .337$, $p \le .02$). Schools located in large urban areas had greater percentages of students who received free or reduced-price lunches ($r = .549$, $p \le .00$).

VARIABLES

Disciplinary actions. Respondents estimated the percentage of students in 1998 and 1999 who were sent to principals' or vice principals' offices, given detention, assigned to in-school suspension, assigned disciplinary removal, suspended from school, expelled from school, and involved in an incident reported to the police.

Student behavior. On the baseline survey, respondents reported whether various behaviors were not a problem (0), a minor problem (1), or a major problem (2) at their schools. On the follow-up survey, respondents indicated whether during the course of the year, the same behaviors got worse (1), stayed about the same (2), or got better (3). Six scales were created by averaging scores of items for each behavior, as follows.

Truancy and class cutting ($\alpha = .67$) was assessed using three items: lateness to school, cutting classes, and unexcused absences. Classroom disruptions ($\alpha = .81$) was assessed by the following four items: fooling around, disobeying rules, disturbing others in class, and cheating or copying. Respondents reported student-student conflicts ($\alpha = .63$) using the following four items: verbal abuse of other students, fighting or physical conflicts among students, thefts of student or school property, and behavior problems on school buses. Teacher-student conflicts ($\alpha = .75$) used the following two items: verbal abuse of teachers and physical abuse of teachers. Drug use ($\alpha = .96$) was assessed by the following three items: use of tobacco or smoking, use of alcohol, and use of illegal drugs. Finally, respondents reported levels and changes in weapon and gang activity ($\alpha = .72$) on the following two items: gang behavior and the use of weapons in school.

Use of partnership practices. Respondents were asked to report on whether their schools implemented up to 13 specific family and/or community practices to improve student behavior. Examples of these practices included conducting workshops or meetings for parents on school goals and expectations for student behavior, discipline, dress, and/or conduct; involving families or community mentors to guide students with special behavior problems; and involving parents and community volunteers to improve school safety and/or student behaviors and discipline in halls, on the playground, to and from school, or at other school locations. Responses were coded 1 for yes and 0 for no.

Effectiveness of practices. In addition to indicating whether they conducted each of the 13 partnership practices, respondents were asked on the follow-up survey to rate the degree to which each practice was or could be effective for improving students' behavior. Schools rated each practice on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from *cannot do at this school* to *very helpful*.

Partnership program rating. On the baseline and follow-up surveys, schools rated the quality of their family, school, and community partnership programs for the 1999 school year on a 4-point scale ranging from *weak* (1) to *excellent* (4). Each quality rating was accompanied by a short description of the characteristics of a program at each level. For example, an excellent program was defined as a "comprehensive, permanent program with ongoing plans from year to year. Well-functioning action team. Program covers all six types of involvement; and addresses the needs of all families at all grade levels." In contrast, a weak program was described as "just starting. Action team not well developed. Plan and program need work."

RESULTS

This study was conducted to learn which school, family, and community practices implemented by schools were most likely to affect student behavior and school discipline. Analyses began by examining the extent of student behavior problems and changes in schools' disciplinary actions from one year to the next. Then, we investigated perceptions of the effectiveness of family or community involvement activities to improve student behavior and to reduce the use of school disciplinary actions. Finally, longitudinal analyses

TABLE 1
Degree to Which Student Behaviors Were
a Problem and Improved During the School Year

Behavior Problem	N	Average Degree Behaviors Were a Problem		Average Degree Behaviors Improved	
		M	SD	M	SD
Classroom disruptions	41	0.92	0.39	2.41	0.47
Student-student conflicts	40	0.75	0.35	2.36	0.57
Truancy and class cutting	34	0.74	0.44	2.34	0.54
Drug use	28	0.30	0.58	2.18	0.51
Student-teacher conflicts	32	0.22	0.36	2.30	0.59
Weapon and gang activity	29	0.14	0.32	2.26	0.58

NOTE: Degree behavior is a problem: 0 = not a problem, 1 = minor problem, and 2 = major problem. Degree of improvement: 1 = got worse, 2 = no difference, and 3 = got better.

explored the links between practices to involve family and community members and changes in school disciplinary actions with students, taking into account the schools' prior disciplinary actions.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

On average, respondents reported minor, not major, problems with the behavior issues investigated in this study. Table 1 shows that classroom disruptions were the most serious problem that school officials faced with students. Noticeably low were respondents' ratings of violence, drug use, and conflict between teachers and students. During the course of the school year, most respondents reported that student behavior improved or remained the same on all of the behavior measures.

Bivariate correlation analyses showed that some school characteristics were associated with specific behavior problems. Elementary schools had significantly less drug use ($r = .783$, $p \leq .001$) than did secondary schools. Larger schools (mainly secondary schools) had more problems with truancy and class cutting ($r = .621$, $p \leq .001$) and more student drug use ($r = .699$, $p \leq .001$). Schools with higher proportions of students receiving free or reduced-priced lunches reported that drug use was less of a problem than did schools with more affluent student bodies ($r = -.416$, $p \leq .01$).

RATES OF DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

In general, respondents reported that only small percentages of students received disciplinary actions in the 1999 school year. Several schools skipped items on the questionnaires because they did not apply or because respondents could not estimate the percentage of students involved. Thus, there are uneven sample sizes in the analyses of different disciplinary actions. On average, just more than 11% of students were sent to principals' offices and about 10% of students received detention, as shown in Table 2. These two types of disciplinary actions involved the greatest proportion of students and had the greatest variation among schools. Other types of discipline involved smaller percentages of students, including in-school suspensions (4%), school suspensions (3%), and disciplinary removal (2%). Less than one half of 1% of students were expelled from school (0.2%) or involved in an incident reported to the police (0.3%). The small percentage of students in these schools receiving some form of disciplinary action reflects the low levels of serious crime and violence in schools nationally (Kaufman et al., 2000).

Because prior research found that older students tend to be more involved in delinquent behavior than do younger students, we compared the average percentages of elementary and secondary students involved in disciplinary actions. Consistent with national statistics, elementary schools in this sample had smaller percentages of students involved in all disciplinary actions than did secondary schools, with the exception of disciplinary removals—a strategy used only in elementary schools.

Other analyses explored whether the percentage of students involved in disciplinary actions was related to school characteristics. Bivariate correlation coefficients indicated that larger schools reported higher percentages of student expulsions ($r = .559$, $p \le .04$). Also, secondary schools reported that larger proportions of students were suspended from school ($r = -.811$, $p \le .001$). Schools with larger percentages of students speaking English as a second language reported higher rates of students sent to principals' offices ($r = .849$, $p \le .001$).

CONNECTIONS OF BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Table 3 reports relationships between the seriousness of behavior problems and the percentages of students involved in disciplinary actions. Classroom disruptions were not significantly correlated with rates of disciplinary actions, although schools with more disruptions (mainly secondary schools) tended to react with more in-school suspensions. Schools in which truancy

TABLE 2

Percentage of Students Receiving Disciplinary Actions for the 1999 School Year for All Schools and by School Level

| | All Schools | | | | Elementary Schools | | | Secondary Schools | | |
| | | Percentage of Students | | Maximum Percentage of Students | | Percentage of Students | | | Percentage of Students | |
Disciplinary Action	N	M	SD	Students	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Sent to the principal	17	11.47	9.21	35.71	14	9.98	7.40	3	18.41	15.35
Given detention	15	9.60	11.66	33.33	12	6.99	8.89	3	20.04	17.66
Given In-School Suspension	13	4.04	6.74	24.22	9	4.01	7.85	4	4.12	4.14
Suspended from school	19	2.88	2.79	8.55	15	1.74	1.74	4	7.14	1.37
Given disciplinary removal	11	2.17	2.58	8.65	10	2.39	2.61	1	0.00	
Involved in a police incident	12	0.33	0.51	1.73	10	0.33	0.54	2	0.36	0.51
Expelled from school	14	0.20	0.32	0.95	10	0.12	0.30	4	0.39	0.32

TABLE 3
Zero-Order Correlations of Seriousness of Behavior Problems and Percentage of Students Receiving Disciplinary Actions in the 1999 School Year

Behavior Problem	Sent to Principal	Received Detention	Received In-School Suspension	Suspended From School
Classroom disruptions	.258	−.159	.468	.358
Truancy and class cutting	.055	.743***	.465	.516**
Student-student conflicts	.487**	.222	.530**	.372
Student-teacher conflicts	.306	.436	.232	.306
Drug use	−.073	.513**	.517**	.659****
Weapon and gang activity	.451**	.362	.731****	.438**
N	22	15	16	21

**$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$. ****$p \leq .001$.

and class cutting were more serious problems reported that greater proportions of students received detention ($r = .743, p \leq .002$) and were suspended from school ($r = .516, p \leq .017$). Schools with more student conflict reported that more students were sent to principals' offices ($r = .487, p \leq .022$) and received in-school suspensions ($r = .530, p \leq .035$). Thus, two kinds of infractions prompted different disciplinary actions. Students having conflicts were sent to principals' offices or given in-school suspension, whereas students who skipped school (more common in secondary schools) were given stricter punishments of detention and suspension from school.

Table 3 also shows that the more extreme behavior problems of drug use and weapon or gang activity were significantly linked with several types of discipline. More drug use by students was positively associated with the percentage of students who were given detention ($r = .513, p \leq .050$), in-school suspension ($r = .517, p \leq .030$), and suspension from school ($r = .659, p \leq .001$). Also, schools in which weapon and gang activity were more serious problems reported that greater percentages of students were sent to principals' offices ($r = .451, p \leq .035$), received in-school suspensions ($r = .731, p \leq .001$), and were suspended ($r = .436, p \leq .047$).

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Schools were asked whether they implemented 13 partnership activities to help improve student behavior and reduce discipline problems. Table 4

<div align="center">

TABLE 4

**Average Ratings of Perceived Effectiveness of Family and Community
Involvement Activities Focused on Student Behavior**

</div>

Partnership Practice	Effectiveness Ratings by Schools' Use of Practice			
	Yes	n	*No*	n
Type 1: Parenting practices				
Workshops for parents on school goals and				
expectations for student conduct	2.84	32	2.63	8
Information and resources for parents on age-appropriate				
parenting and discipline skills	2.56	36	2.40	5
Type 2: Communication practices				
Day planners or assignment books for communication				
about behavior and schoolwork	2.89	35	2.14	7
Orientations for new families before school starts	2.86	37	2.50	6
Regular communication for building a positive				
foundation for solving problems	2.79	39	2.33	3
Parent-teacher conferences to discuss student behavior	2.70	46	—	0
Parent notification of poor behavior, detention, and so forth	2.70	47	—	0
Types 3 and 6: Parent and community volunteering				
Use of parent and community volunteers to				
improve safety and behavior	2.69	29	2.11	9
Parents' attendance at assemblies for good conduct	2.68	31	2.20	10
Family or community mentor involvement to guide				
students with special behavior problems	2.72	18	2.30	13
Type 4: Learning at home				
Interactive homework assignments to prevent				
problems in class	2.63	40	2.33	3
Type 5: Decision-making practices				
Parent involvement in annual review of policies	2.75	20	2.08	12
Parent involvement in prevention programs and activities	2.74	19	2.33	12

reports respondents' ratings of the effectiveness of the activities for schools
that implemented the practices and for schools that did not use the practice in
the 1999 school year. Overall, schools considered all of the partnership prac-
tices as generally effective ways to improve student behavior at school,
although the ratings were consistently higher in schools that actually imple-
mented the activities in 1999. The use of day planners or assignment books to
communicate with families ($\bar{x} = 2.89$), conducting orientations for new fami-
lies before the school year begins ($\bar{x} = 2.89$), and conducting workshops for
parents on school goals and expectations for student conduct ($\bar{x} = 2.84$) were
perceived to be among the most effective practices for improving student
behavior.

TABLE 5
Partial Correlations of Family and Community Involvement and
School Disciplinary Actions, Controlling for Prior Discipline Rates

	Percentage of Students			
Involvement Practices	Sent to Principal (pr)	Received Detention (pr)	Received In-School Suspension (pr)	Suspended From School (pr)
Number of Involvement Activities by Type				
Parenting practices	−.56[a]*	−.76[a]**	−.15	.19
Communication practices	−.16	−.06	−.62[a]*	.01
Parent and community volunteering	−.76[a]***	−.68[a]**	−.31	.26
Decision-making practices	−.25	−.52[a]	−.25	.29
Total number				
Activities implemented for six types of involvement	−.60[a]**	−.64[a]*	−.45[a]	.23
Quality				
Quality of partnership program (1999)	−.05	−.63[a]*	−.32	.39
Change in program quality (1998-1999)	−.60[a]**	−.82[a]***	−.47[a]	−.31
N	13	10	9	14

a. Partial coefficients (*pr*) are greater than .4 and considered meaningful.
*$p \leq .10$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$.

PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES AND DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Partial correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the number and quality of school, family, and community partnership activities that schools implemented and the percentages of students involved in disciplinary actions in 1999, after accounting for schools' prior discipline rates in 1998. The partial correlations statistically account for each school's starting point on one variable (e.g., 1998 disciplinary actions) to isolate the association of family involvement with changes in disciplinary actions in 1999. This procedure is more appropriate than ordinary least squares regression, given the relatively small sample of schools in the study.

Table 5 shows the results of analyses of the relationships of the number of parenting activities, communication practices, volunteering practices, and decision-making practices implemented in schools with the percentages of students sent to principals' offices, given detention, given in-school suspensions, and suspended from school. Table 5 also reports the impact on

disciplinary actions of the total number of partnership activities implemented for all six types of involvement, the quality of schools' partnership programs in 1999, and changes in the quality of schools' partnership programs from 1998 to 1999. The partial correlations (pr) in Table 5 identify the independent association of different family and community involvement activities with the percentage of students disciplined after accounting for the schools' discipline rates in the prior school year.

The longitudinal analyses indicate that the implementation of different types of family and community involvement activities was related to decreases in several disciplinary actions. After statistically accounting for their prior discipline rates, schools that implemented more opportunities for family and community volunteers reported lower percentages of students sent to principals' offices ($pr = -.76, p \leq .004$) and given detention ($pr = .68, p \leq .042$). Also, schools that implemented more activities to help families understand school goals for student behavior, parenting skills, and how the home environment may affect student behavior reported lower percentages of students given detention ($pr = -.76, p \leq .017$) and sent to principals' offices ($pr = -.56, p \leq .060$).

Table 5 also indicates that regardless of their prior levels of disciplinary actions, schools that used more practices to communicate with families reported lower percentages of students given in-school suspensions ($pr = -.62, p \leq .104$). In addition, schools that involved parents in policy making and evaluating schools programs reported lower percentages of students who received detention ($pr = -.52, p \leq .155$). Although not quite statistically significant at the traditional $p < .05$ level, these indicators are informative and consistent with the patterns previously reported. It is important to note that schools that implemented more activities overall for all six types of involvement reported that lower percentages of students were sent to principals' offices ($pr = -.60, p \leq .040$), given detention ($pr = -.64, p \leq .061$), and given in-school suspensions ($pr = -.45, p \leq .259$).

Finally, analyses examined the relationship of the quality of schools' partnership programs with changes in the percentages of students involved in disciplinary actions. Controlling for disciplinary actions in the prior year, schools that improved the quality of their partnership programs from one year to the next reported that lower percentages of students were sent to principals' offices ($pr = -.60, p \leq .040$), received in-school suspensions ($pr = -.47, p \leq .238$), and received detentions ($pr = -.82, p \leq .007$). These results suggest that schools that work to improve their partnership programs may see their efforts pay off in improved student behavior.

DISCUSSION

In addition to helping students learn, schools have a responsibility to keep children safe. Maintaining order at school and good behavior in the classroom are priorities for all schools. Yet, school is just one context of students' lives, and educators are unlikely to reduce the disruptive or delinquent behavior of children without the help of families and the community. This study suggests that schools' efforts to draw on family and community support to reduce problem behavior of students may help produce desired results and create safer school environments.

The study used multiple measures of various student behaviors (from minor disturbances to major delinquencies) and multiple measures of school actions (from minor rebukes to serious punishment). The study also measured schools' use of various family and community involvement activities for six types of involvement. Longitudinal data on partnership programs and student disciplinary actions permitted analyses of the association of changes in program quality with changes in student behavior and school discipline. The data and analyses highlight three main issues involving student behavior and discipline at school.

First, the data are consistent with national studies indicating that student behavior is a minor problem at most schools. Schools in this study, like most schools in the nation, have low levels of serious behavior problems and take disciplinary action with only a small percentage of students. The schools, including urban, suburban, and rural locations, did not perceive drug use, violence, conflicts among students, or conflicts between teachers and students to be serious problems. Also consistent with prior studies of student delinquency, this study finds fewer problems with student behavior and discipline in elementary schools and small schools than in secondary schools or large schools.

Problems with student behavior improved, on average, during the course of the school year. One explanation for the improvements is that students may become more familiar with school rules and more familiar with the degree to which they can act out before their teachers and administrators take disciplinary actions. Another explanation revealed by this study is that student behavior and schools' responses may improve if schools implement varied, high-quality family and community involvement activities.

Thus, although problems were relatively few, these schools, like many others, wanted to improve student behavior and disciplinary actions that were disrupting classrooms and student learning. Unlike many other schools, the schools in this study were working on implementing partnership activities to address the problem.

Second, the data suggest that schools perceived the use of family and community involvement practices as an effective way to improve student behavior and reduce the need for disciplinary actions with students. When schools made an effort to implement various involvement activities, respondents reported that families and communities could be helpful in improving student behavior. Beliefs about effectiveness of family and community involvement were stronger in schools that had actually implemented the activities than in schools that did not use the practices during the year.

Third, analyses suggest that the use of certain types of partnership practices may affect student behavior and reduce discipline problems from one year to the next. Longitudinal analyses indicated that regardless of schools' prior rates of discipline, the more family and community involvement activities were implemented, the fewer students were disciplined by being sent to principals' offices or given detention or in-school suspension.

Two types of involvement, parenting and volunteering, were most predictive of reducing the percentages of students who received disciplinary actions over time. By implementing activities to increase parents' support for good behavior at home and by using family and community members as volunteers to increase the number of adults at school to improve student behavior, schools increased the overlap between home and school and may have supported and guided students in ways that improved behavior. The total number of activities implemented to involve families and the community in all six types of involvement also showed significant power to lower the percentage of students sent to principals' offices, given detention, and given in-school suspension.

In addition, schools that improved the overall quality of their partnership programs from one year to the next reported reductions in the percentages of students receiving three of the four disciplinary actions measured over time. This finding is particularly important because it connects the improvement of partnership programs with outcomes related to students' behavior.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results of this study provide new evidence that some types of school, family, and community partnerships may help improve student behavior and specific disciplinary actions at school, but there must be caution about interpreting the findings. The longitudinal data in this study were obtained from a relatively small number of schools, mainly elementary schools. Thus, it is not clear whether the results can be generalized broadly to all elementary schools or that the identified practices will be effective with secondary school

students and families. Because the data were collected over time and from schools with diverse populations, however, it is possible to draw initial insights from this study about the potential of family and community involvement activities to assist schools in improving student behavior. Research is needed on larger numbers of elementary and secondary schools to test the results reported here.

Future studies also need to improve the measures and nature of the data on student behavior. Although many schools provided reports on the level of behavior problems and statistics on disciplinary actions, there was relatively little variation in the seriousness of problems and rates of disciplinary actions across schools. In part, this problem reflects the national picture that schools are generally safe places for the large majority of students. Future studies about student behavior, however, might benefit from a broader scale for measuring the severity of behavior problems and additional indicators of student misbehavior, such as bullying, student fights, and other measures of victimization. Information is needed on the rates with which these incidents occur and the numbers of different students involved to more closely examine how school, family, and community partnerships affect student behavior.

This study showed, however, that collecting data on specific student behavior creates its own set of limitations. Although the measures were specific on student behavior and discipline in school, relatively few schools were able or willing to provide these statistics. Future studies need to guide schools to collect systematic and parallel data on suspensions, detentions, and percentages of students sent to principals' offices or to other locations for discipline.

This study clearly indicates that research on student behavior and school discipline should include detailed information on family and community involvement activities and responses, information that is missing from most previous work on behavior and discipline in schools. Future work could be informed by studies that follow specific students to determine if and how family and community involvement activities at school affect individual patterns of behavior and school discipline over time.

This study supports the argument that the implementation of targeted family and community involvement activities can influence specific student outcomes. In this case, schools that implemented more practices to involve parents at home as knowledgeable partners about schools' expectations for student behavior as well as those that involved families and community members as volunteers at school reported smaller percentages of students receiving disciplinary actions at school, regardless of schools' prior rates of discipline. Other types of involvement predicted improvements in school discipline, although less consistently. Also, schools that improved the quality of their

partnership programs reported fewer students needing to be disciplined. The results suggest that creating more connections and greater consistency within school, family, and community contexts may be one way for schools to improve student behavior and school discipline.

REFERENCES

Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (1998). Reframing mental health in schools and expanding school reform. *Educational Psychologist*, *33*, 135-152.

Anderson, M., Kaufman, J., Simon, T., Barrios, L., Paulozzi, L., Ryan, G., et al. (2001). School-associated violent deaths in the United States, 1994-1999. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *286*, 2695-2702.

Astor, R. A., Meyer, H. A., & Pitner, R. O. (2001). Elementary and middle school students' perceptions of violence-prone school subcontexts. *The Elementary School Journal*, *101*, 511-528.

Balli, S. J., Demo, D. H., & Wedman, J. F. (1998). Family involvement with children's homework: An intervention in the middle grades. *Family Relations*, *47*, 149-157.

Barton, P. E., Coley, R. J., & Wenglinsky, H. (1998). *Order in the classroom: Violence, discipline, and student achievement*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Berends, M., Pallas, A. M., & Spade, J. Z. (1996). Safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools: Issue sheet. In K. M. Borman, P. W. Cookson, Jr., A. R. Sadovnik, & J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Implementing educational reform: Sociological perspectives on educational policy* (pp. 82-86). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Bowen, N. K. (1999). A role for school social workers in promoting student success through school-family partnerships. *Social Work in Education*, *21*, 34-47.

Bowen, N. K., & Bowen, G. L. (1999). Effects of crime and violence in neighborhoods and schools on the school behavior and performance of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *14*, 319-342.

Brener, N. D., Simon, T. R., Krug, E. G., & Lowry, R. (1999). Recent trends in violence-related behaviors among high school students in the United States. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *282*, 440-446.

Catsambis, S., & Beveridge, A. A. (2001). Does neighborhood matter? Family, neighborhood, and school influences on eighth grade mathematics achievement. *Sociological Focus*, *34*, 435-457.

Clark, S. (2002, December/January). District chops away at suspensions: Are schools calmer? *Catalyst for Cleveland Schools*, pp. 4-6.

Dauber, S. L., & Epstein, J. L. (1993). Parents' attitudes and practice of involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. In N. Chavkin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society* (pp. 53-71). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Warger, C. (1998). *Early warning timely response: A guide to safe schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Elliott, D. S., Wilson, W. J., Huizinga, D., Sampson, R. J., Elliott, A., & Rankin, B. (1996). The effects of neighborhood disadvantage on adolescent development. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *33*, 389-426.

Epstein, J. L. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. In K. Hurrelman, F. Kaufmann, & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints* (pp. 121-136). New York: Aldine.

Epstein, J. L. (1991). Effects on student achievement of teacher practices of parent involvement. In S. Silvern (Ed.), *Advances in reading/language research: Literacy through family, community, and school interaction*. (Vol. 5, pp. 261-276). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *76*, 701-712.

Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (in press). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Education Research*.

Flaxman, E. (Ed.). (2001). *Evaluating school violence programs*. New York: ERIC Clearninghouse on Urban Education.

Gottfredson, D. C. (1996). The social organization of safe high schools. In K. M. Borman, P. W. Cookson, Jr., A. R. Sadovnik, & J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Implementing educational reform: Sociological perspectives on educational policy* (pp. 339-358). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Gottfredson, D. C., Gottfredson, G. D., & Hybl, L. G. (1993). Managing adolescent behavior: A multiyear, multischool study. *American Educational Research Journal*, *30*, 179-215.

Gottfredson, G. D., & Gottfredson, D. C. (1985). *Victimization in schools*. New York: Plenum.

Hess, F. M. (2002). *School boards at the dawn of the 21st century: Conditions and challenges of district governance*. Alexandria, VA: National School Board Association.

Kaufman, P., Chen, X., Choy, S. P., Ruddy, S. A., Miller, A. K., Fleury, J. K., et al. (2000). Indicators of school crime and safety: 2000. *Education Statistics Quarterly*, *2*, 43-47.

Learning First Alliance. (2001) *Every child learning: Safe and supportive schools*. Washington, DC: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lee, S. (1994). *Family-school connections and students' education: Continuity and change of family involvement from the middle grades to high school*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

Lee, V. E., & Croninger, R. G. (1996). The social organization of safe high schools. In K. M. Borman, P. W. Cookson, Jr., A. R. Sadovnik, & J. Z. Spade (Eds.), *Implementing educational reform: sociological perspectives on educational policy* (pp. 359-400). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Ma, X. (2001). Bullying and being bullied: To what extent are bullies also victims? *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*, 351-370.

McLaughlin, M. W., & Irby, M. A. (1994). Urban sanctuaries: Neighborhood organizations that keep hope alive. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *75*, 300-306.

McPartland, J. M., & Nettles, S. M. (1991). Using community adults as advocates or mentors for at-risk middle school students: A two-year evaluation of project RAISE. *American Journal of Education*, *99*, 568-586.

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bully behaviors among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *285*. Retrieved May 9, 2001 from jama. ama-assn.org/issues/v285n16/rfull/joc01746.html

Nettles, S. M. (1991). Community contributions to school outcomes of African-American students. *Education and Urban Society*, *24*, 132-147.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat 1425.

Noguera, P. A. (1995). Preventing and producing violence: A critical analysis of responses to school violence. *Harvard Educational Review*, *65*, 189-212.

Perry, K. E., & Weinstein, R. S. (1998). The social context of early schooling and children's school adjustment. *Educational Psychologist*, *33*, 177-194.

Rothstein, R. (2001, February 14). Lessons: A school district refuses to worship scores alone. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 14, 2001, from www.nytimes.com/2001/02/14/national/14LESS.html

Sanders, M. G. (1996). School-family-community partnerships focused on school safety: The Baltimore example. *Journal of Negro Education*, *65*, 369-374.

Sanders, M. G. (2001). The role of "community" in comprehensive school, family, and community partnership programs. *Elementary School Journal*, *102*, 19-34.

Sanders, M. G., & Harvey, A. (2000, April). *Developing comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships: The community perspective*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2001). *Focus on math achievement: Effects of family and community involvement*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Anaheim, California.

Simon, B. S. (2000). *Predictors of high school and family partnerships and the influence of partnerships on student success*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

Snyder, J., & Patterson, G. (1987). Family interaction and delinquent behavior. In H. C. Quay (Ed.), *Handbook of juvenile delinquency* (pp. 216-243). New York: John Wiley.

Taylor, L., & Adelman, H. S. (2000). Connecting schools, families, and communities. *Professional School Counseling*, *3*, 298-307.

Tosto, P. (2002, May 7). Suspending very young can harm more than help. *Pioneer Press*, p. A1.

Van Voorhis, F. L. (2000). *The effects of interactive (TIPS) homework on family involvement and science achievement of middle grade students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged: The inner-city, the underclass and public policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.